



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

**Report of the Quality Review Group
to
Department of Nursing and Midwifery**

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Quality Review Group (QRG)	Appendix A
UL QSU website	www.ul.ie/quality
Division website	http://www.nm.ul.ie/
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Table of Contents

1	The UL Quality Review Process	1
2	Department of Nursing & Midwifery	2
3	Preliminary Comments of the Quality Review Group (QRG)	3
4	QRG Commendations and Recommendations.....	4
	4.1 QRG Commendations.....	4
	4.2 QRG Recommendations	6
	Appendices.....	9
	A Membership of the QRG	9
	B Membership of the Unit's Self-Evaluation Team	9

1 The UL Quality Review Process

The University of Limerick (UL) follows an established process for quality assurance (QA) and quality improvement (QI) in line with that originally developed jointly by the Irish Universities Association (IUA) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB), the latter whose functions are now carried out by Quality and Qualifications Ireland ([QQI](#)). The review process involves an approximate seven-year cycle during which each unit works to improve the quality of its programmes and services and undergoes a rigorous self-evaluation prior to a quality review by internationally recognised experts in the relevant field.

The common framework adopted by the Irish universities for their QA/QI systems is consistent with both legislative requirements and international good practice. The process itself evolved as a result of the Universities Act, 1997, in which the responsibility for QA/QI was placed directly on the individual universities. The process now complies with the [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012](#). The UL Quality Support Unit (QSU) website (www.ul.ie/quality) provides details on the process.

Academic units are reviewed in line with [A Guide to the Quality Review Process for Academic Departments](#), which is available on the [QSU website](#). The planned schedule of quality reviews for both academic and support units is available on the [QSU website](#).

The UL quality review process comprises the following three phases:

1. Pre-review phase, in which the unit under review conducts a self-evaluation exercise and writes a self-assessment report (SAR).
2. Review phase, in which a quality review group comprising external experts, both national and international, review the SAR, visit the unit, meet with stakeholders and produce a report (this report), which is made publicly available on the [QSU website](#).
3. Post-review phase, in which the unit considers the recommendations of the QRG, devises plans to implement them and reports implementation progress to a Governing Authority subcommittee and UL senior management.

The recommendations made by the quality review group (QRG) form the basis of a quality improvement plan (QIP) prepared by the QSU for the unit under review. Once the site visit is over, the unit sets about evaluating and implementing the recommendations, as appropriate.

Approximately six months after receiving the QIP template from the QSU, the head of unit provides a summary overview of progress to the university's Governing Authority Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance (GASPQA) sub-committee. GASPQA members are afforded the opportunity to discuss and evaluate progress.

Approximately 12 months after receiving the QIP template, the head of unit, Vice President Academic & Registrar and Director of Quality meet to formally review progress and to agree on any remaining actions to be taken.

2 **Department of Nursing & Midwifery**

Nationally, nursing and midwifery education has a relatively short history within third-level educational systems. In 1995, the Centre of Nursing Studies was established at UL within the Department of Life Sciences, College of Science. Nursing was offered for the first time in 2002 as a four-year, pre-registration Level 8 BSc programme. Government strategy led to a transfer arrangement that formalised and integrated nurse education and nurse tutors into higher education structures. The [Department of Nursing & Midwifery](#) (DN&M) was formed in 2003. A similar integration process took place for midwifery, which supported the commencement of the BSc Midwifery in 2006.

DN&M plays an active role in the Faculty of EHS and has a well-established commitment to designing and delivering programmes that support the educational needs of nurses and midwives. In responding to strategic healthcare priorities and in collaboration with regional and national health service partners, DN&M has developed and grown over the last decade. The last five years have seen changes in higher education and health service funding and reform ([Hunt Report](#), [Bradley Report](#), etc.), which have influenced the direction taken by the department.

