



Report of the Quality Review Group to the Department of Economics

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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 Description of Unit

The Department of Economics (the Department) contributes directly to the University and Kemmy Business School's (KBS) mission and strategy, which were developed through a consultative process involving faculty, students, and external stakeholders, including the KBS International Advisory Board.

The KBS mission states: "We research and educate to create a sustainable and equitable future for all" and sits within the University's broader mission "to build on the expertise of our scholars in creating, harnessing and imparting knowledge for the benefit of our students and the enrichment of our community".

These overlapping missions are further reflected in the KBS values of Bravery, Impact, Respect, Integrity and Sustainability which are designed to help guide our teaching, research, and outreach activities.

Placed in the context of these broader missions and values, the Department aims to provide a high-quality education that equips students with the analytical and critical skills required for addressing global economic challenges.

Its staff have a strong focus on applied economic research that is of high academic standard and contributes to national and international policy debates. The department's goals are to: Enhance research outputs, increase international collaborations, and promote ethical and sustainable economic practices.

3 Panel Membership

Dr John Paul Clifford

John Paul Clifford is a Senior Demonstrator in the Department of Economics, Cork University Business School, University College Cork (UCC). John Paul has five academic years of economics teaching experience having previously been an Economics Lecturer, Senior Demonstrator, and a Teaching Assistant in the School of Economics in UCC. He has successfully completed his PhD defence with minor corrections on February 20th 2025 at University College Cork. His research interests lie in the areas of regional economics, applied and spatial econometrics, governmental decentralisation, regional development, industrial development and policy, deindustrialisation and deprivation. He has also recently been a Research Assistant working with Dr. Junwen Luo and Prof. Justin Doran working on a paper on the impact and output of research funding. John Paul was the recipient of the 2020 Irish Research Council Government of Ireland

Postgraduate Scholarship providing research funding for four years to undertake his PhD. In 2022, John Paul received the Deans' Best Paper Award at the Cork University School (CUBS) Postgraduate Research Symposium for his paper on 'The employment impact of business and technology parks'. In 2024, John Paul received the Emerald Publishing 'Literati Award for Outstanding Paper' for his paper on 'The relationship between city size, decentralisation and economic growth' in the Journal of Economic Studies. He has also been invited to be a reviewer of some economics journals

Professor Lucy-Ann Buckley

Lucy-Ann Buckley is Full Professor of Commercial Law and Head of the School of Law at the University of Limerick. She originally studied law at University College Cork, where she was awarded a BCL and an LLM by research. After qualifying as a solicitor, she completed a BCL (masters) at the University of Oxford and a PhD at Trinity College Dublin. She commenced her academic career at the University of Warwick, and subsequently lectured at the University of Limerick and the University of Galway, before returning to the University of Limerick. Lucy specialises in employment law, particularly employment equality. Her research has had significant international impact. For example, from 2018-2020 and again in 2022, she acted as an expert advisor to the States of Guernsey (Channel Islands) in relation to the development of new multi-ground equality legislation, which was enacted in 2022. She previously contributed to the Joint Statement Towards Inclusive Social Protection Systems Supporting the Full and Effective Participation of Persons With Disabilities(2019), developed by the International Labour Organisation in consultation with stakeholder organisations

Professor Eleonora Fichera

Professor Eleonora Fichera is a Professor of Applied Economics at the University of Bath, where she is also Director of Research of the Centre for Public Health. Before joining the University of Bath in 2017, she was a Research Fellow at the University of Manchester, where she held an MRC Early Career Fellowship in the Economics of Health. Her research explores how individuals and organisations interact within health systems, using policy evaluation methods to analyse health behaviours, policy interventions, and long-term health outcomes. She has particularly focused on the impact of information and taxation on dietary choices, the impact of environment on health, the economic consequences of early-life health shocks, and the relationship between physical and mental health. Beyond her research, she plays an active role in the academic community as a co-editor of Health Economics. She is a member of the Social Sciences Advisory Group of the Wellcome Trust and a member of the Social Sciences Advisory Committee for the Food Standards Agency.

Professor Cloda Jenkins

Cloda Jenkins is Associate Dean, Education Quality and a Professorial Teaching Fellow in the Department of Economics and Public Policy in the Imperial Business School. She is Head of Year for BSc Economics, Finance and Data Science. Prior to joining Imperial, Cloda was a Professor (Teaching) in the Department of Economics at University College London where she taught students from 1st year BSc through to MSc. Cloda is an expert in regulatory economics and mechanism design. She has applied this expertise to practical policy making, having advised organisations in a range of regulated sectors since 1997, including heading Ofgem's Review of Energy Network Regulation (2008-2010), sitting on the Expert Panel of the UK Regulatory Network and providing expert advice to the water regulator for England and Wales (Ofwat). She is also an expert in economics education, with particular interest in research-based education, developing employability skills in economics degrees, designing authentic assessments, adapting economics curriculum to make education resilient to shocks and improving student learning and well-being by working in partnership with students. As Associate Director of the Centre for Teaching and Learning Economics (CTaLE), member of the RES Education and Training Committee and Chair of the EEA Education Committee she is passionate about sharing lessons with peers globally to improve the evidence base for enhancements in economics education.

Professor Ian Walker (Chair)

Professor Ian Walker is a lifelong academic economist with a teacher/researcher career spanning 1977 to the present. His first position was as lecturer at Manchester University, then as full professor at Keele, then at Warwick and, finally, at Lancaster. He has been a visiting professor at Sydney University, UNSW, Aarhus U, Toulouse School of Economics, and (twice) at Princeton University. And he has spent two years as an ESRC Policy Fellow working in Whitehall. He has published in the top journals in the subject and in the top journals in his field (labour/education/health economics). He has a h-index score of 50 that puts him in the top 500 of all active researchers in Economics. He has served on the management of several professional associations (the Royal Economic Society, the European Economic Association, and the European Association of Labour Economics). He was founding member of the IZA – the largest network of research economists in the field of labour economics, with its centre in Bonn, and he has been its Research Director of Education Economics. He has been the Managing Editor of Labour Economics, one of the top journals in the field, Fiscal Studies, an important policy journal in the field, and a co-editor of the Economic Journal, and of the IZA World of Labour. He was a member of the Economics Panel of the 2014 UK Research Assessment Exercise.

4 Preliminary Comments of the Quality Review Group

The QRG's first impressions, which emerged from the reading of the documentation prior to the visit, were clear – the Department of Economics is small but efficient in its undergraduate teaching because of the scale of KBS student cohorts. The Department delivers modules that are popular with students so it is clear that it serves KBS well in the service teaching that it provides. The need to also provide for Economics majors using the same core modules as it provides to non-specialist students is often difficult because of the heterogeneity of the students and the progressive nature of the subject.

The Department seems to have responded to this dilemma by pivoting towards “applications” of economics, rather than delivering a traditional course structure that would usually focus on “theory”. This is not dumbing-down – it is a reflection of the way in which the discipline as a whole has moved since the Great Financial Crisis. Moreover, it better reflects the needs of KBS.

During the visit, our initial impressions were largely confirmed by the evidence, in particular by the “market test” that showed that student outcomes are excellent and that graduates are highly regarded by employers.

