University of Limerick

Linked Provider Framework

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1 Overview of framework

1.1 Policy statement

The University of Limerick (UL) will consider entering into a linked provider relationship (referred to in this document as 'linked provision') with third-party educational providers on a case-by-case basis. UL will enter into such a relationship only if (i) the relationship aligns to the strategic aims and objectives of the University and is compatible with and supports UL's Quality Policy and Policy for Collaborative and Transnational Provision and (ii) it can be demonstrated that statutory requirements associated with linked provision can be fully met.

1.2 Legal and Statutory Context

The *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*, amended 2019 establishes the concepts of a designated awarding body and a linked provider and defines each as follows:

> **Designated awarding body (DAB)**: "a previously established university, the National University of Ireland, an educational institution established as a university under section 9 of the Act of 1997, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland"
>
> **Linked provider**: "a provider that has a place of business in the State and is not a designated awarding body but enters into an arrangement with a designated awarding body under which arrangement the provider provides a programme of education and training that satisfies all or part of the prerequisites for an award of the designated awarding body"

UL falls under the definition of a DAB. As such, UL recognises its statutory responsibilities in respect of linked providers and commits to meeting those responsibilities. The Act places an obligation on DABs to approve, monitor and review its linked providers' quality assurance (QA) procedures. The provisions of the Act are supported by *Sector-specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies*, published by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

The relationship between UL and its linked providers is largely framed by inter-institutional Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) or Memorandums of Agreement (MoA) and the quality assurance and enhancement (QAE) oversight arrangements articulated in this framework document.

1.3 Implementation

Overall responsibility for ensuring the framework is implemented lies with the Provost and Deputy President.

1.4 Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to:

1. Articulate a UL policy framework in respect of linked providers
2. Present procedural documentation that facilitates the implementation of this framework
3. Set out governance and oversight responsibilities in relation to linked provision
4. Provide information in a transparent manner to interested parties, internal and external to the University, in relation to linked provision policy and procedures
5. Provide assurance to interested parties that UL's linked provision arrangements are in line with national statutory requirements

2 Linked Provision at University of Limerick

2.1 Defining a Linked Provider

In some instances, the classification of a collaborative provider1 as a linked provider can be less than straightforward. In developing its definition of a linked provider, the University has considered the following

- The 2012 Act as a whole and the principles and ethos underpinning the Act
- QQI sector-specific guidelines for DABs
- QQI core statutory guidelines
- The UL quality statement and the contextual institutional QA architecture
- Contextual dialogue between the Irish Universities Association Quality Officers (IUAQO)
- Dialogue with QQI

A linked provider conforms to the description provided in the 2012 Act as amended with the following additional clarifications.

2.1.1 A linked provider is a legally independent entity registered and operating within the Republic of Ireland with a primary focus on education and training.

2.1.2 A linked provider may be a public or private entity.

2.1.3 A linked provider independently operates its own QA policies and procedures. The QA procedures may be aligned in part or in full with UL's QA procedures or may be developed independently of UL's procedures.

2.1.4 Students of the linked provider are not students of the University of Limerick. However, the two institutions may agree terms on which their staff and students may have access to their respective facilities.

2.2 Exclusions

Collaborative provision arrangements are not considered to be linked provision arrangements under the following circumstances:

2.2.1 Where the entity delivers a UL programme in part or in full in which the students are registered as UL students and in which the programme(s) and students thereon are subject to direct QA oversight by UL to a level that assures equivalence of student experience with students undertaking a UL programme in which no collaborative provider is involved. Exemplar QA oversight mechanisms would include:

- Direct UL programme approval/monitoring/review
- Programme grades approved by UL Academic Council

[1] Collaborative provision: Where two or more higher educational providers are involved, by formal agreement, in the provision of a programme of higher education and/or training.

- If a UL academic acts as course director/joint course director for the programme
- If students on the programme are included in UL student satisfaction feedback mechanisms

2.2.2 Where the entity contributes to the delivery of taught UL programmes but not to all students undertaking the programme. Illustrative examples would include entities providing experiential learning opportunities (e.g. Cooperative Education placements, teaching practice, etc.) as well as entities participating in student exchange programmes.

2.2.3 Where a UL-registered student undertakes a programme of research, in part or in full, using third-party facilities. Illustrative example: A student undertaking a PhD in an industrial setting under the supervision/co-supervision of a UL academic.

