



# UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

## Quality Review of the Human Resources Division

The University of Limerick (UL) follows an established process for Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Improvement (QI). This involves a seven-year cycle during which all Support Departments develop a quality management system, and undergo a rigorous self-evaluation prior to a quality review by internationally recognised experts in the field.

The process itself has 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 review process is designed to satisfy the requirements of the recent Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, meet the expectations of QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) and most importantly, assist support departments in meeting their obligations to maintain an effective QMS (quality management system). The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) require all institutions to develop formal quality procedures designed to achieve continuous enhancement of quality.

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Quality Review Group	Appendix A
UL-QSU Web Site	<a href="http://www.quality.ul.ie">www.quality.ul.ie</a>
Department Web Site	<a href="http://www.ul.ie/hr">http://www.ul.ie/hr</a>
QQI Web Site	<a href="http://www.qqi.ie">www.qqi.ie</a>
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## **1.0 Background**

### **1.1 Legislative Framework**

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

Section 35 (1) of the Act further requires 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.

More detail is available at <https://www2.ul.ie/pdf/181038187.pdf>.

### **1.2 Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)**

Quality and Qualifications Ireland was established on 6 November 2012 under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. The new Authority is being created by an amalgamation of four bodies that have both awarding and quality assurance responsibilities: the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB). The new Authority will assume all the functions of the four legacy bodies while also having responsibility for new or newly-statutory responsibilities in particular areas.

The role and general functions of QQI incorporate the previous functions of FETAC, HETAC and the NQAI in relation to the maintenance and development of the National Framework of Qualifications, the validation and awarding of qualifications, and the monitoring and review of providers. QQI also has responsibility for the external quality review of the universities; a function performed previously by the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) in conjunction with the Higher Education Authority (HEA). In addition, the authority has been assigned some new functions. It is responsible for the development and implementation of a register of programmes leading to awards in the NFAQ. It will also establish a Code of Practice and International Education Mark for the provision of education to international learners.

### **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 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 Report.
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.ul.ie/quality](http://www.ul.ie/quality)

#### **1.4 Committee for the Establishment of Quality Management Systems**

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. In 2006, the Deans' Council established the Committee for the Establishment of Quality Management Systems (CEQMS) to oversee the development of quality management systems across the university and to provide support for the review procedures.

The first round of reviews for support departments took place between 2005 and 2008. Copies of the review reports are available on the [QSU website](#).

In 2006, the CEQMS confirmed an earlier decision by the university to implement ISO9000 as a quality management system (QMS) in all support departments. The committee decided, however, that a UL bespoke QMS would be more widely acceptable 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".

The second round of reviews is scheduled to take place between 2013 and 2016. The review will take account of significant developments in the design and implementation of quality management systems across the University since the first round of reviews. As a consequence, the reviewers will now expect to see a fully functional QMS which is seamlessly embedded into department operations and drives decision making processes.

## **2.0 Human Resources Division**

The HR Division provides a service to approximately 1,300 UL academic, support and research members of staff. In addition, the division provides support to approximately 330 retired members of staff and to all job applicants. HR currently comprises seven sections and employs 27 staff members. The seven sections, or functions, are:

- Recruitment
- Compensation and Benefits
- Pensions and Superannuation
- Learning, Development and Equal Opportunities
- Research
- Employee Relations and Equality
- Health & Safety

Each section has its own strategic objectives through which the UL/HR goals will be achieved. Most of the division's staff are assigned to specific sections but work together on a daily basis to provide a coherent service to the division's customers. The seven HR sections listed above are supported by the HR Information Service (HRIS), which is responsible for ensuring that the division has the technological supports it requires to do its job effectively. The Division also has a HR Shared Services Manager. This is a new area of focus for the Division, the aim of which is to implement a shared services model that simplifies, streamlines and optimises HR service delivery and efficiencies enhancing the employee experience within the University of Limerick and in so doing transforming the HR Division within UL into a HR Centre of Excellence.

