

Quality Support Unit – Key Business Process

PURPOSE

The Quality Support Unit (QSU) is one of three sub-units/offices comprising the Office of the President, and is thus integrated into the latter's Quality Management System (QMS). QSU activities are informed by the [UL Strategic Plan](#), the [UL Quality Policy](#), statutory quality requirements enshrined in the [2012 Education & Training Act](#) (part 3, pages 22-32) and national statutory quality guidelines as developed by [Quality and Qualifications Ireland](#) (QQI). The QSU thus plays a cross-cutting role in supporting UL's strategic priorities and fulfilling institutional statutory quality obligations. Core QSU activities are:

- (1) Quality-related strategic leadership and policy development;
- (2) Co-ordination of assessment of institutional compliance with statutory QA requirements and guidelines and institutional contact point for Quality and Qualifications Ireland;
- (3) Management of internal, institutional and linked provider quality reviews;
- (4) Support the development of Quality Management Systems;
- (5) Management of student surveys, including the university exit survey and module satisfaction survey (MSS);
- (6) Management reporting service.

QSU produces an annual operational plan outlining the key activities to be conducted each year, which details key tasks, functional areas of responsibility and timelines. Refer to 'Annual Operational Planning Policy and Procedure'. The Unit also produces an annual schedule of meetings and maintains a risk register. SharePoint is used as a central repository of information.

The Unit is led by the Director of Quality who is responsible for governance, strategy, policy development and overall QSU activities. The Quality Officer is responsible for operational management of the Unit, quality assurance (QA) compliance and managing the quality review process. The Quality Research Officer is responsible for student surveys, data analytics and research institute quality reviews. The Executive Administrator provides support for compliance and quality review activity. The Unit is also supported by a part-time office administrator. Refer to the QSU operational structure, available [here](#).

The core purpose of this document is to outline the key services provided by the Quality Support Unit, as listed above. Operational procedures are available for all the key services provided by the QSU and are available on SharePoint.

RESPONSIBILITY

The Director of Quality has overall responsibility for management of the QSU and all of its services.

PROCEDURE

1. Strategic Leadership and Policy Development

The Director of Quality, with the support of the QSU, is responsible for providing strategic institutional quality-related leadership and developing policies and procedures in relation to quality. In this context the Director of Quality is a member of several key institutional-level committees, namely Academic

Council, Management Committee and Governing Authority Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance sub-committee. The development of specific QSU policies will usually be driven by the ongoing identification of policy requirements as they arise. Any stakeholder within or outside of the QSU may, at any time, submit a draft proposed policy statement or policy idea to the Director of Quality for consideration. Institutional-level policies are approved by the Governing Authority. QSU Unit-level policies are approved by the Director of Quality. A log is maintained by QSU of all unit-level policies. Refer to 'QSU Policy Deployment, Approval and Review Process' for further details.

2. Co-ordination of assessment of Institutional Compliance with Statutory QA Requirements and Institutional Contact Point for Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is a state agency appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills. In the area of quality assurance, QQI are responsible for maintaining oversight of institutional compliance with statutory QA requirements as enshrined in the 2012 education & training act, and with associated QA guidelines. QQI are also responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures in further and higher education providers in Ireland.

The QSU is the primary institutional contact point for QQI. Engagement with QQI includes, but is not limited to the following:

- a) Facilitating assessment of Institutional compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements. Quality assurance policies and guidelines are received by QSU from QQI. Upon notification of a new or revised quality requirement, the university's Quality Support Unit (QSU) will coordinate an exercise that assesses the extent to which the university complies with the requirement. Policies are continually reviewed to ensure the University complies with current legislation. Refer to 'Assessment of Institutional Compliance with Statutory and Related Quality Requirements: Policy and Procedure'.
- b) Submitting the Annual Quality Report (AIQR) to QQI: The QSU submits an annual report to QQI which details all quality-related activity for the reporting period. An on-line reporting template is received by the Unit from QQI which outlines the format and structure of the report. The Quality Officer coordinates completion of the AIQR. A full discussion of the report is conducted during the Annual Dialogue Meeting (ADM) which is attended by the VPAASE, Associate Registrar, Dean of Graduate Studies and staff members from QSU, as well as additional agenda items proposed by QQI. Refer to operational procedure 'Submission of the Annual Institutional Quality Report'.