2.2.4 Where an entity has entered into an articulation arrangement[2] with UL

2.2.5 Where an entity has provided training or experience (prior learning) to a student, which has facilitated that student's entry on to a UL programme and/or facilitated the student to gain an exemption from certain elements of a UL programme.

2.2.6 Where:

(a) A *national* collaborative partner is a recognised DAB under the 2012 Act.
(b) The award is a joint award with the collaborative partner – national or international.

2.3 Linked provider programmes not validated by UL

A linked provider may deliver additional programmes of education, in part or in full, which are not validated by UL. Under such circumstances, UL's responsibility in relation to QA arrangements and oversight is limited to those elements of linked provider arrangements and activities that impact upon the standard and quality of the experience of students undertaking UL-accredited programmes.

2.4 Linked Providers and International Students

A linked provider recruiting or intending to recruit international students is required to apply independently to QQI for authorisation to use the TrustEd Ireland mark and to co-operate with UL as the DAB and QQI in the monitoring of the implementation of the *Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners*.

2.5 Protection of enrolled learners

In the event of the termination of the academic linkage between UL and the recognised linked provider, UL shall ensure that the learners enrolled on linked programmes leading to awards of the University of Limerick are protected. UL and the recognised linked provider shall implement, on commercially reasonable terms, arrangements to enable students who are enrolled on programmes

[2] Articulation arrangement: An arrangement whereby all students who satisfy academic criteria on one programme are automatically entitled to be admitted with advanced standing onto a UL programme.

that are accredited by UL and are the responsibility of the recognised linked provider to complete their programmes. These arrangements will be set out in the underpinning MoU/MoA between UL and the recognised linked provider.

2.6 Collaborative provision

Collaborative provision arrangements that are considered not to be linked provision arrangements are subject to alternative QA arrangements and oversight appropriate to context as set out in the Policy on Collaborative and Transnational Provision and detailed in their respective memoranda of agreement.

2.7 Fees

The University reserves the right to charge fees to linked providers for accreditation and other services. The nature of these fees is agreed from time to time with the provider and set out in the Memorandum of Agreement.

2.8 Procedures governing linked provision

UL will implement and periodically review an integrated framework of procedures for (i) establishing a relationship with prospective linked providers; and (ii) routinely monitoring and periodically reviewing the relevant QAE procedures of recognised linked providers.

2.9 Procedures relating to standards, awards and certification

2.9.1 The integrity of the awards and QAE procedures of linked providers is an integral part of UL's academic standards and Quality Policy. The University will ensure that each award made on behalf of the recognised linked provider within the specified academic linkage framework, is recognised within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). UL will ensure that learners enrolled on programmes leading to awards recognised within the NFQ acquire the standard of knowledge, skills and competencies associated with the level of that award.

Programme Development and Modification

2.9.2 UL will safeguard that the development and validation of new programmes by the recognised linked provider are conducted in a systematic way and are designed in a constructively aligned way so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes and appropriate assessments. Except as where provided for in 2.9.6 below, proposals regarding the accreditation of new and modified programmes of the recognised linked provider shall be directly submitted to UL's Academic Programme Review Committee (APRC). Validation panels for new or modified programmes of the linked provider shall be convened and chaired by UL. Such validation panels shall comprise representatives from both institutions and external advisors.

2.9.3 UL will ensure that professional regulatory bodies and QQI are consulted with on the standards and quality assurance of programmes leading to qualifications in regulated occupations delivered by linked providers.

2.9.4 The recommendation for a new or modified programme award made by the validation panel shall be submitted to UL Academic Council for approval.

2.9.5 The recognised linked provider shall commit to ongoing monitoring and periodic review of all linked programmes in a way that offers opportunities to evaluate and enhance the programme with the benefit of feedback from staff, students, external examiners, employers, student enrolment, retention, progression, completion and graduate destination data, as relevant. The outcomes of annual monitoring, which will include an action plan for quality enhancement, shall be communicated to UL Academic Council in an open and timely manner.Depending on context and the nature of the academic linkage, Academic Council may delegate decisions regarding the validation of new programmes and the modification of existing programmes to the relevant academic authorising body of the recognised linked provider. That authorising body of the linked provider shall communicate in writing its decisions to the chair of Academic Council in a timely manner.

