



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Quality Review
of the
Buildings & Estates Department

The University of Limerick (UL) follows an established process for Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Improvement (QI). This involves a seven-year cycle during which all Support Departments develop a quality management system, and undergo a rigorous self-evaluation prior to a quality review by internationally recognised experts in the field.

The process itself has evolved as a result of the Universities Act, 1997 in which the responsibility for QA/QI was placed directly with the individual universities. The UL Quality Support Unit (QSU) web site provides an elaboration of this process and the state of progress.

The review process is designed to satisfy the requirements of the recent Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, meet the expectations of QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) and most importantly, assist support departments in meeting their obligations to maintain an effective QMS (quality management system). The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) require all institutions to develop formal quality procedures designed to achieve continuous enhancement of quality.

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Quality Review Group	Appendix A
UL-QSU Web Site	www.ul.ie/quality
Department Web Site	http://www.ul.ie/buildings
QQI Web Site	www.qqi.ie

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1.0 Background

1.1 Legislative Framework

The University of Limerick, in common with all the universities in the Republic of Ireland, falls within the Universities Act, 1997. This Act specifies the responsibilities of universities in Ireland for Quality Improvement and Quality Assurance. Section 12 stipulates that, 'The objects of a university shall include - ... to promote the highest standards in, and quality of, teaching and research'.

Section 35 (1) of the Act further requires that each university Governing Authority 'shall...require the university to establish procedures for quality assurance aimed at improving the quality of education and related services provided by the university'. The Act provides a framework for the universities to develop their quality processes. Section 35 requires each university to review the quality of the work of all faculty, academic Departments and service (including administrative) Departments on a ten-year cycle. In particular 'The procedures shall include ... assessment by those, including students, availing of the teaching, research and other services provided by the university'.

Although each university is free to develop its own procedures in fulfilling its obligations under the Act, close co-operation has been achieved through the co-ordinating role of the Irish Universities Association Quality Committee, (IUAQC). Accordingly, the universities have developed a framework comprising a set of common principles and operating guidelines for quality improvement and quality assurance. These principles and guidelines have been integrated into each of the universities procedures, which ensure coherence through the university system, while maintaining the autonomy of each university and its individual institutional culture.

More detail is available at <https://www2.ul.ie/pdf/181038187.pdf>.

1.2 Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

Quality and Qualifications Ireland was established on 6 November 2012 under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. The new Authority is being created by an amalgamation of four bodies that have both awarding and quality assurance responsibilities: the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB). The new Authority will assume all the functions of the four legacy bodies plus some new responsibilities in particular areas arising from the Act.

The role and general functions of QQI incorporate the previous functions of FETAC, HETAC and the NQAI in relation to the maintenance and development of the National Framework of Qualification, the validation and awarding of qualifications, and the monitoring and review of providers. QQI also has responsibility for the external quality review of the universities; a function performed previously by the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) in conjunction with the Higher Education Authority (HEA). In addition, the authority has been assigned some new functions. It is responsible for the development and implementation of a register of programmes leading to awards in the

NFQ. It will also establish a Code of Practice and International Education Mark for the provision of education to international learners.

1.3 The Quality Review Process

The common framework adopted by the Irish universities for their Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement systems consistent with both the legislative requirement of the Universities Act 1997 and international practice comprise the following stages:

1. Preparation of a self-assessment report by the unit taking into account feedback from students and customers.
2. Quality (Peer) Review involving external experts, both nationally and internationally, who have visited the Department, met the students and studied the Self-Assessment Report.
3. Quality Review Report, made publicly available by the Governing Authority of the university, incorporating the reactions and quality improvement plans of the Division and University.
4. Continuing improvement through implementation within the resources available to the university.

More detail is available at www.ul.ie/quality

1.4 Committee for the Establishment of Quality Management Systems

The Vice President Academic and Registrar has overall responsibility for implementation of Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement policy and implementation at the University of Limerick. Implementation is carried out by the Director of Quality. In 2006, the Deans' Council established the Committee for the Establishment of Quality Management Systems (CEQMS) to oversee the development of quality management systems across the university and to provide support for the review procedures.

The first round of reviews for support departments took place between 2005 and 2008. Copies of the review reports are available on the [QSU website](#).

In 2006, the CEQMS confirmed an earlier decision by the university to implement ISO9000 as a quality management system (QMS) in all support departments. The committee decided, however, that a UL bespoke QMS would be more widely acceptable and developed a suitable template with the assistance of external quality experts. This system is described in the document "Quality Management Systems – Standard Framework for Support Departments".