Staff members of the Quality Support Unit regularly attend information sessions and seminars scheduled by QQI in order to keep informed of best practice for quality assurance and enhancement.

3. Management of Internal, Institutional and Linked Provider Quality Reviews;

3(a) Managing Internal Quality Reviews

In line with international good practice and national statutory requirements, the University of Limerick undertakes periodic quality reviews of its educational, research and related services every seven years. Coordinated by the Quality Support Unit, the review process represents one cornerstone institutional quality assurance and enhancement mechanism. Information relating to both the current and previous cycle of quality review activity is available on the QSU website ([Current Review Cycle](#), [Previous Review Cycle](#)).

Prior to each cycle of reviews, the QSU engage in a campus-wide consultation process. Timelines are agreed for the review cycle which are approved by the Executive and published on the QSU website.



Quality review guidelines for the various streams of reviews are prepared in consultation with relevant stakeholders. Quality review guidelines are approved by the Vice President Academic Affairs and Student Engagement (VPAASE).

The QSU co-ordinates the quality review process, offering support and guidelines to all units. There are three key stages to the process:

- a) The unit/Faculty under review initially undertakes a self-analysis exercise, identifying its strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities for improvement. The unit/Faculty documents these findings in a self-assessment report (SAR), which is circulated to the review team prior to the site visit.
- b) A quality review group (QRG), comprising internationally recognised experts, is appointed to review the unit. The QRG members study the SAR prior to the site visit and provide preliminary comments to the QSU for circulation to the review team. The site visit is a three-day event on campus at which the review team (QRG) meet with faculty and staff of the unit. They also meet with students and a range of internal and external stakeholders. This leads to the production of a concise report by the QRG (commendation and recommendations), which is read back to the unit at the conclusion of the site visit.
- c) Follow-on activities which include discussion of the report by the UL Executive Committee, publication of the report on the QSU website, the creation of a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) by the unit/Faculty, and presentation of the report and QIP to Governing Authority Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance Committee (GASPQA). The final stage of this process is a progress update meeting with the VPAASE 12-18 months after the review, where the Director of the Unit reports on all the actions taken by the Unit/Faculty relating to the report recommendations.

Full details of the process for managing quality reviews of the operational procedure “Managing the Quality Review Process” which is stored on SharePoint along with additional review records.

3 (b) Co-ordinate the UL Institutional Review

Irish universities are required to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance and periodically undergo a review of the effectiveness of these. The Institutional Review of Irish Universities (IRIU) – an institution-wide quality review process, typically takes place every 7 years. There are four stages to the review process.

1. Institutional Self-Assessment Report (ISAR): A core team are established to conduct a self-reflective and critical evaluation of the University. This results in the writing of an Institutional Self-Assessment Report.
2. The review visit(s) – an initial planning visit and the main review visit: In consultation with the IRIU, a 3-day site visit is scheduled after an initial planning meeting.
3. The publication of the review team’s report: The report is submitted to the University by the IRUI. The report is published on the QSU website.
4. Institutional and sector level follow-up: Recommendations for improvement outlined in the report are presented to the UL Executive Committee, who is responsible for consideration and implementation as appropriate.

At least two years before the scheduled institutional review, the Director of Quality prepares a project management plan, which outlines institution-wide activities required in preparation for the review. This plan is presented to the VPAASE for consideration and final approval is given by the University Executive. Full details of all quality review activity are available [here](#).

3 (c) Oversee and Review the Quality Assurance Processes of our Linked Providers

The University of Limerick, as the designated awarding body (DAB), is responsible for reviewing the quality assurance processes of all our linked providers. Linked providers are providers of educational programmes that are accredited by the University of Limerick. QQI guidelines relating to DAB responsibilities have recently been developed and are published on the [QQI website](#). The QSU are in the process of developing appropriate processes to meet guideline requirements. Details of UL linked providers are available [here](#).