Academic Regulations, Awards and Certification

2.9.6 The academic regulations for UL-accredited programmes offered by the recognised linked provider shall be, or shall align as fully as practicable with, the academic regulations of UL. Exceptions to this stipulation may be requested by the recognised linked provider through formal written proposal to Academic Council.

2.9.7 Academic Council shall ratify all awards made on linked programmes leading to awards of the University of Limerick.

2.9.8 On behalf of Academic Council, examination boards for programmes offered by the linked provider that lead to awards of the University of Limerick shall be constituted and shall make recommendations to Academic Council in relation to the awards to be made to students who have completed such programmes of study.

2.9.9 Academic Council shall meet to consider the recommendations of a duly constituted examination board for linked provider programmes leading to awards of the University of Limerick. The recommendations of the examination board shall be communicated to Academic Council for ratification in a timely manner. The linked provider will have appropriate governance procedures in place to ensure that recommendations made to UL Academic Council in accordance with academic regulations agreed with UL.

2.9.10 Depending on context and the nature of the academic linkage, Academic Council may delegate responsibility for the ratification of awards to the relevant academic authorising body. This delegation will be made on a case-by-case basis.

2.9.11 Appropriate awards shall be granted to the candidate on programmes leading to awards of the University of Limerick. Academic Council shall determine the award, including grade and classification (if applicable), to be conferred on the candidates considered.

2.9.12 Academic Council shall retain the power to appoint external examiners to the programmes offered by the recognised linked provider. The functions of such external examiners shall be those set out in the University's Policy for External Examining

2.9.13 UL is responsible for the production of the certificates of award in accordance with UL's Parchment and Heraldic Guidelines. Linked Providers may not produce or reproduce parchments or -e-parchments. The Linked Provider is responsible for producing and distributing the diploma supplement to its students, unless otherwise agreed with UL.

2.9.14 UL is responsible for maintaining a record of the award conferred on graduates of the linked provider. The linked provider is responsible for providing the data required by UL for this purpose and for its responsibilities in 2.9.14 as set out by UL from time to time.

2.9.15 The linked provider shall provide programme and award data to UL to allow UL to fulfil its statutory obligations as agreed through the Joint-Sectoral Protocol between Designated Awarding Bodies and Quality and Qualifications Ireland for the Inclusion of Qualifications within the National Framework of Qualifications for the formal inclusion of awards made by designated awarding bodies within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) through the Irish Register of Qualifications. This data shall be made available on at least an annual basis.

2.9.16 UL and the linked provider shall establish a data protection best practice protocol. Both institutions shall fully adhere to the protocol and ensure full compliance by all authorised users in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Acts 1988–2018. The protocol shall be subject to periodic review in order to take into account any changes in data protection legislation.

Access, Transfer and Progression

2.9.17 UL will ensure that the recognised linked provider has robust approaches in place in regard to learner admission, progression and recognition. This means that there are pre-defined and published regulations that are consistently applied by the linked provider to cover all areas related to learner admission, progression, and recognition of awards. Access policies, admission processes and criteria are established and implemented consistently and in a transparent manner and, as appropriate, in accordance with national policies and procedures for access, transfer and progression.

2.9.18 Learners enrolled on programmes of linked providers leading to awards of the University of Limerick shall not be registered students of UL.

2.10 Agreements

Using the principles outlined above, the precise nature of the relationship between UL and the linked provider shall be articulated in an MoU/MoA, which will stipulate the specific arrangements agreed between UL and the linked provider. The MoU/MoA will be developed in accordance with procedures set out in the *Policy on Collaborative & Transnational Provision* and *Contract Signing Policy* and will contain clauses that shall include but are not limited to:

1. The scope of provision covered by the agreement.
2. A statement on what aspects of this policy, if any, are delegated to the linked provider.
3. A statement on the academic regulations that apply to the linked programmes.
4. A statement on the obligations of the linked provider in respect of quality assurance procedures.
5. A statement outlining the content and design of the award parchment to be provided to learners.
6. A statement on the obligations of UL to approve, monitor and review those procedures.
7. Arrangements for the termination of the agreement.
8. A statement on the arrangements in place for the protection of learners in the case of termination of the agreement.

3 Procedures for establishing a relationship with a prospective linked provider

3.1 Background, context and scope

From time to time, the University of Limerick (UL) may wish to consider establishing a linked provision relationship with a prospective (new) linked provider. This section of the framework describes the procedures UL follows when doing this and, if appropriate, when establishing such a relationship. Incorporated into these procedures are relevant requirements of the 2012 Act and the aforementioned QQI guidelines.

