



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Quality Review
of the
Department of
Physical Education and Sport Sciences

The University of Limerick (UL), follows an established process for Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Improvement (QI) in line with that developed jointly by IUA and IUQB. 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 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
Web Site	www.ul.ie/pess
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, fell within the Universities Act, 1997 until recently. This Act specified 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 required 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, (IUQAC). 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.

In late 2012 the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 superseded the Universities Act 1997 in respect of quality assurance matters in the universities and the IUQB was subsumed into the new Quality and Qualifications Ireland agency. The will be a consultative process during 2013 and it will be some time before changes to QA and QI practice are reflected in the universities.

1.2 The IUQB / QQI

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 were:

- 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) and has since been subsumed into Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). More detail is available at www.qqi.ie

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 good 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

2.0 The Department of Physical Education & Sport Sciences

The Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences (PESS) at the University of Limerick originates from the National College of Physical Education (NCPE), established in 1972, which later became part of Thomond College of Education (1976) which in turn became part of University of Limerick in 1991. The first degree programme for the education of physical education teachers in Ireland was established at the NCPE in the early 1970s. This programme has been continued and developed by Thomond College and to this day continues in the PESS department at the University of Limerick. In 1993, a second degree programme, Sport and Exercise Sciences, commenced. Again, this was the first of its kind in Ireland and the first students of this programme graduated in 1997.

The PESS department currently has a quota of 18 full-time academic staff, a chief technical officer, a senior technician, an experimental officer and two administrators. The department also has four teaching support staff and employs some visiting lecturers to cover aspects of the two degree programmes. The PESS department currently has over 500 undergraduate students registered on either Sport and Exercise Sciences (SES) or Physical Education (PE).

65 to 75 students are admitted annually to each of the SES and PE programmes. Additionally, the PESS department takes 6 to 10 students annually for the Graduate Diploma/MA in Dance; 15 to 20 students for the professional diploma in Physical Education and 15 -20 students for the MSc in Sport Performance. There are also approximately 35 PESS postgraduate research students.

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 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	Head of Dept, 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 Peer Review Group (PRG) appreciates the welcome extended to it by the University of Limerick (UL) and, in particular, Professor Paul McCutcheon's introduction to UL and his identification of the current context of our task. The PRG also wishes to thank the Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences (PESS) for its hospitality and cooperation throughout the review process.

The department is commended for its thorough self-assessment report (SAR), the provision of requested supplementary information and the frank and informative participation in the several meetings of the PRG with the departmental quality team and other staff.

PESS is providing an outstanding student experience and is committed to enhancing this further. The PRG recognises the department's excellent research performance and the steps being taken to further enhance its research activities and impact. The PRG commends the department's success in internationalisation in all areas of activity and its continued development of student opportunities in a global arena. PESS clearly plays an important role in the community.

The PRG is very impressed by the evidence provided of the high quality and distinctive nature of the initial teacher education provided by PESS. The university's strategic objective of creating a centre of excellence in teacher education could benefit greatly from the tradition, values, research focus and expertise of the department's teacher education staff.

The PRG commends the department for its dedication to a multidisciplinary approach to programmes in sports performance, for which it has earned a national and international reputation. The quality of the programme in conjunction with the cooperative placement provides a good opportunity for students to enhance their employability and gain insight into career direction.

PESS has benefited from substantial investment in its accommodation. In distinct phases since 2007, some €6.6 million has been obtained from the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and this has resulted in a significant improvement in both the teaching/learning and research environments.

The PRG commends the progress that the department has made since its previous review in 2005. In recognition of the overall high quality of the provision, PESS may justifiably seek to publicise its achievements in a variety of fields.

5.0 The Report of the Peer Review Group

5.1 Mission

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.1.1 The PESS mission and vision which are aligned well with the university's four strategic goals.

5.1.2 The work achieved to date in initiating the Physical Activity, Health, Lifestyle and Sports Institute (PAHLS).

5.1.3 The recognition by the department of the importance of links with the sports industry.

5.1.4 The department's commitment to building an international focus across all areas of activity.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.1.5 Map explicitly the extent to which PESS is implementing the university's four strategic goals across the four enabling themes (people, resources, quality and communication) in *Pioneering and Connected: UL Strategic Plan 2011-2015*, and use this map to focus the three-year departmental strategic plan.

5.1.6 Formalise the current arrangements into a service-level agreement between PESS and the University Arena.

5.1.7 As part of a structured employability strategy, develop and maintain links with graduates in order to ensure the relevance of PESS courses for future employment.