The HR Director is a member of the UL Executive Committee and reports directly to the president. The Executive Committee is responsible for the overall management of the university's affairs. With representation on the Executive Committee, HR does not just respond to strategy but also helps to shape the future direction of UL.

The HR sub-committee of the UL Governing Authority advises Governing Authority on HR-related matters and identifies and prioritises areas requiring policy initiatives. The sub-committee's terms of reference are published on the UL website.

The HR mission is "to contribute to the achievement of the University's mission through progressive policies and customer-focused services that ensure that all staff are enabled to achieve their full potential and enhance the performance of the organisation". As specified in "Pioneering and Connected: University of Limerick Strategic Plan 2011–2015," UL has four strategic goals and four key enablers (People, Resources, Quality and Communication) through which the goals will be achieved. Three times per calendar year, HR staff devise and update their own section's goals and objectives with reference to each enabling theme (see section 4.3.1 for details). Furthermore, the division takes a lead in ensuring that HR policies, practices and strategies are in place to enable people – members of the campus community – to make a positive contribution to the achievement of the university's goals.

See also <http://www.ul.ie/hr/>

### **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 six Departments is reviewed annually. Once the Quality Review 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 division 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 Executive Committee.

Presentation to the University's Governing Authority usually follows within six months of the QRG visit. The Governing Authority will publish the Quality Review report, including reactions and plans, immediately 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.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>
Date of Review	Department is issued with Quality Review 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.
+ 2/3 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	Director, Dean, Vice President Academic and Registrar and Director of Quality discuss progress with resolution of recommendations and outstanding items are referred to Executive Committee and Governing Authority as appropriate.

#### **4.0 Preliminary Comments of the Quality Review Group (QRG)**

The QRG found the self-assessment report (SAR) of the Human Resources Division (HR) to be a clear account of the division's activities and a thoughtful analysis of its current environment and context. All members of the division had contributed to the compilation of the SAR. The report was supported by a wide range of relevant evidence and we are grateful for the helpful and timely way in which the division responded to our requests for additional documentation. The SAR formed a very helpful basis for our engagement with the division.

In our discussions with members of HR, we found staff to be very helpful and open. The QRG met with a range of stakeholders and users of HR services; all spoke highly of the professionalism displayed by members of the division and we heard many endorsements of the high quality of service provided by staff.

HR demonstrated a clear and consistent commitment to addressing the needs of its users and stakeholders. Staff have a strong focus on delivering services to users across the university in a wide range of functional areas. There is an admirable focus on developing and maintaining robust and rigorous processes across all the division's functions.

While recognising the operational requirements for clear and consistent processes, particularly in sensitive areas such as recruitment, the QRG thinks there may be scope for exploring additional flexibility which would better support the changing needs and activities of the university in the longer term.

Given the rapid pace of change in the university's academic and business context, we think there is scope for the division to engage more proactively with its users and stakeholders in order to better anticipate and address their changing needs over the coming years.

In the view of the QRG, there is scope for the division to further develop its approach to feedback and performance monitoring in order to make more effective use of these valuable data sources.

Our detailed recommendations in the following sections will, we hope, provide some useful pointers for areas of potentially fruitful development for the work of the division.

## **5.0 The Report of the Quality Review Team**

### **5.1 Quality Management System**

#### **Commendations**

The QRG commends the following:

- 5.1.1 The achievement and maintenance of ISO 9001 accreditation since 2008.

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- 5.1.2 The systematic mapping of ISO 9001 requirements to elements of the division's quality management system (QMS).

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- 5.1.3 The strong and clear commitment of the division to a culture of high quality and continuous improvement.

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#### **Recommendations**

The QRG recommends the following:

- 5.1.4 Implement the plans being developed in UL's Efficiency of Operations Committee to simplify the current approach to documentation of 70 key processes.

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- 5.1.5 Review the current approaches to gathering and managing objective feedback in order to explore the scope for more systematic ways of identifying trends.

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- 5.1.6 Consider new approaches to feedback that would help to anticipate future needs of the division and its customers.