The QRG wondered how the BSc in Economics and Mathematics programme fits into this pivot, but during the visit we felt reassured that there is no inconsistency. This programme serves good maths students who have aspirations to work in the finance sector. The combination of stochastic calculus, statistical distribution theory and time series analysis with micro (and macro) economics should lead to a deep understanding of how one should evaluate risky investments. Moreover, economists now know that the same ideas that apply to “financial options” also apply to “real options” problems – i.e., risky physical investments where there is “irreversibility”. A classic example of this is to R&D investments. Thus, this programme reflects the Department's strength in innovation. Moreover, it opens up the possibility of new modules that could better signpost to students on this programme how maths and economics complement each other.

The QRG remains concerned about the sustainability of the Department. Cohort sizes will be dropping in Ireland, and the success of the new technological universities is also a threat to UL. Nevertheless, the pivot towards applications of economics and away from economic theory, together with the Department's history of high value added for students and its research strengths in innovation and in trade, should serve the Department well and enable growth – despite the threats.

The QRG sees the Department as becoming more important to KBS, and we can envisage its becoming a potential bridge to departments outside the School because of its interests in such areas as health and environmental issues.

5 Findings on Departmental Strategy and Alignment with University Policies

The UL strategy is set out at length in online documentation made available to the QRG. In summary, consistent with UL strategy aims, the QRG finds that the Department clearly documents its aspirations for teaching to be research-led and to better equip graduates with skills that will serve them in developing their careers and enable them to be adaptable. The Department also seeks to build on connections with its more important stake-holders – from employers to policymakers. The policies and practices that have already been adopted, some of which have only been decided and acted on quite recently, extend the ways in which the Department fulfils its mission.

The Department articulates its desire to do more high-quality research and to use this to underpin high-quality teaching. Moreover, it wants to deliver teaching that is more “applied” than has historically been the case – and it will achieve this through being selective in appointing new staff to fill “applied” gaps in the Department and to complement existing strengths.

The Department has recently hired very well in the field of Economic History, a field where Ireland has been extremely influential at the international level. The rationale for focusing more on the applications of economics will be seen by prospective KBS students as relevant and topical; this will increase student demand for the Department’s modules, which is the main driver of resources. The QRG also felt that this would provide a better “fit” given that the Department is part of a business school. Focusing on the applications of economics seems like a wise response to increasing competition from the technological universities and falling Irish cohort sizes.

The Department reflects UL’s priorities in its aspirations for its teaching to be research-led and its desire to better equip graduates with adaptable skills that will serve them in developing their careers in later life. Moreover, it seeks to be (even) better connected to its most important stake-holders – employers, regulators and policymakers.

The QRG found evidence that the Department “punches above its weight” in Ireland. It is the smallest Economics Department amongst the Irish Universities Association (IUA) members, by some way, and yet it delivers a large quantity of undergraduate teaching. It is a “tight ship” that exploits economies of scale from servicing the wider needs for Economics inputs coming from the large cohorts of students taking KBS degrees. This works because the staff are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subject and are prepared to go the extra mile to pass this on to their students, irrespective of the constraints of the workload model.

Moreover, the value of the Department’s MSc in Economics and Policy Analysis, with its policy orientation, is evident from student progression into the market for professional economists.

The quality of the undergraduate (UG) teaching provided was evident and the skills that this teaching imparts to a wide variety of students seem to generate value-added that is reflected in good labour market outcomes for KBS undergraduates. This is supported by the opportunities that UL provides for work experience. The admirable commitment of the KBS administration in this area, as witnessed by the QRG, was found to be reflected in the enthusiasm of the Economics staff for embedding work experience in the development of their UG students.

The Department is to be commended for ...

- having a credible plan for expansion, when that becomes possible for UL, and for having made a step towards this with its most recent junior hire and plans for future ones.
- recognising, in discussion with the QRG, that the Department is a portfolio of skills and that using this portfolio efficiently might entail differences across individuals in how they contribute to the Department's work.
- exploiting economies of scale in its UG teaching – not least so it can support its *own*, credible, but small, MSc in Economics and Policy Analysis, which generates a flow of excellent professional economists for the labour market and contributes to the applied pivot strategy.

It is recommended that the Department ...

- develop a “discipline profile” that reflects its own personality, which it can use to guide staff recruitment, help staff to plan for progression and inform promotion committees of the international norms for the economics profession.
- ensure that it respects and upholds UL's own stated commitment to the Digital Operational Resilience Act (DORA) in its discipline profile and how it uses it.
- discuss how it can ensure that well-evidenced good teaching can be recognised, and champion the need for UL to develop a career progression track based on teaching quality supported by scholarship.

6 Findings on Organisational Structure and Management of the Department

The Department is very small, with just 16 full-time academic staff and five teaching assistants (TAs), and yet it provides a large proportion of KBS UG teaching. It seems that the Department manages this by having fewer modules per staff member than elsewhere, but these modules appear to be in high demand. The Department is the monopoly supplier of economics inputs into KBS and generates large economies of scale from its service teaching on UG programmes.

The level of departmental administrative support seems low, with only one single administrator dedicated to the Department. However, this person seems highly skilled

and well organised and is recognised as providing a very good service. The QRG, nevertheless, was conscious that the burden of administration is closely tied to the number of students serviced. The group was left wondering what administrative work was being picked up by academic staff, how much was being done at the School level, and how much was not being done at all – and how robust this arrangement is.

Discussions with the Irish Economics Association highlighted that the Department operates with a staff:student ratio approximately three times lower than that of peer institutions, while its academic staffing levels are roughly half those of comparable Irish departments. Despite these constraints, it delivers high-quality programmes and policy-relevant research, which speaks to the dedication of its academic staff.

The management of the Department relies heavily on informal mechanisms, which work well because of its collegiality and small size. There is, however, a higher proportion of senior staff in Economics than elsewhere in the University and the Department should ensure that this wealth of leadership experience is harnessed in more formal ways to support the effective running of the Department.

The QRG is aware that all departments are made up of those who have been hired in the past and retained to the present. Hiring and retention are both onerous tasks. As the Department increases in scale, we would recommend that it should develop, agree and adopt more formal mechanisms to ensure sustainability. This would allow the Head of Department (HoD) to have more time for personal research, research-building activity, external ambassadorial work and, the most important job of all – bringing clever people to Limerick and trying to hire them!

Mentoring junior staff is an important component of retention and it appears that staff mentoring is provided within the Department – beyond the provisions of the UL Advance programme. The QRG felt that there should also be a more formal approach to academic staff development, in line with the Performance & Development Review (PDR), but including clear processes for requesting training and accessing internal funding. This is especially important for planning, as well as from an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) perspective. It might also include extending support and mentoring to include PhD students and others on temporary or vulnerable contracts.

The Department is to be commended for ...

- clearly seeking to generate social mobility through its outreach activities, which it does systematically with UL and KBS support. These commendable activities appear to be effective and student feedback provided evidence to confirm this.
- its informal connections with many UL graduates, including many Economics graduates who hold significant roles across the Irish economy, and having developed a wide range of connections with stakeholders and using the “adjunct” role to enhance what it does – especially in teaching.

- its strong sense of collegiality and its achievements in both teaching and research, particularly given the significant structural pressures it faces.
- building on the UL Advance scheme in a constructive way to ensure that its mentoring meets disciplinary needs.
- the efficiency and effectiveness of its single administrator.

It is recommended that the Department ...