3.2 Procedural elements

3.2.1 Procedural element 1: Initial consideration of a potential linked provision arrangement

Any initial approach by a prospective linked provider is referred to the UL Standing Panel on Collaborations, (SPC) which acts on behalf of the University. The SPC considers the approach and determines if further evaluation is strategically desirable or otherwise.

Depending on the scope of provision of the prospective linked provider, the approach must have the endorsement of the relevant Dean(s) in the case of a particular discipline(s) or of the Provost and Deputy President if the prospective provider is a comprehensive provider.

If the SPC has made a decision in principle to further consider the establishment of a linked provision arrangement, the steps below will be followed.

3.2.2 Procedural element 2: Due diligence

On behalf of Academic Council, the SPC constitutes a Partnership Evaluation Panel (PEP) which carries out due diligence, including assessing the quality of the applicant's academic provision, its commitment to student representation, its governance, financial health, support for students and QAE procedures (see Procedural element 3 below).

The PEP oversees the due diligence process and ensures that the academic linkage aligns to the strategic priorities of the University. The PEP may consist of different sub-panels depending on expertise. The Provost and Deputy President as Chair of the PEP oversees the assessment of QAE documentation. The PEP may co-opt additional members with appropriate quality-related expertise to assist in this process, as they deem appropriate.

To support the due diligence process as part of the application, the applicant must provide documentation that enables the following requirements to be assessed:

- Legal status, reputation and compliance
- Financial sustainability
- Organisational structure, governance and management of QAE:
    - References – information about other academic collaborations
    - Disputes, complaints and litigation information
    - Reference checks from existing partner universities
- Equality, diversity & inclusion policies
- QAE system and procedures as outlined below:
    - Programme development, approval, monitoring and review

- Assessment of learners and feedback
- Support for learners
- Learning and teaching, including learning environment, facilities and resources
- Staff recruitment, management and development
- Information and data management
- Public information and communication
- Other parties involved in education and training
- Access, Transfer and Progression
- Protection of enrolled learners
- Research integrity and ethical guidelines

As part of its application for linked provider status, the prospective linked provider submits its draft QAE procedures (as specified, for example, in a Quality Manual) and any related documentation requested by UL. The UL Director of Quality is well placed to advise on the precise nature of the related documentation required, which will depend on context. At a minimum, the prospective linked provider shall be asked to submit an evidence-based self-assessment of how it complies with relevant statutory QQI QA guidelines.

During its review of the prospective linked provider's QAE procedures, the PEP assesses the extent to which the linked provider has met relevant (QAE-specific) requirements. Depending on the context, the Partnership Panel may make a decision based on a desk review and discussion of the documentation submitted. As part of the due diligence process, provisions must be to be made for at least one site visit to the prospective linked provider by the PEP, including a meeting with key stakeholders and a visit to the key learning facilities and resources. Depending on the context, the PEP may seek third-party input into the process.

Following its review of the linked provider's QAE procedures, the Partnership Panel agrees to recommend one of the following four outcomes:

1. Approve the proposed procedures as presented.
2. Approve the proposed procedures as presented but include specific recommendations and timelines for future enhancements.
3. Do not approve the procedures but make recommendations, which must be met prior to resubmitting the procedures for approval.
4. Do not approve the procedures.

3.2.3 Procedural element 3: Approval of the prospective linked provider as a recognised linked provider of UL

The recommended outcome of the due diligence process will be communicated by the PEP to the Quality Committee (as a sub-committee of Executive Committee), the recommendations will be formally approved by Academic Council and, following that, by Governing Authority.

Following approval by Academic Council and Governing Authority, the linked provider will be informed in writing by the Provost and Deputy President of the outcome of the application process.

Once the academic linkage has been approved, a comprehensive Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) shall be developed between UL and the recognised linked provider. The MoA shall make provision for the academic management, assessment and QA processes as set out in section 2.10 of this document. The MoA shall be approved by Academic Council and Executive Committee.

In the event of the termination of an MoA, UL and the recognised linked provider shall implement, on commercially reasonable terms, arrangements to enable students who are enrolled on programmes that are accredited by UL and are the responsibility of the recognised linked provider to complete their programmes.

4 Procedures for monitoring and reviewing the QA procedures of recognised linked providers

4.1 Background, context and scope

This section of the framework document describes how UL monitors and reviews the effectiveness of the QA procedures of its linked providers.