The second round of reviews is scheduled to take place between 2013 and 2016. The review will take account of significant developments in the design and implementation of quality management systems across the University since the first round of reviews. As a consequence, the reviewers will now expect to see a fully functional QMS which is seamlessly embedded into department operations and drives decision making processes.

2.0 The Buildings & Estates Department

The Buildings and Estates Department (B&E) is a customer-driven department that aspires to providing an excellent service to the university campus and wider community. The B&E mission is to support the university to achieve its goals; its vision is to provide outstanding physical facilities for the pursuit of academic, cultural and recreational activities; its ethos is to sustain and seek to continually improve the quality of all services that it provides to the campus community.

B&E has a wide-ranging portfolio of activities that centre on the development and maintenance of the campus. The campus has expanded significantly in recent years and, consequently, the activities of B&E have grown considerably commensurate with the growth of the university.

The department's key services can be summarised as follows:



The university operates within tight financial parameters and, therefore, B&E is required to operate in an effective and efficient manner. The recurrent budget for the department is approximately 10% of the total university annual budget. Thirty-five members of B&E staff are employed directly by UL; a further 77 are employed on a whole-time contract basis and 61 on a part-time contract basis. Specialist firms are engaged as required.

The development of the physical infrastructure on campus continues to be busy, with significant current and future projects on site or in planning at any one time. The expenditure on these developments varies from year to year but has averaged €28m per annum over the last 13 years.

See also www.ul.ie/buildings

3.0 The Follow-up Process

The Quality Review process occurs on an approximately seven-year cycle at the University of Limerick. An average of six Departments is reviewed annually. Once the Quality Review report is finalised, the Department concerned immediately sets about planning its response to the issues raised therein.

The self-evaluation process is intended to be a reflective exercise in which a Department/Division should identify many of its strengths and weaknesses and develop plans to strengthen and grow as appropriate. Quite often, the Quality Review Group (QRG) will reinforce these issues and may identify areas of concern that were overlooked. In many cases, the QRG will also highlight the strengths of the Department and encourage faculty and staff to take advantage of these.

After the division and the university have been given time to respond to the issues raised; the Quality Review Group's report will be made available to the wider community through the University's web site. Normally, the report is available within the University less than four weeks after the QRG visit. Responses and plans for action are incorporated into the report and are subject to the approval of the Executive Committee.

Presentation to the University's Governing Authority usually follows within six months of the QRG visit. The Governing Authority will publish the Quality Review report, including reactions and plans, immediately following approval.

It is expected that a review of progress in implementing recommendations and investigating issues raised would occur quarterly for the two years following the Quality Review Visit. Progress Reports will be published as deemed appropriate.

Date	Action
Date of Review	Department is issued with Quality Review report and required to prepare reactions and plans for Quality Improvement as appropriate. The report is circulated to all members of Management Committee for comment.
Date of Review	QRG Report, incorporating reactions, is presented to UL Executive Committee for discussion, as appropriate.
+ 2/3 Months	Reactions and plans incorporated into the Quality Improvement Action Plan and circulated to GA Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance Committee. QRG Report with Responses and Quality Improvement action Plan are tabled at GA-SPQAC meeting for discussion.
+ 1 Year	Director, Dean, Vice President Academic and Registrar and Director of Quality discuss progress with resolution of recommendations and outstanding items are referred to Executive Committee and Governing Authority as appropriate.

4.0 Preliminary Comments of the Quality Review Group (QRG)

The Buildings and Estates Department has a wide-ranging portfolio of activities which centre on the development and maintenance of the University of Limerick (UL) campus and which has expanded with the recent growth of the university. The department aspires to meet the needs of a wide customer base, ranging from students and staff to commercial units and visitors to the campus. The university has reason to be grateful for the way that Buildings and Estates has been successful in maintaining the quality of the campus and its buildings in a time of increasing demands and diminishing resources.

The department has been engaged with the development of a quality management system (QMS) for over a decade. It underwent a quality review in 2007 and has continued to develop its QMS since then. There was a short hiatus in internal auditing of the QMS, in terms of conducting Self-Assessments, from December 2010 to July 2013 when a gap analysis was conducted in conjunction with the Quality Support Unit. This was followed by the immediate implementation of its key findings. The practice of internal auditing on an annual basis was re-established in early 2014, with an audit conducted with the help of trained auditors from other departments. It was readily admitted to the Quality Review Group (QRG) that there had been a movement from compliance with the requirements of the Quality Review System to an appreciation of the benefits of full engagement.

