



Report of the Quality Review Group to the School of Law

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1 Introduction

UL's quality review process, as applied to academic, research institutes, professional services units, affiliates and thematic, was developed and continues to evolve in order to satisfy university quality policy and meet legislative QA requirements. UL complies with the [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012](#), as amended by the [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) \(Amendment\) Act 2019](#), which places a legal responsibility on universities to establish, maintain and enhance QA procedures relating to their activities and services (Part 3, Section 28). These QA procedures reference the European Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education Area (ESGs) and must take due account of relevant quality guidelines issued by [Quality and Qualifications Ireland](#) (QQI). QQI is the statutory body responsible for reviewing and monitoring the effectiveness of QA procedures adopted and implemented by higher (and further) educational institutions within Ireland.

All academic units are reviewed according to the terms of reference as described in the [Academic Quality Review Framework](#) and tailored quality review guidelines, which are available on the [QSU website](#). The planned schedule of quality reviews is also published.

The UL academic quality review process comprises the following three phases:

1. Pre-review phase, in which the unit under review conducts self-evaluation exercises and writes a department self-assessment report (DSAR) and a programme self-assessment report (PSAR).
2. Review phase, in which a quality review group comprising external experts, both national and international, review the DSAR and PSARs, 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 and formally responds to the recommendations of the QRG, devises plans to implement them and reports implementation progress to the University Quality Committee 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 seven to nine months after receiving the QIP template from the QSU, the head of unit provides a summary overview of progress to the university's Quality Committee. Committee members are afforded the opportunity to discuss and evaluate progress.

Approximately 18 months after receiving the QIP template, the head of unit, Provost and Deputy President, Dean and Director of Quality meet to formally review progress and to agree on any remaining actions to be taken.

2 The School of Law

The School of Law (referred to as 'SoL' or 'the School' hereafter) at the University of Limerick (UL) is a dynamic and forward-thinking academic institution dedicated to the study and practice of law. The SoL offers a comprehensive range of undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional programmes designed to provide students with a deep understanding of legal principles, critical thinking skills, and the practical experience necessary to succeed in a variety of legal careers.

2.1 Academic Programmes and Specialisations

The SoL delivers 22 taught programmes, either wholly or in part:

Level 8

- Bachelor of Laws (LLB) Law Plus
- Bachelor of Arts (BA) Law and Accounting (interfaculty)
- BA Criminal Justice
- LLB Common and Civil Law
- LLB (Evening)
- LLB (Graduate Entry)
- BA Applied Policing and Criminal Justice
- LLB Law and Cyber Security (not yet commenced)

Level 9

- LLM General
- LLM/MA Law, Human Rights in Criminal Justice (face to face and online)
- LLM International Commercial Law
- Certificate in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Postgraduate Diploma in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Professional Diploma Intermediary Studies (interfaculty)
- Professional Diploma Law and Technology
- MA in Serious Crime Investigation
- Postgraduate Diploma in Proceeds of Crime and Asset Investigation
- MA in Proceeds of Crime Investigation
- Postgraduate Diploma in Intelligence Management
- Professional Diploma in Court Presentation

- Postgraduate Certificate in Law Enforcement Oversight

2.2 Research Excellence and Focus Areas

Staff in the SoL are the leading national and international authorities in such diverse areas as criminology, criminal law, contract, tort, competition, property and land law, penology, sport law (including animals in sport), constitutional law, victim studies together with hate crimes. Our researchers believe that research must have an impact in the real world, providing workable solutions to the increasing legal challenges our society faces. In addition to publishing regularly in leading national and international prestigious journals, at the heart of our approach is the breaking down of barriers not only between different academic disciplines but between the academic and wider community.

Our staff are regularly consulted as expert contributors and analysts in the Irish media. They regularly feature as interviewees in the national broadcast and print media on a wide range of legal and political issues, have presented before Oireachtas Committees and the Citizen's Assembly on important issues of social justice and many have been appointed to high level positions in public agencies.

2.3 Commitment to Global Engagement

The SoL places a significant emphasis on internationalisation, offering students the chance to study abroad through exchange programmes with partner universities across Europe, the United States, and Asia. This global perspective enhances students' understanding of diverse legal systems and practices, preparing them for careers in an increasingly interconnected world.

2.4 Conclusion

The SoL stands as a distinguished institution that combines academic excellence, practical experience, and a global outlook. With a broad range of programmes, cutting-edge research, and a focus on student employability, the SoL provides an ideal environment for students to thrive as future legal professionals, policymakers and good citizens.

The School of Law (SoL) at the University of Limerick (UL) is a dynamic and forward-thinking academic institution dedicated to the study and practice of law. The SoL offers a comprehensive range of undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional programmes designed to provide students with a deep understanding of legal principles, critical thinking skills, and the practical experience necessary to succeed in a variety of legal careers.