DN&M has 35.5 members of staff: 26.5 academics, including the Head of Department (HoD), a 0.5 professor of clinical nursing and nine support staff. The HoD role is rotational. The Professor of Clinical Nursing was appointed in September 2014 and is one of two national joint appointments. Chaired by the HoD, a management group was established in October 2015 to support the strategic development of the department. All academic members of DN&M are registered nurses or midwives. Seven academic staff currently fulfil the role of course director of one or more of the department's 14 taught programmes. The [Staff](#) page of the department's website provides profiles of academic staff.

Significant changes were managed within the department during a period when 18 academic staff were engaged in PhD studies. Eight academics are qualified to doctorate level, and 10 are due to complete their doctoral studies over the next two years. However, only one academic currently fulfils the requirements for being a primary supervisor to PhD students. Three academics are members of supervision teams.

DN&M members actively contribute to campus and university life; they represent the department across UL structures and committees, including Management Council, Academic Council, Academic Programme Review Committee, Senior Advisor, First Seven Weeks, Athena SWAN, EHS Management Group, EHS Research Committee and EHS [Ethics Committee](#). DN&M members contribute nationally to developing nursing and midwifery professions through membership of and involvement with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland ([NMBI](#)), the national registration body; Irish Universities Association ([IUA](#)) Heads of Schools of Nursing and Midwifery section; Chief Nursing Office, Department of Health; National Allocations Officers Group; UL/UHL (University Hospital Limerick) Strategic Group; and other fora.

Critical to the sustainability and success of the department are international collaborations and the department's relationships with health service partners in all areas of nursing and midwifery practice, education and research.

Responding to the UL, national and international call for increasing international education opportunities, DN&M has committed to the internationalisation agenda in its current strategic plan, *DN&M Statement of Strategy 2016–2021* (appendix 1.1). DN&M recognises that intercultural learning opportunities for students play a vital role in enriching the learning experience of international and host students and academic staff. In 2012, the department appointed the first course director for International Studies. The benefits of a broader international education perspective have led to a number of key developments, including MSc and BSc programmes and the first international summer school for EHS.

3 Preliminary Comments of the Quality Review Group (QRG)

The Quality Review Group (QRG) appreciated the warm welcome it received from the University of Limerick (UL) and wishes to thank the Department of Nursing and Midwifery (DN&M) and the Quality Support Unit for the cooperation and support it received throughout the review process. The QRG wishes to commend the department on a very thorough and well-presented self-assessment report (SAR) which provided the group with a very clear picture of the work of the department. During the course of the visit, the QRG met with most of the staff in the department, along with a selection of students and stakeholders from local health service providers. We had access to senior-level staff, including the Dean of the Faculty, and an opportunity to tour the department and examine student work. Throughout our discussions, we found staff to be open, honest and positive in their attitude.

DN&M offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate professional programmes which have been consistently highly evaluated by students on a range of objective measures including the UL Student Evaluation of Teaching and the Module Satisfaction Survey. These high scores were endorsed by the undergraduate and postgraduate students with whom we spoke. Student support was particularly highlighted, and the QRG had the strong impression that this is an exceptional element of the student experience which aids recruitment and retention to post-registration courses. Of particular note is the commitment across the department to an ethical approach to the UL internationalisation agenda. International students spoke extremely highly of the range and scope of practical programme-related and personal support on offer.

The QRG was impressed by the positive feedback from stakeholders on all aspects of the programme. Nurses and midwives were considered well-prepared and fit for practice at the point of graduation, and DN&M staff were reported as being very responsive to any issues arising in the clinical setting. The student allocations team was particularly mentioned as being excellent. The portfolio of postgraduate courses was thought to be relevant to the needs of the health service. There appears to be a growing research partnership between DN&M and the health service, largely as a result of the jointly funded Professor of Clinical Nursing, who was singled out for particular mention. It was felt that more joint posts would be welcomed at professorial level and below, including a joint professorial appointment in midwifery.

