

## Quality Review for Support Units – Emerging Themes

### Background and Context

The [Quality Review Process](#) at the University of Limerick (UL) is one of the University’s cornerstone quality assurance mechanisms. The second cycle of quality reviews for support units took place between 2013 to 2016. In total, [12 units were reviewed](#). Following comprehensive feedback on the review process, the guidelines were revised in 2015 and approved for publication in January 2016. Under these revised guidelines, four support units participated in quality reviews: Research Office (Jan ’16); UL Sport (Apr ’16); Plassey Campus Centre (June ’16) and Office of the President (Sept ’16). This report outlines emerging themes from these four reviews.

### Emerging Themes

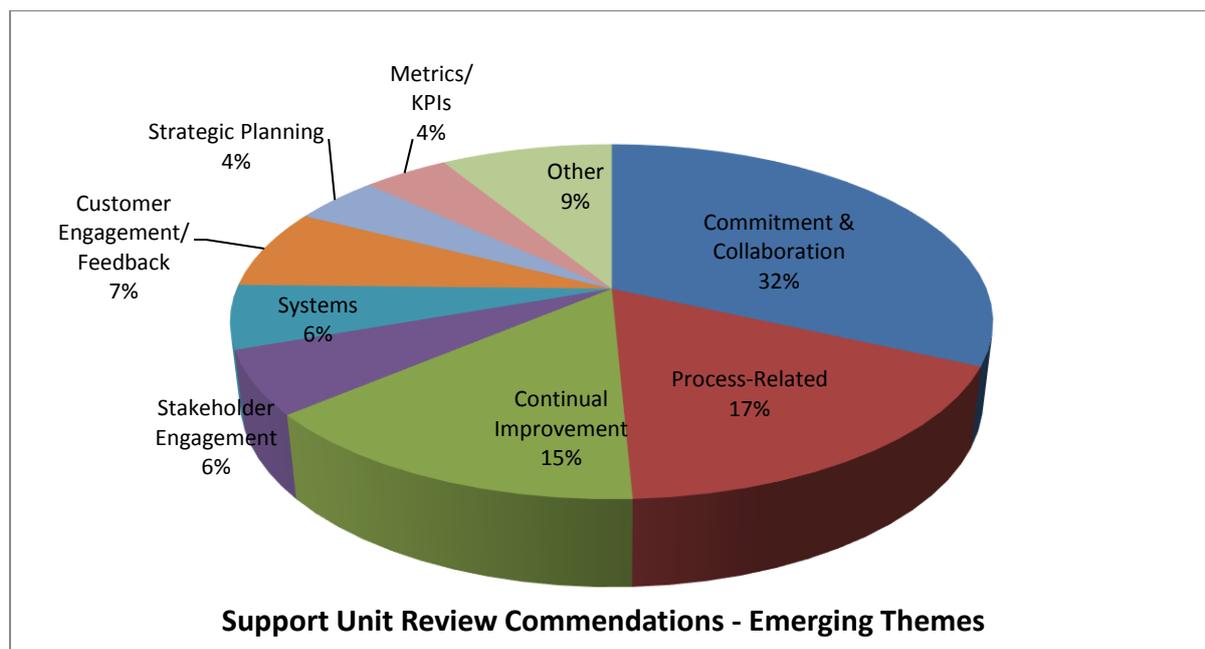
The quality review process at UL has three distinct phases:

1. Prior to the review, the unit undertakes a self-evaluation exercise and writes a self-assessment report.
2. The review site visit, during which the members of the quality review group (QRG) meet staff and stakeholders and write a final report (QRG report).
3. Post-review phase, when the report is published and the unit works on implementing the recommendations, with oversight at Governing Authority and senior management level.

The QRG report outlines the preliminary comments from the QRG, followed by a list of commendations and recommendations. Emerging themes from QRG report commendations and recommendations are outlined below.

### Commendations

In total, there were 69 commendations between the four units reviewed. The following graph identifies emerging themes from these commendations.



