



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

Report of the Quality Review Group to UL Sport Division

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Quality Review Group (QRG)	Appendix A
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1 **The UL Quality Review Process**

The University of Limerick (UL) follows an established process for quality assurance (QA) and quality improvement (QI) in line with that originally developed jointly by the Irish Universities Association (IUA) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB), the latter whose functions are now carried out by Quality and Qualifications Ireland ([QQI](#)). The review process involves an approximate seven-year cycle during which each unit works to improve the quality of its programmes and services and undergoes a rigorous self-evaluation prior to a quality review by internationally recognised experts in the relevant field.

The common framework adopted by the Irish universities for their QA/QI systems is consistent with both legislative requirements and international good practice. The process itself evolved as a result of the Universities Act, 1997, in which the responsibility for QA/QI was placed directly on the individual universities. The process now complies with the [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012](#). The UL Quality Support Unit (QSU) website (www.ul.ie/quality) provides details on the process.

Support units are reviewed against international standards as described in the document *Quality Review Process for Support Units: Guidelines and QMS Framework*, which is available on the [QSU website](#). The planned schedule of quality reviews for both academic and support units is available on the [QSU website](#).

The UL quality review process comprises the following three phases:

1. Pre-review phase, in which the unit under review conducts a self-evaluation exercise and writes a self-assessment report (SAR).
2. Review phase, in which a quality review group comprising external experts, both national and international, review the SAR, visit the unit, meet with stakeholders and produce a report (this report), which is made publicly available on the [QSU website](#).
3. Post-review phase, in which the unit considers the recommendations of the QRG, devises plans to implement them and reports implementation progress to a Governing Authority subcommittee and UL senior management.

The recommendations made by the quality review group (QRG) form the basis of a quality improvement plan (QIP) prepared by the QSU for the unit under review. Once the site visit is over, the unit sets about evaluating and implementing the recommendations, as appropriate.

Approximately six months after receiving the QIP template from the QSU, the head of unit provides a summary overview of progress to the university's Governing Authority Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance (GASPQA) sub-committee. GASPQA members are afforded the opportunity to discuss and evaluate progress.

Approximately 12 months after receiving the QIP template, the head of unit, Vice President Academic & Registrar and Director of Quality meet to formally review progress and to agree on any remaining actions to be taken.

2 The UL Sports Division

UL Sports Division was established in 1985 and over the past 30 years has evolved through the development and expansion of sports facilities which include UL Sport Arena, UL Sport Outdoor Facilities, UL Sport All-weather Pitches, UL Sport Adventure Centre and UL Sport Boathouse. Each facility is subdivided into a number of areas, and each area offers particular services to student and staff of UL as well as the wider communities. UL plays a unique national role in sport.

Prior to 1999 the UL's Department of Sports & Recreation operated the Sports Facilities, including a gym, 33m Pool and Halls, in the PESS Building on campus. In 1999 the UL Sports Arena opened. A new company, Plassey Campus Arena CLG (PCA) was set up by UL to provide strategic focus and oversight of the facility. The UL Department of Sport and Recreation was retained and located in the UL Sports Arena. Therefore the employees of PCA and UL operate as a team in the running UL SPORT.

UL Sport., is governed by a Board of Directors. The board comprises internal and external stakeholders, including representatives from the UL Students' Union and Governing Authority, and meets four times a year to review the activities of the Division at a strategic level. There is a large workforce in UL Sport which has grown over the years with the development of the Division - 45 fulltime staff and 100 part-time staff are currently employed.

The mission: *"To become a world-class campus for physical activity, sport, recreation and health"*. While UL Sport operates as a self-funding business, it also has a responsibility to support the university's academic departments to deliver degree programmes. The delivery of a well-supported sport and recreation programme for the entire campus community forms part of the Division's core responsibility – new activities and sports are added to the programme every year, which requires greater levels of support services from the Division.