One of the biggest challenges for DN&M lies in meeting the demands of the UL research agenda. For a variety of historical reasons, the department started from a low baseline of research expertise and outputs which, coupled with the workload constraints associated with providing professional education, has resulted in a struggle to meet the various metrics associated with grant income and published outputs. The department has a robust strategy in place which has resulted in a rapid growth in publications in high-impact journals and growing numbers of staff PhD completions. Further progress requires wider support, including immediate appointment of a full professor and mentorship for post-doctoral staff development and grant application writing.

Overall, the QRG believes that DN&M is excelling in the engaged learning pillar of its strategy and, with enhanced support from the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences (EHS) and UL, has the potential to succeed in the research pillar.

4 QRG Commendations and Recommendations

4.1 QRG Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

1.	The obvious commitment of DN&M to engagement and collaboration both within the university and with relevant external bodies and its alignment with national and institutional policies, governance structures and strategies.
2.	The initiative of the department in the development of a comprehensive international education programme and its continuing exploration of intercultural learning.
3.	The department's strategic approach to the change and development agenda through the use of defined goals, key actions and measurable metrics.
4.	The department's collaborative and inclusive approach to curriculum development.
5.	The willingness of DN&M staff to listen to the student voice and their responsiveness to feedback.
6.	The DN&M approach to the supervision of final year undergraduate projects and master's dissertations and the alignment of these with the department's research clusters.
7.	The alternative exit award (BSc Health Sciences) for students not completing the clinical requirements of nursing or midwifery degrees.
8.	The innovative approaches used to engage students and meet individual learner needs.
9.	The processes in place to support clinical practice placements.
10.	The practical and ethical commitment of the department to providing a quality learning experience for international students.
11.	The quality and currency of the learning environment provided in the clinical skills laboratories.
12.	The support provided to students by the library, both online and through workshops, in areas such as data management, databases and reference management systems.
13.	The purpose-built postgraduate research space in the Health Sciences Building.
14.	The appointment to the post of Professor of Clinical Nursing and the associated prioritisation of research actions.
15.	The commitment within the department to the academic, leadership and managerial development of staff.
16.	The strong and cohesive departmental team which demonstrates enthusiasm, passion and commitment to students, the programmes and the university.
17.	The approachability of DN&M staff, especially lecturers and allocations staff, and their availability to support all students within the department.
18.	The high level of support available to under-represented student groups, such as mature students, international students and students with disabilities.

19.	The high level of collaboration and communication between clinical placement, university and departmental staff, which results in excellent support and an enhanced university experience for students.
20.	The remarkable undertaking of having 20 members of the department engage in PhD studies, seven of whom have completed.
21.	The well-developed research plan and the structures in place to support its implementation, which include, for example, aligning student projects with faculty research, scaffolding undergraduate work to align with publication requirements by final year, and participation in cross-department and cross-institution research partnerships.
22.	The realistic assessment of their research accomplishments by department members and their understanding of the university key metrics in this regard.
23.	The work carried out in the department to create a research environment that will enhance the likelihood of successfully reaching research goals and expectations.
24.	The clear lines of departmental organisation, which are well aligned with UL processes and expectations.
25.	The strong collegial relationships among faculty and administrative staff who work together in a well-defined organisational structure to provide high-quality nursing and midwifery education.

4.2 QRG Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

Level 1 Recommendations

No.	Level (1/2)	Recommendation	Brief Justification (Level 1 only)
1.	1	Revisit the governance pillar of the strategy and consider replacing it with clinical practice, with governance as a cross-cutting activity.	The representation of governance as a standalone pillar implies that it is a separate isolated function. Clinical practice is evident in the implementation of strategy but lacking in the strategy statement.
2.	1	Prioritise the development of an implementation plan for the oversight and governance of the DN&M strategy.	A programmatic/project approach to implementation is vital to ensure critical progress milestones are met.
3.	1	Draw up a future workforce plan, to include adequate administrative staff, to reflect the needs of projected or actual increases in student numbers as listed in the strategic statement.	It will be necessary to balance teaching and administrative commitments with research targets which influence the funding resource allocation.
4.	1	Maintain the current student support systems to keep pace with growth in student numbers.	Student support is a key feature contributing to programme quality. It allows for the success of students who enter from a variety of different backgrounds.
5.	1	Continue to plan strategically for next steps in developing the departmental research programme, with periodic review of the results of these strategies. This should include a solid plan to support faculty with newly attained PhDs as they move into their research careers.	DN&M is at a tipping point in terms of attaining success in the research realm. There is evidence of a very solid research foundation, achieved despite the many other challenges of maintaining a quality education programme and unexpected setbacks such as the loss of senior faculty. Successful launching of novice PhD researchers in the department will be key to success.
6.	1	Work with community partners to secure funding for joint appointments, beginning with a professor in midwifery.	This model has worked well in nursing and is highly valued by the community stakeholders in nursing. Stakeholders expressed interest in an initiative for midwifery as they felt the position would support local research and clinical practice needs and would align well with the