3 Panel Membership

Professor Martin Phillipson, Dean of the College of Law, University of Saskatchewan (Chair)

Professor Martin Phillipson is Dean of the College of Law at the University of Saskatchewan, a position he has held since 2016. He has been a faculty member of the College of Law since 1999 and previously taught at Osgoode Hall Law School at York University (1991-92), Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand (1992-1995) and the Australian National University (1995-1999).

Prior to becoming Dean, Martin held a variety of senior leadership positions at the University of Saskatchewan including Vice-Provost College of Medicine Organizational Restructuring (2011-2015) and Interim Vice-Provost Faculty Relations (2010-2011).

From May 2022 to the present Martin has occupied the role of President of the Council of Canadian Law Deans and he has been a Bencher of the Law Society of Saskatchewan since his appointment as Dean in 2016.

Professor Karen Scott, Associate Dean Research and Professor of Law, University of Canterbury.

Karen N. Scott is a Professor of Law at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand and Associate Dean (Research). She has previously served terms as Acting Executive Dean of Law and Head of the School of Law.

Karen is the Editor-in-Chief of *Ocean Development and International Law* (ODIL). Karen is on the board of seven journals including the *Brill Research Perspectives on the Law of the Sea* and the *Australian Yearbook of International Law*.

In July 2023, Karen completed a four-year term as President of the *Australian and New Zealand Society of International Law* (ANZSIL). She previously taught at the University of Nottingham in the UK. Karen teaches and researches in the areas of the law of the sea, international environmental law and Polar law and has over 100 publications in these areas.

Professor Paul Harpur, ARC Future Fellow, University of Queensland, Australia.

Professor Paul Harpur is a nationally and internationally acclaimed legal scholar, higher education thought leader, and director. He is currently an Associate with the Harvard Law School Project on Disability, and an International Distinguished Fellow with the Burton Blatt Institute, College of Law, Syracuse University, New York. He has previously held an academic fellowship with the Harvard Law School Project on Disability and visiting positions with the Centre for Disability Law and Policy, Institute for Lifecourse and Society, National University of Ireland, Galway and with the Burton Blatt Institute, College of Law, Syracuse University, New York.

Professor Harpur is a thought leader on higher education and inclusion. He is a former Fulbrighter, having been awarded a prestigious Fulbright Future Scholarship entitled "Universally Designed for Whom? Disability, the Law and Practice of Expanding the "Normal User"". In 2021 Professor Harpur was awarded a 4-year Future Fellowship, commencing in 2022, with the Australian Research Council. Professor Harpur is using his Future Fellowship to support the higher education sector to become champions of disability inclusion.

Professor Harpur is involved in higher education reforms, serving during 2023 on the Federal Education Minister's Universities Accord Ministerial Reference Group.

Professor Harpur chairs the University of Queensland's Disability Inclusion Group, which supports the university in its implementation of the UQ Disability Action Plan. He also sits on the Academic Board, the University Senate's sub-committee focusing on inclusion, and on the Senate Committee for Equity Diversity and Inclusion.

Professor Harpur has published monographs with Cambridge University Press. His monograph, *Discrimination, Copyright and Equality: Opening the E-Book for the Print Disabled* (2017), analyses the interaction between anti-discrimination and copyright laws, and his *Ableism at Work, Disablement and Hierarchies of Impairment* (2019) analyses disability inequalities at work in several jurisdictions. Professor Harpur has also led a range of projects, including an International Labour Organization project assessing labour rights in the South Pacific, including a particular focus on the rights of persons with disabilities. In the 2024 Australia Day Honours, Professor Harpur was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia by the Governor General of Australia (OAM). The citation for his OAM is "for service to people with disability". Professor Harpur aims to create a world which is more inclusive for all. He advances his vision through advancing human rights and helping universities become disability champions of change.

Nicola White, Director of Learning and Development, Matheson LLP.

Nicola is the Director of Learning and Development with one of Ireland's largest commercial law firms. She has over ten years' leadership experience in corporate learning, talent management, employee engagement and change programmes.

Prior to joining Matheson LLP, Nicola worked as a legal researcher with the Law Reform Commission of Ireland, a case manager with the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution and as a lecturer with Independent Colleges Dublin.

Nicola obtained her LL.B from the University of Limerick and her LL.M from Trinity College Dublin. As part of an international fellowship programme she also spent time as a visiting student at Stanford University.

Ronan O'Sullivan, recent graduate of Bachelor of Laws (Law Plus), 2024.

Ronan O’Sullivan is a FE1 candidate and a recent LL.B. graduate from the University of Limerick, with additional academic experience from completing his Erasmus at the University of Bologna.

Ronan's professional experience includes a legal internship at A&L Goodbody LLP, where he gained exposure to corporate law working in the Banking & Finance Department, and also working on pro bono cases. His leadership role as President of the UL Law Society has honed his organisational and communication skills. He also demonstrated his analytical and negotiation skills by reaching the Grand Final of the British and Irish Commercial Awareness Competition.

Patrick Healy, Associate Professor and Head of Department of Computer Science and Information System, University of Limerick.

