



UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK

O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

Quality Review of the **Cooperative Education and Careers Division**

The University of Limerick (UL), follows an established process for Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Improvement (QI) in line with that developed jointly by IUA and IUQB. This involves a seven-year cycle during which all Departments work to improve the quality of their programmes and services, undergo a rigorous self-evaluation prior to a quality review by internationally recognised experts in the field.

The process itself evolved as a result of the Universities Act, 1997 in which the responsibility for QA/QI was placed directly with the individual universities. The UL Quality Support Unit (QSU) web site provides an elaboration of this process and the state of progress.

The broader picture is described in the publication 'Quality Management Systems: Standard Framework for Support Departments' which can be downloaded from the QSU web site: www.quality.ul.ie

Issued by QSU	Stage 4 - 1 st July 2013
Review Date	25 th to 27 th June 2013
Quality Review Group	Appendix A
UL-QSU Web Site	www.quality.ul.ie
Web Site	www.ul.ie/coop
QQI Web Site	www.qqi.ie

Copyright © – University of Limerick, June 2013

This report is the property of the University of Limerick and may be printed and distributed for personal use only. The document must not be redistributed or republished, in part or whole, without the express permission of the University of Limerick.

Table of Contents

1.0	Background.....	3
1.1	Legislative Framework.....	3
1.2	The IUQB / QQI.....	3
1.3	The Quality Review Process	4
1.4	Management of Quality in the University.....	4
2.0	The Cooperative Education and Careers Division	5
3.0	The Follow-up Process	6
4.0	Preliminary Comments of the Quality Review Group (QRG).....	7
5.0	The Report of the Quality Review Group	8
5.1	Current state of development of the Division's QMS	8
5.2	Customer Focus	9
5.3	Leadership.....	10
5.4	Involvement of Staff.....	11
5.5	Continual Improvement	12
5.6	Process Approach	13
5.7	Systematic Approach to Management.....	14
5.8	Factual Approach to Decision Making	15
5.9	Mutually Beneficial Supplier, Partner & Community Relationships.....	16
	Appendices.....	17
A	Membership of the Quality Review Group:.....	17
B	Membership of the Division Quality Team:	17
C	Contact	17

1.0 Background

1.1 Legislative Framework

The University of Limerick, in common with all the universities in the Republic of Ireland, fell within the Universities Act, 1997 until recently. This Act specified the responsibilities of universities in Ireland for Quality Improvement and Quality Assurance. Section 12 stipulates that, 'The objectives of a university shall include - ... to promote the highest standards in, and quality of, teaching and research'.

Section 35 (1) of the Act further required that each university Governing Authority 'shall...require the university to establish procedures for quality assurance aimed at improving the quality of education and related services provided by the university'. The Act provides a framework for the universities to develop their quality processes. Section 35 requires each university to review the quality of the work of all faculty, academic Departments and service (including administrative) Departments on a ten-year cycle. In particular 'The procedures shall include ... assessment by those, including students, availing of the teaching, research and other services provided by the university'.

Although each university is free to develop its own procedures in fulfilling its obligations under the Act, close co-operation has been achieved through the co-ordinating role of the Irish Universities Association Quality Committee, (IUAQC). Accordingly, the universities have developed a framework comprising a set of common principles and operating guidelines for quality improvement and quality assurance. These principles and guidelines have been integrated into each of the universities procedures, which ensure coherence through the university system, while maintaining the autonomy of each university and its individual institutional culture.

In late 2012 the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 superseded the Universities Act 1997 in respect of quality assurance matters in the universities and the IUQB was subsumed into the new Quality and Qualifications Ireland agency. There will be a consultative process during 2013 and it will be some time before changes to QA and QI practice are reflected in the universities.

1.2 The IUQB / QQI

The Governing Authorities of the seven Irish universities established the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) in February 2003. This board comprises representatives of the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU) and a number of external members.

The aims of the IUQB were:

- To increase the level of inter-university cooperation in developing Quality Assurance processes
- To represent the Irish universities nationally and internationally on issues relating to quality assurance and quality improvement

- To articulate, on behalf of the Governing Authorities of the universities, the resource implications of recommendations for quality improvement.

The IUQB subsumed the roles and functions formerly carried out by the IUQSC (Irish Universities Quality Steering Committee) and has since been subsumed into Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). More detail is available at www.qqi.ie

1.3 The Quality Review Process

The common framework adopted by the Irish universities for their Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement systems consistent with both the legislative requirement of the Universities Act 1997 and international good practice comprise the following stages:

1. Preparation of a self-assessment report by the unit taking into account feedback from students and customers.
2. Quality (Peer) Review involving external experts, both nationally and internationally, who have visited the Department, met the students and studied the Self Assessment.
3. Quality Review Report, made publicly available by the Governing Authority of the university, incorporating the reactions and quality improvement plans of the Division and University.
4. Continuing improvement through implementation within the resources available to the university.