Twenty-two of the commendations (32%) related to 'commitment/collaboration'. Example commendations include:

- *The Office staff, who are held in high respect because of their professional service, policy knowledge and expertise.*
- *The high quality support and advice that adds value to the experience of UL units undergoing quality reviews.*
- *The widespread staff involvement in the preparation for this review and the development of the QMS to date.*
- *The positive energy, spirit of commitment and drive to succeed evident across the entire team.*
- *The very motivated and driven workforce, which is fully committed to providing excellent levels of service to its diverse customer base at all levels.*

Twelve commendations (17%) were 'process-related'. Examples include:

- *The identification of QMS goals and objectives, the updating of the quality manual to include the QMS processes and the identification of key business processes.*
- *The establishment of a management review and the development of a quality improvement plan (QIP) to capture information that will drive continual improvement.*
- *The high standard of documentation that supports the QMS, particularly the quality improvement plan (QIP) which is an exemplar of good practice.*
- *The strong process approach as demonstrated by the audit schedule, the number of trained auditors across the unit and the impact of process review recommendations on continual improvement.*

Ten commendations (15%) focused on 'continual improvement'. Examples include:

- *The embedding of a culture of continual improvement at all levels in the unit.*
- *The proactive approach to the use of technology to enhance service provision.*
- *The significant development and embedding of the QMS to a high standard in a relatively short period of time.*

Five commendations (7%) focused on 'customer engagement/feedback'. Examples include:

- *The high level of customer service achieved by staff, with feedback from a wide range of stakeholders confirming this.*
- *The discussion of customer feedback at all levels to drive action, and the sharing of information across units to ensure best practice.*
- *The introduction of a comprehensive customer charter which inspires a high level of confidence in the facilities and services provided.*

Four commendations (6%) were related to 'stakeholder engagement' while another four focused on 'systems'. Examples include:

- *The effective use of feedback from both internal and external stakeholders.*
- *The excellent formal and informal relationships between the unit and its stakeholders.*

Three commendations (4%) related to 'strategic planning' and another three focused on 'metrics/KPIs'. Examples include:

- *The development and launch of the five-year strategic plan with its clear set of objectives and targets.*

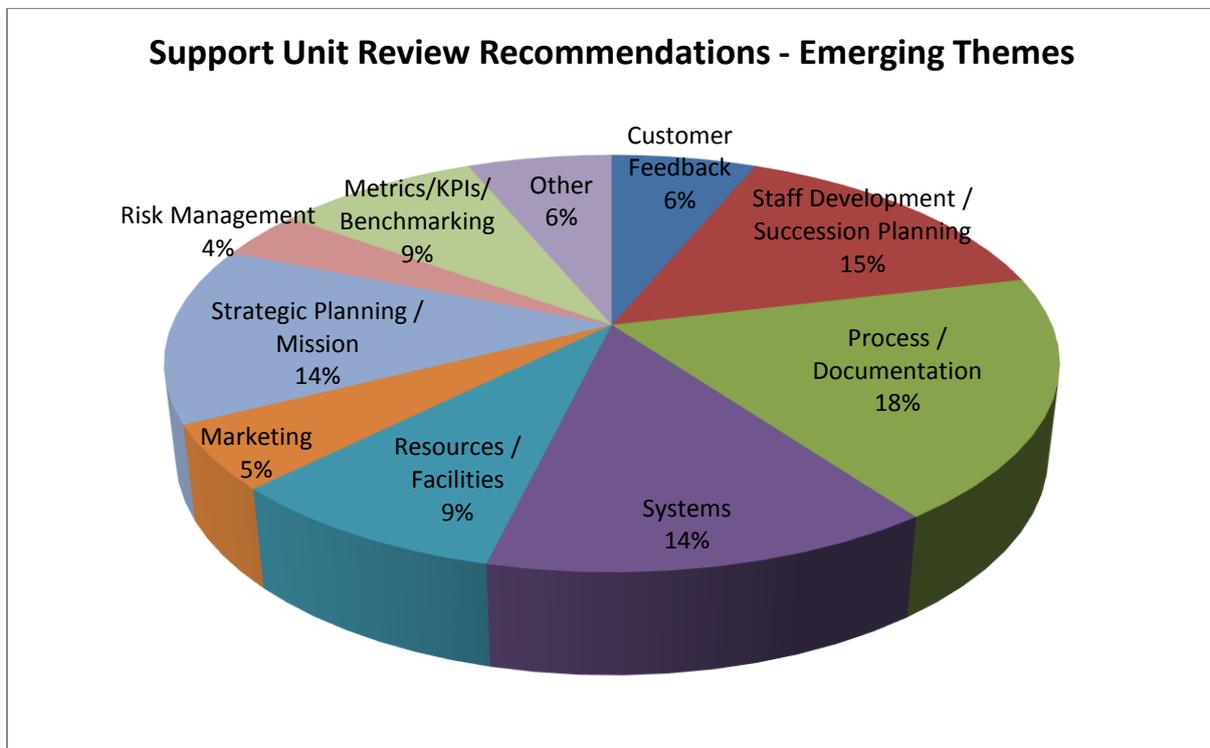
- *The President’s Implementation Report to Governing Authority on progress against the Strategic Plan, which is a model of good practice for monitoring the implementation of plans.*