Patrick Healy is an Associate Professor in the Computer Science Department. He is currently serving as Head of Department. Following completion of his MS in Applied Mathematics (University of Illinois) and his Ph.D. in Computer Science (University of Massachusetts) he joined the Research and Development Department of United Airlines and developed algorithmic advisory systems for handling irregular operations there. His interests are combinatorial optimization, operations research, design of algorithms, and algorithms for automated graph drawing. He has numerous publications in international journals in these areas. He has consulted for some of the largest research grant funding bodies in Europe providing algorithms and systems to streamline processes in resource allocation and scheduling.

Ailish O’Farrell, Technical Writer

Ailish studied for a BA (Hons) degree in Italian and French, with English subsidiary, followed by a Higher Diploma in Education at what was then University College Galway (UCG). After spending a year at the Università degli Studi in Pisa, Italy, studying contemporary Italian literature, she did an MA in Italian, again in UCG, before teaching at a variety of levels. Changing direction, Ailish obtained a Graduate Diploma in Software Localisation at University of Limerick, which led to a career in e-learning, instructional design and technical writing. She has acted as recording secretary during most of the quality reviews at UL.

4 Preliminary Comments of the Quality Review Group

The Quality Review Group (QRG) appreciated the warm welcome it received from the University of Limerick (UL) and wishes to thank the School of Law (referred to as ‘SoL’ or ‘the School’ hereafter) and the Quality Support Unit for the cooperation it received throughout the review process. The process was incredibly well organised and ran very smoothly.

SoL produced a thorough and well-presented self-assessment report (SAR), as did many of the course directors (CDs) in relation to the programmes. Challenges and potential solutions were clearly identified and addressed. Meetings with members of SoL, undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students, external stakeholders and UL officials were frank, collegial and informative. The QRG was particularly impressed with the dedication and commitment of SoL academic and administrative staff to student success. This view was corroborated by students from a range of programmes who expressed enthusiasm and a high level of satisfaction with the content of their programmes and the supports they receive from SoL. The QRG was similarly impressed by the research output of the academic staff of the School. Meetings with external stakeholders clearly illustrated that SoL enjoys an excellent reputation with the practising bar and public sector agencies with which it collaborates.

The unanimous conclusion of the members of the QRG is that the School is a high-functioning academic unit that should be proud of its teaching and research missions. The QRG finds this conclusion all the more remarkable given the significant resource constraints under which SoL operates. The QRG strongly encourages the Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences (AHSS) and the University to increase support to a school that brings considerable acclaim and revenue to UL.

5 Departmental Strategy and Alignment with University Policies

SoL aligns its activities with UL's strategic objectives, which include increasing student engagement, promoting research initiatives and fostering strong community relationships. The strategic parameters in which SoL operates include UL's overall strategy and other strategies including the Learning, Teaching & Assessment strategy, the Research strategy, the Equality and Human Rights strategy and UL's sustainability and academic integrity frameworks, as well as SoL's own strategy.

A SoL Research strategy for 2024-2027 has been developed and was adopted in April 2025. The QRG notes the available resources available to the School and **recommends that the SoL must develop a strategic plan which will identify its core priorities and allow it to allocate resources accordingly.**

6 Organisational Structure and Management of the School

The QRG observed that SoL operates in an environment of significant funding and resource scarcity, placing a heavy burden on academic and professional staff alike. The QRG was unanimous in reaching this conclusion and strongly **recommends the provision of extra resources to assist SoL in maintaining and enhancing its teaching and research missions.** Despite these challenges, the QRG was extremely impressed

by the dedication to teaching and research demonstrated by the SoL staff. It is clear that they work extremely hard delivering their many programmes (22 taught) with a relatively small staff. The Management Committee appears to be optimally structured and staffed. During our meetings, there was some discussion around the reconvening of a now-defunct Advisory Committee. With a properly functioning Management Committee, it is not clear if this would be necessary.

It was notable that the majority of CDs we met with were early career academics. This may disadvantage this faculty in terms of career advancement given the workload associated with being a CD. If, as presented, the University values research outputs above almost everything else, then the QRG **recommends that these duties be distributed more evenly across the ranking spectrum within the School**. This will have the additional benefit of higher-rank academics bringing their long experience to bear on the management of programmes.

SoL appears to be particularly challenged by staffing shortages due to long-term sick leaves, resulting in a combined approach, with people carrying extremely heavy teaching loads and temporary staff being employed. The latter approach is problematic since it represents a loss of teaching expertise to the school when the temporary staff inevitably leave. Furthermore, in a school as financially constrained as SoL the additional financial burden denies support to other worthy activities and initiatives. While the QRG has come to learn that UL provides central relief for long-term absences, we recommend that this policy be reviewed so that it is activated much earlier in the staff absence so that sufficient and appropriate cover can be put in place.