Additional inter-institutional arrangements, such as those specified in or underpinned by an MoU/MoA or localised (e.g. programme-level) arrangements and oversight will continue to operate with a view to complementing this process in terms of the totality of the inter-institutional relationship.

There are two distinct procedural elements described in this section of the framework:

1. Annual monitoring and review of the already-established QA procedures of the linked provider
2. Periodic review of the adequacy and effectiveness of the implementation of the QA procedures by the linked provider

This section of the framework also describes the appeals process that can be invoked by a linked provider to whom UL has informed its intention to withdraw its approval of the linked provider's QA procedures.

4.2 Annual review of established QA procedures

4.2.1 The Director of Quality (DQ) provides the linked provider with a Linked Provider Annual Quality Report (Linked Provider AQR) template and invites the linked provider to return the completed report to the DQ by a given date. The report template may be tailored by the DQ to suit the specific context. The purpose of the report is to provide UL with an overview of the QA activities and enhancements undertaken by the linked provider in the previous year and to indicate planned QA activities and enhancements for the coming year. A sample report template is provided in Appendix D1. If the linked provider's Quality Manual has been updated during the year under review, a copy of the updated manual, with the changes highlighted, must accompany the AIQR.

4.2.2 After receiving the completed AQR from the linked provider, the DQ reviews the report and arranges an annual dialogue meeting to be held between representatives of UL and the linked provider. The meeting is chaired by the Provost and Deputy President.

4.2.3 The annual dialogue meeting provides a forum at which both parties discuss the AQR and broader, relevant QA-related activities. Approval by UL of incremental updates to the linked provider's QA procedures is normally ratified through the annual dialogue meeting. If fundamental changes to the provider's QA procedures are reported or proposed, the chairperson of the meeting refers the changes to Executive Committee and Academic Council.

4.2.4 Following the annual dialogue meeting, UL may request the linked provider to modify the content of its AQR to reflect the meeting's deliberations. The AQR is then published by UL and the linked provider and remains on both websites for a period of 7 years.

4.2.5 By default, the entire AQR is published. However, should UL and the linked provider agree, elements of the AQR can be redacted at the discretion of both parties for reasons such as protecting confidential, business-sensitive information.

4.3 Periodic review of QA procedures and their implementation

4.3.1 At least once every seven years, the Provost and Deputy President, with operational support from the QSU, arranges for a review to be conducted of both the adequacy of the linked provider's QA procedures and the extent to which the provider is implementing the procedures effectively. The review can be coordinated directly by UL or on behalf of UL by a competent authority, such as QQI.

4.3.2 The scope, terms of reference and review process is included in a set of published review guidelines, the content of which is informed by relevant elements of the MoU/MoA, relevant statutory requirements and guidelines, and nationally and internationally accepted norms. The linked provider is provided with an opportunity to comment on the guidelines document before it is finalised. UL retains ownership of the guidelines document and review process.

4.3.3 Following the review, the reviewers prepare a report setting out the findings of the review.

4.3.4 The reviewers provide a copy of the report to UL and the linked provider.

4.3.5 The linked provider provides a response to the report and the findings of the review.

4.3.6 The report and response by the linked provider are considered by the relevant committees of both institutions and then published by both institutions.

4.3.7 The linked provider generates and works on implementing a quality improvement plan (QIP) based on the findings of the report. The linked provider must provide periodic progress reports on the implementation of the QIP to UL within a timeline specified by UL.

4.3.8 If, during its review of the report at 3.3.5 above, UL identifies significant deficiencies in the adequacy or effectiveness of the implementation of the linked provider's QA procedures, it issues 'directions' (section 38 (1) of the 2012 Act) to the linked provider in relation to those issues.

4.3.9 Notwithstanding 3.3.7 above, should UL, at any time, consider there to be serious deficiencies in the linked provider's QA procedures or in the implementation of same, UL can issue directions to the linked provider in relation to those issues.

4.3.10 Where UL considers that the directions issued to the linked provider (in the context of 3.3.7 or 3.3.8 above) have not been complied with, UL notifies the linked provider in writing that it proposes to withdraw its approval of the procedures and includes the reasons for the proposed withdrawal.

4.3.11 Within one month of receiving the notice of withdrawal, the linked provider may submit in writing to UL any observations it has on UL's reasons for proposing to withdraw approval of the procedures.

