UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Quality Review

of the

Department of Personnel and Employment Relations

The University of Limerick (UL), through its membership of the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB), follows an established process for Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Improvement (QI). This involves a seven-year cycle during which all Departments work to improve the quality of their programmes and services, 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 broader picture is described in the publication *A Framework for Quality in Irish Universities* which can be downloaded from the IUQB web site: *http://www.iuqb.ie/*

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Quality Review Group	Appendix A
UL-QSU Web Site	www.quality.ul.ie
Dept. Web Site	www.ul.ie/business/departments/personnel-employment-relations
IUQB Web Site	www.iuqb.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 *www.quality.ul.ie/The_Act.htm* and *www.iuqb.ie*

1.2   The Irish Universities Quality Board

The Governing Authorities of the seven Irish universities established the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) in February 2003. This board comprises representatives of the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU) and a number of external members.

The aims of the IUQB are:
- To increase the level of inter-university cooperation in developing Quality Assurance processes
- To represent the Irish universities nationally and internationally on issues relating to quality assurance and quality improvement
- To articulate, on behalf of the Governing Authorities of the universities, the resource implications of recommendations for quality improvement.

The IUQB subsumed the roles and functions formerly carried out by the IUQSC (Irish Universities Quality Steering Committee). More detail is available at *www.iuqb.ie*

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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.
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.quality.ul.ie*

1.4   Management of Quality in the University

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.
The planned schedule of Quality Review of both academic and support departments was commenced in the year 2000, with the first full cycle of units within the University being reviewed within a seven-year cycle.

Academic departments are reviewed against international standards as described in the document "A Guide to the Quality Review Process for Academic Departments", which is available on the UL website at www.quality.ul.ie   .

In 2006, the university decided to implement a bespoke quality management system (QMS) 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".

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

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2.0 The P&ER Department

The Department of Personnel and Employment Relations at the University of Limerick resides in the Kemmy Business School (KBS) and is one of four constituent Departments. Formed in 1994, the Department of Personnel and Employment's mission is to advance learning and research on work, employment and society which is achieved through a combination of evidence based learning, community engagement and independent rigorous research.

Staff work together to deliver a suite of programme and module offerings and research outputs in a wide range of areas related to the management and development of people. Programmes and modules are offered within the discipline areas of human resource management, employment relations, organisational behaviour, human resource development and organisational psychology, while research outputs are captured within the broad ambit of the Work, Knowledge and Employment research theme of the Kemmy Business School.

Taught programmes are offered at undergraduate Certificate and Degree levels, and at graduate Masters and PhD levels. The principal academic programmes offered by the Department are the MSc in Human Resource Management, the MSc in Work and Organisational Psychology, the MSc in Work Organisational Behaviour, the Human Resource Management Specialist Option offered on the undergraduate BBS programme, the post-experience BA in Human Resource Management and the Certificate in Human Resources and Supervisory Practice. These courses combine academic rigour with preparation for a professional foundation for a range of careers involving people management. The Department also provides modules on the MBA and the Masters in Project Management in addition to a wide range of undergraduate service modules on programmes offered by other Colleges.

The Department of Personnel & Employment Relations has established a strong international reputation for both the quantity and quality of its research output. The department's record of publishing high-impact and translational research has been a particular strength over the years; in a recent analysis (2012) of the research performance of business schools and business scholars in Ireland, Professor Richard Tol ranks the Department of P&ER as number 1 in its research specialisation (industrial and human relations) with respect to research-active staff, publications and citations while Carbery et al's (2013)[1] detailed retrospective analysis of the development trajectory of HRM research in Ireland shows that, since 1990, UL has contributed the largest proportion of HRM-related research output in Ireland (29.2% of overall output in ISI-listed journals).

Research links have been established with a wide range of international universities and business schools around the globe, and a number of important projects have been completed or are underway with partner institutions that have strong translational significance.

Readers are invited to visit the Department's website for a full description of the nature and diversity of the teaching and research activities of the Department.