4. Support the Development of Quality Management Systems

The QSU offers support and guidance to all units in developing and enhancing their quality management systems. This includes advice and guidance on writing the self-assessment report; aligning the QMS with the [UL framework](#); modifying the framework for smaller units ([QMS-Essential](#)), designing templates for use by units; QMS induction training; QMS auditor training; attendance at unit quality meetings. The procedure is as follows:

- a) The request is initiated either by the unit head or the quality team leader.
- b) The request for service is evaluated by the Quality Officer.
- c) A meeting is scheduled to discuss the request and plan the service.
- d) The service is provided by the Quality Officer.
- e) A review of the service is conducted to ensure satisfaction.

5. Management of Surveys

The QSU conducts the following surveys:

- (a) Annual UL student exit survey
- (b) Module Satisfaction survey
- (c) Departmental customer surveys
- (d) QSU customer satisfaction surveys

Refer to 'Surveys Administered by QSU on Behalf of Units: Policy and Procedure'.

(a) Annual UL student exit survey

The QSU conducts the UL student exit survey annually. The survey, which targets graduating students, is based on the UK's National Student Survey (NSS), the results of which are published online. This enables the University to conduct benchmarking against a selection of appropriate UK institutions as well as conducting longitudinal internal benchmarking for UL, its academic units and programmes.

The procedure for conducting this survey is as follows:

- a) The survey is designed using MarkClass survey software;
- b) The survey list is provided by Student Academic Administration, formatted by QSU and then imported into MarkClass;
- c) The survey is published to the list;
- d) Reminders are sent out periodically to students who haven't yet completed the survey;
- e) The survey is closed off;

- f) Survey reports are generated. There are two types of report generated, depending on whether or not the *minimum response threshold*¹ has been met:
- A full report containing quantitative and qualitative responses (the minimum response threshold has been met) and
 - A comment only report containing only the qualitative responses (the minimum response threshold has *not* been met).

Reports are also generated for support Units based on data from quantitative and / or qualitative responses. These reports are circulated to heads of unit. The university level reports are available on the [QSU website](#).

(b) Module Satisfaction Survey

UL put in place a Module Satisfaction Survey (MSS) for evaluating the student experience at a modular level. The MSS provides valuable student feedback and is one of an array of QA/QI mechanisms that UL employs.

The purpose of the MSS is to serve as an indicator of the student learning experience and to assist faculties, academic units, Units and staff with the identification of actions that may be applied to improve and enhance the student experience. The steps involved in the process include the following:

1. Prior to launching the survey, QSU get a list of all modules from SAA. List detailing all modules, students registrants and module coordinator details
2. QSU perform a data verification check to ensure all coordinating lecturers and Heads of Department (HoDs) listed are correct.
3. The finalised list is uploaded to MarkClass survey software.
4. The survey is administered through MarkClass to every student who is registered to every module. The survey is typically run over weeks 5 and 6 of term.
5. Periodic reminders are sent to students who have yet to respond.
6. The survey is closed off in MarkClass after the two week period.
7. The results are downloaded and a series of reports generated and sent to each module coordinating lecturer, heads of department and Deans.
8. An overall institution-wide report is generated for executive committee and a summary institutional report is published on the QSU website.

Full details of the Module Satisfaction Survey process, frequently asked questions, including sample reports, and Institution-level summary reports are available on the [QSU website](#).

(c) QSU Customer Satisfaction Surveys

As part of our ongoing process of continual improvement, the QSU regularly survey our customer base to elicit feedback on the quality of services provided. This includes surveys of units that have undergone quality reviews, surveys of quality team leaders and also surveys of external peer reviewers. Feedback from these surveys is incorporated into the QSU quality improvement action plan. Reports are available on the [QSU website](#).