4.3.12 Where UL continues to consider the QA procedures to be significantly deficient, it notifies the linked provider in writing that it intends to withdraw its approval of the provider's QA procedures from a specified date. The notice shall include the reasons for the withdrawal. UL sends a copy of this notice to QQI.

4.3.13 Where UL withdraws its approval of the linked provider's QA procedures, the linked provider may appeal against that withdrawal to an independent appeals person appointed by UL for that purpose. The appeals process is documented in Appendix D2.

4.3.14 Where an appeal by the linked provider is upheld, UL notifies QQI of that fact within 14 days of the decision being made.

4.4 Appendix D1: Sample linked provider AQR template

The University of Limerick reserves the right to tailor this template to render it more context-appropriate to individual linked providers.

AQR Template for Completion by Xxxxxxxx

The University of Limerick's commitment to quality is articulated in its institutional quality statement (http://www.ul.ie/quality/quality-ul), which commits the University to a culture of continual quality improvement and to complying with national statutory quality requirements.

The purpose of this template is to facilitate Xxxxxx – a linked provider of the University of Limerick – to complete an Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Report (AIQR) in accordance with the relevant provisions of the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*.

Instructions for completion and submission:

Fill in the reporting period and complete the text boxes by overwriting the text within each box. While there is no exact word limit, it is expected that each completed text box would fill approximately half a page to one and a half pages (guideline only). Hyperlinks to websites and online documents can be inserted. Additional supporting material can be submitted along with the completed template.

Please include the Xxxxxx quality manual/quality framework document when submitting this AIQR. That document should incorporate an overview description of quality governance as well as institutional-level quality policies and procedures. Please indicate in Section 1 any changes that have been made (in the current reporting period) to the quality manual/quality framework document.

Please email this completed AIQR along with the Xxxxxx quality manual/quality framework document and any additional relevant documents to the UL Director of Quality, sinead.osullivan@ul.ie, by 30 October annually.

Reporting period (academic year):

Section 1: Quality assurance and enhancement activity and evolution at institutional level

Please describe institutional-level quality assurance or enhancement activity that occurred during the reporting period (e.g. an institutional-level quality-review-related activity). Please include reference to any amendments made to systematic, institutional-level quality assurance or quality enhancement mechanisms, activities, policies or governance arrangements during the period.

The focus of this section should be on institutional-level, quality-related processes, activities, policies and governance arrangements that are either applied systematically or have a systematic effect across the institution (e.g. institutional-level student survey activity, external examination system, institutional-level policies impacting upon the quality of Xxxxxx activities, changes in the structure or resourcing of the quality assurance/enhancement infrastructure of the institution).

In each case, please provide a **brief** description of the innovation; the rationale for its introduction (e.g. to strengthen compliance with a particular item from the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) or a Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) statutory guideline or to implement a particular institutional quality review recommendation); the anticipated impact of the innovation; and, if relevant, the internal reporting structure and how the feedback loop is closed.

Section 2: Quality assurance and enhancement activity and evolution at local level

If relevant, please describe local-level quality-related innovations introduced by individual Xxxxxx units/offices during the reporting period.

Focus on change or innovation in quality-related processes or activities introduced at a local level (e.g. within a specific support or academic unit). In each case, please provide a **brief** description of the innovation; the rationale for its introduction (e.g. to strengthen compliance with a particular ESG, etc.); the anticipated impact of the innovation; and, if relevant, the internal reporting structure and how the feedback loop is closed.

Section 3: Implementation of quality governance and oversight

Please attach (or provide a link to) the Xxxxxx published academic calendar for the reporting period and, if relevant, please indicate and discuss deviations from the detail therein that occurred in practice. If not incorporated into the academic calendar, please attach or provide a link to the schedule of meetings of key governance and quality committee meetings. If relevant, please indicate and discuss deviations from the detail therein that occurred in practice.

Focus on significant deviations from published calendars/meeting schedules.

Section 4: Internal quality reviews undertaken during the reporting period

Please provide detail of any internal quality review activity that occurred during the reporting period.

Please include the name of the unit/activity/academic programme(s) reviewed, the composition of the quality review team (names, positions and home organisations), the dates of the review site visit, a link to any published review reports and any post-review quality improvement plan (QIP) oversight activity undertaken, as appropriate. Please also include a brief update on the overall status of the internal unit/activity/programme review cycle, focusing on any deviations therefrom.