The average teaching load carried by faculty is high, even by the standards of UL, which, too, appear to be above international norms. During our meetings with faculty, some discussions around rationalising modules took place, though it is the view of the QRG that more drastic cuts should be considered. Although it has become clear that many crucial decisions concerning the functioning of the School are not fully within its control, we recommend that serious consideration be given to the number of programmes SoL delivers. It is notable that a new, and very worthy, programme in cyber security has been developed, to commence in autumn 2026; yet, in very stretched circumstances, no discussion of programme elimination appears to have taken place. The high programme count requires administrative duties of all faculty, denying them time that might be spent on advancing the School's research output and furthering UL's stated goal of being a research-led institution. We recommend that by appropriate means the per-faculty teaching load be reduced in order to allow more time for research.

For a school of its size, SoL houses a significantly large research project, Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice (REPPP). REPPP's contribution to the school appears to be mainly financial with some contribution to module delivery and

masters supervision. REPPP occupies limited physical space within SoL, with many of its staff working remotely. This further isolates the REPPP unit from the School.

Through external engagement, some valuable initiatives have been brought to fruition. An outstanding example of this is the Appellate Moot Courtroom, for which the school is to be commended. The development of a three-year teaching allocation plan is a positive development that should allow teaching staff space to plan other activities.

Future priorities, such as recruitment, do not appear to have been addressed.

7 Programme Portfolio and Curriculum

As part of the review, the QRG received self-assessment reports (SARs) for each of the programmes offered by SoL. The SARs were reviewed by the QRG and a desk report for each programme was provided in advance of the review. The QRG met each of the programme teams to discuss the reports and programmes during the review period. Detailed reports have been provided for each of the programmes and the QRG **recommends that specific recommendations made in these reports should be reviewed and implemented.**

The School should be commended on the alignment of programmes with Faculty research strengths and School strategy. Degree programmes are accredited by a number of professional bodies in Law and Accounting as well as by the Bar Council of India. Courses are aligned with Learning, Teaching & Assessment strategies but, it should be noted, as is common with law programmes, assessment constraints are imposed by relevant professional bodies. There is a robust system for examination and programme performance review. Staff demonstrate responsiveness to modify programmes in light of feedback from a variety of sources, including stakeholders, as well as exit surveys.

SoL offers a large number of programmes relative to staffing and other resources. These range from the flagship LLB Law Plus programme through to LLMs and bespoke diplomas and a certificate for criminal justice professionals and members of An Garda Síochána (AGS), the Irish police force. While the quality of these programmes is high, as demonstrated by extremely positive feedback from students, employers and stakeholders (in the form of surveys and during review panel sessions), the workload they create for a small school is significant and has an impact on other activities such as research. The QRG **recommends that the School consider options to rationalise programmes and modules as appropriate in order to focus on core offerings that are considered to be central to its strategy.**

8 Learning, Teaching and Assessment

8.1 Learning, Teaching & Assessment

The approach of SoL to learning, teaching and assessment is commendable, and it is clear that faculty provide useful material to students via virtual learning environments. Also praiseworthy is the School's proactive engagement with Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Unlike in many jurisdictions, Ireland's commitment to UDL is underpinned by policy, and the School's efforts demonstrate a genuine commitment to inclusivity. Rather than redeveloping similar systems the QRG **recommends that in the spirit of efficiency the School leverage existing resources** such as those provided by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) and noted in the Australian Higher Education Support (Disability Support Programmes) Guidelines 2025,

The School's provision of hybrid learning for students is also commendable, especially regarding the LLB Evening programme. However, as noted by attendees during the site visit, recorded lectures should not be used in lieu of live lectures, especially at UG and PG levels, as participation is important for the development of cohorts. The QRG **recommends seeking further clarification on how these flexible offerings reconcile with UDL principles**. A review of the use of online modules at UG and PG level is necessary to assess whether the mode of delivery (online or in person) is appropriate for the intended pedagogical and other aims and outcomes of the module. It is noted, however, that recorded lectures are useful resources for students who cannot attend due to varying circumstances. Students also commended the expanded use of tutorials within the School as being a notable positive for community and engagement within the unit.

For the most part, according to students who spoke to the QRG, modules delivered by faculty are engaging, with module leaders being responsive to student feedback and offering important support to students when contacted. This is particularly praiseworthy. Some students suggested that guest lectures would be a welcome development in the delivery of modules. It is noted, however, that it may be more difficult to provide these for modules with large syllabuses that are subject to accreditation by professional bodies. The QRG **recommends that the inclusion of guest lecturers should be considered**, nonetheless. An area highlighted by students was guidance in relation to desirable exam answers. One suggested providing a schematic to answering, but, although noteworthy, this again is difficult due to varying styles in technique. The QRG learned that the offering of electives can be constrained due to centralised scheduling of timetables. A review of this may be desirable in terms of the tailoring of programmes for students.

The time allocation for teaching development of faculty is commendable.