Together with the existing facilities in January 2015, construction commenced on an extension to the UL Arena, which will house the Munster Rugby Training Centre (due for completion in June 2016) and an additional 25m swimming pool incorporating springboard diving (due for completion at the end of 2016). Planning permission and funding has been approved for a PGA Golf Academy, which will include 20 individual golf bays on a 320m driving range together and a research centre (the first of its kind in Ireland). The Golf Academy will be located adjacent to the UL Sport Boathouse. On 13th April 2016 3,698 (26.96%) students voted in the UL SU Referendum for a Student Centre and additional Sports Facilities - 78.75% (2912 votes) voted Yes while 21.25% (786 votes) voted No.

The poll exceeded the required quota of 15% student population turnout and the required simple majority in favour. The Student Centre and Sports Facilities development will commence immediately and the staggered student levy will come into effect in 2017.

This Sports Facilities development will include -upgrade of Maguires fields to include 2 full size synthetic playing fields fully floodlit, hurling walls and grass training area; construction of a climbing wall extended off the side of the UL Sport Arena and reconstruction of level 2 in the UL Sport Arena

UL Sport continues to strive to be the best it can be, offering more programmes and a complete range of facilities that will allow students, staff and the wider communities improve their quality of life through sport and physical activity. There is a very exciting Sport & Recreation Programme professionally developed, all-inclusive and for all to enjoy - so embrace our motto 'Mens Sana in Corpore Sano' ('Healthy Mind in a Healthy Body')

3 Preliminary Comments of the Quality Review Group (QRG)

The Quality Review Group (QRG) appreciated the welcome extended to it by the University of Limerick (UL) and, in particular, Professor Paul McCutcheon's introduction to the university and his identification of the context of our current task within the broader mission of UL.

The QRG wishes to thank the UL Sport Division and the Quality Support Unit for their hospitality and cooperation throughout the review process. UL Sport produced a thorough and well-presented self-assessment report (SAR) which identifies many of the strengths of the Division and some of its concerns. The QRG appreciated the Division's provision of requested supplementary information and the frank and informative participation of the divisional quality team, other staff and various stakeholders in their meetings with the QRG. The QRG was struck by the passion, enthusiasm, honesty and professionalism of the UL Sport participants.

The QRG noted the Division's progress since its last quality review in 2007 and its continued commitment to the provision of excellent sporting facilities for a wide range of internal and external user groups. It is hoped that the commendations and recommendations in the section to follow will be useful to the Division as it continues to develop a quality-focused delivery of services to its customers.

In terms of overall commendations, the QRG recognises the efforts that are being made to adopt a quality improvement approach in all aspects of the operation of the Division. There is recognition of the value this will ultimately add to the organisation, its customers and the university.

As regards overall recommendations, the QRG feels that the development of the UL Sport strategic plan by 2017, preceded in the interim by a temporary roadmap, will significantly add to the Division's capability in the long term. Furthermore, compliance in terms of HR management practices, internal health and safety ownership and the development and management of a media and communications strategy will further enhance this capability.

4 QRG Commendations and Recommendations

4.1 Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

1.	The whole-hearted engagement of the UL Sport Division with the review process and the evidence of improvements to date.
2.	The training of UL Sport staff as auditors and the resultant potential for learning through engagement with other departmental audits.
3.	The quality of customer service provided by all frontline UL Sport staff.
4.	The ongoing development of a social media strategy.
5.	The re-establishment of the quality team and the progress made in advancing the quality agenda.
6.	The development of and commitment to a strong internal meetings structure and calendar.
7.	The positive energy, spirit of commitment and drive to succeed evident across the entire team at UL Sport.
8.	The widespread staff involvement in the preparation for this review and the development of the QMS to date.
9.	The considerable evidence of an ethos of continual improvement across the team in the absence of a formal continual improvement focus in recent years. This has been demonstrated by the successful delivery of many physical projects and community engagement initiatives.
10.	The recent development of a continual improvement process and quality improvement plan which shows a strong commitment among staff to drive improvement into the future.
11.	The work which has already been undertaken in documenting processes and developing document control systems.
12.	The quality of the health and safety risk assessments.
13.	The proactivity demonstrated with regard to data management/protection and CCTV footage.
14.	The introduction of a customer feedback log.
15.	The extension of the Gladstone MRM system to include satellite facilities.