Section 5: Quality activity and interaction with third parties

Section 5a: Please provide details of professional, regulatory or statutory bodies with which you have a relationship (e.g. Teaching Council), focusing in particular on quality-related activities pursued with such bodies over the reporting period (e.g. professional body review activity). Please provide details of the outcomes of any such activity (e.g. professional body review reports and follow-on Xxxxxx activities on foot of such reports, changes in accreditation status, etc.). Section 5b: Please provide details of other third-party institutions (national or international) with which you have a relationship (e.g. programme-based academic linkages), focusing in particular on quality-related activities pursued with such institutions over the reporting period. Please provide details of the outcomes of any such activity (e.g. reports and follow-on activities on foot of such reports, changes in relationship terms or status, etc.).

Section 6: Quality-related objectives over the coming reporting period

Please list and briefly describe each objective.

Section 7: Additional information

Please use this section to provide additional information relating to quality assurance or to report upon relevant quality-focused topics or issues.

I confirm that this AQR was reviewed and approved by [*please insert the relevant Xxxxxx governance body/office/officer*] and constitutes a comprehensive and accurate account of quality-related activities pertaining to Xxxxxx over the reporting period.

_____

Director of Quality, Xxxxxx

This AIQR was submitted to the Director of Quality, University of Limerick on: _____

4.5 Appendix D2: Appeals process for recognised linked providers

Legal context

Under the provisions of the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (section 28*), each designated awarding body (DAB) and linked provider must establish procedures in writing for quality assurance for the purpose of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training, research and enterprise and related services that the linked provider provides.

Under *section 32* of the 2012 Act, DABs must establish procedures for:

- The review by the DAB of the effectiveness of procedures established by a linked provider
- The review by the DAB of the effectiveness of the implementation by the linked provider of those procedures
- The appointment of an independent appeals person for the purposes of hearing an appeal under *section 39* of the 2012 Act (see below)
- The hearing of an appeal under *section 39*

A DAB should review the effectiveness of the procedures established by a linked provider at least once every seven years from the issue of the guidelines (*section 28*) and from time to time as the DAB thinks appropriate (*section 37*). Where a DAB has carried out a review under *section 37,* it may, following consultation with the linked provider concerned, issue such directions, as it thinks appropriate, in writing to that linked provider in relation to the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures established by that linked provider under *section 28* and the implementation by that linked provider of those procedures (*section 38 (1)*). Where a direction is issued under *section 38 (1)* to a linked provider, the linked provider shall comply with the direction (*section 38 (2)*).

Under *section 39* of the Act, where a DAB considers that:

a) directions issued to the linked provider under *section 38 (1*) of the 2012 Act have not been complied with (*section 39 (1a)*); or
b) there are serious deficiencies in the implementation of quality assurance procedures by the linked provider (*section 39 (1b)*),

the DAB shall, by notice in writing, inform the linked provider that it proposes to withdraw its approval of the procedures established by the linked provider under *section 28* and state the reasons for the proposed withdrawal.

A notice under *section 39 (1)* shall state that the linked provider may submit observations in writing to the DAB in relation to reasons for the proposed withdrawal set out in the notice not later than one month after the notice has been served on the linked provider (*section 39 (2)*).

Where, after consideration of any observations submitted to the DAB under *section 39 (2)*, the DAB continues to consider that paragraph (a) or (b) of *section 39 (1)* applies, it shall withdraw its approval of the procedures established by the linked provider under *section 28*, by notice in writing addressed to the linked provider, from such date (not earlier than the date of service on the linked provider of the notice of withdrawal) as it considers appropriate and as is specified in the notice (*section 39 (3)*). A notice under *section 39 (3)* shall state the reasons for the withdrawal referred to in that subsection *(section 39 (4)*).

Section 39 (5) states that where a DAB withdraws approval under *section 39 (3),* the linked provider concerned may appeal against that withdrawal to an independent appeals person appointed by the DAB for that purpose.

Appeals mechanism for recognised linked providers

General

1. An appeal from a linked provider against a decision of UL to serve a notice in writing under *section 39 (3)* of 2012 Act upon the linked provider will be considered under the procedures described below and in accordance with the provisions of *section 39* of the Act.
2. In dealing with an appeal, privacy and confidentiality will be respected. Disclosure about the appeal will be made only insofar as this is necessary for dealing with the appeal or to the extent required by law. UL will nominate an independent person to hear the appeal (the independent appeals person).