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[1] Source: Carbery, R., Gunnigle, P. & Morley, M. (2013) "Human Resource Management Research Output In Ireland: A Retropsective", Irish Journal of Management, forthcoming

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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 five academic Departments are reviewed annually. Once the Peer Review Group 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 Peer Review Group (PRG) will reinforce these issues and may identify areas of concern that were overlooked. In many cases, the PRG will also highlight the strengths of the Department and encourage faculty and staff to take advantage of these.

After the department and the university have been given time to respond to the issues raised; the Peer 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 PRG visit. Responses and plans for action are incorporated into the report and are subject to the approval of the University's Governing Authority Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance Committee. Presentation to the committee usually follows within six months of the PRG visit. The Governing Authority will publish the Peer Review report, including reactions and plans, 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 Peer Review Visit. Progress Reports will be published as deemed appropriate.

Date	Action
Date of review	Department is issued with Peer Review Group 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	PRG 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. PRG Report with Responses and Quality Improvement Action Plan are tabled at GA-SPQAC meeting for discussion.
+ 1 year	Director, Dean, Vice President Academic & Registrar and Director of Quality discuss progress with resolution of recommendations and outstanding items are referred to Executive Committee, Academic Council and/or Governing Authority as appropriate.

4.0   Preliminary Comments of the Peer Review Group (PRG)

The PRG was impressed by the warmth of the department's welcome and the overall constructive approach to the quality review process. The clearly presented self-assessment report (SAR), with its comprehensive and detailed appendices, greatly facilitated the work of the group and was much appreciated. The willingness to engage and the openness shown by those with whom the PRG had discussions were indicative of the positive and cooperative attitude which pervades the department.

The location of P&ER in the modern building which houses the Kemmy Business School (KBS) – the academic home for approximately 3,000 students and over 100 members of staff – has ensured a purpose-built and stimulating environment for teaching which can encourage cross-disciplinary interaction of research interests.

Students and alumni spoke highly of the education which they experienced in a challenging and dynamic environment. Of particular mention was the cooperative placement, a core requisite of undergraduate courses at the University of Limerick (UL), which ensured full involvement of students with the "real world", and prepared them well for future employment.

Accreditation by the European Programme Approval System (EPAS), the globally recognised accreditation body for international management education programmes, is a measure of the department's standing. The EPAS evaluation panel report earlier this year commended in particular "*Strong programme management and administrative support*", "*Strong focus on student and experiential learning*" and "*Strong programme reputation with employers*" and the present quality review concurs with these commendations.

The department's mission statement includes the aspiration to be *"an Irish and international leader in the field"* and its highly-rated research outputs suggest that this target is achievable.

The department is responding well to the economic and other challenges which face it.

The PRG is indebted to the Quality Support Unit at the university for facilitating all aspects of the PRG's activities.

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5.0   The Report of the Peer Review Group

5.1   Mission

Commendations
The PRG commends the following:

5.1.1	The very good employment record of the department.
5.1.2	The number one rating of the department in Ireland for its research specialisation.
5.1.3	The accreditation of the P&ER degree programmes by a wide range of accrediting bodies at national and international levels.
5.1.4	The credibility of the department as attested to by its very positive record on placements in a difficult economic context.

Recommendations
The PRG recommends the following:

5.1.5	Reflect on the meaning of an "international leader", as per the mission statement, and how progress in this direction can be evaluated and achieved.
5.1.6	Consider further external benchmarking of performance against relevant comparators in teaching, learning and research.
5.1.7	Evaluate the potential benefits of internationalising the student body.
5.1.8	Establish criteria that enable discretion over entry standards to postgraduate degrees.
5.1.9	Increase efforts to publicise the distinctiveness of the department.

5.2   Design and Content of Curriculum

Commendations
The PRG commends the following:

5.2.1	The clarity and relevance of the learning objectives, especially the emphasis on personal and professional development via key skills.
5.2.2	The broad involvement of key stakeholders, alumni and professional bodies in the design of the curriculum.
5.2.3	The collaboration of the department with UL providers of essential student services, such as the Cooperative Education & Careers Division (CECD).
5.2.4	The extent of research-led teaching in the department.
5.2.5	The development of specialist master's programmes to meet perceived demand and capitalise on staff expertise.

