



Report of the Quality Review Group to the Department of Biological Sciences

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1 Introduction

University of Limerick's (UL) quality review process, as applied to academic, research institutes, professional services units, affiliates and thematic areas, was developed and continues to evolve in order to satisfy the University's 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 (QRG) comprising external experts, both national and international, reviews the DSAR and PSARs, visits the unit, meets with stakeholders and produces 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 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 Department of Biological Sciences

The Department of Biological Sciences (hereafter DBS) is one of eight constituent departments/schools within the Faculty of S&E. DBS aims *‘to pursue excellence in biological sciences through teaching, research, and service to the community’*. It is committed to providing and maintaining a rigorous research-led curriculum through its in-house undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, as well as its service teaching. Five programmes are currently offered at undergraduate level in the diverse areas of Bioscience, Equine Science and Food Science and Health. These include the Certificate, Diploma and BSc in Equine Science, BSc in Bioscience and BSc in Food Science and Health. A new integrated BSc/MSc in Immersive Bioscience and Biotherapeutics will start in September 2026. DBS also offers a suite of taught postgraduate programmes; these include the Postgraduate Diploma in Functional Foods and Product Development; MSc in Functional Foods and Product Development (both part-time and full-time and started in 2022); MSc in Biomolecular Sciences (online full-time and online part-time from 2023) and a new MSc in Molecular and Analytical Bioscience, started in September 2025.

DBS secured €13.309 million in external research funding during AY2019/2020 – AY 2023/2024 and offers a range of PhDs and research Masters opportunities across a variety of disciplines. This includes cell biology, protein chemistry, cancer research, neurobiology, infection and immunity, environmental biology, reproductive biology, equine science, food science, functional foods, food microbiology, and microbial ecology.

The department currently has 24 full time academics (Assistant Professor to Professor), one temporary academic (covering sick leave), three university teachers, two associate teachers, three teaching assistants, 8 technical and 2 administrative staff and 40 postgraduate students as well as 19 post-doctoral researchers undertaking externally funded research programmes.

As stated in its vision — *‘to advance understanding of the living world through cutting-edge research, dynamic teaching and impactful collaboration, equipping graduates to address pressing global societal challenges’* — DBS aims to provide its students with a high-quality education that develops analytical and critical skills for meaningful societal impact.

3 Panel Membership

Professor Jo-Anne Murray, Vice-Principal Education, University of Aberdeen. *Chair*

Professor Jo-Anne Murray is Vice-Principal Education at the University of Aberdeen, responsible for all aspects of education and the student experience. Prior to joining Aberdeen, Jo-Anne was Pro-Vice Chancellor, Digital Transformation at the University of Leeds.

Previously, Jo-Anne was a Managing Director at Higher Ed Partners and Assistant Vice-Principal Digital Education, at the University of Glasgow. She has also held senior roles at the University of Edinburgh leading on digital education.

Jo-Anne is Professor of Educational Innovation and a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and has led many novel and innovative approaches to education.

Professor Leon Terry, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Research and Innovation, Cranfield University. *Senior Peer 1*

Professor Leon Terry is responsible for the strategic direction of research provision and innovation across the University. His vision is that Cranfield is globally recognised as the UK's applied research powerhouse.

Prof Terry graduated from Imperial College, London, and completed his MSc, PhD and DSc at Cranfield University. He is a leading international figure in agricultural research with his personal scholarship being driven by a need to preserve and maintain the quality of food to reduce losses.

Dr Sarah Atkinson, Academic Lead for Education, School of Biomedical Sciences, Ulster University. *Senior Peer 2*

As a senior lecturer with over eight years of leadership experience, Sarah has a strong working knowledge of both teaching and research in the area of Bio and Healthcare Sciences, including five years within the School of Biomedical Sciences as a Post-Doctoral Research Associate and in her current role as Academic Lead for Education in the School of Biomedical Sciences.