6. Management Reporting Service

Management reports (such as progression analysis reports or specific reports required for unit reviews) can be requested by members of the UL Executive Committee or by units undergoing quality reviews. The request for such a report is made to the QSU Research Officer. Depending on resources, a decision is made to fulfil the request. The Research Officer will generate the data and

¹ Response rates of greater than or equal to 20% and number of respondents greater than or equal to 10

compile the report which is then given to the requestor. An example of this report is the Student Performance Analysis reports generated for units in preparation for their quality review.

DOCUMENTATION

The following documentation is used in conjunction with the services provided by the Quality Support Unit:

- Annual Operational Planning Policy and Procedure
- QSU Policy Deployment, Approval and Review Process
- Assessment of Institutional Compliance with Statutory and Related Quality Requirements: Policy and Procedure
- Submission of the Annual Institutional Quality Report (AIQR)
- Managing the Quality Review Process
- Quality Management Systems: Standard Frameworks for Support Units
- QMS Audit Process for UL Support Units
- Surveys Administered by QSU on Behalf of Units: Policy and Procedure
- How to Generate StuDaYO reports by Programme
- How to Generate progression reports by Programme
- Progression Analysis Method
- How to Run and Analyse the UL Exit Survey
- Assessment of Compliance with Quality Requirements Policy
- Module Satisfaction Survey Procedure

RECORDS

- A [SharePoint site](#) is used as a central repository of information for Academic Unit reviews. All members of QSU have access to this site.
- A [SharePoint site](#) is used as a central repository of information for Support Unit reviews. All members of QSU have access to this site.
- A [SharePoint site](#) is used as a central repository of information for student surveys, progression analysis and StuDaYO analysis. All members of QSU have access to this site. All related process and procedural documents are also stored on this site.
- Quality review reports (QRG) are published on the QSU website ([academic unit reports / support unit reports](#)).

All records held by the Quality Support Unit adhere to the University [Records Management and Retention Policy](#).

PROCESS VERIFICATION

There are numerous ways in which the QSU verify the effectiveness and efficiency of this key business process. These include:

- Internal/QMS audits;
- Feedback from QQI (both formal and informal);
- Customer feedback;
- Post-review feedback from external reviewers;
- Post-review survey of units;
- Forum for quality team leaders;

All survey feedback is formally reviewed at QSU weekly meetings with a view to integration into the QSU quality improvement action plan.

REVISION HISTORY

Revision No.	Date	Approved by:	Details of Change	Process Owner
1	Nov '15	Gary Walsh	<i>Initial Release</i>	Director of Quality
2	May '16	Gary Walsh	<i>Updated following audit recommendation (26 Apr)</i>	Director of Quality
3	July '16	Gary Walsh	<i>Updated to reflect unit operational changes and to include new policies.</i>	Director of Quality
4	Jan '17	Gary Walsh	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Minor edits to comply with QMS audit recommendations.</i> 2. <i>Included overview of the structure and purpose of QSU.</i> 3. <i>Included details of the AIQR.</i> 4. <i>Added a new section 'Policy Development/Deployment'.</i> 5. <i>Updated Quality Review Process for Academic Units to include Units and/or Faculties.</i> 6. <i>Documented the operational steps for conducting MSS.</i> 7. <i>Linked relevant policies/procedures to individual sections of process.</i> 8. <i>Updated web-links for supporting documentation.</i> 	Director of Quality
5	Aug '17	Gary Walsh	<i>Updated all hyperlinks following the reformatting of QSU website.</i>	Director of Quality
6	Mar '18	Gary Walsh	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Revised 3(a) to outline a generic process for managing internal quality reviews.</i> 2. <i>Updated 3(b) to include circulation of project plan for institutional review preparation to Executive.</i> 3. <i>Included details of QMS-Essential.</i> 4. <i>Changed title from VPA&R to VPAASE.</i> 5. <i>Removed reference to surveys conducted on behalf of other units as this service is no longer offered.</i> 	Director of Quality
7	Apr '17	Gary Walsh	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Updated roles and responsibilities of QSU staff.</i> 2. <i>Updated Section 2 in relation to compliance.</i> 	Director of Quality