Recommendations
The PRG recommends the following:

5.2.6	Integrate internationalisation more widely across the whole curriculum.
5.2.7	Consider ways in which current programmes in the P&ER master's suite can include both basic core modules and a greater selection of elective modules.
5.2.8	Liaise more comprehensively with relevant industry professionals whose knowledge, expertise and business needs can contribute to programme development.
5.2.9	Strengthen the link between theory and practical application via real-life business case studies and similar methods.
5.2.10	Further develop the skills aspects of the programmes to cover a wider range of interpersonal, management and cross-cultural skills.

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5.3   Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Commendations
The PRG commends the following:

5.3.1	The appropriate, and in places innovative, balance of methods of teaching delivery.
5.3.2	The evidence of a very positive student experience and the high retention rates.
5.3.3	The wide range of opportunities available for the development of teaching skills in cooperation with the commendable work of the Centre for Teaching & Learning (CTL).
5.3.4	The clearly coordinated assessment strategies for all programmes.
5.3.5	The very positive use of practitioner guest lecturers and guest academics.

Recommendations
The PRG recommends the following:

5.3.6	Investigate further possibilities for expanding the flexibility of modes of delivery of teaching to improve the student learning experience on and off campus.
5.3.7	Continue to work on reducing class sizes on large undergraduate modules.
5.3.8	Benchmark with comparable departments, both internally and externally, on standards and award distributions.
5.3.9	Work with the KBS and UL to critically review the external examining process to ensure comparability with relevant institutions on standards and awards.

5.4　Facilities and Learning Resources

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.4.1	The deliberate range, size, layout and availability of rooms to facilitate programme delivery and encourage different learning activities.
5.4.2	The investment in the CCTV lab and the use of this technology to facilitate skill development and awareness.
5.4.3	The current online resources which are appreciated particularly by part-time students who cannot easily gain access to the library.
5.4.4	The positive student feedback on the availability of facilities and on the service provided by the dedicated KBS librarian.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.4.5	Acquire dedicated IT support to implement technology advances that will support and facilitate the department's strategy and mission.
5.4.6	Exploit the high levels of laptop ownership to mitigate the under-capacity in the library by posting more journals, articles and reading list items online and providing more charging points across the campus.
5.4.7	Make training mandatory at undergraduate level on the effective use of library resources and on other writing and research-related skills.
5.4.8	Ensure access to print and photocopying services out of hours and over the weekend.

5.5   Staff

Commendations
The PRG commends the following:

5.5.1	The excellent approach to mentoring in the department with a strong sense of collegiality and support.
5.5.2	The good use of research assistants as a supplementary resource for teaching while enabling their personal development and portfolio building.
5.5.3	The equality across the department in terms of workload and access to research project involvement.
5.5.4	The good integration of PhD researchers into the department.

Recommendations
The PRG recommends the following:

5.5.5	Increase exposure of less senior staff to engagement with the KBS, the university and the wider community.
5.5.6	Seek assistance to review the administrative tasks of the department to enable greater free time for research.
5.5.7	Make a proposal to Student Academic Administration (SAA) to protect, where possible, free days for research in staff timetables.
5.5.8	Explore, when possible, the opportunity to headhunt international talent to enhance the reputation, succession planning and internationalisation of the P&ER department.

5.6   Student Guidance and Support

Commendations
The PRG commends the following:

5.6.1	The approachability and availability of staff.
5.6.2	The good integration of the department with the university support systems, such as Student Affairs and the CECD.
5.6.3	The process for continual student feedback on performance.
5.6.4	The high levels of employability of P&ER graduates.
5.6.5	The added value of the student employment experience via the co-op placement programme.