- discuss and develop a formal succession planning mechanism.
- establish a “professoriate” that meets regularly with the HoD to better share managerial responsibility.
- discuss the delegation of roles to fill administrative needs. Delegation appears to exist for teaching activities, but two non-teaching examples come to mind.
 - It would be useful to have a Research Director who: disseminates information on grants and opportunities, helps fellow staff with grant applications, serves on the KBS research committee and liaises with relevant KBS officers, and takes the lead in academic hiring activity.
 - It would also be useful to have a PhD Director who: is a focal point for promotional marketing activity and applications, serves and liaises with UL PG administration, takes responsibility for ensuring that Economics PGR students understand the demands of their discipline, creates and pursues sources of studentship funding, and acts as the “placement officer” in PhD job-market activity.
- discuss how to onboard new hires in a way that melds UL probation rules with the demands of the economics profession and that respects UL’s own stated commitment to the Digital Operational Resilience Act (DORA).
- discuss mechanisms to allow it to extend its reach to potential new stakeholders.

7 Findings on Programme Portfolio and Curriculum

The Department owns and solely delivers an MSc in Economics and Policy Analysis, with great success in student academic outcomes, employment outcomes and student satisfaction. The MSc is an excellent example of how the Department connects its research focus with its education offering. Moreover, it represents the Department’s contribution of professional economists to the Irish economy. In addition, it could also send its graduates to those PhD programmes elsewhere in the world that reflect the applied nature of the UL Economics MSc training. The cohort is small, potentially raising questions about its financial viability long-term and suggesting a need to clearly articulate what it is offering to the target market and intended audiences.

All economics undergraduate teaching is on joint degrees and on service teaching to the wider KBS needs. The Department teaches many modules across 1st, 2nd and final year, all to a high standard, with students very positive about the economics modules and those who teach them. Lecturers appear to keep their modules up to date although it was not clear to what extent they share ideas with each other on how to improve or to what extent these modules compare to similar modules in other universities in Ireland, the UK and further afield where relevant.

Employers were very positive about the quality of economics UG students as graduates and of the co-operative education placement programme (Co-op) – both in terms of their knowledge and the fact that they come work-ready with valuable skills, enthusiasm and curiosity. Employers and alumni suggested that more could be done to seek their input when considering what and how to teach at the module level – and the Department seemed willing to do so.

Many modules are taught to a very large number of students and those students come with very different backgrounds and motivations. The scale allows for efficiencies in teaching for the Department, and KBS, which should continue to be exploited given the small size of the Department. However, teaching large heterogeneous groups does bring challenges for the individual lecturers and teaching assistants in terms of the ability to engage students in interactive lectures and classes, marking load and the wider administration associated with supporting such large groups. The QRG felt that the pivot towards applications and away from theory has contributed to their success in dealing with student heterogeneity.

As a result of this teaching model, the Departments staff:student ratio is one of the highest in the University and higher than peer economics departments in other Irish universities. This means that the workload and pressure on individuals, who also have demands on their time for research, their policy advisory knowledge exchange work and their wider outreach initiatives, is significant.

The positivity of the academics, and their willingness to go above and beyond for their students, is impressive. The student experience has not been impacted but there are potential negative effects for the wellbeing of the staff involved, as well as for their research which is important for their career progression. The *opportunity cost* of the hours involved with delivering teaching to such a high quality should not be taken for granted.

A consequence of teaching across programmes and student groups is that economics teaching is very module-focused with limited evidence of connections being made across modules, other than in the context of prerequisites. Both the students and, to a large extent, the lecturers seem to think about their learning and teaching experience at a module level rather than as part of an integrated programme of study. This is

somewhat inevitable for service teaching on programmes where economics is a very small part of the student offering. However, on large programmes where there is a very high number of students choosing to major in economics – for example BA majors, BBS majors and those who select into BSc Economics and Mathematics from a common mathematics first year – there is more scope to think about the student journey through the economics curriculum.

It was not clear from the reports provided in advance of the review or in our discussions with the Department what criteria are used for deciding what modules to offer and, importantly, what to stop and what to start. At face value, it appears there may be potential duplication of content in the existing undergraduate module portfolio as well as many interesting ideas for new modules better aligned with the Department research interests and policy nature of their teaching. The mechanisms and criteria by which such decisions are made, in a world of constrained resources, are unclear.

It seems that Programme Boards are the place to consider how modules connect and to think holistically about what modules are needed, what could be stopped and what could be introduced. However, in discussion with Department academics, including programme leads, it seemed they felt constrained to wait to see what was happening on a programme rather than being able to put forward proposals on how the economics curriculum connected as an offering. The Department has the potential to offer more to BBS but, in the context of the BBS review, there was a sense of the Economics faculty waiting to be told what was needed rather than coming up with proposals themselves.

There were many great examples of modular level curriculum design discussed with us on our visit, but it was not clear how academics shared their teaching experiences and plans with each other. For example, in the context of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Economics Education many individuals were developing their own approaches within their modules but there appeared to be little discussion of a cross-Department holistic approach or strategy.

It was also unclear to what extent academics worked with colleagues in other departments to co-create or co-teach modules in joint programmes. For example, in our discussion on the BSc Economics and Mathematics there was some appetite from colleagues in the Department of Mathematics & Statistics to embed some economics data and wider applications into maths modules.

In addition to the MSc and undergraduate teaching, the Department has in recent years expanded into delivery of professional courses through their Postgraduate Diploma in Economics and Policy and wider micro-credential offerings. A few academics work closely with digital learning support personnel to deliver these courses and were very passionate about their value. This is a very different type of teaching, with a lot of upfront and updating cost involved. These courses provide a potential revenue source

for the Department and could, where focused on the research interests of the Department, provide a way to showcase the applied work of research clusters. However, the current approach seems to be somewhat organic, with no evidence of an overarching strategic plan for micro-credentials, and currently only a small number of students take these courses. In some cases, the connection between the micro-credential courses and existing research expertise in the Department was not clear.

The QRG provides more detailed comments on the specific programmes covered in the review in the Programme Reports.

The Department is to be commended for ...

- its consistent delivery of high-quality programmes and policy-relevant research, which speaks to the dedication of the Economics academic staff.
- its strong student performance in terms of progression, employability and degree outcomes and the generally very positive student feedback on their experience of studying economics.
- the high quality of Economics students on placements who are then employed as graduates, as testified by employers, both for their knowledge and the fact that they come work-ready with valuable skills, enthusiasm and curiosity.
- its entrepreneurial spirit to explore the world of micro-credentials and wider professional learning.

It is recommended that the Department ...

- engage with the excellent and enthusiastic Co-op office to develop additional placements with a greater economics focus, if possible.
- identify clearer criteria to use when making decisions about removing and adding modules to the BSc and MSc portfolio.
- consider if there is merit in introducing distinct pathways within the MSc programme structure to accommodate multiple learner groups and objectives.
- discuss how to align skill development in the MSc with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and consider whether there is scope to integrate some content and skills development into key modules to help reduce assessment overload.
- map out the learning journey of an Economics major in BBS and BA, and in BSc Economics and Mathematics with an eye on how content and skill development connect from year to year, what the assessment load is and how aligned the offering is with programme learning outcomes and Department research interests.

- consider opportunities to engage alumni and employers in reviews of economics teaching at BSc, MSc and micro-credential levels.
- when reviewing the pathways of different students, consider creative ways of meeting their varying needs, such as using the development of new mathematics and statistics foundation modules as an opportunity for a more quantitative pathway for some students.
- share ideas and resources, as an economics teaching community, to help module leaders keep modules up to date.
- develop a clear strategic Department plan for micro-credentials activity and continue to explore such opportunities.

