



**UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK**

**OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH**

**University of Limerick**  
**Academic Programme Review Policy**

*Approved by Academic Council 12 December 2018*

# Academic Programme Review Policy

The University of Limerick has under the Universities Act 1997 a statutory authority to “provide courses of study, conduct examinations, and award degrees and other qualifications”. In fulfilling this function the University is required to ensure that policies and procedures are in place to ensure and assure the quality of the programmes of study and awards made by the University. The 2012 Qualifications and Quality act provides on a statutory basis that the University as a Designated Awarding Body ‘*shall establish procedures in writing for quality assurance for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training, research and related services the provider provides*’. The quality assurance policies and procedures of the University are subject to review by the Quality and Qualifications Ireland authority. The QQI National Guidelines, which are in turn based on their European equivalent, identify good practices in programme approval, programme monitoring and periodic review (these are included in Appendix One).

The University of Limerick is committed to provide an “*outstanding and distinctive experience*” to students registered on programmes offered by the University. To support this aim and assure the quality of programme offered, and in accordance with statutory requirements the University will ensure that each programme of study offered by the University is subject to annual monitoring and review by the relevant Course Review Board, and to periodic review (normally every five years) by an External Panel.

## 1.0 Annual Programme Review of Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes

Each Faculty is responsible for ensuring that all taught programmes offered (or coordinated) by the faculty undergo Annual Programme Review. Academic programmes, where there is progression from an award levels to the next higher award level may be considered as one programme for the purpose of the Annual Programme Review (i.e. progression from Certificate, Higher Certificate, Diploma, Degree, and Higher Diploma to the next higher award level). The annual review will normally occur in January for all academic programmes. In the case of Inter-faculty programmes the Deans of the relevant Faculties will agree a coordinating Faculty to manage the Annual Programme Review.

### 1.1 The Role of the Course Review Board

The Annual Programme Review will normally be coordinated by the Course Director. Faculty Deans or heads of department as appropriate may re-assign this responsibility. The person assigned this task will assume the role and responsibilities of the Course Director on the Course Review Board. The Course Director will convene a meeting of the Course Review Board to obtain their input to the Annual Programme Report (see template in Appendix Three).

Membership of the Course Review Board will include the Course Director who will chair the board, academic members of staff from all appropriate disciplines that contribute core or elective streams to the programme and representatives from the students taking the programme. Other staff and external members may be invited to join at the discretion of the Chairman. Full details of the Terms of Reference and Board membership is shown in Appendix Two.

The Course Review Board will be provided with the following -

- Course Data Report<sup>1</sup> (sample in Appendix Four)
  - *Application data – CAO + International*
  - *New entrant CAO points – minimum and median*
  - *New entrant entry mode – DARE, FETAC, HEAR, and mature*
  - *Student enrolment and progression data*
  - *First year presence and progression after one year*
  - *Graduates by Award level*

- Course specific results from the University of Limerick Exit Survey
- External Examiner reports from the previous three academic years
- First Destination Reports (sample in Appendix Five)
- All available Annual Programme Review Reports since the previous periodic review.

*1 – Course Data Report for Level 9 + 10 programmes currently under consideration*

The Course Review Board will consider the all documentation, review programme performance indicators, highlight examples of good practices, identify issues or trends that require further action and provide a written report detailing the Boards considered response (the Annual Programme Report – Appendix Three). The report, including any proposed action plans, will be considered by the Course Director, department and faculty responsible for delivering the programme before submission to the Academic Programme Review Committee for consideration and reporting to Academic Council.

The issues that the Annual Programme Report will be expected to consider include:

- Key Strengths and challenges of the programme, recruitment, progression, graduation, student destination ( e.g. employment, further study, professional training)
- Implementation of University Policies and/or strategies.
- Feedback from External Examiners
- Feedback from APRC or from any external accrediting body
- Feedback from students and staff.
- Good practices identified.
- Agree response to external examiners, where appropriate.