The module assessment modes used in SoL are also quite innovative. These include, for example, the use of the Seen Exam in the Tort Law module and the use of moots as a form of assessment in Tort Law and Labour Law. Students highlighted that such innovative practices would also be desirable in the assessment of other modules. The use of continuous assessment in some modules is also commendable as aligning with pedagogical principles, while external examiners ensure alignment of standards. The feedback gathered by CDs and Course Boards with regard to student experience and module delivery and assessment is treated with a high level of responsiveness. The QRG commends the School's output and evident student satisfaction with SoL in light of the high staff: student ratio (SSR); to ensure this continues, efficiencies are recommended regarding module duplication to address the burdensome workloads on faculty. Furthermore, the QRG **recommends the allocation of additional resources to address the discrepancy between the AHSS SSR and that of SoL** to allow the School to improve its research output and student experience and, ultimately, its reputation and attractiveness in the competitive UG and PG student markets.

8.2 Centralised and Local Supports and Guidance Available to Students including HR/EDI and Learning

SoL has shown prudence in aligning with central policies, particularly in relation to disability supports. The absence of duplicative local policy is welcomed; however, ongoing attention must be paid to the consistency and currency of institutional versus school-level policy frameworks. Where both exist, there remains a risk of contradiction and inefficiency. An annual policy audit or mapping exercise may assist in this regard. The School is also heavily involved in the Personal Advisor Support System (PASS) which allocates a faculty member to a student to assist them with any difficulties they may have. This praiseworthy system should be highlighted to students as a means of support.

In its SAR, the School identified the emergence of generative AI as a significant issue and informed the QRG that a UL-wide group to study this has been initiated. The Faculty should engage with this to ensure good practice and guidance.

8.3 Taught Programmes

At the time of the 2011 quality review, SoL offered nine Level 8 and 9 taught programmes. It now delivers 22 taught programmes, either wholly or in part, as listed in 2.1 above.

In addition to these programmes, SoL offers a range of micro-credentials courses. MicroCreds are bite-sized, accredited, enterprise-powered qualifications that enable learners to develop skills and competencies in a flexible, fast and affordable way.

Learners can take courses in ‘Contemporary Issues in Sports Law’, ‘Housing Law and Policy’, ‘Fundamentals of Law’ and ‘Law of Evidence’.

SoL also makes a significant contribution to other programmes. At undergraduate level, the School offers modules on the BA Journalism and Digital Communication, BA European Studies, BA Applied Languages, BSc Sport and Exercise Sciences, BSc Nursing (General), Bachelor of Business Studies, and BA International Business. Moreover, there are examples of interfaculty teaching and learning collaboration between law and engineering in the form of a moot court exercise.

SoL has recognised, and the QRG agrees, that there is a need to conduct a review to rationalise programmes and modules. Although SoL’s micro-credentials and bespoke programmes further its mission of supporting lifelong learning and providing service to the community, the considerable administrative and academic time resourcing of such activities, combined with the limited returns on such activity, lead *the QRG to recommend that some of these offerings may need to be discontinued to enable SoL to concentrate on core offerings.*

9 Research

SoL has a strong research profile in terms of publications with all staff engaged in research, and this is recognised by the Dean of AHSS. There is a high number of PhD students enrolled relative to the number of staff available to supervise. Many staff are publishing in well ranked international/Scopus journals and have developed international research reputations, particularly in the field of criminal justice. It is clear that a number of staff members have had and are continuing to have significant policy impact. The association with REPPP has a strong reputational benefit, particularly in the field of socio-legal studies, although the type of publications produced by REPPP staff do not necessarily contribute to ranking and other academic/university processes. The School should be commended on its research profile and impact, particularly given the resource constraints it is operating under. However, the QRG was unclear as to the nature of the relationship between REPPP and SoL and **recommends that SoL clarify this relationship in order to maximise benefits to the School.**

The School is to be commended on promoting a strong nexus between research and teaching and this is demonstrated in particular by its postgraduate and bespoke offerings as well as by the LLB Law Plus options on offer. SoL has focused on three broad areas of research, for which it is clearly developing an international reputation, and the designation of research institutes and centres.

The School has recently adopted an ambitious and comprehensive research strategy, which is to be commended. The strategy addresses core School and UL interests in terms of rankings and external income generation but, importantly, is fully

contextualised for law and addresses the often inadequate metrics that are used to assess legal research for promotions and rankings purposes. It addresses alternative measures of the quality and impact of legal research and this is commendable. The strategy sets out a range of important measures and initiatives, a number of which require investment at School and Faculty level. It is notable that investment in research (in the form of conference support, for example), is currently low. Accordingly, the QRG **recommends that the School and Faculty make provision in their budgets to support these research-focused initiatives.**

It is clear that, in common with many other law schools, the greatest challenge to research is finding time and energy to research. The extremely high SSR and course load, in addition to the significant administration that is associated with a large number of programmes, are an on-going challenge for research, particularly for staff in the earlier stages of their career. It is not obvious that the proposed revised workload allocation model (WAM) will successfully address this. The QRG **recommends that the School address workload with a view to ensuring staff are genuinely able to spend 40 percent of their time on research, as consistent with the UL Research strategy.**