8 Findings on Teaching, Learning and Assessment

As noted in the previous chapter, the QRG heard much positive student feedback on the teaching of economics in the Department. Students spoke about the engaged, enthusiastic and caring staff and the accessibility of course directors, module leaders and TAs to answer student queries as they arise. From what the QRG heard in meetings, there are many examples of well taught modules, incorporating, for example, consideration of application to policymaking, research-led learning, skill development, guest lectures and connections between tutorial activities and lectures.

Many of the Department staff we met talked confidently about their teaching approaches, showing a good general understanding of pedagogy and of what is appropriate for economics teaching. It is not clear to what extent the Department encourages or facilitates sharing of what is working well in modules so everyone can learn from one another. We heard that several, but not all, members of staff engaged with the Centre for Transformative Learning (CTL) professional development opportunities. Many academics in the Department dedicate themselves to being excellent and engaged teachers and to investing significant time and effort into course leadership and associated education service. However, there does not seem to be any scope to advance through promotion if someone chooses to specialise in this way.

Students report that in some tutorials they are taught from the front, with no opportunity for discussion amongst students. It was noted that this was different from teaching in other arts and social science subjects. There appears to be some variation depending on the TA and the module. Lecturers also expressed concern at teaching to very large cohorts of heterogeneous students, recognising that this prevented them from having more interactive learning opportunities in their classrooms. Some did note the use of polling for interaction but felt it was not sufficient. It was not clear what other teaching strategies for large group teaching have been explored.

For undergraduates and MSc students, it is commendable that module leaders aim to have a mix of assessment types within their modules. There is a potential risk of assessment overload on some programmes and in some years, related to the point made in the previous chapter that there appears to be little discussion of the cross-module or programme-level experience of an Economics major. In our discussion about student community, some students suggested that they mainly met fellow students when they got to work with them on group projects, but these opportunities did not arise frequently and, in some cases, were primarily in the final year. On the other hand, other students did note that it is important not to have too much group work as issues can arise with free-riding, suggesting that students perceive this and that teaching staff are not adopting appropriate incentive mechanisms to counter free-riding.

Staff raised concerns about student use of AI in assessments but also recognised that economics students are graduating into a world where AI is everywhere. Like many working in Higher Education, economics staff are grappling with both the need to help students develop skills to use AI and the need to ensure they are producing their own work when it comes to assessment. Many of the staff we spoke to mentioned activities they were exploring in their modules, although it was not clear to what extent these strategies were shared and discussed across the Department.

Something that arose during discussions was the fact that a very high number of students are majoring in economics across different programmes, but they do not have a sense of community with other economics students or with the Department. The students we talked to seemed quite isolated and would value having more opportunities to engage with other students outside of their modules. It was also noted that they do not have consistency in the student composition of tutorial groups, where perhaps these bonds might form. There is a society, the Economics and Investments Society, that hosts events, but these are not attended by most students majoring in economics. Although a few staff members do speak at events hosted by the society, the Department does not, as far as we could tell, host any social or speaker events to bring students together.

The QRG heard that many students work part-time and many commute long distances from home. This undermines the extent to which peer effects can be generated and might easily be a source of stress and mental health problems. Expansion of student residential capacity would be the best long-term solution, enabling more students to belong to a supportive student community.

In the short term, other helpful initiatives could be implemented at Departmental level. For example, students do not seem to self-organise into supportive study groups. Providing spaces (even virtual ones) for these would help generate peer effects as well as a sense of connection to their department. The TAs could organise the formation of such groups by getting students at their tutorials to divide into small groups that are

expected to work together on tasks outside class in preparation for subsequent tutorials. In addition, the student society, with support from the staff, could organise events that bring groups together. These events might be social and also contribute to the curriculum and even to career planning. No one solution would work. It would be a matter of trying to shift the culture. It seemed, however, that the students the QRG met were not aware of the Society's events – suggesting that there is room for the staff and TAs to help disseminate information and promote attendance.

The Economics and Investments Society needs to have a constitution that encourages it to be sustainable, with officers starting on small tasks that incoming UGs could do, while the more senior students move up a pathway that potentially leads to senior positions. Liaison with the Department will be important for harnessing support for events from staff. Organisational meetings could be largely via WhatsApp. The QRG would hope that if the Department raises the profile of the society as something important and of value, it will become important for the students as well. In this regard, the QRG notes that the Department is operating with a very small non-pay budget relative to the number of students it teaches.

It was not clear what opportunities exist for the keenest students, with a deep interest in economics, to engage with the research undertaken in the Department, for example through undergraduate research opportunities. Concerns were also raised by the Department and students that placements did not always align with the economics interests of some students. It was not clear whether and how the Department staff were leveraging their extensive connections with industry and policymakers to help with this.

There is also a wider issue about undergraduate student awareness of support available to them and the apparent absence of a student representative. Those we spoke to did not seem aware of who their personal tutor was or when and how they should contact them. They did not seem to know if they had an Economics student representative on their programmes who could bring issues to course directors or module leaders on behalf of the cohort. Economics majors have raised issues on an individual basis but do not discuss their experiences as a group given the perceived absence of a student-led community. It was noticed that in other Majors in BBS the students have a community WhatsApp chat, and the students that were consulted by the QRG agreed that something like that would help for economics.

Somewhat related to the concerns about student community, both staff and students identified an issue with student attendance. There appear to be multiple issues at play including disconnected timetables (e.g., having a lecture at 9am and not another until 4pm), the cost of catering on campus, an increasing number of commuting students and the question as to whether it is worth a student's while coming to campus if they think they can understand the module material simply by reading course notes.

The Department is actively discussing what the problems are, although there was less evidence of staff thinking about what they could do within their modules whilst waiting for bigger changes at university level. In our discussions with students, it was noted that having in-class quizzes encouraged attendance, but these were not used across modules, particularly in later years.

The QRG encourages the Department to investigate “what works”, in the context of Higher Education, to encourage attendance and effort. However, the devil is in the detail as shown in some recent publications of results from experiments, which show that the best way to evaluate Econ101 is probably NOT to examine student performance and feedback on 101, but to measure how 101 improves the learning, understanding and achievement in *subsequent* modules – see Chevalier et al JRSS 2018 (<https://doi.org/10.1111/rssa.12278>) and Brownback, EconEducRev 2018 (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2017.11.005>).

Part of the issue with engagement is timetabling. The current approach, designed to allow full optionality to students, which results in very complex and late timetabling, does not work for students or staff. There are also issues with availability of suitable teaching spaces, particularly for large cohorts, during the full teaching day. The uncertainty about what will be taught when, until very close to the teaching term, and the disparate nature of student timetables affects student engagement and attendance. It also makes it very hard for module leaders and teaching teams to plan and scaffold their teaching and student learning.

Improvements to UL feedback systems do appear to have made a difference for teaching in the Department, although the changes are recent, so it is hard to comment on impact. Until recently, there does not appear to have been a coherent and consistent UL approach to gathering student feedback, to help with review and reflection on teaching and the wider student experience. This appears now to be more standard with the Trust-EM system, and some staff mentioned the value of the feedback they received recently and noted the opportunity to close the feedback loop by responding on the platform to students.

Feedback is often affected by low and/or unrepresentative responses. The consensus elsewhere is that compulsion is impossible to enforce but strong incentives can help. The Trust-EM system needs to grasp this nettle. The design of the feedback mechanism is also important; it is important to know about how challenging modules are. Moreover, feedback is not enough; it needs to be linked to student performance in modules, provided that confidentiality can be respected. For example, linkage could be done by a trusted third party. Analysing such data should become an important part of monitoring modules and an essential part of evaluating teaching innovation and reforms.