More detail is available at www.quality.ul.ie

1.4 Management of Quality in the University

The Vice President Academic and Registrar has overall responsibility for implementation of Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement policy and implementation at the University of Limerick. Implementation is carried out by the Director of Quality. The planned schedule of Quality Review of both academic and support departments was commenced in the year 2000, with the first full cycle of units within the University being reviewed within a seven-year cycle.

Academic departments are reviewed against international standards as described in the document “A Guide to the Quality Review Process for Academic Departments”, which is available on the UL website at www.quality.ul.ie .

In 2006, the university decided to implement a bespoke quality management system (QMS) and developed a suitable template with the assistance of external quality experts. This system is described in the document “Quality Management Systems – Standard Framework for Support Departments”.

More detail is available at www.quality.ul.ie

2.0 The Cooperative Education and Careers Division

The Cooperative Education & Careers Division (CECD) is responsible for the management, development and delivery of the cooperative education, careers and teaching practice programmes at the University of Limerick (UL). Alive to the link between academia and the workplace, UL pioneered the concept of cooperative education (Co-op) in Ireland in 1972. Co-op is central to both UL's educational philosophy and branding and is consistently cited by students as one of their top reasons for choosing UL over other higher education institutions (HEIs). Based on the North American system, UL operates a centralised model of placement for both its Co-op and teaching practice programmes, whereby responsibility for securing placements lies with the University. It is CECD's policy to develop its placement programme on a unilateral basis (i.e. UL sources placements directly), and the University does not operate reciprocal placement arrangements with other HEIs.

Co-op is a defining feature of the student experience and the way UL brands itself. A reflection of the strength of the Co-op brand lies in the fact that the term 'Co-op' is widely used by employers, other HEIs and even the Higher Education Authority (HEA) as a generic term for work-integrated learning. Under the Co-op programme, UL undergraduate students across the faculties of Business; Science & Engineering; and Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences undertake a placement as a formal, compulsory and academically accredited element of their four-year degree. Students are required to undertake a six-to-eight-month placement in second or third year, the timing and duration of which are prescribed according to the placement calendar of their programme of study. Spanning some 56 degree programmes (as listed in appendix 1.1), Co-op is the largest placement programme in Ireland and one of the largest in Europe. Over 1,600 placements are secured annually; the average placement rate over the past three years is 94%.

The international dimension of the programme is significant: more than 20% of students undertake placements within a network of twenty-five countries across all five continents. Aligned to this, UL won the 2012 AHECSEngage Africa, its African Co-op programme. Among Irish third-level institutions, UL is the largest participant in the EU Erasmus work placement programme¹ All Ireland Employability Award for 2. The sectoral spread of the cooperative education placement network reflects the diversity of degree offerings, and placements are identified across the full sectoral spectrum, including financial services, information and communications technology (ICT), engineering, manufacturing, medical technologies, pharmachem, aerospace, creative technologies, food, R&D, the legal sector, public and civil services and education.

For students of Bachelor of Education (BEd) programmes, UL manages the largest teaching practice programme in Ireland, both in terms of placement numbers and disciplinary spread. Under the teaching practice programme, 800 students across the twelve education degrees are placed within UL's network of 550 post-primary schools annually. In terms of graduate employment levels, UL's employment rates are consistently higher than the average for the third-level sector according to successive HEA graduate destination data.

3.0 The Follow-up Process

The Quality Review process occurs on an approximately seven-year cycle at the University of Limerick. An average of two to three academic Departments are reviewed annually. Once the Quality Review Group report is finalised, the Department concerned immediately sets about planning its response to the issues raised therein.

The self-evaluation process is intended to be a reflective exercise in which a Department/Division should identify many of its strengths and weaknesses and develop plans to strengthen and grow as appropriate. Quite often, the Quality Review Group (QRG) will reinforce these issues and may identify areas of concern that were overlooked. In many cases, the QRG will also highlight the strengths of the Department and encourage faculty and staff to take advantage of these.

After the department and the university have been given time to respond to the issues raised; the Quality Review Group's report will be made available to the wider community through the University's web site. Normally, the report is available within the University less than four weeks after the QRG visit. Responses and plans for action are incorporated into the report and are subject to the approval of the University's Governing Authority Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance Committee. Presentation to the committee usually follows within six months of the QRG visit. The Governing Authority will publish the Quality Review report, including reactions and plans, following approval.

It is expected that a review of progress in implementing recommendations and investigating issues raised would occur quarterly for the two years following the Quality Review Visit. Progress Reports will be published as deemed appropriate.

