Quality Review
of the
Information Technology Division

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.

Issued by QSU	April 2015
Review Date	24th to 26th March 2015
Quality Review Group	Appendix A
UL-QSU Web Site	www.quality.ul.ie
Department Web Site	http://www.ul.ie/itd
QQI Web Site	www.qqi.ie
Copyright © – University of Limerick, April 2013	
This report is the property of the University of Limerick and may be printed and distributed for personal use only. The document must not be redistributed or republished, in part or whole, without the express permission of the University of Limerick.	

Published – 14th April 2015

Table of Contents

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 while also having responsibility for new or newly-statutory responsibilities in particular areas.

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 Qualifications, 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 Information Technology Division (ITD)

Introduction

The University of Limerick (UL) was established in 1972 as the National Institute for Higher Education, Limerick and classified as the University of Limerick in 1989.

The University of Limerick is an independent, internationally focused University with over 12,000 students and 1,200 staff. It is a young, energetic and enterprising University with a proud record of innovation in education and excellence in research and scholarship. Its mission is to promote and advance learning and knowledge through teaching, research and scholarship in an environment which encourages innovation and upholds the principles of free enquiry and expression. Particular attention is paid to the generation of knowledge which is relevant to the needs of Ireland's continuing socio-economic development. A profile of the University is available at http://www.ul.ie/about-ul/.

The Information Technology Division (ITD) provides the University community with appropriate quality Information and Communications Technology (ICT) services to facilitate the learning, administrative and research activities of the University.

Mission

ITD is committed to providing the University community with high quality ICT services. Key to this commitment is the continual improvement of ICT services, which include:

The development and provision of:

- Services to enable communication for the University community (email, post, telephone, internet, network, video conferencing)
- Appropriate information systems to support the management and administration of the University.
- Appropriate computing environments
- Printing and Audio-Visual Services
- Support in the use of these services by the University community.

To achieve customer satisfaction in the above services, the ITD Quality Management System is built on the basis of ISO9001:2008.

ITD management is committed to the fundamental aims of ISO9001:2008 and communicates this policy to all ITD staff. The process of Management Review used in ITD provides the framework for establishing and reviewing the Quality Management System, the Quality Policy and Management Objectives on an on-going basis.

Structure

The ITD Management Team comprises:

Brendan Lynch (Head Enterprise Solutions), Brian Sexton (Head Technology Solutions), Clare McCracken (Manager Office Services), Declan Maguire (Head IT Services), Edel Gissane (Head Governance, Portfolio & Quality Management), Padraig Hyland (Head Educational Technology), Denis Hickey (CommNet) and the Director ITD.

ITD forms part of Academic Services of the University and reports via the Director to the Vice President, Academic and Registrar.

See also www.ul.ie/itd

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 QRG was impressed by the high priority given to quality management by ITD and with the maturity of the ITD Quality Management System (QMS). The division is to be commended for becoming in 2005 the first division in the university and the first university department in Ireland to achieve ISO9001:2000 certification. Since 2005, ITD has been audited annually by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI), and in 2014 it underwent a successful re-assessment audit to achieve ISO9001:2008 certification. The strength of the QMS is demonstrated by its maintenance and continued development during the period between 2008 and 2013 when there was no permanent director in post.

The QRG found the self-assessment report (SAR) a useful foundation for the conduct of the review. It was a clear and straightforward account of the history of the QMS, the principles behind it, the way in which it operates and the work that remains to be done. Within time constraints, all members of the division had been given the opportunity to contribute to a consultation exercise and to comment on the draft report. The SAR was well supported with documentary evidence and the QRG is grateful for the prompt supply of additional data. The QRG met a considerable number of the staff of the division and is grateful for their willing engagement with the review process. The QRG also had the opportunity to meet a range of undergraduate and postgraduate students and representatives of user divisions, departments and faculties. These, for the most part, spoke highly of the helpfulness of ITD staff and the support they provide to individuals and user departments.

There can be no doubt about the current maturity and strength of the QMS. Staff are clearly committed to quality in their day-to-day operations. QMS processes and procedures are well embedded within the division and are audited regularly, both externally and internally. However, as the division moves forward under firm leadership and in a new strategic direction, there may be reason for concern that increased demand for the services provided by ITD, allied to diminished resources, might inhibit the continued development of the QMS.

5.0 The Report of the Quality Review Team

5.1 Current State of Development of the Division's Quality Management System (QMS)

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

5.1.1	The successful achievement of certification to ISO9001:2008 standards.
5.1.2	The review of the QMS at quarterly management meetings.
5.1.3	The work of the internal audit team and the tracking of improvement action items.
5.1.4	The strong customer focus in the QMS.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.1.5	Incorporate organisational change management procedures into the QMS.

5.0 The Report of the Quality Review Team

5.2   Customer Focus

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

5.2.1	The use of customer feedback mechanisms to drive improvement.
5.2.2	The web-enabled service desk which allows customers to report and track faults and service requests.
5.2.3	The consultation with stakeholders about the suitability and timing of changes in the ITD service provision.
5.2.4	The consistently high levels of customer satisfaction in day-to-day support, evidenced in feedback mechanisms.
5.2.5	The dedicated IT support roles established in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.2.6	At university level, reconsider introducing the dedicated IT support roles in the Kemmy Business School and the Faculty of Science and Engineering.
5.2.7	Benchmark and monitor improvements to the consistency of the student experience.
5.2.8	Improve communication with customers about ITD service provision.
5.2.9	Consider all aspects of equality and diversity when developing the new customer charter.
5.2.10	Update and maintain the ITD website.