Other themes included ‘communication’ (2), ‘staff development’ (2) and ‘the student experience’ (2). Examples of recommendations from these areas include:

- *The effective communication within and between the different operational units of the Research Office.*
- *The effective use of cross training to cover staff absence.*
- *The strong and productive relationship of the Office with the student representative bodies and the demonstrable commitment to working in partnership to deliver initiatives that respond to student demand and improve the student experience.*

### Recommendations

A total of 80 recommendations were received across the four units. The following graph identifies emerging themes from these recommendations.



The most cited theme emerging from recommendations relates to ‘process/documentation’: 15 recommendations in total (18%). This is not a surprising trend given that support unit reviews focus on the unit’s quality management system and how it impacts on service delivery. Examples include:

- *Draft an integrated quality action plan taking into account issues raised through gap analysis, internal audits and the outcomes of this quality review, with an outline of deadlines, actions and responsibilities.*
- *Build on the existing process for continual improvement to identify disruptive stimuli in order to effect step change.*
- *Review the document management system to include: All required processes and procedures; A record matrix that details all required records; Documents of an external nature which are required to meet compliance with external regulations.*

- *Identify and publish owners (in terms of both institutional function and name) for each policy and process in the remit of the unit.*

With 12 citations (15%), 'staff development/succession planning' was another theme emerging.

Examples include:

- *Develop a leadership succession strategy to ensure that the impressive pace of progress achieved under the current leadership and management team is sustained.*
- *Ensure a consistent level of service provision by using the PDRS to assist staff to achieve their full potential.*
- *Implement the Performance Development Review System (PDRS) for each member of staff, in alignment with growth and development of the unit in accordance with the divisional strategic plan.*
- *Provide staff with opportunities to connect with university administrators working in equivalent offices, nationally and internationally, through networking opportunities, conference attendance and comparative site visits.*

Eleven recommendations (14%) related to 'strategic planning/mission' Examples include:

- *Create a robust organisational structure and align resources appropriate to the current and future scope of activity of the unit as per the strategic plan.*
- *Develop a concise mission statement that has full buy-in from all employees to sit alongside the customer charter.*
- *Highlight the capacity of the Office to provide expertise and advice to the University community on a range of policy and strategic issues.*

An additional eleven recommendations (14%) were 'systems' related. Examples include:

- *Prioritise the development of a web-based platform for workflow management.*
- *Develop the IT systems across the unit to allow real-time customer feedback and improved response rates.*
- *Review and deliver a needs analysis of the current in-house management system software, and consult with partners and all users to develop the specification and business case for an upgrade. Use industry and higher education networks to provide valuable intelligence and guidance in supporting the overall process.*

Seven recommendations (9%) related to 'metrics/KPIs/benchmarking' while a further seven (9%) focused on 'resources/facilities'. Examples include:

- *Complete an exercise to identify baseline measurements of quality to inform the development of a range of KPIs.*
- *Identify performance indicators that allow for the effective operation and control of identified processes and establish measurement criteria for each critical area.*
- *Given the recent establishment of a continual improvement framework, ensure as a matter of importance that the appropriate resources and structures are in place to sustain the current momentum and safeguard its development into the future.*
- *Establish a more visible on-campus physical presence to make the services of the office more accessible to potential external clients in a welcoming environment.*

'Customer feedback' accounted for 6% of the recommendations (5). Examples cited were:

- *Develop a comprehensive, UL-wide approach to gathering and responding to student feedback, including student surveys.*
- *Review and revise mechanisms to enable customer feedback to the Office.*

Less frequently occurring themes included 'marketing' (5%), 'risk management' (4%) and 'other' (6%), which focused on continual improvement, student experience and research. Examples include:

- *Develop a media and communications strategy and first-year action plan commencing August 2017 which encompass and coordinate the promotional and marketing needs and expectations of all stakeholders, customers, services and facilities.*
- *Ensure that Garda vetting takes place for all relevant staff members.*

Quality Support Unit

April 2018