Date	Action
Date of review	Department is issued with Quality Review Group report and required to prepare reactions and plans for Quality Improvement as appropriate. The report is circulated to all members of Management Committee for comment.
Date of review	QRG Report, incorporating reactions, is presented to UL Executive Committee for discussion, as appropriate.
+ 2 months	Reactions and plans incorporated into the Quality Improvement Action Plan and circulated to GA Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance committee. QRG Report with Responses and Quality Improvement Action Plan are tabled at GA-SPQAC meeting for discussion.
+ 1 year	Head of Division, Vice President Academic & Registrar and Director of Quality discuss progress with resolution of recommendations and outstanding items are referred to Executive Committee, Academic Council and/or Governing Authority as appropriate.

4.0 Preliminary Comments of the Quality Review Group (QRG)

In the view of the Quality Review Group (QRG), staff of the Co-operative Education and Careers Division (CECD) form an effective, closely knit team. Their primary goals are to ensure that students are supported in achieving successful work placements which will enable them to develop a range of employability skills and continue to provide support as they move from university into the employment market. All members of the division's staff were involved in the process of compiling the self-assessment report (SAR) which was clearly written and reflective, providing the QRG with an excellent starting point for its deliberations. Staff at all levels willingly engaged in discussion with the QRG, demonstrating themselves to be knowledgeable and fully engaged with the division and its mission.

The University of Limerick is currently regarded as one of the leaders worldwide in co-operative education with most undergraduate students, and some postgraduates, undertaking a work placement of 6-8 months' duration. This and the high employment rate of its graduates are key points in the institution's overall marketing strategy. The majority of work placements, including teaching practice for education students, are organised and managed through CECD. Undergraduate numbers are increasing and the competition for placements is becoming more intense as other universities and national initiatives become involved in similar activity. Despite this, and despite the current economic climate, CECD placed over 95% of students in 2011/2012. The QRG wishes to encourage the division to publicise this impressive record much more widely and to investigate ways in which it might make use of the significant data associated with the placement programme for research purposes.

Success to date has been sustained by the streamlining of processes and increasing use of technology. To maintain the university's reputation, as numbers continue to rise and both jobs and placements remain scarce, the QRG believes that an increase in resources for the division is essential. The greatest needs are for additional human resources and the further development of support technology, in particular the complete revision and restructuring of the CECD website.

5.0 The Report of the Quality Review Group

5.1 Current state of development of the Division's QMS

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

5.1.1 The considerable progress made on the development and operation of a Quality Management System since the 2006 quality review.

5.1.2 The effective use of a trained audit team to monitor the operation of the Quality Management System.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.1.3 Ensure that all quality management processes are fully documented.

5.1.4 Assign responsibility for the oversight of the Quality Management System to one person.

5.1.5 Consider applying for external accreditation in the form of the Matrix Standard.

5.2 Customer Focus

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

- 5.2.1 Achievement of high placement targets and exceptional graduate employment levels in on-going difficult economic circumstances.

- 5.2.2 The passion and commitment demonstrated by CECD staff.

- 5.2.3 The proactive planning to accommodate course changes and industry recruitment needs.

- 5.2.4 The early intervention with under-achieving students during the placement process.

- 5.2.5 The tailoring of the CECD 'drop in' service to meet student demand.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

- 5.2.6 Prioritise the development of a more user friendly CECD website as a key tool for communicating with customers.

- 5.2.7 Further communicate the focus on generic employability skills in order to manage customer and stakeholder expectations.

- 5.2.8 At University level, ensure faculty engagement with the division to increase the level of onsite visits and phone calls.

- 5.2.9 Continue to improve the communication process with students before and during international placements.

- 5.2.10 Seek University support for an appropriate budget allocation to CECD to restore the disability advisor resource.

5.3 Leadership

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

5.3.1 The clear commitment to delivery of service excellence aligned to the University and Division's Mission and Vision.

5.3.2 Engagement across university structures and committees at all levels including participation in, and contribution to, policy development.

5.3.3 Successful bids for external funding, e.g. Shannon Consortium proposals.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.3.4 Scoping and delivery of a robust marketing / communications plan to all key stakeholders to raise the profile and visibility of the Division, in particular the careers service.

5.3.5 Seek a mandatory divisional involvement in programme review, development and design at the planning stage.

5.3.6 Engage with the Quality Support Unit to review and inform the content of student exit surveys.

5.3.7 At University level, investigate ways to strengthen the workforce of the division in order to better address the needs of the students.

5.4 Involvement of Staff

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

5.4.1 The team ethos in decision making and service delivery evident in the bottom up / top down and lateral management structure for implementation of ideas / projects.

5.4.2 The biannual strategy planning days to evaluate service delivery and prioritise project and output delivery.

5.4.3 The use of the internal training and development programme and 'Meet the Stakeholder' initiative to inform knowledge across the team.