Where feedback has been received, scores have been high. However, we did not hear any mention of peer review of teaching between lecturers or with teaching assistants.

On the other hand, the MSc cohort is well integrated into the Department activities. The students have their own base where they help each other, their enthusiasm for learning was apparent, and they are supported in their career endeavours through staff connections with relevant organisations.

The Department is to be commended for ...

- the delivery of a significant number of modules to a high standard across a wide range of undergraduate programmes to a very large number of students.
- the openness of several Economics staff to engaging with the Centre for Transformative Learning (CTL) professional development opportunities.

It is recommended that the Department ...

- develop an effective means to evaluate teaching quality.
- continue to engage with CTL to support the development of relevant training for staff, including TAs, and to develop additional and wider active learning strategies.
- encourage the University and KBS to consider how best to reward excellent teaching and education leadership via promotion criteria and to evaluate the merit of having a teaching-focused pathway for progression.
- continue to encourage staff, including TAs, to engage with CTL for support and training and to consider engaging with wider opportunities for teaching and learning CPD (e.g., through the UK *Economics Network* and UK *Advance HE*).
- consider how best to support TAs through the teaching teams to provide active learning opportunities in tutorials, as opposed to teaching from the front.
- continue to explore different ways of engaging students in large lectures, for example by researching what peers in UK and US institutions do with similarly large cohorts in introductory and intermediate economics teaching and consider how more interaction in lectures may help incentivise attendance.
- consider exploiting the excellent and extensive economics teaching support provided by the UK *Core Econ* collaboration – see <https://www.core-econ.org/>.
- review ways in which Economics undergraduates can access opportunities to engage in research work (perhaps as internships that might complement C-op activities or even substitute for them for those students aiming to pursue MSc Economics training).
- encourage by example wider provision of student research opportunities across UL – but be aware that providing UG research opportunities is expensive and that weaker students tend to do badly in such situations. Given this, it might be best

to make research opportunities a competitive “prize” (perhaps for the summer before or after graduation) rather than a curriculum obligation.

- review what the assessment load is like for a student majoring in economics on the main programmes and reflect on whether there is a case for more group work and in-class quizzes across years to provide scaffolding for community building and attendance respectively.
- look to the experimental evidence when designing reforms to content delivery and learning evaluation, embed robust ex-post evaluation in whatever you choose to do, and do more than simple-minded before and after comparisons.
- explore the case for having a Department Teaching and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy, allowing for learning between module leaders and consistency for students within and across modules.
- identify potential opportunities to bring the community of undergraduate students interested in economics together, both with one another and with the Department, perhaps through energising the existing Economics and Investments Society.
- identify, with KBS and UL, opportunities to increase the budget to facilitate activities to enhance the student community of undergraduates majoring in economics.
- ensure that student representatives for undergraduates majoring in economics are in place and known to the student cohort, consider how best to support these representatives to create a student-led community, and consider giving them a seat as student representatives on Departmental decision-making committees.
- advise UL on staff and student needs when it revises the timetabling systems and processes, highlighting the need to ensure that adequate teaching and learning spaces are available throughout the teaching day.
- continue to enhance student feedback mechanisms, building on the new Trust-EM system and consider supplementing student feedback with more embedded peer review of teaching.

9 Findings on Research

Despite the small size of the Department of Economics, compared to other departments in Ireland, it has earned a strong reputation for producing policy-relevant research that has real-world impact. This was consistently affirmed in conversations with stakeholders, particularly regional actors and employers, and is further evidenced by the Department’s robust funding record and its publication portfolio.

However, this strength is largely driven by a minority of staff, who are individually outstanding scholars and whose work spans diverse areas of applied economics and

policy. The reliance on this limited group poses challenges to sustainability and strategic development, particularly given the heavy distribution of responsibilities across teaching, service and management.

The Department has identified three key research clusters, namely Economics of Innovation and Policy; Privatisation and Public Private Partnerships; and Economic Efficiency and Productivity, with the potential to develop into research centres, suggesting an initial step towards building a more coherent research identity. Nevertheless, this intent could be strengthened with a clearly articulated strategic vision to guide the growth and coordination of these clusters and diversify their content to embrace staff who are not currently embraced by the existing centres.

Currently, research impact is framed through a lens of individual achievements rather than as the outcome of deliberate, department-wide knowledge exchange strategies, branding and communication that go through both their teaching and research portfolios. This fragmented approach limits the Department's capacity to leverage collective expertise and hinders the development of a recognisable research profile within KBS and the University, and externally. For example, stakeholders were unaware of the Department's expertise in productivity research and instead raised the economics of unemployment as a key regional issue, without realising the potential relevance of the Department's existing strengths to this challenge.

Additionally, the newly appointed KBS Research Strategy Lead has yet to engage with the Department's emerging research structure, representing a missed opportunity to integrate Departmental efforts with broader Faculty-level strategic initiatives.

In terms of funding, the Department has clear opportunities to build on its current strengths and strategic positioning both within KBS and through its external partnerships. Internally, there is untapped potential to more effectively communicate the Department's research success by packaging more of its work into these research clusters by diversifying their content. Doing so would not only help articulate a more coherent narrative but could also strengthen the case for increased non-pay budget support from KBS leadership, aligning Departmental needs with Faculty-level resource planning.

Externally, stakeholder feedback suggests a high level of satisfaction and ongoing engagement with individual members of the Department – many stakeholders were either trained here or have collaborated closely on specific initiatives.

Currently, funding opportunities are not sufficiently diversified. For PhD funding, there might be opportunities to leverage the employer and stakeholders' network. For instance, currently, there is research-led PhD funding with the *Cliffs of Moher Experience* that sources untapped data and new research. This highlights a significant

opportunity to develop a more structured approach to “industry PhD” partnerships and applied research collaborations that could broaden the department’s funding base. Such collaborative awards are common in the UK.

In parallel, the Department would benefit from increased visibility of its research clusters to attract a broader and more diverse portfolio of funders. While there is some existing engagement with EU and national funding schemes, additional opportunities may lie in partnerships with the private and public sectors, as well as charitable foundations – such as government tenders, industry collaborations or targeted calls from funders such as the Wellcome Trust.

The Department is to be commended for ...

- having established three active research groups that harness the research activities of many of the academic staff and for ensuring that cognate PhD students are involved.
- its active engagement with stakeholders and in its external partnerships.
- reflecting the reality of the discipline in its DSAR, in making the quality of research much more important than the quantity.
- its staff who conduct potentially impactful research on Irish topics.
- its senior staff whose work is of the calibre to be published in the world’s leading field journals, and especially its junior staff, who do the same.

It is recommended that the Department ...

- have greater engagement with the very enthusiastic and knowledgeable KBS Research Strategy Office for assistance in developing a funding strategy.
- formally recognise that funding is hugely important at the individual level and for the Department as a whole, but is very lumpy in its nature, and very risky for any one individual to apply for, so some risk-spreading is required via the workload mechanism.
- consider having a Research Director whose job it is to provide funding intelligence, help and advice on grant applications and be a funnel for research intelligence.
- advocate to be allowed to formalise a workload allowance for the burden of grant applications, successful or otherwise, and for managing externally funded research when an application is successful – something that it currently does informally.
- deepen the content of its existing research clusters to embrace a wider group of active researchers from within the Department, which would allow its clusters to own and project more of the Department’s outputs.

- broaden the reach of the existing research clusters to affiliate cogent researchers from across KBS and UL to build multi-disciplinary capacity to better compete for large grants.
- consider how to disband existing clusters and create new ones to reflect the changing nature of activities in the Department and opportunities that arise for it.