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## 5.2 Customer Focus

### Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

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|-------|--|
| 5.2.1 | The strong alignment between the HR objectives and the UL strategic plan.  |
| 5.2.2 | The proactive involvement of HR in the facilitation of strategic research support programmes.  |
| 5.2.3 | The awareness in HR of the importance of collecting customer feedback and of using it to develop meaningful interventions.   |
| 5.2.4 | The positive contribution made to the retirement process by the provision of retirement planning courses, the retirement staff protocol and the continued support for 'Restart'. |
| 5.2.5 | The recognition by stakeholders of the advocacy role of HR on behalf of staff.   |
| 5.2.6 | The effective response to feedback on the academic promotion policies and procedures.  |

### Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

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|-------|---|
| 5.2.7 | Review the sustainability of the support for retirees and increase the focus on emotional and psychological elements in the retirement planning course.   |
| 5.2.8 | Explore the scope for an enhanced strategic partnership with UNITE.   |
| 5.2.9 | At university level, develop a central anonymised feedback mechanism for staff views which would manage the information independently and disseminate it appropriately to the relevant departments. |

## 5.3 Leadership

### Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| 5.3.1 | The HR director, who is highly respected both personally and professionally within the HR Division and the university as a whole.   |
| 5.3.2 | The significant improvement in the standard of HR service to departments and faculties over the last few years.   |
| 5.3.3 | The important contribution the division has made in supporting the university's growing strength in research.   |
| 5.3.4 | The evidence that the HR team is professionally strong and close-knit, which is clearly a reflection of the leadership of the HR director and senior members of the division.                         |
| 5.3.5 | The effective contribution of the HR director to corporate strategy and decision making through his participation in the Executive Committee, to the benefit of the organisation and the HR function. |
| 5.3.6 | The development programme for aspiring leaders and its contribution to succession planning.   |

### Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

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|--------|--|
| 5.3.7  | Initiate a review led by the HR director, on behalf of the Governing Authority, of the approvals process for staff appointments, taking account of international best practice, and make recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the process. |
| 5.3.8  | Maximise the scope for independent decision making by staff, for example by reducing the frequency of one-to-one meetings with managers and identifying named contact persons for specific HR functions.   |
| 5.3.9  | Encourage HR senior staff to contribute more widely to UL staff development initiatives in order to share their expertise and build relationships.   |
| 5.3.10 | Continue efforts to bring about changes to CORE through collaboration with other higher education institutions.  |
| 5.3.11 | Ensure that the practice of 360° appraisals for the senior members of the HR Division take place regularly at two- to three-year intervals and promote its wider use within the university.  |

## 5.4 Involvement of Staff

### Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

- 5.4.1 The evident staff commitment and collegial working environment.

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- 5.4.2 The support from the division, both financial and in terms of time off, for professional development including third-level education.

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- 5.4.3 The effective use of the PDRS review system which gives HR staff the opportunity to review progress and set out goals and objectives for the year ahead.

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### Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

- 5.4.4 Develop a formal training and procedures manual.

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- 5.4.5 Develop a plan for further cross-training throughout the division to encourage flexibility and resilience.

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- 5.4.6 Consider further ways to exploit the expertise and experience of HR staff in professional development within the division and the wider university.

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## 5.5 Continual Improvement

### Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

- 5.5.1 The division's ISO accreditation which has laid a very strong foundation for the work of the QRG.

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- 5.5.2 The culture of proactive improvement and the palpable sense of ownership of quality within the HR team.

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- 5.5.3 The process for mapping faculty, divisional and individual goals which facilitates the achievement of the university's objectives.

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### Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

- 5.5.4 Strengthen the analysis and interpretation of performance data including KPIs, feedback data and other metrics. In doing so, consider issues such as the demographics, impact on strategic objectives for the division and the university, and the prioritisation of actions.

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- 5.5.5 Simplify or collapse the number of processes and, at a holistic level, look for opportunities for refinement or for the removal of redundant processes.

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- 5.5.6 Consider the scope for an enhanced university-wide approach to staff surveys in order to generate more meaningful targeted information on the performance of the support units, such as HR.