### **1.2 The Role of the Faculty Board**

Each Faculty Board will present to the Academic Programme Review Committee the annual reports for its programmes together with the Faculty Commentary and Action Plan (using the template provided in Appendix Six) that identifies key strengths and challenges of programmes offered by the Faculty and Faculty-level actions for the coming year.

### **1.3 The Role of the Academic Programme Review Committee**

The Academic Programme Review Committee will consider the Annual Programme Report and the Faculty Commentary and Action Plan from each faculty; provide feedback and recommendations for consideration by the Course Review Boards, department and faculty prior to reporting to Academic Council.

The APRC report to Academic Council will be in the form of a recommendation to the Faculty responsible for the programme: (i) noting the Annual Programme Report and the Faculty Commentary and Action Plan, (ii) recommendations to the Faculty, or (iii) a recommendation that the programme be subject to a full Programme Review.

### **1.4 The Role of the Academic Council**

The Academic Council will be invited to endorse the recommendation of the Academic Programme Review Committee.

## **2.0 Periodic Programme Review of Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes**

Academic Programmes accredited by the Academic Council of the University are subject to the Annual Programme Review process and are normally accredited for an initial period of five years. Academic Programmes that are cognate; or where there is progression from an award levels to the next higher award level may be reviewed together (i.e. progression from Certificate, Higher Certificate, Diploma, Degree, and Higher Diploma to the next higher award level).

Each Faculty and Course Board is responsible for ensuring that all taught programmes offered (or coordinated) by the faculty undergo a full Programme Review within 12 months following completion of the accreditation period (normally after five years). The Faculty, in scheduling programme reviews, should take cognisance of overall programme offering within the faculty and review cognate programmes together. The opportunity to schedule programme reviews that coincide with external accreditation reviews should also be considered where appropriate. The faculty is encouraged to schedule Programme Reviews to occur within 6 to 12 months of any external professional review to minimise duplication. The accreditation schedule will be agreed between the Faculty coordinating the programme and the Office of the Vice President Academic Affairs & Student Engagement.

The objective of the Programme Review is to review the programme(s)' aims and objectives, programme outcomes and Annual Reports, and make recommendations to the Academic Programme Review Committee on the continued suitability and quality of the programme offered. The terms of reference and board membership of the Periodic Programme Review Panel is shown in Appendix Seven.

### **2.1 The Role of the Course Review Board**

The self-assessment report will be compiled by the Course Director in conjunction with the Course Review Board. Faculty Deans or heads of department as appropriate may re-assign this responsibility. The person assigned this task will assume the role and responsibilities of the Course Director on the Course Review Board. The Course Director will convene a meeting of the Course Review Board to obtain the Boards input to the Self-assessment Report. The Course Director may form a core team from to assist in the preparation of the Self-assessment Report.

The Self-assessment Report should incorporate an evaluative section (approximately four pages) with appendices incorporating supporting data including Annual Programme Reports, input and feedback from staff, students, employers, graduates, and other external stakeholders. In order to avoid duplication of effort, Course Review Boards may elect to submit documents supplied to external accrediting institution, including their terms of reference, and the accrediting institution's findings. The Course Director shall supply supplementary documentation to address any of the terms of reference not satisfactorily addressed by the external accrediting institution.

### **2.2 The Role of the Periodic Programme Review Panel**

The Chair of the Periodic Programme Review Panel will convene a meeting of the Periodic Programme Review Panel to consider the Self-assessment Report and produce a Periodic Programme Review Report.

### **2.3 The Role of the Faculty Board**

Each Faculty Board will present to the Academic Programme Review Committee the Periodic Programme Review Reports for its programmes together with the Self-Assessment Report that identifies key strengths and challenges of programmes offered by the Faculty and Faculty-level actions for the coming year. The outcome of the Periodic Programme Review Panel including any action plans will be considered and responded by the departments and faculties responsible for delivering the programme(s) before submission to the Academic Programme Review Committee for consideration.