5.3   Leadership

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

5.3.1	The regular and well-documented meeting cycles, including team meetings and one-on-ones, supporting the quality management process.
5.3.2	The creation of the role with dedicated responsibility for governance, portfolio and quality management.
5.3.3	The prioritisation of activities around the future roles and skills requirements for the IT division.
5.3.4	The progress made on project prioritisation processes.
5.3.5	The work completed so far on the IT Vision document.
5.3.6	The planned development of a series of costed options for running, improving and innovating technology services within UL.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.3.7	Finalise an IT strategy, aligned with the UL strategic goals, that presents a clear and costed vision for a step-change in service provision.
5.3.8	At university level, continue to support the IT director in the steps necessary to implement the IT strategy.
5.3.9	At university level, ensure that sufficient resources are available to support the agreed strategic development of IT.
5.3.10	At university level, establish a senior IT committee with cross-university engagement to own the IT strategy and the university-wide technology roadmap.
5.3.11	Review the organisational structure after the appointment of a deputy director.
5.3.12	Develop a methodology for the complete project management lifecycle.
5.3.13	Invest in a dedicated project management tool for the initiation, planning, management and monitoring of projects.

5.4 Involvement of Staff

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

5.4.1	The SWOT analysis process.
5.4.2	The *50 small Good Ideas* initiative.
5.4.3	The maintenance by staff of their personal development logs.
5.4.4	The willingness of staff to support their colleagues.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.4.5	Improve succession planning.
5.4.6	Implement the PDRS process across the entire division as soon as possible.
5.4.7	Run team-building exercises on a regular basis.
5.4.8	Focus on achieving more consistency in staff development opportunities across the division.
5.4.9	Improve formal and informal engagement with all staff by the director and management team.

5.5   Continual Improvement

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

5.5.1	The benchmarking exercise with the Innovation Value Institute (IVI) to map process maturity and capability.
5.5.2	The tracking of improvement activity through prioritised action plans.
5.5.3	The establishment of an Educational Technology team to improve support for learning and teaching practice.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.5.4	Renew ITD membership of faculty boards.
5.5.5	Identify business owners for all strategic applications and services.
5.5.6	Develop a single operating model in agreement with business owners of strategic applications.
5.5.7	Consider ways of expanding student representation and involvement in service development.
5.5.8	Following the IVI benchmarking exercise, develop an action plan to drive process maturity.

5.6   Process Approach to Services Provided

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

5.6.1	The comprehensively documented ITD management and service realisation processes.
5.6.2	The deeply embedded QMS processes and procedures in the day-to-day activities of the division.
5.6.3	The risk-based approach to operational skills requirements.
5.6.4	The intention to review the suitability of the RMS service desk tool.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.6.5	Define a process for creating and implementing a university-wide technology roadmap.
5.6.6	Review staff competencies and skills requirements against the envisaged technology roadmap.

5.7 Systematic Approach to Management

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

5.7.1	The effectiveness of the Plan-Do-Check-Act process management structure.
5.7.2	The involvement of staff from a variety of levels in the decision-making process relating to technical changes.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.7.3	Develop a workforce plan to meet increasing service demands.
5.7.4	Create a business continuity and disaster recovery plan.
5.7.5	Actively address any single points of failure arising from staffing issues.
5.7.6	Re-engage with the Co-op student placement programme.

5.8   Factual Approach to Decision Making

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

5.8.1	The strong commitment to data-driven decision making.
5.8.2	The collection and effective use of both quantitative and qualitative data.
5.8.3	The attention given to performance levels against SLAs and KPIs.
5.8.4	The low number of complaints received.
5.8.5	The very competent manner in which staff deal with the workload on the service desk.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.8.6	Develop a financial breakdown on the cost of all services matched to the emerging service catalogue, and benchmark this internally and externally.
5.8.7	Formulate a high-level architecture of existing systems and services.
5.8.8	Derive more detailed information on the nature and status of calls logged in the RMS service desk system.
5.8.9	Identify an appropriate process for timely sign-off of SLAs and KPIs with key stakeholders.

5.9   Supplier, Partner & Community Relationships

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

5.9.1	The ITD Supplier Management procedure.
5.9.2	The establishment of the Educational Technology network and the formation of the virtual Technology Enhanced Learning Centre.
5.9.3	The active engagement by the Director of ITD in the IT Director Network group of the seven Irish universities.
5.9.4	ITD engagement and support for community-related activities.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.9.5	Accelerate the development, implementation and monitoring of a schedule for the review of ITD suppliers.
5.9.6	Re-establish the forum for engaging and collaborating with IT technicians across the university.
5.9.7	Investigate mechanisms to raise the profile of the division through enhanced communications, marketing and promotional opportunities.

Appendices

A   Membership of the Quality Review Group:

Ms. Eileen Brandreth	Director of Portfolio Management & IT Services, Cardiff University
Ms. Ann Kettle	(Chair), Honorary Senior Lecturer, University of St. Andrews
Dr. Stuart Lee	Deputy CIO, IT Services, University of Oxford
Ms. Laura Moloney	Executive Administrator, International Education Division, UL
Ms. Ailish O'Farrell	(Recording Secretary) Technical Writer, Limerick
Ms. Anne Weadick	Quality Enhancement Office, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
Mr. Keith Young	PhD Student, Education & Professional Studies, UL

B   Membership of the Department Quality Team:

Edel Gissane	Declan Maguire
Denis Hickey	Clare McCracken
Padraig Hyland	Ian McKenzie
Brendan Lynch	Brian Sexton

C   Contact

The Quality Review Group was given the opportunity over three days to talk to the division's Quality Team both formally and informally. Meetings with staff, postgraduate & undergraduate students and others were scheduled as group sessions. The QRG was given the opportunity to meet staff during a visit to the division and this was most helpful.

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