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## 5.6 Process Approach to Services Provided

### Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

5.6.1 The continuing ISO reaccreditation process.

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5.6.2 The visual mapping of the core HR processes.

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5.6.3 The ongoing development and maintenance of the process maps.

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5.6.4 The use of a document control process.

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5.6.5 The use of the Corrective & Preventative Action (C&PA) Register.

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### Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.6.6 Evaluate in a timely manner the impending changes in ISO format in relation to continuing with ISO or sourcing an alternative.

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5.6.7 Make key process maps available in an appropriate format to the wider customer base and communicate their availability.

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5.6.8 Streamline appropriate processes to make online form submission more efficient.

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5.6.9 Ensure that important quality documents (such as the document control register and the C&PA Register) are stored in a format that protects them from loss and corruption.

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5.6.10 Expand the functionality of the C&PA Register to capture and track quality issues raised from all feedback sources.

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## 5.7 Systematic Approach to Management

### Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

- 5.7.1 The structured, rigorous, detailed and systematic HR QMS.

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- 5.7.2 The documented improvements over recent years in a range of programmes and services which deliver enhanced value to stakeholders.

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- 5.7.3 The value HR places on stakeholder input and its focus on outputs that respond to stakeholder needs.

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### Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

- 5.7.4 Critically review the volume of document control changes to determine the real added value for the business.

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- 5.7.5 Consider ways in which to raise wider awareness of the high standard of the HR QMS in order to support the culture of continual improvement across the university.

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## 5.8 Factual Approach to Decision Making

### Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

- 5.8.1 The development of the HR Dashboard for managers.

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- 5.8.2 The pilot of the ePerformance system.

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- 5.8.3 The effective workflow of employee data through HR to Payroll via CORE.

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- 5.8.4 The use of KPIs to measure progress.

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### Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

- 5.8.5 Continue the development of the HR Dashboard and other HR reporting tools for managers to move from 'interesting' to 'useful'.

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- 5.8.6 Keep pushing for improvements to CORE by putting pressure on the provider to meet customer needs.

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- 5.8.7 Continue the search for a suitable e-performance system, ideally one that is compatible with current systems such as CORE and appropriate for potential future developments.

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- 5.8.8 Ensure that the action plans from the 2010 staff survey have been fully addressed and publicised to the entire university.

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- 5.8.9 Ensure sufficient commonality of questions between the 2010 and 2015 surveys in order to benchmark progress.

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- 5.8.10 Ensure that KPIs are the right ones to support the business objectives of the division.

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## 5.9 Supplier, Partner and Community Relations

### Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

- 5.9.1 The use of Unijobs to supply and manage contract staff.

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- 5.9.2 The presence of HR on a wide range of UL committees as an important means of wider engagement and influence.

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### Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

- 5.9.3 Review the approach to sourcing and recruitment of high-calibre candidates to senior posts in order to maximise UL's ability to attract the best possible people.

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- 5.9.4 Review HR involvement with stakeholders so as to proactively support their strategic planning for short-, medium- and long-term needs.

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- 5.9.5 Develop a stronger HR identity, in partnership with the new Director of Marketing, which enhances the profile of the division and the value of the wide range of initiatives it undertakes across campus.

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- 5.9.6 Take steps to ensure that, as it diversifies and develops its activities, Unijobs remains fully compliant with all UL's processes and procedures.

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## ***Appendices***

### **A Membership of the Quality Review Group:**

Rob Allan	Director of Human Resources, Loughborough University
Richard Arnett	Associate Director of Quality, Royal College of Surgeons
Patricia Bourke	Accounts Research Office, University of Limerick
Charles Dolan	HR & Educational Consultant, Charles Dolan Consulting Ltd., Cork
Bill Harvey	Chair, Former Director, QAA Scotland
Judi Kinnane	Associate Director Recruitment & Staffing UK/IRL, MSD
Ailish O'Farrell	Technical Writer, Limerick

### **B Membership of the Department SET Team:**

Alison O'Regan	Team Leader
Yvonne Coughlan	
Ellen Keegan	

### **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 and stakeholders 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.