Procedure

1. Where UL withdraws approval of a linked provider's QA procedures pursuant to *section 39 (3)* of the Act, the linked provider may appeal against the decision.
2. An appeal must be submitted in writing to the **Corporate Secretary** within one calendar month from the date UL gives written notice to the linked provider that UL proposes to withdraw or has withdrawn approval of the linked provider's QA procedures. The (**UL contact**) shall act as secretary to the independent appeals person.
3. The written appeal must state all the grounds on which the linked provider challenges the decision of UL, and any documentation the linked provider relies upon must be attached. UL shall be given a copy of the grounds of appeal and shall be given a period of one calendar month to provide a written submission with supporting documents to the (**UL contact**). A copy of UL's written submission shall be given to the linked provider. The independent appeals person shall consider the linked provider's written appeal and UL's written submission and shall then convene a hearing.
4. The linked provider and UL may make oral submissions to the independent appeals person at the hearing but may not be represented by another party, including a legal representative.
5. Subsequent to the hearing and within a period of not more than 30 days, the independent appeals person shall do one of the following:
   (a) Allow the appeal and rescind the decision of UL.
   (b) Reject the appeal, in which case the decision of UL shall stand.
   (c) Seek further written information prior to reconvening a second hearing.

   The determination of the independent appeals person shall be given in writing with reasons. If the appeal is rejected, there shall be no further right of appeal.
6. The decision of the independent appeals person will be communicated to UL, the linked provider and QQI within seven working days of the decision being made.
7. The outcome of the appeal will be reported to Executive Committee, Academic Council and Governing Authority.

8. UL may withdraw its written notice served under *section 39 (3)* of the Act at any point up to the time the independent appeals person makes their determination. UL does this by notifying the linked provider and the independent appeals person in writing.
9. The linked provider may withdraw its appeal at any time up to the time the independent appeals person makes their determination. The linked provider does this by notifying UL and the independent appeals person in writing.

Other

1. Venue: UL will secure a room/location for the oral hearing.
2. Payment of expenses: The linked provider and UL will separately be responsible for their own costs.
3. Format of the oral hearing: The oral hearing will be held in private. The independent appeals person will begin the hearing by introducing those present and will then give an outline of the decision against which the appeal is being made, the grounds of appeal and UL's response to these grounds. Both parties to the appeal will be entitled to be heard and to present evidence. Both parties will be given an opportunity to present their case; each will have the right of reply and to question the other through the independent appeals person. The order of speakers is determined by the independent appeals person; this may be communicated to the parties in advance of the hearing by means of a proposed agenda.
4. Timescale: The oral hearing will be completed promptly and efficiently within a reasonable timescale. The hearing may be adjourned for a short period, as required, to review information supplied in the course of the hearing. If necessary, the hearing may be adjourned until a date specified by the independent appeals person.
5. Determination: The determination of the appeal will be made within 30 days of the completion of the oral hearing.

Framework governance, implementation and revision

4.6 Governance

This University of Limerick Linked Provider Framework was approved by:

- Quality Committee on 7th June 2025
- Executive Committee on 3rd September 2025
- Governing Authority (section 1 – Policy statement) on **xx/xx/2025**
- Academic Council on **18/06/2025**

4.7 Review and revision

This framework document is subject to a default review five years from the date of its initial release (see revision history table below). The review will be undertaken by the Provost and Deputy President in consultation with the Director of Quality and existing linked providers.

Any proposed amendment to the linked provision policy statement (section 1 of this document) must be approved by Executive Committee, Academic Council and Governing Authority.

Incremental updates/changes to procedural elements of this framework document (between reviews or upon review) may be instigated and/or approved by the Quality Committee

Rev.	**Date**	**Details of change**	**Policy owner**	**Framework approval pathway**
1	25 April 2019	Initial release	VPAASE	Executive Committee* Academic Council Governing Authority
2	July 2025	Updated to reflect structural changes within UL, implementation of the Policy on Collaborative & Transnational Provision, QQI policy on the Authorisation to use the TrustEd Ireland Mark.	PDP	Quality Committee Executive Committee (3 September 2025) Academic Council (4 June 2025) Governing Authority (30 September 2025)
Effective Date			30 September 2025	
Scheduled Review Date:			30 September 2030	