16.	The introduction of performance reviews for key suppliers.
17.	The implementation of a supplier log to monitor performance and issues.

4.2 Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

4.2.1 Level 1 recommendations

No.	Level (1/2)	Recommendation	Commentary
1.	1	Develop a strategic plan for UL Sport 2017-21, acknowledging the potential synergy with the UL Beo initiative and encompassing overarching aspirations for sport, health and physical activity across the Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences (PESS), Plassey Campus Centre (PCC) and Plassey Campus Arena (PCA)/UL Sport.	The initial findings of the QRG suggest that a significant restructuring of the relationship between key stakeholders which deliver sport provision for UL could be beneficial in terms of effective resource usage, communication, business coordination and customer service. This should include a review and restructuring of the UL Sport organisational chart to reflect key functional pillars: facilities, sport development, marketing and communications, along with support mechanisms from IT, HR, Finance and Buildings and Estates.
2.	1	Develop a set of key values fundamental to UL Sport to underpin the divisional strategic plan.	This will provide a foundation that reflects the ethos and behaviours of UL Sport (and its staff).
3.	1	Review and address the legal obligations of UL Sport in the areas of data protection and employment law. All activities undertaken as a result of this review should be referenced in the risk register.	This measure is urgent in both cases as these areas present major legal, financial and reputational risks not just to UL Sport but to the university. It is understood that the updated risk register will be presented to the Corporate Secretary's Office before end of April 2016.
4.	1	Develop a 'roadmap' to include an action plan, objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs) for the 2016-17 academic year as an interim position until the new UL Sport strategic plan is approved in late 2017. Balanced Scorecard would serve as a good framework for both.	The intent is the provision of clear objectives and direction in the current absence of the UL Sport strategic plan.

5.	1	Create a robust organisational structure and align resources appropriate to the current and future scope of activity of the Division as per the UL Sport strategic plan.	The existing structure would appear to be facility-driven and is an inhibitor of performance and development at UL Sport. A change of structure with an emphasis on core function would be more effective.
6.	1	Appoint a UL Sport Health and Safety Officer who will manage all health and safety matters in the Division. It is recommended that this role be assigned to an existing member of the facilities management team who will receive the relevant training and development.	The QRG identified a number of areas within UL Sport where potential health and safety risks and vulnerabilities exist. While it is commendable that the Division has direct liaison with the UL Health and Safety Officer, UL Sport should appoint an internal Health and Safety Officer given the size and complexity of the organisation, the potential risks posed and the scope of the activity of the Division.
7.	1	The Director of Sport is advised to promote and champion a continual improvement ethos and its associated value to the organisation.	To ensure the momentum and long-term sustainability of a continual improvement programme, with its impact on the development of the relevant facilities and services, this initiative must be supported by those leading the organisation.
8.	1	Draft an integrated quality action plan taking into account issues raised through gap analysis, internal audits and the outcomes of this quality review, with an outline of deadlines, actions and responsibilities.	There have been a number of reviews in a short space of time, all resulting in recommendations. Therefore, the Division will need to take an approach which ensures that there is no duplication of effort and that responsibility for the implementation of each recommendation is clear.
9.	1	Define the role of a marketing, media and communications officer for the whole of UL Sport and appoint in time to ensure effective coordination and impact of the media and communications strategy launch and delivery in 2017.	There is a need to coordinate the currently fragmented approach to marketing and marketing budgets and to assure cohesive well-planned, effective use of resources.
10.	1	Demonstrate and assure that the instigation of any capital project is in	It is understood that there are approximately ten capital projects

		complete alignment with the UL Sport strategic plan.	in the pipeline. While all will have individual value and opportunity, it is unclear if there is a consistent and coherent overarching strategy.
11.	1	Ensure all staff are issued with appropriate contracts of employment with a clear job description and employment terms and conditions, together with a generic staff handbook.	All employees should have a contract outlining the terms and conditions of their employment with the Division. The provision of contracts will provide greater clarity for all concerned, and consideration should then be given to the impact of varying terms and conditions on staff morale and performance.