Sarah has been the Academic Lead for Education in the School of Biomedical Sciences since 2022. In this role, she champions, develops, and monitors the implementation of the School's Education strategies relating to delivery, aligned with Ulster's Strategy for Learning and Teaching Enhancement.

Through her external networks, Sarah has been involved with training experiences including revalidation of the BSc Biomedical Science and BSc Medical Genetics courses at Oxford Brookes, acting as External Examiner for RCSI, acting as a reviewer for the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) and a member of the RSB/HUBS and HUCBMS mentoring network.

Dr Mary O'Loughlin, Project Manager Leader, Janssen Pharmaceutical Companies of Johnson & Johnson. Senior Employer Representative

Project Manager Johnson and Johnson

Mary is a dynamic Project Manager with over 12 years of experience leading complex lifecycle management projects in cross-functional environments. She has a proven ability to drive process improvements, manage multiple high-stakes projects, and influence senior leadership. Mary has strong expertise in project methodologies (FPX), risk management, and effective stakeholder communication.

Evan Conroy, Research & Development Pilot Plant Manager, Tirlán. Student Representative

Evan graduated with a first-class honours degree in Food Science and Health from the University of Limerick in 2022.

Subsequently, he was awarded a summer research bursary for a 10-week research project as part of the 'Food Proteins and Peptides Research Group'. Following this, he joined Dairygold's graduate programme in September 2022 as a production graduate based in Castlefarm Dairy Processing Complex, Dairygold's largest manufacturing site.

Since then, he has worked as a production shift manager based in Castlefarm, and he is currently working as an R&D pilot plant manager based in Tirlan's Ballyragget site, the largest multi-purpose integrated dairy processing site in Europe.

Professor Tofail A. M. Syed, Head of Department of Physics, University of Limerick. Internal Representative

Professor Tofail A. M. Syed is an Associate Professor and the Head of the Department of Physics at UL.

His research focuses on biodielectrics, surface and interfacial properties of bio/nonbio interactions, new-generation theranostics, and first principle design of novel materials and devices. He has published over 170 peer-reviewed journal articles, presented over 70 invited and plenary lectures at international conferences/symposia, and received over 15 granted patents. His research has saved millions in industrial process and product yields.

Prof Tofail has promoted three start-up companies, led two European consortia and partnered in five European consortia. He has led Ireland's largest innovation partnership and largest industry Spoke with Cook Medical and collaborated with leading multinational companies such as Analog Devices International and Borg-Warner Beru Systems.

Mark Collins, Editor and Technical Writer. *Recording Secretary*

Mark works as an editor and technical writer for various organisations, ranging from government departments and third-level institutions to SMEs and individuals. I am a freelance contractor and promote my work via www.writer.ie

Mark started working on Quality Reviews with the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) in 2015 as a 'rapporteur'. Since then, I have worked on 25 reviews for the RCSI and two for Dublin City University.

Mark graduated from Trinity College Dublin with a degree in philosophy.

4 Preliminary Comments of the Quality Review Group

The QRG praises the Department for its exemplary quality in self-assessment reporting and its high esteem within the University and industry. A key strength is the positive, collegiate culture where staff prioritise the student experience and success. The Department's unique focus on long student placements is highly admired, with graduates recognised by employers as well-equipped professionals.

Commendations also highlight the high quality of education, confirmed by strong graduate outcomes and positive feedback. The excellent laboratory facilities and extensive use of practical teaching are crucial in preparing students for careers. The recent increase in staff numbers and a positive, well-supported staff environment, where leadership is praised, bodes well for the future. The Department's commitment to active EDI (including Athena Swan) and its foundation of high-impact research performance are also celebrated.

The QRG provides ten recommendations focused on managing strategic growth and ensuring sustained quality.

A major concern is managing the impact of growth on the existing positive culture and maintaining a consistent student experience, including access to research staff. The Department needs to create a clearer Research Strategy and Internationalisation Strategy to define its vision and prevent misalignment.

Educational updates are required, including reviewing AI policies to provide guidance and curriculum integration, and considering lecture recording as part of Universal

Design for Learning (UDL). The Department should also enhance external links by creating an Industrial Advisory Panel.