The QRG found the self-assessment report (SAR) a useful foundation for the conduct of the review. Centred on the findings of the gap analysis, it was clearly written and well supported with documentary evidence. All members of staff had contributed to the compilation of the SAR and had had an opportunity to comment on the complete draft. In their meetings with the QRG, the staff of the department were exceptionally open and straightforward and eager to engage with the review process. The QRG is grateful for the willingness of the department to supply additional documentation promptly, to explain complex management processes with patience and courtesy and to reflect further on issues raised in the SAR. The QRG met with a wide range of stakeholders, representing academic and support staff, clubs and societies and commercial units. All spoke highly of the professionalism displayed by members of the department and their helpfulness to individuals. It was clear that the services provided by Buildings and Estates are very much appreciated.

The QRG concludes that there can be no doubt about the commitment of Buildings and Estates to quality in all its activities and it hopes that the department will maintain the momentum demonstrated in preparation for this review as it continues to develop its QMS.

5.0 The Report of the Quality Review Team

5.1 Current State of Development of the Department's Quality Management System

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

- 5.1.1 The prevailing ethos of sustaining and improving quality in all the services the department provides to its customers.

- 5.1.2 The effective use of the gap analysis conducted by the Quality Support Unit.

- 5.1.3 The involvement of all staff in taking responsibility for quality.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

- 5.1.4 Consider the use of the department's team of trained auditors to sustain and monitor the operation and development of the Quality Management System (QMS).

5.2 Customer Focus

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

- 5.2.1 The very obvious commitment to customer focus both in policy and practice.

- 5.2.2 The good relationships and partnerships with all customer and stakeholder groups.

- 5.2.3 The well-developed, customer-friendly minor works and maintenance log system.

- 5.2.4 The plans to incorporate customer feedback into the customer charter.

- 5.2.5 The very positive plans in place for a range of customer-focused initiatives.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

- 5.2.6 Set percentage targets against a baseline, with supporting actions to increase scores in areas identified for improvement in staff and student surveys.

- 5.2.7 Utilise maintenance log trends when forward planning maintenance programmes.

- 5.2.8 Further develop a range of electronic communication mechanisms for use in emergency situations.

- 5.2.9 Make further use of social media in communications with the entire campus community.

- 5.2.10 Introduce stakeholder focus groups to enhance customer feedback.

5.3 Leadership

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

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| 5.3.1 | The clear leadership and strong sense of shared responsibility among staff. |
| 5.3.2 | The effective meeting structure, in particular the weekly 'Pulse' meetings. |
| 5.3.3 | The reinstatement of the global annual meeting with staff and core contractors. |
| 5.3.4 | The effectiveness of the department's open-door policy. |
| 5.3.5 | The production of a high-quality annual report. |

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

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| 5.3.6 | Produce a strategic plan for the department. |
| 5.3.7 | Become more proactive in initiating contact with deans and relevant directors to understand their respective strategic plans and emerging needs. |
| 5.3.8 | Establish clearer short- and long-term arrangements for deputising and back-filling for senior roles and responsibilities. |

5.4 Involvement of Staff

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

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| 5.4.1 | The recognition that effective communication channels between staff and management are essential in the delivery of service. |
| 5.4.2 | The introduction of the online discussion forum to allow staff to make suggestions and provide anonymous feedback. |
| 5.4.3 | The maintenance of individual staff training and development records. |
| 5.4.4 | The rotation of the chair at weekly meetings. |
| 5.4.5 | The support offered to staff to undertake personal and professional development. |

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

- | | |
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| 5.4.6 | Develop a training plan to support the department's strategic plan. |
| 5.4.7 | Ensure the effective implementation of the PDR system with appropriate training. |

5.5 Continual Improvement

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

5.5.1 The extensive evidence of a proactive approach to continual improvement initiatives.

5.5.2 The system used for developing and monitoring action plans.

5.5.3 The project management approach for projects and initiatives.

5.5.4 The investment in a number of large-scale continual improvement initiatives.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.5.5 Develop a calendar of activities to ensure the QMS maintains momentum.

5.5.6 Link continual improvement initiatives to department strategy and objectives as appropriate.

5.5.7 Develop a process to ensure that lessons learned arising from major events are addressed at Quarterly Business Review (QBR) meetings.