4.2.2 Level 2 recommendations

12.	2	Complete an exercise to identify baseline measurements of quality to inform the development of a range of KPIs.	It is important for the Division to identify baselines in order to measure improvement and set goals.
13.	2	Develop a media and communications strategy and first-year action plan commencing August 2017 which encompass and coordinate the promotional and marketing needs and expectations of all stakeholders, customers, services and facilities which constitute or are associated with UL Sport.	This will inform the UL Sport strategic plan (which in turn will be informed by the UL strategic plan).
14.	2	Identify, resource and deliver a customer service excellence standard award across UL Sport within 24 months in order to ensure that the divisional staff are adequately aware of and trained in all aspects of the customer journey, and that UL Sport receives the recognition and reward for the continual improvement this will engender.	
15.	2	Ensure that development programmes are aligned with the UL Sport strategic plan. Such programmes will include, for example, staff training and development	

		plans, IT system support and development, student leadership and volunteer development.	
16.	2	Provide a complete HR function across the Division in order to address gaps that exist in this area.	The absence of a divisional HR function poses a risk of many employee-related inconsistencies in terms of contracts, policies, expectations and the work environment. Examples have been given by the Division of collaboration with UL HR. This approach is worthy of further exploration.
17.	2	Implement the Performance Development Review System (PDRS) for each member of staff, in alignment with the growth and development of UL Sport in accordance with the divisional strategic plan.	UL Sport needs to have an accurate sense both of its talent pool and its skills/competency and training requirements so that staff have the opportunity to reach their full potential.
18.	2	Given the recent establishment of a continual improvement framework, ensure as a matter of importance that the appropriate resources and structures are in place to sustain the current momentum and safeguard its development into the future.	Considering the scope of the current UL Sport operation and the future projects planned, the QRG believes that without a robust structure and resources in place it will not be possible to sustain the drive for continual improvement.
19.	2	Consider the implementation of an appropriate accreditation or quality assurance award for UL Sport.	External accreditation provides valuable external recognition and benchmarking which allows for the development of best practice.
20.	2	Identify appropriate means of communication of processes and information for those staff who do not have access to SharePoint.	It is essential that access to information be consistent across the whole Division.
21.	2	Review and deliver a needs analysis of the current in-house management system software (Gladstone MRM), and consult with partners and all users to develop the specification and business case for an upgrade. Use industry and higher education networks to provide valuable intelligence and guidance in supporting the overall process.	

22.	2	Consider the appointment of a relationship/partnership manager.	UL Sport has a wide range of important partnerships which would benefit from having a dedicated staff member with responsibility for managing them.
23.	2	Develop and implement a variety of customer feedback tools.	With the expansion of facilities comes a related growth in customers. In order to deliver a high standard of experience, it is important to operate a strong programme of customer feedback opportunities.

Appendices

A Membership of the QRG

Mr. Charlie Dolan (Chair)	HR & Educational Consultant, Charles Dolan Consulting Ltd., Cork
Mrs. Karen Henderson	Quality Assurance Team Leader, Queens University, Belfast
Ms. Alison Odell	Director of Sport, University of Manchester (Retired)
Mr. John O'Rourke	General Manager, Plassey Campus Centre, University of Limerick.
Mr. Niall Sturrock	Alumni & Development (Retired Director of Sport & Recreation), University of Strathclyde
Ms. Ailish O'Farrell (Recording Secretary)	Technical Writer, Limerick

B Membership of the Unit's Self-Evaluation Team (SET)

Neasa Fahy O'Donnell (Team Leader)	Andree Walkin
Ger Cunningham	Alan Ward
Jennifer-Anne Mulholland	Sinead Kelly
Noreen O'Connell	