10 Findings on Stakeholder Engagement

KBS has clear objectives in relation to its external engagements, with strong engagement with policy actors and some international links, potentially enabling it to achieve significant impact. There is also strong public engagement through media contributions and from interactions with schools.

The QRG was impressed with the enthusiasm and knowledge of the administrative staff we talked to. The Department receives strong support from Faculty administrators in relation to undergraduate programme management, financial and personnel management, research development, marketing and other aspects. It also receives excellent support from a range of university units, including in relation to the co-operative education programme (Co-op), library resources and pedagogical development.

Employers spoke very positively about the quality of the students, noting that they were significantly more “employment ready” than students from other universities and that they were able to apply economics in a very practical way. Employers also praised the Department for its readiness to engage with them and its promotion of economics in secondary schools.

There are some very strong engagements with national policy bodies, regional public bodies and businesses/business bodies, which have led to important social and business benefits, as well as benefits to the Department. These include data collection, PhD research engagement and student mentoring opportunities, particularly through adjunct staff. Stakeholders also identified a number of other potential opportunities for collaboration and policy impact.

It appeared both from the DSAR and from stakeholder engagements that the Department was failing to capitalise fully on its alumni links. Alumni spoke very highly of the Department and were keen to engage further and support the Department’s development. The alumni newsletter was noted with appreciation; however, alumni were not always aware of relevant events in sufficient time, indicating that communications could be improved.

Department staff undertake an extremely wide range of external engagements and activities, including policy and media contributions. However, there appears to be no formal communications or marketing strategy. This is surprising given the range of

public engagements and policy contributions by the Department and may mean that it is not getting full credit or visibility for its contributions. Furthermore, while the Department identifies Faculty objectives for its external engagements, it does not appear to have a clear strategy for these, and it acknowledges that a more selective and focused approach might be needed. Although marketing support is available at Faculty level, this does not appear to feed into the general marketing of Departmental activities.

Many of the external engagements seem driven by individual connections, which is to some degree inevitable. The wide range of engagements has opportunity costs suggesting a need to prioritise. While recognising the importance of both academic freedom and freedom of expression generally, it would be worth exploring the possibility of developing a communications strategy that both identified clear priorities for external activities and how these might be communicated most effectively. This could also be an aspect of the stakeholder engagement strategy.

The Department is to be commended for ...

- its very strong engagement with policy actors, its international links, its strong public engagement through media contributions, and its interactions with schools.
- its highly regarded reputation for its engagement with employers.

It is recommended that the Department ...

- continue to engage with employer and business bodies, as well as public bodies, so as to identify opportunities for collaboration and policy impact, and to consider how it might develop stronger links with Industry.
- develop alumni engagement as part of a wider stakeholder engagement strategy, to build stronger relationships with its alumni community, with benefits for all aspects of its mission.
- develop a communications and marketing strategy to support stakeholder engagement.

11 Conclusion

The primary commendation of the QRG is that the Department runs a tight ship. It is small in size, but it produces good research, some of which makes significant contributions to the respective fields of the researchers and some of which is impactful for the Irish economy.

It also clearly adds value to students by developing those skills that are important for their productivity in the labour market. Economics undergraduate teaching is in high demand across KBS and is highly regarded by students. The Department contributes to the BSc Economics and Mathematics programme which has excellent students and

offers the prospect of generating technical skills that are highly prized in the labour market. Its MSc in Economics and Policy Analysis is small and selective and does exactly what it aims to do – delivering high-quality professional economists to the labour market. It has also shown an enthusiasm for providing micro-credentials.

Our secondary commendation is that the Department has a very clear idea of its direction of travel. It realises that economics has changed radically over time, especially since the Great Financial Crisis, and that an understanding of economics is important, not because of its ability to make theoretical predictions on the basis of strong (and, perhaps, unrealistic) assumptions, but because of the wide range of topics that can be addressed with a small toolbox of powerful ideas. The discipline has switched from theory to applications of the theory and has become vastly more empirical and scientific.

Economists now have a much better idea of how markets work; why they may not work very well in some circumstances; what might be done to fix markets so that they might work better; and why government might fail to adopt policies that would fix the problems – so that some problems are very intractable. The Department works to spread this message, to attract more and better students and to engage with key stakeholders for its graduates. Its pivot towards applications of economics helps embed the message in its teaching.

There is much detail in what the Department does well that lies behind these aggregate commendations. In particular, it has a strong sense of identity that is embedded in a firm conviction that economics is important. Moreover, there is a culture of collegiality that pervades the work of the Department, which means that when shocks happen the wheels don't fall off. Indeed, the staff close ranks to support one another when shocks happen – they have each other's backs. The QRG saw evidence that people strive to do good work, in all dimensions, because they think that the work is important, not because the workload allocation model tells them to do it. This commitment works because the Department is small, has a wealth of experienced leadership and has looked to the international market to ensure a flow of excellent young researchers.

There are many recommendations we have made in previous chapters that are worth considering. Though exhaustive, these recommendations are not meant to be prescriptive – the QRG is conscious that it knows less than the Department knows about itself. Thus, we offer these recommendations as suggestions for discussion rather than as a recipe for success. Indeed, the QRG is conscious that quick decisions are good, but that process permits consultation, ownership and legitimacy.

There are threats to the Department. Most of all, its size is sub-optimal, but there are strong economies of scale in the provision of undergraduate teaching that it harnesses through its commitment to service teaching in the School. It needs, however, to find

ways of being more efficient at postgraduate teaching. The MSc in Economics and Policy Analysis is an expensive product, one that should be prioritised for growth because the Department has impact, partly because of its well-prepared graduates who take up roles as professional economists. The MSc needs marketing in a way that reflects how important economics now is. The current website does not currently reflect this very well – the Royal Economic Society (RES) Discover Economics material (<https://res.org.uk/discover-economics/>) might be useful in helping the Department to better communicate what it does and market what it is selling.

There is no post-MSc teaching provided to the small cadre of PhD students. The UK has sought to exploit the geographical distribution of PhD supervisory expertise by encouraging greater collaboration within regions. This was modelled on an example set by Scotland and has worked surprisingly well. Technology also can now make this work even better – poor transport connections are no longer an issue for students who are hungry to get the best training. Advanced courses can take advantage of the best expertise, which could draw students from elsewhere for supervision. The UL Department of Economics has some comparative advantages and could benefit from such an initiative. The QRG urges the Department to take a lead in promoting this idea in Ireland, and when greater collaboration within the island of Ireland becomes possible, the benefits to the Department from capitalising on its advantages will be even greater.

Postgraduate teaching is expensive relative to that for undergraduates – but it is also the case that, when there is a large number of undergraduates, you need a strong cadre of young researchers who can support the large number of tutorial classes required. The allocation of PhD studentships needs to reflect the fact that large programmes generate revenue at low marginal cost, not just reflect the research intensity of departments. PhDs are an output, but they are also an input that generates internal benefits. PhD students can lower the burden of teaching on research-active staff, which can lead to the generation of more research.

The Department is the *people* it has hired and retained. Hiring in the Department is now aligned with the international market for newly minted PhDs in Economics and is being successful. The Department should consider other ways in which it can bring young researchers to Limerick to experience its healthy research environment – ways that make them more likely to apply. Many UK institutions, for example, hold focused research workshops, which sometimes involve inviting external researchers *and* their completing PhD students to participate.