Finally, the report recommends improving internal consistency by reviewing PhD systems (on-boarding, supervision) and implementing succession planning to retain institutional knowledge after staff turnover.

5 Findings on Departmental Strategy and Alignment with University Policies

The Department is credibly achieving its mission across education and research and is well aligned to UL's strategy. The QRG's commendations reinforce this: the SAR quality evidences a mature, reflective culture; the Department is held in high esteem by internal and external stakeholders; staff-student relations are positive and collegiate; and the education offer is clearly high-quality, as shown by student/employer feedback, strong graduate outcomes and further-study pathways. The mission's employability focus is powerfully realised through universal placements whose length is distinctive in the sector, supported by excellent, well-maintained laboratories and extensive practical teaching that prepares students for a wide range of science roles. Research is on a strong footing (high-impact outputs with momentum), and the EDI commitment is visible in the Athena Swan Bronze (2025) award and in recognising outreach/citizenship in workload and progression, directly echoing UL's EDI strategy.

Strategically, the trajectory aligns with UL's Learning, Teaching and Assessment and Research strategies, the academic integrity framework, and the sustainability framework, but growth now needs careful management to protect what makes the Department strong. The QRG's cautions are well-made: continued growth can erode culture and access to research-active staff if resources, facilities and support do not scale; rapid international growth requires intentional integration mechanisms; and transparency in how growth translates into reinvestment is essential to sustain morale and planning. In parallel, there is an opportunity to codify direction through a concise Department Research Strategy and an Internationalisation Strategy, so research diversity stays aligned to strategic priorities, and to modernise pedagogy and integrity by sharpening AI guidance (assessment design and student/staff support) and adopting lecture capture as part of Universal Design for Learning. Doctoral systems (on-boarding, core training, supervision norms) and succession planning merit attention so capacity and institutional knowledge keep pace with ambition; similarly, deeper analysis of low-satisfaction modules and a more responsive interface with the Co-op Office will help maintain consistency of student experience as numbers rise.

The following are the QRG's recommendations (woven to the mission and UL frameworks): (1) review data veracity and benchmarking and set KPIs that link the Department's aims to UL Learning and Teaching Assessment

(LTA)/Research/EDI/sustainability and academic-integrity KPIs; (2) adopt the twin strategies, Department Research and Internationalisation, with clear priority themes, partnership targets, and placement/employer pipelines; (3) protect culture and research-active access during growth by tying intake targets to resourcing (staffing, teaching assistant cover, bench/room capacity) and by making the reinvestment logic transparent; (4) strengthen academic-integrity and inclusion by issuing proactive AI guidance, redesigning summative assessments to be authenticity- and integrity-led, and implementing UDL through initiatives such as lecture recording; (5) refresh doctoral and succession arrangements with defined induction/training, supervision expectations and leadership pipelines; and (6) run a focused quality deep-dive on low-satisfaction courses and co-design fixes with students and the Industrial Advisory Panel, ensuring the curriculum remains tightly tuned to societal, economic and industry needs.

6 Findings on Organisational Structure and Management of the Department

The Department's governance is fundamentally strong and collegiate. The QRG's praise for the exemplary SAR and associated paperwork signals a mature quality culture and effective programme management, where evidence flows cleanly to Boards and the Department Management Committee (DMC). Staff are complimentary about the leadership team, morale is clearly a priority, and a positive, student-centred ethos is visible in day-to-day operations. Excellent, well-maintained laboratories and extensive practical teaching show that facilities governance is working, while universal placements, longer than the sector norm, are being coordinated with employers in ways that translate into strong outcomes and further-study pathways. EDI is actively stewarded (Athena Swan Bronze 2025, with preparation for Silver), and recent growth in junior posts bodes well for capacity and succession if channelled through clear development pathways.