A factor noted by all members of the QRG as well as by School staff is the challenging terms of the sabbatical/special research leave (SRL) operational guidelines, which appear to make it difficult to carve out designated research time on a regular basis over the course of an academic career. The requirement that sabbatical leave must be spent outside of Ireland is undeniably discriminatory against staff with caring responsibilities and is particularly prejudicial to women and persons with disabilities. The QRG therefore **recommends that the University immediately review these guidelines and remove the requirement that leave must be taken outside of Ireland in order to give all staff the opportunity to focus on research for a designated period of time.**

Additional barriers to research identified by staff include the insufficient support provided in relation to funding applications and, subsequently, in managing any funding award; insufficient/inadequate support in respect of tendering applications; challenges in working in an interdisciplinary way owing to the siloed nature of academic departments and associated administrative support; and the challenges of finding time to develop internal collaborations, including with REPPP.

The relatively high number of PhD students within the School is commendable and feedback from students indicated a high level of satisfaction with supervisors. It was reported that there has been a relatively high attrition rate, with a number of factors being a potential cause, including the enrolment of weaker students. The School is to be commended on developing a more robust application process to weed out less able candidates. It was reported that UL permits part-time enrolment of PhD students but charges full-time fees. Not only is this policy discriminatory, but it may lead to a perverse incentive whereby students who are unable to study full time are nevertheless

enrolling in a full-time degree and are setting themselves up to fail. The QRG **recommends that UL review its policy with a view to charging fees on a pro rata basis for part-time PhD students.**

Student feedback was critical of the shared PhD space which is felt to be too open and not conducive to productive study. It was noted that the nature of the space led to many students working at home and this impacted collegiality between students and reduced peer support. The QRG **recommends that consideration be given to whether physical changes can be made to the space in order to make it more appropriate to private study.**

The newly adopted SoL research strategy includes a number of positive recommendations for supporting PhD research/supervision and for integrating PhD researchers into the School. The QRG **recommends that these recommendations be implemented and supported with budget as appropriate.**

10 Stakeholder Engagement

10.1 Internal Stakeholder Engagement

The School maintains a number of positive and effective relationships with internal stakeholders, including Finance, the Graduate and Professional Studies Office (GPS) and the Cooperative Education & Careers Division (CECD), among others. These partnerships are working well and are widely regarded as constructive. During the visit, every manager interviewed offered favourable feedback regarding their interactions with SoL staff, which is encouraging.

One area identified for further development is the School's engagement with Academic Registry. In particular, establishing a direct point of contact to assist with recruitment matters would enhance efficiency and coordination.

SoL's relationship with the Faculty Manager is also noteworthy. Together, they have initiated a plan with UL Foundation to raise additional funds, which is a praiseworthy step that reflects strategic forward thinking.

Another developmental opportunity lies in the area of alumni engagement. While much of this is currently managed centrally, the School could benefit from formalising its own alumni strategy. Doing so could enhance SoL's reputation, expand cooperative placement opportunities and attract guest speakers, thereby adding value to the student experience.

10.1.1 Cooperative Education & Careers Division (CECD)

UL pioneered the first cooperative education programme in Ireland and currently has one of the largest student placement programmes in Europe. Graduates from UL have an excellent employment record in all industry sectors, and UL graduate employment

rates are significantly higher than the national average. Three of the SoL undergraduate programmes (LLB Law Plus, BA Law and Accounting and BA Criminal Justice) require students to undertake a six-to-eight-month clinical placement as an integral part of their education.

This long and sustained commitment to law in action ensures that students get vital clinical experience with prestigious employers such as Matheson LLP, A&L Goodbody LLP, Holmes O'Malley Sexton LLP, Mason Hayes and Curran LLP, Arthur Cox LLP, LK Shields Solicitors LLP, William Fry LLP, KPMG, Deloitte, PwC, Maples, Grant Thornton, Ernst and Young, ESB Networks, The Courts Service of Ireland, Allianz Ireland, Legal Aid Board and GE Capital Aviation Services.

UL operates a centralised model for placements, meaning the responsibility for securing placements lies with the University itself. Although students can arrange placements independently, the primary means of managing the cooperative education programme is through CECD. Although the cooperative education programme is industry leading, representing a strong positive selling point for SoL, industry and students raised several concerns regarding the administration of the programme. These concerns include the following:

- Student preparedness remains a concern. Ensuring all students are adequately prepared for their placements can be difficult, given varying levels of skills and experience. In particular, employers and students indicated that they would benefit from completing corporate law modules prior to seeking or securing placement as many employers specialise in this area of law.
- Some students expressed frustration that for students of law their placement was comparatively less relevant and beneficial than those of their peers.
- Employers expressed concern that large numbers of students available for placements were released by the cooperative education programme at the same time. This places time pressures upon employers to finalise contracts with students in a short timeframe. Additionally, employers expressed frustration that they are unable to determine from the administration of the cooperative education programme website if a student has already accepted a contract and is thus no longer available for an offer. This has resulted in employers short-listing students who are no longer available for placement.
- A number of students each semester struggle to secure accommodation and pay rent, especially when the placement is in Dublin. Students may make a request to remain in a location close to their home, however this then limits the placements available to them. Students who have these financial pressures are likely to have debts and may struggle to secure additional loans independently.