5.1.8 Seek to play a leading role in a UL strategy for sport.

5.2 Design and Content of Curriculum

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

- 5.2.1 The Physical Education (PE) teacher education curriculum that integrates school experiences and other authentic teaching experiences across the four years of course work.

- 5.2.2 The Sport and Exercise Sciences (SES) faculty consensus to focus their curriculum on sport performance to differentiate it from sport and exercise science programmes at other universities that offer programmes emphasising health, exercise and rehabilitation.

- 5.2.3 The plans for restructuring the Graduate Diploma/MA in Dance programmes with a view to exploring the possibility of collaboration with the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance to embrace a variety of dance perspectives as outcomes for postgraduate students.

- 5.2.4 The creation of the MSc in Performance Psychology to enhance the department's postgraduate options.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

- 5.2.5 Strengthen departmental liaisons for cooperative education and other SES placements to ensure quality instructional experiences for SES students, connecting the SES curriculum with employment in the SES field.

- 5.2.6 Prioritise the integration of PE and SES students early in their programmes to show connections between the two fields of study.

- 5.2.7 Provide formal opportunities for students to share their experiences in schools and SES placements with peers and students in the early stages of their university programmes as a means of motivating and inspiring other students.

5.3 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

- | | |
|-------|--|
| 5.3.1 | The variety of teaching and assessment methods used throughout PESS programmes. |
| 5.3.2 | The exploration of a blended approach to learning and the nomination of a blended learning champion. |
| 5.3.3 | The publication of papers based on final year project (FYP) work in peer-reviewed journals. |
| 5.3.4 | The inclusion of external experts for module delivery. |
| 5.3.5 | The reinforcement and contextualisation of externally delivered module content within PESS-specific modules. |

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

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|--------|---|
| 5.3.6 | Take action to improve the graduation rates of SES students to bring them into line with the UL average. |
| 5.3.7 | Enhance feedback to students in terms of quality, consistency and timing. |
| 5.3.8 | Determine whether lower student satisfaction rates as indicated on the 2012 exit survey are associated with externally delivered or PESS-delivered modules or both. |
| 5.3.9 | Reduce the number of assessments per module where possible. |
| 5.3.10 | Enhance the use of online learning through suitable technologies where appropriate and identify resources to facilitate this. |

5.4 Facilities and Learning Resources

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

- 5.4.1 The improvements in equipment, facilities and configuration of the PESS building in recent years and the planning that went into maximising use of the space.

- 5.4.2 The priority given to undergraduate students when it comes to lab space allocation.

- 5.4.3 The links between the library and the department and the proactive nature of the support provided by the faculty librarian.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

- 5.4.4 Ensure that, in line with the university's research agenda, consideration is given to managing risks relating to equipment maintenance and use.

- 5.4.5 Make all learning spaces inspiring (especially the physiology lab), continue displaying the PESS e-Zine on department screens and implement other ways in which students can become aware of the work and research that PESS postgraduates and staff are doing.

- 5.4.6 Continue to lobby for improved AV equipment in the PESS teaching rooms, or look at alternative ways of funding and implementing improvements if support is not forthcoming.

- 5.4.7 Investigate ways in which current equipment and facilities can be used to generate income while enhancing research and learning.

5.5 Staff

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

- 5.5.1 The general high academic credentials of the PESS department.

- 5.5.2 The evidence of internationalisation in the department – in personnel, networks and research output.

- 5.5.3 The significant participation of PESS staff in university- and faculty-level leadership and management.

- 5.5.4 The use of the EHS workload recognition model.

- 5.5.5 The provision being made to incorporate current practitioner expertise in programme delivery.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

- 5.5.6 Commence, as a matter of urgency, a set of initiatives to reduce the staff student ratios (SSRs) for undergraduate programmes to norms that apply across the university and in line with the requirements of the relevant accrediting professional bodies.

- 5.5.7 Refine the department's presentation of SSR data to reflect the full input of academic resources to PESS programmes, including those provided by collaborating departments.

- 5.5.8 Review the current application of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) metrics with a focus on the total student learning experience and the most effective use of academic staff time within the learning continuum.

- 5.5.9 Review the academic support provision for school placement for initial teacher education programmes and make the necessary appointments to ensure that the standards sought by accrediting bodies can be delivered.

- 5.5.10 Continue to recognise the importance of including academic staff that have recent and relevant classroom experience in teacher education.

5.6 Student Guidance and Support

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

- 5.6.1 The PESS attendance policy, the rationale behind it, and the ways in which the policy encourages responsibility and professionalism.

- 5.6.2 The ways in which academic staff encourage students to support each other in their learning.

- 5.6.3 The recognition of the importance of early support for students including their participation in the First SevenWeeks programme.