			national policy on maternity care.
7.	1	Work with university senior management to expedite recruitment of senior faculty who can be expected to make a meaningful contribution to the development of the research programme.	There is a need to address the DN&M skill mix profile in order to align the department with the University of Limerick strategic research plan and funding model. Replacement of the 1.0FTE professor position is imperative so that DN&M can meet its academic and research expectations; these include adequate supervision of graduate students, mentoring of more junior faculty and securing of research grant funding and resulting publication. This position should be filled as soon as it is possible to recruit a suitable candidate.
8.	1	Work with senior UL management to explore ways to combine the process of accreditation required by professional bodies (nursing and midwifery) with the quality review process.	Reviews of this nature take a tremendous amount of preparation, and typically there is a large amount of overlap between the two requirements. In other jurisdictions, reviews of this nature may be combined.
9.	1	Explore with UL management the use of adjunct clinical faculty positions for preceptors and other clinicians who contribute to the programme.	Adjunct appointments may be used to recognise the contribution of clinicians in the community to the education of students. Individuals with these designations might be called on to assist with speciality lectures and other activities to enhance student learning and contribute to the research agenda.

Level 2 Recommendations

No.	Level (1/2)	Recommendation	Brief Justification (Level 1 only)
10.	2	Embed values that underpin the department and its programmes in the mission statement.	
11.	2	Explore creative ways to plan interprofessional learning (IPL) opportunities with students from other departments in EHS.	The department is very well positioned for IPL as EHS also includes the Department of Clinical Therapies and the Graduate Entry Medical School (GEMS) and offers a programme for paramedics. Interprofessional simulation could be particularly beneficial.
12.	2	Explore with other universities and service providers the possibility of a national competency assessment document for pre-registration students.	There may be benefits to having a national competency assessment document as this would both reduce the need for preceptor training as staff move between different service providers and provide a more consistent approach to assessment of student competency.
13.	2	Assist central administration to develop an understanding of the unique room requirements of the department in order to maximise efficiency of room allocation.	
14.	2	Continue to contribute to the Professional Practice and Education research group through research and scholarly papers on innovations in teaching and education.	
15.	2	Work with national partners to lobby for nursing- and midwifery-specific research grant funding.	
16.	2	Work with other professional programme departments and UL management to develop a policy around references and records of programme completion for international requests.	

Appendices

A Membership of the QRG

Prof. Gary Rolfe (Chair)	Emeritus Prof of Nursing
Prof. Lesley Baillie	Florence Nightingale Foundation, Chair of Clinical Nursing Practice, at LSBU, UCL Hospitals & NHS Foundation Trust. Director, Centre for Nurse and Midwife-led Research and Honorary Professor, University College London
Prof. Eileen Hutton	Assistant Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences (Midwifery)
Ms Avilene Casey	Senior member of ONMSD, HSE
Mr Finbar Horgan	Staff Nurse (Intellectual Disability)
Ms Ailish O'Farrell (Recording Secretary)	Technical Writer

B Membership of the Unit's Self-Evaluation Team

Ms Deirdre O'Sullivan (Team Leader)	
Dr Margaret Graham	
Dr Pauline O'Reilly (HOD)	
Ms Patricia White	