5.6 Process Approach to Services Provided

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

5.6.1 The inclusion of quality on the agenda of meetings at different levels.

5.6.2 The central importance of the quality handbook in the QMS.

5.6.3 The accessibility of operational-level policies and procedures.

5.6.4 The ongoing review and development of operational policies and procedures.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.6.5 Undertake internal audits of each key service and management process on an annual basis.

5.6.6 Redesign the quality handbook to align with the QMS framework principles.

5.6.7 Undertake a mapping exercise for all processes.

5.6.8 Identify a process owner for all key processes.

5.7 Systematic Approach to Management

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

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| 5.7.1 | The systematic approach and success in providing a wide range of services in the context of an expanding building footprint and diminishing resources. |
| 5.7.2 | The significant innovation demonstrated in developing bespoke systems to support processes. |
| 5.7.3 | The identification of the interaction of management and service processes. |
| 5.7.4 | The evidence of continuing commitment to the development and maintenance of the campus master plan. |

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

- | | |
|-------|--|
| 5.7.5 | Undertake a formal review of the campus master plan every five years. |
| 5.7.6 | Undertake an annual review of the structure of the department and allocation of responsibilities in response to emerging developments. |
| 5.7.7 | Put in place a multiannual backlog maintenance programme to address building deficits. |
| 5.7.8 | Explore methodologies for encouraging better utilisation of space. |
| 5.7.9 | Embed risk management at a departmental level. |

5.8 Factual Approach to Decision Making

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

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| 5.8.1 | The planning approach to capital projects, including visits to exemplar sites. |
| 5.8.2 | The use and dissemination of lessons learned on the completion of projects. |
| 5.8.3 | The identification of key risks for the UL risk register. |

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

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| 5.8.4 | Ensure that project risk registers are implemented for all projects that warrant the formation of a buildings committee. |
| 5.8.5 | Ensure that each buildings committee remains in place until final account and presentation of post-completion review. |
| 5.8.6 | Progress with establishing a more formal benchmarking process with other Irish, and possibly UK, universities. |

5.9 Supplier, Partner and Community Relations

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

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| 5.9.1 | The recognition of the importance of supplier, partner and community relationships. |
| 5.9.2 | The development of the energy awareness programme and the broader Green Campus initiative. |
| 5.9.3 | The involvement in the Smarter Travel initiative, in collaboration with external stakeholders. |
| 5.9.4 | The development of sectoral tenders for legal and insurance services. |

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

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|--------|--|
| 5.9.5 | Work with other university directors of estates to share good practice across the sector. |
| 5.9.6 | Map the contacts with external bodies to ensure optimum relations are maintained. |
| 5.9.7 | Organise formal reviews with other support departments for best alignment of service provision. |
| 5.9.8 | Establish and review annually a procurement strategy in the context of emerging national and sectoral initiatives. |
| 5.9.9 | Expand the commuter plan to include dynamic management and communication of the plan and supporting initiatives, with a clearly identifiable person with overall responsibility. |
| 5.9.10 | Explore membership of relevant professional bodies to ensure awareness of up-to-date industry developments. |

Appendices

A Membership of the Quality Review Group:

Lily Carroll	President, Postgraduate Students Union, UL
Patrick Hughes	Director, Property & Facilities, Edinburgh Napier University
Ann Kettle (Chair)	Honorary Senior Lecturer, University of St. Andrews, Scotland
Rhona McCormack	Mature Student Officer, Student Affairs Division, UL
Louise McNamara	Director, Invisio Ltd., Co. Wicklow
Ailish O'Farrell	Technical Writer, Limerick
Mark Poland	Director, Buildings & Estates, University College Cork

B Membership of the Department Quality Team:

Tony Considine (Team Leader)	Sean McDermott
Brian Considine	Pat McMahon
Donncha Corrigan	Jane Murphy
Cliona Donnellan	Kelly O'Connor
Chris Fogarty	Ian O'Donoghue
Karen Fraher	Pat O'Neill
Gerald Hallinan	Robert Reidy (Director)

C Contact

The Quality Review Group was given the opportunity over three days to talk to the department Quality Team both formally and informally. Meetings with faculty, staff and department stakeholders were scheduled as group sessions. The Review Group was given the opportunity to meet all staff during a visit to the facilities of the department and this was most helpful.

All the meetings provided extremely useful additional information to support the SAR.