That said, the QRG cautions that growth can strain the very features that make governance effective: culture, access to research-active staff, and learning-support resources. Risks include unplanned workload pressure, lab/timetabling bottlenecks, and diluted student experience if resources do not scale in step with intake, especially for international cohorts who may require additional integration and support. The panel also highlights system areas that sit squarely in management's span of control: the need for transparent reinvestment in resource logic so departments can plan; a refreshed Department Research Strategy and Internationalisation Strategy to keep activity aligned as the Unit scales; clearer, proactive guidance on AI (for students and staff) and a focus on UDL; stronger industry engagement via an Industrial Advisory Panel; more consistent PhD on-boarding, training and supervision norms; succession planning to avoid knowledge loss during staff turnover; a deeper diagnostic of low-

satisfaction modules; and closer working with the Co-op Office so placement processes adapt to students' disability, caring, and economic circumstances.

These steps keep the current strengths; collegial culture, capable leadership, robust labs, strong employer links, while tightening the management machinery needed to scale well, protect staff wellbeing, and deliver a consistent, high-quality experience for every student.

7 Findings on Programme Portfolio and Curriculum

The Department's programme portfolio management is characterised by robust governance and successful strategic growth, earning high esteem from both internal and external stakeholders. A clearly defined and effective governance model, along with a high level of staff commitment to the student experience, underpins a positive and collegiate departmental culture. This strategic approach has translated into capacity, with postgraduate programmes successfully attracting substantial international cohorts and supporting the hiring of additional academic and technical staff. Future strategic expansion is planned with new offerings such as the MSc Molecular and Analytical Bioscience and the integrated BSc/MSc in Immersive Bioscience and Biotherapeutics.

However, the rapid growth poses a critical risk to the current high standards, particularly in terms of teaching quality and diversity of assessment. The continuous increase in student enrolment places a significant strain on laboratory facilities and drives large class sizes, threatening to erode the student experience and staff morale. Furthermore, the portfolio faces recruitment risks from internal overlaps (e.g., Biomedical Science) and external competitors, necessitating a clear strategy for differentiation.

To mitigate these risks and ensure sustainability, the Department must adopt a strategy of managed growth. This includes undertaking a critical assessment of resourcing for teaching activities and staffing levels to maintain course quality as student-to-staff ratios increase. Operationally, this requires succession planning to safeguard institutional knowledge following concurrent staff departures. Strategically, the Department should consider an internationalisation strategy to explicitly define the Department's core vision; exploring international recruitment through targeted models like 2+2 or 4+0 pathways with overseas universities.

Curriculum development is supported by a strong foundation of quality assurance and pedagogical excellence. The QRG commends the high quality of academic staff, with over 70% holding or pursuing formal teaching qualifications, ensuring research-led teaching that reflects current scientific developments and fosters graduate capital for Industry. Facilities are a key strength, with excellent, modern laboratory facilities supporting extensive practicals that effectively prepare students for professional life.

Curriculum benchmarking is maintained through full alignment with NFQ Level 8 and Level 9 standards, supplemented by continuous review from six external examiners.

The curriculum demonstrates strong alignment with the LTA Strategy, particularly through its inclusive pedagogy and emphasis on experiential learning. The adoption of UDL principles ensures flexible learning, which could be further enhanced by implementing lecture recording to benefit commuting students and those with additional responsibilities. Experiential learning is a standout feature, with the strong integration of co-op placements and Final Year Projects - a length of placement uncommon in the sector.

A central area for improvement is formalising curriculum review processes. There is currently an over-reliance on informal mechanisms, which must be replaced by a formalised, structured review framework involving clear timelines and documented procedures. This framework should also be used to address persistent issues, such as strengthening preparatory support for incoming students in foundational subjects like chemistry. Furthermore, the Department must proactively address the impact of rapid technological change by implementing the University's AI policies to provide clear guidance on summative assessments and to integrate the critical evaluation of AI into the curriculum. Finally, to maintain consistency, the Department should implement the proposed learning-analytics system to proactively track engagement and inform early interventions to sustain strong retention rates.