- Although students who source their placement independently can benefit from their own networks or employers who align to their interests, this creates risks that the placement may not meet requirements for credit.
- Students who elect to source placements are unable to ascertain which employers already have contracts with CECD and who deal exclusively with the division. This results in students contacting employers who are not in a position to offer them placements. When this occurs, the employers concerned are required to devote resources to handling the situation.

10.1.2 Additional Internal Stakeholder Engagement

Internal stakeholders also provide valuable support for outreach events such as Law for a Day and UL Open Days, which is commendable and demonstrates a strong collaborative ethos.

Separately, the Research Office has suggested that the School consider broadening its principal investigator (PI) base. There is a risk that opportunities may be missed if this base remains too narrow.

Finally, the UL Global Office reported that while their relationship with SoL is positive overall, there is room to increase engagement with law students. This is an area that may warrant further attention moving forward.

Following on from its meetings with stakeholders, the QRG **recommends that SoL review existing relationships with internal stakeholders, including Academic Registry, GPS, UL Global and CECD as several areas were identified for increased cooperation which would be beneficial to SoL and its students.**

10.1.3 External Stakeholder Engagement

SoL is to be commended for the excellent reputation it has cultivated within the legal profession, particularly through the placement of high-calibre students in legal practices through the University's cooperative education programme. This engagement not only enhances students' professional readiness but also reinforces the School's standing as a trusted partner within the sector. This partnership has also evolved as an important talent pipeline for the legal profession in terms of securing future apprentices. The QRG **recommends that the School prioritise the marketing of the cooperative placement programme to a broader network of legal practices, including in-house legal teams and the Bar Council of Ireland, to expand the availability of such placements for students.** One effective way to consider achieving this would be by establishing continuing professional development (CPD) events for legal practitioners within the Limerick region which, in turn, would allow for promotion of these placement opportunities.

The School has demonstrated a proactive and innovative approach in its collaboration with key external stakeholders, notably through the design and delivery of bespoke academic programmes, such as those developed in partnership with AGS, including the Graduate Diploma in Intelligence Management and Postgraduate Diploma in Proceeds of Crime and Asset Investigation. These initiatives exemplify the School's commitment to meaningful, practice-oriented engagement that responds directly to the evolving needs of industry and public service partners. **The QRG recommends that the School explore opportunities to leverage these 'closed' programmes as additional revenue streams or research outputs for SoL.**

This important and strategic collaboration with external stakeholders is further evidenced through the Department of Justice-funded REPPP, which sits within the School. Although there is active engagement between REPPP and SoL, there could be greater strategic engagement and alignment between the unit and the School in terms of research outputs.

The establishment of adjunct professor positions for leading members of the profession is another significant achievement, effectively bridging the gap between academia and practice. This initiative enriches the student experience by embedding real-world insight into the curriculum and further supports the development of students.

It is evident that SoL doesn't currently have a clear marketing strategy or administrative support to deliver on such a strategy. Faculty members are appointed to take on these responsibilities. Given the intensely competitive market for law graduates and postgraduates in Ireland, **the QRG recommends that the School, as part of its overall strategy, incorporate a clear vision for the marketing and differentiation of the School and that consideration should be given to providing an additional administrative support in SoL to manage the marketing, alumni and external stakeholder engagement on behalf of the School.**

11 Conclusion

As stated above, the QRG concluded that SoL provides a broad range of excellent programmes to a diverse range of students and stakeholders while also producing a significant body of high-quality research. However, internal and external factors (particularly in relation to resourcing) raise concerns about the medium to long-term sustainability of this impressive level of performance. Given these concerns, the QRG has provided recommendations that SoL can address internally, while also making several recommendations to the Faculty of AHSS and the University on how they can better support the long-term success of an outstanding academic unit. These commendations and recommendations are set out below.

12 Commendations and Recommendations

12.1 Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

1.	The outstanding commitment of the School of Law academic and professional staff to the success of the students and the School.
2.	The creation of a supportive and collegial working environment.
3.	The quality and delivery of programmes, notwithstanding significant resource constraints.
4.	The commitment to innovative programming that responds to emerging social, legal and regulatory developments.
5.	The impressive SoL research profile in terms of publications, with all staff engaged in impactful research.
6.	The strong research teaching nexus.
7.	The high-quality bespoke programmes delivered to key public sector agencies.
8.	The excellent reputation of the School and students within the legal profession and with key stakeholders.
9.	The enthusiastic support of the Law librarian for the academic mission of the school, a Law librarian being an essential support for teaching and research in a law school.
10.	The high regard in which SoL is held by senior leadership at the Faculty and University levels, something the QRG considers should be acknowledged specifically.