## **2.4 The Role of the Academic Programme Review Committee**

The Academic Programme Review Committee will consider the Periodic Programme Review Panel reports and the Self-Assessment Reports and subsequently provide feedback and recommendations for consideration by the Course Review Boards, department and faculty prior to reporting to Academic Council.

The APCR report to Academic Council will be in the form of: (i) a recommendation to renew the approval for a period of time, normally five years; or (ii) a recommendation to renew accreditation subject to conditions and for a maximum period of five years; or (iii) recommendation that the programme not be approved for future intakes. Where recommendation (ii) is made in respect of a programme APCR will identify actions required to ensure that the interests of students remaining on the programme are protected.

## **2.5 The Role of the Academic Council**

Academic Council will be invited to endorse the recommendation of the Academic Programme Review Committee.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Quality and Qualifications Ireland Good Practice Guidelines for the Approval, Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes and Awards in Irish Universities**

#### ***Annual Programme Review***

- G.28.** All study programmes are monitored routinely to a sufficient degree, and in just sufficient detail, to assure the quality of their management, teaching, learning assessments and the student experience.
- G.29.** Programme boards and programme co-ordinators are the primary agents responsible for monitoring and enhancement (see Appendix 1.10 for some procedures and processes that may be needed for effective monitoring).
- G.30.** A variety of monitoring procedures and channels are used that, in combination, are sufficient to provide assurance of quality and identify where changes to programmes (and how they are delivered) may be needed or desirable (see Appendix 1.11 for a wide range of options).
- G.31.** Focused monitoring activities are undertaken for all substantial collaborative provisions nationally or internationally, with reporting to both the host institution and the associated institutions.
- G.32.** University and college/faculty systems minimise the workloads associated with monitoring and reporting; for example, data and information are collected and processed just once and are readily available in suitable formats.
- G.33.** Training, guidance, templates, support and back-up to facilitate feedback from students and other monitoring methods are provided centrally.
- G.34.** Students are assured of the preservation of their anonymity when contributing to surveys, regardless of the format used (paper or on-line) to elicit feedback.
- G.35.** The university has regulations, guidelines and supporting documentation (including templates for reports etc.) that define generically the roles and responsibilities of external examiners, and minimum standards for their appointment and their reports. These allow for flexibility, and differences between disciplines (See Appendix 1.12 for some areas that might be included).
- G.36.** There are regulations and procedures governing improvements and changes to study programmes that facilitate enhancements while preserving academic integrity and protecting students' interests (see Appendix 1.13 for one approach to how this might be done).
- G.37.** Programme co-ordinators and boards monitor closely the impact of implemented changes on student workloads, timelines and general experience, particularly with respect to changes to modules that are shared between programmes.
- G.38.** Annual reports by programme boards include sufficient information to allow higher management levels to identify recurring issues as well as important isolated issues (including examples of exemplary practice) (see Appendix 1.14 for a list of data and information that could be included, and also Appendix 1.3).
- G.39.** Students have access to a formal university student complaints process that is separate from routine feedback mechanisms, and information about this process is made available to all students.

#### ***Periodic Programme Review***

- G.40.** University policies and regulations regard 'monitoring' and 'periodic review' of programmes as complementary processes that, together, assure students and external stakeholders of the continued fitness for purpose and relevance of its study programmes to students, employers and society. Periodic reviews of programmes take place at agreed intervals and all associated review reports and action plans are made easily available to internal and external stakeholders.
- G.41.** The university has defined criteria, regulations and guidelines requiring and governing procedures for programme review, that ensure effectiveness and efficiency, and that result in the recommendations arising being discussed, evaluated and acted upon (Appendix 1.15 outlines some options for review processes).