The programme portfolio is highly informed by employers and external stakeholders, leading to excellent graduate outcomes and strong employment rates. This success is driven by robust industry partnerships across placements, research collaborations, and guest lectures. Employer feedback confirms that graduates are exceptionally well-equipped for a broad range of careers in the science industry.

Despite the proven success of this engagement, the QRG recommends formalising the mechanisms to ensure systematic and sustained input. This is necessary because current practice still suffers from a lack of formal structure for capturing and documenting stakeholder feedback, leading to low visibility of this input in programme-level decision-making. To address this, the Department should establish a formal Industrial Advisory Panel to benchmark the curriculum and ensure its strategic relevance to evolving industry and research trends. Alongside this, structured feedback loops must be developed to systematically integrate employer and alumni input into the curriculum review process, allowing for the exploration of new opportunities such as micro-credential programmes co-designed with employers to meet specific emerging skills needs. Finally, the Department must review the PhD system to improve consistency in on-boarding, doctoral training, supervisory support, and the defined number of supervisors, which will directly strengthen the research training offered in partnership with industry. The Department should ensure ongoing engagement with

industry via discussion panels or committees to ensure that the programme portfolio retains its competitiveness.

8 Findings on Teaching, Learning and Assessment

The approach of the Department to learning, teaching and assessment is highly commended, and it is clear that staff provide useful material to students via the Brightspace VLE. Also praiseworthy is the Department's engagement with UDL.

For the most part, according to students who spoke to the QRG, modules delivered by staff are engaging, with module leaders being responsive to student feedback and offering important support to students when contacted. Particularly praiseworthy is the inclusion of guest lectures, particularly from industry partners.

For some modules, particularly those in first year with large co-taught cohorts, consideration should be given to summative assessments in terms of assessment design, to retain assessment diversity and to evaluate if there are assessments which could be incorporated to allow students to develop a working knowledge of AI; including the benefits and pitfalls of this technology. It may be advantageous to include industry partners within development of AI use, to ensure it enhances students' employability.

As several of the staff involved in teaching within the Department are at a more junior level, enhanced time for teaching development may be beneficial. This may be a consideration for all staff involved in teaching, to allow development and integration of innovations in learning materials and assessments.

The Department has shown alignment with central policies, particularly in relation to disability supports and AI use. The absence of duplicative local policy is welcomed; however, ongoing attention must be paid to the consistency and currency of institutional versus department-level policy frameworks. Where both exist, there remains a risk of contradiction and inefficiency. An annual policy audit or mapping exercise may assist in identifying inefficiencies.

The Department delivers a range of level 8 and 9 taught courses, both online and on-campus. Consideration could be given to delivering some of the taught content as micro-credential courses, which would allow area-specific learners to develop skills and competencies in a flexible, fast and affordable way. This consideration should include reflection of the administrative and academic time resourcing of such activities, particularly with the growth in the number of existing courses within the Department.

Student feedback from staff-student consultative committees is praiseworthy including the use of this feedback to improve the student experience. It is recommended that the student feedback survey be used to provide additional quantitative data for the

qualitative information from committees. To enhance student completion of the survey, time could be provided in class and information could be provided on the importance of the student survey for improving student experience for both current and future students in the modules. The Department should regularly review student feedback to better understand where improvements can be made and for increased understanding of the student cohort and their needs. A deep dive of existing feedback should be completed.

It is evident from review panel meetings that staff within the Department demonstrate a deep level of care for the students. With the large cohort sizes for some modules, particularly those in the first year of study, pastoral care should be evaluated to determine if any students, who may not be known by the UL Student Disability Service, are supported to make contact with the service and ensure that they have their needs met with the difficulties they encounter. Focusing on this area has the potential to improve retention in courses.

The Department should be highly commended and recognised for the inclusion of final year projects within courses, particularly in exposing students to cutting-edge research and providing enhanced practical skills. Consideration should be given to the planning of the growth of student numbers and allocation of projects which have the potential to impact staff workloads. Additionally, evaluation of budget demands for different research project areas should be carried out as well as determining whether the current budget provided for Final Year Projects (FYP) and MSc projects is sufficient.