Recommendations
The PRG recommends the following:

5.6.6	Collaborate with the CECD to analyse the profile of first job destinations.
5.6.7	Establish greater links between HRM modules and the President's volunteer programme to aid teaching of such aspects as corporate social responsibility (CSR).
5.6.8	Encourage greater academic and social interaction between students on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

5.7 Research Activity

Commendations
The PRG commends the following:

5.7.1	The international reputation of the department for its leading position in research on HRM, industrial relations and organisational behaviour.
5.7.2	The praiseworthy publication record of the department, with a good proportion of research publications being in journals classified at the leading levels (3* and 4*) in the Association of Business School rankings.
5.7.3	The clear and positive efforts that have been made to disseminate research to potential users.
5.7.4	The fact that all departmental staff are involved in research activity.
5.7.5	The large research student community by subject standards.
5.7.6	The excellent level of cooperation, mainly through informal mechanisms, between researchers with an established international profile and early career researchers.

Recommendations
The PRG recommends the following:

5.7.7	Continue and, where possible, increase support for attendance of researchers at major international conferences. Given the limited research funding in the Irish context, participation in international networks is very important to produce top-level research.
5.7.8	Facilitate flexibility to allow periods of time in which academics are free to concentrate on research activity.
5.7.9	Continue to pursue opportunities to create synergies within the KBS and more broadly with other institutes in Ireland and internationally.

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5.8 Department Organisation and Management

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.8.1	The strategic importance of P&ER staff to the research reputation and image of UL.
5.8.2	The introduction of formal team briefings to supplement the existing informal channels of communication in the department.
5.8.3	The participation of P&ER in an external workshop to evaluate the department itself, the programmes it offers and the alignment of P&ER activities with the UL strategic plan.
5.8.4	The department's quality ethos and commitment to teaching excellence.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.8.5	Facilitate undergraduate exposure to research topics and methods by inviting undergraduate students to the PhD seminar series.
5.8.6	Develop a targeted medium-term succession plan to include raising the profile of the "next generation" of professors in order to ensure the continuity of reputation and impact of the P&ER department.
5.8.7	Conduct a cost-benefit analysis in consultation with the KBS to investigate hiring additional staff (which are not related to student numbers) to facilitate the research agenda of the department in recognition of its contribution to UL's reputation in the marketplace.
5.8.8	To retain key "succession talent", collaborate with the KBS and/or UL Executive Committee to implement a regular promotion review timeline.

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5.9   Quality Improvement Plan

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.9.1	The identification, via the SAR, of improvements in every category.
5.9.2	The commitment to continuous improvement as demonstrated in the quality improvement plan (QIP), suggestions from the strategic off-site workshop and quality initiatives since the last review.
5.9.3	The emphasis on student support and well-being.
5.9.4	The willingness of staff to embrace technology to advance the P&ER mission and facilitate learning.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.9.5	Redraft the QIP as a project plan to include the prioritisation of items, completion dates, initiative sponsors and detailed project milestones.
5.9.6	Research ways to maximise the potential of alumni for input on curricula, the identification of and funding for research topics, and as guest speakers.
5.9.7	Integrate the recommendations of the PRG into the existing plan.
5.9.8	Collaborate with KBS resources to secure dedicated IT professional(s) to address the technology opportunities and challenges identified in areas such as the website, webinars, podcasts and SULIS.

Appendices

A   Membership of the Peer Review Group:

Prof. Phil Almond	Professor of Comparative Employment Relations, De Montfort University, UK
Ms. Karen Burns	Director of Human Resources, Sun Life Financial (Ireland)
Ms. Ailish O'Farrell	Independent technical writer (PRG Recording Secretary)
Dr. Cheryl Travers	Head of Discipline/Senior Lecturer in Organisational Behaviour and Human Resource Management, Loughborough University, UK
Dr. David Whan	Quality Consultant, UK (PRG Chair)

B   Membership of the Department Quality Team:

Dr. Noreen Heraty	Quality Team leader
Dr. Sarah MacCurtain	Member Quality Team
Dr. Tom Turner	Member Quality Team and HoD

C   Contact

The Peer Review Group were given the opportunity over three days to talk to the department Quality Team both formally and informally. Meetings with staff, postgraduate & undergraduate students and others 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.

END OF REPORT

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