The culture of the Department is all-important for retention. This has the potential to be undermined by a formal workload allocation process that attaches “prices” to some tasks, but not to other tasks that are also clearly important to the world at large. For example, engaging in knowledge exchange and generating social impact are time-consuming and their importance has long been a feature of the work of the Department.

The workload needs to reflect this, and much else, if it is to provide sensible incentives. This means that there are more activities that need to be documented and measured. One size will not fit all. There are likely to be disciplinary differences, and there will be differences within departments across individuals that need to be celebrated and used to best advantage. This Department is a portfolio of skills and only a flexible workload will exploit comparative advantage.

Career progression is also important for retention. It makes no sense to subsidise the work of young researchers only to have them poached when they become successful in their research. Thus, it is essential that internal promotion mechanisms match how the external market behaves. If the Department does not use the same standards and criteria as the external market does, it will lose its best young people. This means that the UL progression pathway must be flexible enough to accommodate disciplinary differences.

Finally, the QRG was sensitive to finances being tight right now for historical reasons. In these circumstances, if morale and incentives are to be maintained, it is especially important that staff at the coalface, in all departments, can understand that resources are allocated efficiently. Part of this will be transparency of, and representation in, decision making in relation to policy and resources.

The conclusion of the QRG is that the Department is successful and efficient. It could be more so if it were able to grow in size. In the meantime, there are many ways in which it can build on its achievements so far.

12 Summary of Commendations and Recommendations

12.1 Commendations

1.	<p>The pivot towards applications of economics was a wise move. It better reflects the direction of the discipline, it serves to further cement the place of Economics in KBS, and it has the potential for raising the demand for Economics modules even further.</p> <p>The BSc Economics and Maths programme is a good fit for this pivot: the maths of game theory is core to understanding strategic economic behaviour; stochastic calculus is the foundation of how markets evaluate investments under uncertainty; and the whole of applied economics makes extensive use of statistical methods. This is a programme whose time has come. The pivot is also consistent with the MSc Economics and Policy Analysis programme, which eschews rocket-science theory and is focused on developing practical economics expertise that contributes greatly to job-market skills.</p>
2.	<p>The Department is too small, but it has a credible plan for expansion and ideas on how its activities can be diversified. Despite its small size, the Department consistently delivers high-quality programmes and policy-relevant research which reflects the professionalism of the academic staff and of its TAs and single administrator.</p>
3.	<p>The Department recognises that it is a portfolio of skills and that it will become better at both teaching and research if it is able to capitalise on comparative advantage within this portfolio.</p>
4.	<p>Departmental mentoring practices provide an example of how the UL Advance scheme can be developed to meet disciplinary needs.</p>
5.	<p>The Department's dedication towards social mobility is reflected in its outreach activities.</p>
6.	<p>The activities of Economics academics feature strong engagement with policy in Ireland.</p>
7.	<p>The Department has a strong sense of collegiality that makes for inclusive decision-making, despite the lack of formal structures.</p>
8.	<p>Despite the lack of clarity associated with the allocation of financial resources, the Department and the KBS Dean use ad hoc discretionary arrangements which allow initiatives to be discussed and funded as appropriate.</p>

9.	The entrepreneurial spirit of the Department in exploring the world of micro-credentials and professional learning is impressive.
10.	Several Economics staff display openness to engaging with the Centre for Transformative Learning (CTL) professional development opportunities.
11.	The Department’s teaching of economics modules to large undergraduate groups allows it to generate significant economies of scale.
12.	A wide range of connections with stakeholders and the use of the “adjunct” role enhance the teaching of the Department.
13.	The delivery of a significant number of large modules to a high standard across a wide range of undergraduate programmes is reflected in strong student performance in terms of progression and outcomes and in very positive student feedback on their experience of studying economics.
14.	Economics students on placements and employed as graduates are highly praised by employers, both for their knowledge and the fact that they come work-ready with valuable skills, enthusiasm and curiosity.
15.	Economics has three established research clusters that involve many staff, engage several PhD students and serve as a showcase for research activity.
16.	The Department engages stakeholders in its research activities.
17.	It makes quality the focus of its research activity, and it is also conscious of the need to address Irish issues in its research portfolio with a view to generating societal impact.
18.	Economics has both senior and junior staff whose research contributions are of the calibre to be publishable in top field journals.
19.	The Department has very strong engagement with policy actors, good international links, strong public engagement through media contributions and strong interactions with schools.
20.	It is highly regarded for its engagement with employers.

12.2 Recommendations

12.2.1 Level 1 Recommendations

Strategy	
1.	The QRG suggests that the Department should discuss the development of a “discipline profile” – a document that reflects its own preferences, priorities and personality, for use as follows:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to guide staff recruitment; • to frame probation “agreements” with new staff, as part of onboarding, which encapsulate how these individuals can and should develop and what the Department will do to support them; • to help existing staff to plan for progression and make clear the Department’s commitment to the retention of those staff whose careers flourish; • to inform KBS and UL as to what careers look like in successful economics departments.
2.	The Department and UL both say that they are committed to DORA principles. We suggest that the Department should make this fully explicit in its discipline profile. Doing so will commit it to using expert review of the outputs of staff and to using external reviewers at key career stages. We suggest also that the Department should be vigilant in holding UL to the DORA principles in the decisions that it makes about progression, and that the Department should provide evidence that allows UL to be DORA-compliant in its decision-making.
3.	The Department realises that it is a portfolio of skills. Using that portfolio efficiently implies clear thinking about how those skills can be incentivised. Allowing research quality to dominate career progression is not consistent with the efficient use of the skills available. We suggest that the Department develop a proposal for career progression criteria that reflects the importance of teaching skills to match the current importance of research, which it can use to rank-order the queue for career progression.
4.	We suggest that the Department encourage the University and KBS to consider how best to reward excellent teaching and education leadership in promotion criteria and to evaluate the merit of having a teaching-focused pathway for progression. This would imply the development of a more flexible workload model and might imply innovations in employment contracts.
5.	When the time is right, we suggest that the Department develop a business case that urges KBS and UL to address its low staff:student ratio and bring it more in line with departments in comparator Irish institutions.
Organisational Structure and Management	
6.	<p>We suggest that the Department discuss how to develop more structure through the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a formal progression planning mechanism for senior administrative roles, especially for the Head of Department; • the establishment of a “professoriate” that allows the senior staff to meet together, with a frequency aligned with KBS decision-making, so as to raise and debate ideas for innovations and improvement that can be promoted at School level, and develop internal ideas for discussion at whole Departmental meetings for adoption (or not).