9 Findings on Research

All academic staff are engaged in research and there is a clear desire to increase research intensity. The Department is clearly seeing significant growth in taught student numbers and has a strengthening foundation for increasing research income although the latter is skewed towards a smaller number of faculty members. Whilst this is inevitable and has been accompanied by an increase in staff numbers, especially at more junior levels, which bodes well for future sustainability, greater parity should be sought. This said, the Department is being proactive and the support provided by the leadership team should be commended, e.g. excellent start-up packages to new-joiners and setting an inclusive research culture. However, there is inevitable tension in the work allocation model whereby the growth in taught students is potentially stifling research ambitions and forward culture.

The QRG recommends that the Department create a new Department Research Strategy and Internationalisation Strategy. The Department needs to balance the operational challenge of growth versus defining its strategic direction in what it wants to

become and how it defines research success - income is only one measure and more focus should be given to publication quality. Explore mechanisms to increase industrial engagement since industrial research income is still <10% and this could be a focus to increase research margin and the diversity of income sources. The creation of an industrial advisory panel could aid in fulfilling this aspiration.

The QRG recommends a review of PhD systems. The Department should consider how it can systematically increase externally funded PhDs (e.g. having co-funded studentships) and this should be accompanied by reviewing processes (cf. section 7). The appropriateness of support provided by the Doctoral College should be considered as well as creating a formal early career network.

More generally and in collaboration with the University, the role of the embedded institutes and the Department needs to be explored as there is seemingly a conflict in resources, reputational ambition and research priorities. The modest size of the University's Research Office does not match the ambition to grow research and should be benchmarked, and its desired function reviewed. Clarity over the transparency in resource allocation could be improved such that the Department clearly sees the benefits of its growth so that it can make longer-term plans to reinvest in research.

10 Findings on Stakeholder Engagement

Both internal and external stakeholder relationships were addressed overall very well within the Department. In particular, external stakeholder engagement, such as industry partnerships, provided overall very positive feedback on co-op students and graduates. Engagement with alumni via exit surveys, for example, could be leveraged more with a formalised and structured approach to inform the direction of the programme design/delivery. Similarly, internally, further increased engagement with the co-operative education office may be required due to resource constraints to ensure consistency of student experience remains the same for all students across the Department.

11 Conclusion

The QRG has been incredibly impressed with the quality of the information provided, all of the discussions that have been had, and the organisation of everything. The most notable aspect of the visit to UL was the positive and collegiate culture that exists on campus and the pride that staff, students and alumni have in the University.

11.1 Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

QRG Report, Department of Biological Sciences

1.	The quality of the SAR and associated paperwork was exemplary, providing the panel with the necessary detail to evaluate the Department objectively. It is clear that a tremendous amount of effort went into compiling the reports.
2.	The high esteem in which the Department is held within the University, and amongst internal and external stakeholders and industry partners.
3.	There is a positive and collegiate culture across both Department staff and students. It is evident that staff are focused on the student experience and have a genuine care for the students and their success.
4.	The focus on all students undertaking a placement is to be admired and the length of these is unique in the sector. It is clear from the employer feedback that UL students are well-equipped to work across a broad range of industries in the science sector.
5.	The increase in staff numbers, especially at more junior levels, is commended and bodes well for future sustainability.
6.	The high quality of the education is obvious from both the feedback of the students and employers, as well as the reported levels of graduate outcomes and further study opportunities.
7.	The laboratory facilities are excellent, with a range of modern equipment that is well-maintained. The extensive use of laboratory practicals in teaching is excellent in preparing students for a range of careers.
8.	The staff are complimentary of the leadership team, and it is clear that staff morale is a high priority for the Department.
9.	An active EDI commitment, Athena Swan Bronze 2025, and preparation for Silver demonstrate structured inclusion efforts; outreach and citizenship are recognised in workload progression, aligning governance with values.
10.	High-impact research performance, output quality and influence are a foundation for continued growth.