- 5.6.4 The accessibility of staff to the students.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

- 5.6.5 Identify ways in which the First Seven Weeks initiative, or alternatives, can be optimised at department level without placing further undue strain on staff time.

- 5.6.6 Monitor student progress and where struggling students are identified ensure that appropriate support options are in place as early as possible.

- 5.6.7 Develop the department student handbook to be an inspirational and informative document for the students throughout their time at UL.

- 5.6.8 Ensure that the facility for students to feed back academic concerns to staff is optimised, for example through the “*You Said, We Did*” initiative.

5.7 Research Activity

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

- 5.7.1 The quality of PESS publications, with ISI metrics increasing year on year and the department performing well relative to other UL departments.

- 5.7.2 The efforts of the department to increase the number of postdoctoral researchers within PESS.

- 5.7.3 The overall approach of the department to the need to demonstrate research impact and the development of impact strategies for research.

- 5.7.4 The awareness and growing support for an Open Access policy at the departmental level.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

- 5.7.5 Take significant steps to reduce teaching loads to encourage research.

- 5.7.6 Put research-led learning at the heart of the student experience.

- 5.7.7 Employ an annual workload model for planning purposes rather than recognition, one that emphasises appropriately the strategic university priorities. This could begin through the Performance Development and Review (PDRS) process.

5.8 Department Organisation and Management

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

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| 5.8.1 | The monthly PESS departmental meetings and the monthly meetings between the HoD and the Dean of EHS which ensure that the department is both inward and outward facing. |
| 5.8.2 | The use of a SharePoint portal for storage and access to shared departmental materials. |
| 5.8.3 | The circulation of all PESS meeting dates at the beginning of the semester to facilitate attendance. |
| 5.8.4 | The adoption of the EHS workload recognition model to facilitate equitable allocation of workloads. |
| 5.8.5 | The considerable contribution of PESS staff, relative to the small size of the department, to UL-wide committees. |

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

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|--------|---|
| 5.8.6 | Convene a group to include the Dean of EHS, the HoD and all senior PESS faculty to identify champions from senior academic staff across the department to lead on the delivery of the quality improvement plan. |
| 5.8.7 | Ensure academic staff members receive appropriate professional development training for their non-academic roles such as in accounts and project management. |
| 5.8.8 | Strengthen marketing/PR links with the central UL marketing staff. |
| 5.8.9 | Integrate the workload recognition policy with the PDRS. |
| 5.8.10 | Ensure appropriate planning so that the secondment of senior academic staff to other roles within UL does not leave a range of deficits at departmental level. |

5.9 Quality Improvement Plan

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

- 5.9.1 The strong evidence of internal commitment to strategic planning and quality improvement.

- 5.9.2 The continuing commitment to the development of the Physical Activity, Health, Lifestyle and Sports Institute (PAHLS).

- 5.9.3 The actions proposed which demonstrate the impressive commitment of the department to the quality of the student experience in the context of high SSRs.

- 5.9.4 The increasing prioritisation of the research agenda.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

- 5.9.5 Continue to drive the establishment and operation of PAHLS and bring the current plans to early fruition.

- 5.9.6 Conclude the current process of developing the 2013-2016 departmental strategy in the context of the university's proposal to establish a centre for excellence in teacher education.

Appendices

A Membership of the Peer Review Group:

Prof Nigel Steele	PRG Chairperson, Emeritus Prof of Mathematics, Coventry University, UK
Dr Barney O'Reilly	Kerry Education Service- CEO Emeritus.
Professor David Lavallee	Head of School, School of Sport, University of Stirling, UK
Dr Sarah Doolittle	Associate Professor, Adelphi University, New York
Dr Elizabeth Egan	Enniscorthy, Co Wexford.
Dr Cormac Ryan	Senior Lecturer, Health and Social Care Institute, Teesside University, UK
Ms Ailish O'Farrell	Recording Secretary, Co Limerick

B Membership of the Department Quality Team:

Dr Ann Mac Phail	Head of Department and Senior Lecturer, Physical Education/Pedagogy/Curriculum / Assessment
Dr Deborah Tannehill	Senior Lecturer & Course Director of Graduate Diploma Education Physical Education/Pedagogy/Curriculum/Assessment (Chair of Department Quality Team)
Ms Brigitte Moody	Lecturer & Course Director of Graduate Diploma Dance, EMMAPA, BSc in Physical Education
Dr Mark Campbell	Lecturer in Sport Psychology
Rhoda Sohun	Experimental Officer
Prof Alan Donnelly	Associate Professor in Exercise Physiology and EHS Assistant Dean (Research)

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