7.	<p>The Department should consider using its professoriate more formally in its administration through delegating specific roles. While there are roles that correspond to teaching needs, we sensed that this did not apply more generally. We suggest that the Department discuss having one or more research-related roles. Some immediate examples came to mind:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • someone to champion research issues; • another to champion postgraduate training and progression; • perhaps, someone to develop the Department’s (already successful) outreach with stakeholders including schools. <p>These roles would not only serve the Department as a whole but could also be included in workload allocation and serve as vehicles by which staff gain experience and exposure at School level.</p>
8.	<p>The Department should encourage transparent and strategic planning around the distribution of academic activities. A clear ‘stop–start–continue’ framework could support more focused deployment of academic effort.</p>
9.	<p>The Department should urge UL to reassess the workload allocation model (WAM) to ensure that research is not treated as a residual activity. The current workload structure appears to prioritise teaching and service. Since these are largely decided from above, this leaves research to be managed in residual time. It is essential that the WAM be consistent with the demands on the Department and the resources it has to satisfy those demands.</p>
10.	<p>The Department should urge the KBS to adopt a more formal structure for discretionary budget arrangements rather than having them as a residual.</p>
Programme Portfolio and Curriculum	
11.	<p>We feel that the Department should have a formal annual teaching review (ATR) that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluates how each module was received through sensibly designed student feedback; • considers ways in which teaching might become more effective in adding value (paying particular attention to how well teaching in each module is reflected in achievements in subsequent modules); • reveals what’s missing from the portfolio as well as what’s there. It could also identify criteria to use when making decisions on removing and adding modules – to make the ATR be systematic in its deliberations. <p>The ATR should be informed by some prior statistical analysis. If possible, it should link feedback and achievement. The ATR might include representation from student module “reps” and TAs.</p>
12.	<p>An ATR should also be the place where consideration is given to how well the Department signals learning journeys of sensible pathways through the portfolio, which identifies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gaps between modules; • bridges that could be built where these gaps exist;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the navigation advice that students get. <p>As part of programme reviews, we suggest that the ATR be used to map out the learning journey of an Economics Major in BBS and BA, and in BSc Economics and Mathematics with an eye on how content and skill development connect from year to year, what the assessment load is and how aligned the offering is with the Department's research interests and programme learning outcomes.</p>
Teaching, Learning and Assessment	
13.	Identify potential opportunities, beyond the Economics Society, to bring the community of undergraduate students interested in economics together with one another and with the Department and urge KBS to provide resources to allow this to happen.
14.	Ensure that student representatives for undergraduates majoring in economics are in place and known to the student cohort and consider how best to support these representatives to create a student-led community and how best to involve them in Department teaching deliberations.
15.	Encourage the University, as part of the current project to replace the existing timetable system and the wider ATOM project, to consider stakeholder needs (those of staff and students) when revising the timetabling systems and processes, and to ensure adequate teaching spaces are available throughout the teaching day.
Research	
16.	<p>Consider a research communications strategy. This could encompass:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a research newsletter, blog and social media presence where the vision, ethos and story of the Department are showcased and where current projects, funding wins and impact stories are promoted; a knowledge exchange plan that tells the story of a collective endeavour towards the Department's vision, which is more than the sum of individual success stories. This could include, for example, targeted stakeholder engagement and events. branded materials for each research cluster (such as infographics, summaries and dedicated web pages) for use in stakeholder engagement and funding bids.
17.	Consider aligning future hiring plans with the Department's emerging research cluster strategy, ensuring new appointments support both depth and visibility in priority areas.
18.	<p>Consider the development and publication of a Departmental research strategy that articulates a clear long-term vision, aligned with the three existing research clusters. This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> embedding research clusters within the teaching portfolio to reinforce Departmental identity and increase internal and external visibility;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fostering internal collaboration by holding regular cross-cluster seminars, brown bags and joint research planning workshops.
19.	<p>Consider a departmental PhD development infrastructure. This could encompass:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a Departmental PhD student workshop separate from one where students are assessed for progression, which could help create a shared PhD experience; workshops which could also be organised with other Economics departments in the region to allow for cross-learning and training for the economics job market; having financial resources (allocated from KBS) that could be directed to the support of the above.
20.	<p>Urge KBS to consider the recognition and reward of cluster-based research with a view to developing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> research centres of excellence through internal seed funding, awards, or teaching buyouts; strategic funding intelligence networks to identify opportunities across departments and match them to Department of Economics strengths.
21.	<p>The research culture of the Department would be strengthened if there was an <i>internal</i> research workshop programme, perhaps once a fortnight during semester (reflecting its small size). Staff who are not research-intensive should be encouraged to participate and bring along new contributions to scholarship they have either developed or discovered in the literature, which would strengthen core aspects of teaching. Moreover, this could also be a forum where statistical evaluations of teaching innovations could be aired.</p>
Stakeholder Engagement	
22.	<p>Consider how the Department might develop stronger links with Industry. This could encompass the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> engagement with the Co-op office to develop additional placements with a greater Economics focus; development of a structured “industry PhD” scheme, targeting key employers and regional partners with co-funded opportunities.
23.	<p>Develop an alumni engagement strategy which could be part of a broader stakeholder engagement strategy, identifying clear priorities for external activities to help the Department to focus more on its core mission. This would enable the Department to build stronger relationships with its alumni community, potentially feeding into the development of teaching, placement opportunities, fundraising, policy development and other aspects of its mission.</p>

12.2.2 Level 2 Recommendations

Programme Portfolio and Curriculum

1.	When reviewing the pathways of different students, consider creative ways of meeting their varying needs such as, for example, using the development of new Mathematics and Statistics foundation modules as an opportunity for a more quantitative pathway for some students.
2.	As an economics teaching community, share ideas and resources to help module leaders keep modules up to date.
3.	For the MSc in Economics and Policy Analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> align skill development with the NFQ framework and consider whether there is scope to rationalise some content and skills development into key modules, thereby helping with the assessment burden; consider if there is merit in introducing distinct pathways within the programme structure to accommodate multiple learner groups and objectives.
4.	Consider opportunities to engage alumni and employers in reviews of economics teaching at BSc, MSc and micro-credential level, and continue to explore opportunities for micro-credentials in the context of a clear strategic Department plan for this area of activity.
Teaching, Learning and Assessment	
5.	Continue to encourage staff, including TAs, to engage with CTL for support and training and consider the merits of engaging with wider opportunities for teaching and learning CPD (e.g., through the Economics Network or UK Advance HE).
6.	Consider how best to support tutorial assistants through the teaching teams to provide active learning opportunities in tutorials, as opposed to teaching from the front.
7.	Continue to explore different ways of engaging students in large lectures, for example researching what peers in UK and US institutions do with similar large cohorts in intro and intermediate economics teaching, and consider how more interaction in lectures may help incentivise attendance.
8.	Review what the assessment load is like for a student majoring in economics on the main programmes and reflect on whether there is a case for more group work and in-class quizzes across years to provide scaffolding for community building and attendance respectively.
9.	Take a proactive approach towards existing professional services support staff in KBS and UL, bringing ideas to them as to the support that the Department requires.
10.	Continue to enhance student feedback mechanisms, building on the new Trust-EM system, and consider supplementing the student feedback with more embedded peer review of teaching.

11.	Explore the case for having a Department Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Economics Teaching Strategy, allowing for learning between module leaders and consistency for students within and across modules.
Research	
12.	Consider formalising the three research clusters (Economics of Innovation and Policy; Privatisation and PPPs; Economic Efficiency and Productivity) into structured research with designated leads and co-leads (thus ensuring sustainability over time), goals and activities.
13.	Consider a more structured engagement with the Faculty Research Strategy Lead that would assist the Department in developing its funding strategy. For instance, this could develop more easily with a designated Research Director role.

Appendix A

Membership of Department of Economics Quality Team

Stephen Kinsella	Professor Chair
Jim Deegan	Professor: Co-wrote chapter 2
Mary Wallace	Assistant Professor: Co-wrote chapter 2
Rita Buckley	Associate Professor: Co-wrote chapter 3
Eoin Reeves	Assistant Professor: Co-wrote chapter 3
Helena Lenihan	Professor: Co-wrote chapter 4
Lukas Kuld	Assistant Professor: Co-wrote chapter 4
Ciaran Casey	Assistant Professor: Co-wrote chapter 5
Bernadette Andreosso	Professor: Co-wrote chapter 5