11.2 Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

Level 1 Recommendations

QRG Report, Department of Biological Sciences

No.	Recommendation	Commentary
1.	Consider and manage the impact of growth on the Department's positive culture and plans therein.	The importance of the existing, positive culture should not be underestimated, and rapid growth can negatively impact this if not considered.
2.	Consider and manage the impact of growth on the student experience in general and access to research-active academic staff and learning support resources.	Growth poses risks to the positive culture and student experience, demanding careful planning for consistency. International student growth, while welcomed, requires tools for integration and should be objectively challenged. Improved transparency in resource allocation is vital, as unplanned growth risks staff burnout and lower student satisfaction.
3.	Create a new Department Research Strategy and Internationalisation Strategy.	A clearer vision is required on what the Department wants to become and be core in. A danger exists that research diversity is misaligned with strategic growth.
4.	Ensure implementation of institutional AI policies, together with awareness/training for staff and students.	<p>Improve proactive AI guidance for both students and staff on summative assessments.</p> <p>Consider including the impact of AI in more of the curriculum and equip students to critically evaluate.</p>
5.	Consider implementing lecture recording as part of Universal Design for Learning.	Students with additional support needs, care and responsibilities, and those commuting to campus would benefit from this.
6.	Explore mechanisms to increase industrial engagement to gain input into the curricula.	Create an Industrial Advisory Panel which would provide a forum to benchmark and improve curriculum and research relevance.
7.	Working with the Doctoral College, review PhD systems	Improve on-boarding induction and consistency over the core doctoral training programme. Consider consistency over supervisory support, e.g. frequency of meetings, and define the number of supervisors.
8.	Consider succession planning to maintain institutional knowledge.	There appears to be some areas where a number of staff have left the Department at a similar time leading to many new staff starting at the same time and a loss of departmental knowledge as a result.

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9.	The Department should work with the Coop Office to help it be more responsive to specific student circumstances including disability, family and economic circumstances.	It is clear that the resourcing constraints also impact the Coop Office and their responsiveness and their ability to meet the needs of students.
10.	Undertake a deeper analysis and awareness of the reasons behind low student satisfaction on certain courses.	There are some courses with very low student satisfaction, which would benefit from a deep dive, since it is unclear if results were skewed by low survey participation.
11.	Review and implement the recommendations from the QRG regarding each programme as set out in the QRG Programme Reports	

Level 2 Recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Commentary
1.	Advertise the chemistry aspects of biosciences to employers.	It is not immediately evident that the biosciences includes the level of chemistry that it does. It may be helpful for prospective students and employers to have sight of this.
2.	Clarify education technology support.	It was not clear from discussions what the role of the faculty is in providing education technology support to the Department.
3.	Training for students on academic referencing and citation.	Additional training on referencing embedded in programmes is required based on student feedback.
4.	Review data veracity and benchmarking and set KPIs.	It would be helpful to clarify KPIs (for example, student satisfaction metrics) and to benchmark those internally and externally.
5.	Consider engagement with alumni via exit surveys.	Additional information could be leveraged, for example, with a formalised and structured approach to inform the direction of the programme design/deliver

Appendix A: Membership of the Department of Biological Sciences Quality Team

Seán Fair	Professor and Head of Department
Ken Byrne	Professor and Chair Department Quality Team
Katie Clancy	Administrator
Miryam Amigo Benavent	Assistant Professor B
Eibhlis O'Connor	Associate Professor A
Elizabeth Ryan	Associate Professor A
George Barreto	Professor
Bridget Younge	Associate Professor B
Andreas Grabrucker	Professor
James Brown	Associate Professor B
Stephanie Brosnan	Senior Technical Officer
Angela Boyce	Senior Technical Officer
Dean Brennan	Teaching Assistant
Soraya Morscher	University Teacher
Pedram Vousoughi	Post-Doctoral Research
Audrey O'Grady	Associate Professor A
Nikki Walshe	Associate Professor B