12.2 Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

Level 1 Recommendations

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	Recommendation	Rationale
1.	Develop a strategic plan which will identify SoL core priorities and allow it to allocate resources accordingly.	Given available resources, SoL must identify its core priorities and allocate resources accordingly
2.	At Faculty level, provide extra resources to assist SoL in maintaining and enhancing its teaching and research missions.	AHSS KPIs (2022/23) indicate that SoL generates significant revenue and enrolments that are not reflected in resources allocated to the School. The 2022/23 SSR was 41.2 in SoL as compared to the AHSS average of 22.3
3.	Ensure a fair and equitable distribution of CD duties across the academic ranks.	Many CDs appeared to be early career academics and the QRG is concerned that this may limit their career advancement
4.	Review and implement the recommendations from the QRG regarding each programme as set out in the QRG Programme Reports.	
5.	Consider options to rationalise programmes and modules as appropriate.	Rationalisation should support focus on core offerings that are considered central to SoL strategy.
6.	Rather than redeveloping similar systems and in the spirit of efficiency, leverage existing UDL resources.	SoL as limited resources and can benefit from leveraging resources already developed in other jurisdictions
7.	Review the use of online delivery of modules at UG and PG levels.	This process is necessary to assess whether the mode of delivery (online or in person) is appropriate for the intended pedagogical and other aims and outcomes of the module
8.	At Faculty and School levels, make provision in the budgets to support research-focused initiatives as set out in the SoL Research strategy.	The recently adopted SoL Research strategy sets out a number of valuable initiatives to support research in the School, and some of these initiatives require financial support
9.	Address workload with a view to ensuring staff are genuinely able to spend 40 percent	The UL Research strategy confirms that staff on 40/40/20 contract should have 40 percent

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	Recommendation	Rationale
	of their time on research, as consistent with the UL Research strategy.	of their time available for research
10.	Clarify the relationship between the School and REPPP in order to maximise benefits to the School.	The QRG was unclear as to the nature of the relationship between REPPP and SoL
11.	Review existing relationships with internal stakeholders, including Academic Registry, GPS, UL Global and CECD as several areas were identified for increased cooperation which would be beneficial to SoL and its students.	Following on from the meeting with internal stakeholders, several areas were identified for increased cooperation which would be beneficial to SoL and its students.
12.	Prioritise the marketing of the cooperative placement programme to a broader network of legal practices, including in-house legal teams and the Bar Council of Ireland, to expand the availability of such placements for students.	Areas to consider include school branding, promotion of legal co-op placements, private sector partnerships and philanthropic engagement.
13.	Explore opportunities to leverage 'closed' programmes developed for key external stakeholders as additional revenue streams or research outputs for SoL.	These unique programmes may provide an opportunity to enhance revenue and SoL's research profile.
14.	Incorporate a clear vision for the marketing and differentiation of the School and consider providing an additional administrative support in SoL to manage marketing, alumni and external stakeholder engagement on behalf of the School.	There is an intensely competitive market for law graduates and postgraduates in Ireland. SoL needs structures and supports to deliver on its strategy.

Level 2 Recommendations

	Recommendation	Rationale
1.	At University level, review financial arrangements regarding long term health-related absences to ensure the School has sufficient teaching resources to deliver programmes.	The School is struggling this year to deliver programmes due to a significant number of health-related absences
2.	Consider increasing the use of guest lecturers in UG modules.	Student feedback indicated strong support for this initiative, particularly regarding input from practitioners.
3.	At University level, review sabbatical guidelines with a view to removing the	The current policy is discriminatory, and all staff

	requirement that leave must be taken outside of Ireland.	should be given the opportunity to focus on research for a designated period of time.
4.	At University level, review the policy of charging part-time PhD students a full-time fee.	The current policy is discriminatory and potentially leads to a perverse incentive whereby students only able to study part-time are enrolling on a full-time basis.
5.	Consider whether physical changes can be made to the PhD study space in order to make it more conducive to private study.	The open plan nature of the space is not entirely suitable to PhD research.
6.	Provide budgetary support to implement the recommendations regarding PhD students as set out in the 2025 School Research strategy.	See Level 1 Recommendation 8
7.	Consider making school staff and facilities available for CPD events in order to strengthen links between the School and the legal profession.	This recommendation arises from discussions with stakeholder employers who outlined the benefits it could provide

13 Appendix A

Membership of School of Law Quality Team

Prof Lucy Ann Buckley	Head of School, Full Professor
Dr John Lombard	Co-Chair, Associate Professor A and Director of Curriculum Development
Dr Laura Donnellan	Co-Chair and Associate Professor A
Mr Eoin Quill	Associate Professor A and Director of Teaching and Learning
Prof Paul McCutcheon	Full Professor
Dr Michelle Stevenson	Associate Teacher

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Ms Carol Huguet	Senior Administrator
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