5.4.4 The beneficial participation of staff at all levels in national and international careers related professional bodies.

5.4.5 The organisation, growth and development of the annual Career Fairs.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.4.6 Investigate and evaluate alternative careers service promotion and delivery and pilot these within sample academic departments or faculties.

5.5 Continual Improvement

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

5.5.1 The commitment to, and explicit engagement with, continual improvement.

5.5.2 The success in ensuring that continual improvement is central to quality management.

5.5.3 The engagement with stakeholders on feedback, both negative and positive, which is integral to improvement.

5.5.4 Use of the auditing process to support continual improvement.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.5.5 Prioritise a review of the division's website.

5.5.6 Establish a formal and regular method of engaging with faculty.

5.5.7 Raise the division's profile both internally and externally.

5.6 Process Approach

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

- 5.6.1 Leading the way by being the first division to participate in the second round of reviews of support departments.

- 5.6.2 The innovative and successful process for training and knowledge transfer within the CECD team.

- 5.6.3 The quality of existing process documentation.

- 5.6.4 The effective use of technology to share process information.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

- 5.6.5 Introduce, and insist on the use of, a standardised document control system.

- 5.6.6 Develop CECD auditor skills by participation in the inter-divisional audit teams organised by Quality Support Unit.

- 5.6.7 Initiate a formal process for obtaining feedback from academic departments.

- 5.6.8 Define the process for acquiring new employer contacts through engagement with existing stakeholders.

- 5.6.9 Complete the process definition for international student placement.

5.7 Systematic Approach to Management

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

5.7.1 In these challenging times CECD continually delivers a professional service and contributes to delivering the outstanding graduate employability metrics, well above the national average.

5.7.2 Systematic use of internal audits.

5.7.3 Analysis of surveys to monitor and measure service effectiveness and to deliver improvement.

5.7.4 Proactive approach to forward planning across all CECD activities.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.7.5 Continue to develop a formal approach to the management of both human and system risk.

5.7.6 Systemisation and documentation of the continual improvement and customer interaction processes.

5.7.9 Develop a road map leading to seamless integration of all information systems.

5.8 Factual Approach to Decision Making

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

5.8.1 Decision-making through data analysis and its integration into meeting structures.

5.8.2 Clear use of facts and analysis in setting key targets and identifying future employment needs and trends.

5.8.3 Staff access to data provides transparency for all staff on data-based decision-making processes.

5.8.4 Utilisation of Careers Service usage data to adapt hours and target specific disciplines.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.8.5 A transparent system of complaint analysis and reporting should be developed and routinely shared with faculties to enable a better long-term understanding of how problems are resolved.

5.8.6 Identify ways of utilising the wealth of divisional data in support of research.

5.9 Mutually Beneficial Supplier, Partner & Community Relationships

Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

- 5.9.1 The strong and wide-ranging relationships within and outside UL.

- 5.9.2 The cultivation of national and international partnerships and collaborations.

- 5.9.3 The commitment to local community volunteering culture to showcase the University and benefit students.

- 5.9.4 The First Leanings programme to support second-level students' transition to third level and inform their career decision-making.

Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

- 5.9.5 Ensure that employability is embedded in curriculum development.

- 5.9.6 Explore the benefits of having one person assigned as a client relationship manager.

- 5.9.7 Strengthen alumni engagement.

- 5.9.8 Explore ways to attract external funding to support additional staff and project initiatives

- 5.9.9 Work with the University to ensure that participation in placement preparation and careers in the curriculum is credit-bearing.

Appendices

A Membership of the Quality Review Group:

Prof Gaynor Taylor (chair)	Quality consultant, formerly Deputy VC, Leeds Metropolitan University, UK
David Casey	Director, Careers Service, University of Cape Town, SA
Catherine Duffy	General Manager, Northern Trust, Limerick
Declan Hanley	Business Development Manager, MAPS Ltd. Ireland
Mairead Loughran	Web Developer, University of Limerick (recording secretary)
Patrick O'Brien	Research Executive, London, UK, formerly ULSU President,
Ann Kettle (deputy chair)	St. Andrews University, Scotland, UK

B Membership of the Division Quality Team:

Gavin Connell , Team Leader	Linda Fitzgerald
Patrice Twomey, Division Director	Phyl Fitzgerald
Jerry Cronin	Treasa Landers
Colm Cunniffe	Niamh O'Donovan
	Dara Venner

C Contact

The Quality Review Group was given the opportunity over three days to talk to the department Quality Team both formally and informally. Meetings with staff, postgraduate & undergraduate students and others were scheduled as group sessions. The Review Group was given the opportunity to meet all staff during a visit to the facilities of the department and this was most helpful.

All the meetings provided extremely useful additional information to support the SAR.

END OF REPORT