- G.42.** Procedures for reviews of collaborative study programmes are agreed with the participating partners and satisfy the normal requirements of the university for programme reviews.
- G.43.** Reviews by external professional accrediting organisations inform the internal programme review processes. The associated review reports and action plans are considered, processed and monitored as for internally-organised programme reviews.
- G.44.** Reviews of large omnibus programmes with multiple subjects and choices (e.g. leading to awards of BA or BSc) have a focus on the overall structure as it affects student experiences, graduate suitability for employment or further study. They also consider any implications for the standard of the common award (Appendix 1.16 lists some areas that may be relevant to such reviews).
- G.45.** A group of cognate programmes administered by a single programme board is normally reviewed together.
- G.46.** If substantial issues arise, the senior academic officer, with the approval of academic council, may commission at any time a full review of any particular study programme.
- G.47.** The university's system of reviews of academic support services and, in particular, of academic units such as of schools or colleges/faculties is operated so as to complement reviews of study programmes. (Appendix 1.17 further discusses this issue).

## Appendix Two

### Terms of Reference Course Review Boards<sup>1</sup>

- To support and enhance academic quality and standards of the programme of study.
- To review programme performance metrics on an annual basis, and propose actions to be considered by the department and faculty.
- To provide feedback on proposed programme changes for the following academic year.
- To consider reports from external examiners and where appropriate recommend follow-up actions.
- To consider university, external accrediting body or national policy developments on the programme of study, and where appropriate recommend follow-up action.

### Course Review Board Membership (minimum of three, excluding student representation)

- Course Director (act as Chair)
- Academic staff member(s) who are representative of major disciplines contributing to programme (minimum two members).
- Student representative, (minimum one member, maximum of four student members) should be invited to attend the meeting. The Board should ensure that programmes which have a Part 1 and Part 2 structure have where practicable a student representation from each part of the programme. Where a programme comprises distinct major subject areas the Course Director should seek a student representative from each major subject area, subject to the maximum limit above. Where the number of student representatives exceed the maximum limit the student representatives will be invited to nominate from their number a maximum of four representatives to the Course Board. Where the number of nominees exceeds the number of places available the results will be determined by vote of the student nominees. In circumstances where it is not possible to identify student nominees, the Board should ensure that the appropriate student input and perspective is obtained (e.g. focus groups, surveys, etc.) and considered by the Board.
- Co-opted members, placement staff, technical staff, support staff, external staff). Maximum of 25% board membership)

---

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that decisions regarding individual student's academic grades, progression or recommended award levels are decisions for Exam Boards and these matters are outside the remit of Course Review Boards. Course Review Boards should only consider aggregate or anonymised data regarding individual student grades or performance.

## Appendix Three

### Annual Programme Review Report Template<sup>1</sup>

Board Member Name	Position
	Course Director (Chair)
	Academic Staff (Inc. discipline)
	Student (inc. year of study)
	Other staff (inc. rold)
	Other member (inc. role)

<b>Report Area</b>
Strengths and challenges of the programme, the extent to which Graduate Attributes are incorporated into the programme, recruitment, progression, graduation, student destination ( e.g. employment, further study, professional training, )
<b>Course Review Board Response:</b>

<b>Report Area</b>
Feedback from students and staff.
<b>Course Review Board Response:</b>

<b>Report Area</b>
Response to External Examiner reports.
<b>Course Review Board Response:</b>

<b>Report Area</b>
Feedback from APRC, Academic Council or from any external accrediting body.
<b>Course Review Board Response:</b>

<b>Report Area</b>
Good practices identified.
<b>Course Review Board Response:</b>

<b>Report area</b>
Programme changes implemented in the previous period. Programme review plans for the coming year, rationale and analysis
<b>Course Review Board Response:</b>

<b>Report Area</b>
Other issues/practices Course Board
<b>Course Review Board Response:</b>

1 – Responses should be succinct - guideline = 150 words

## Appendix Four

### Sample Course Report

#### Applications

	Academic Year							
	2013/4		2014/5		2015/6		2016/7	
Total Applications	163		152		210		269	
CAO Applications	155	95%	140	92%	197	94%	250	93%
CAO First Preference	14	9%	13	9%	26	12%	37	14%
International Applicants	10	6%	18	12%	19	9%	28	10%

#### New Entrant CAO Points (Enrolled New Entrants based on November Returns to HEA)

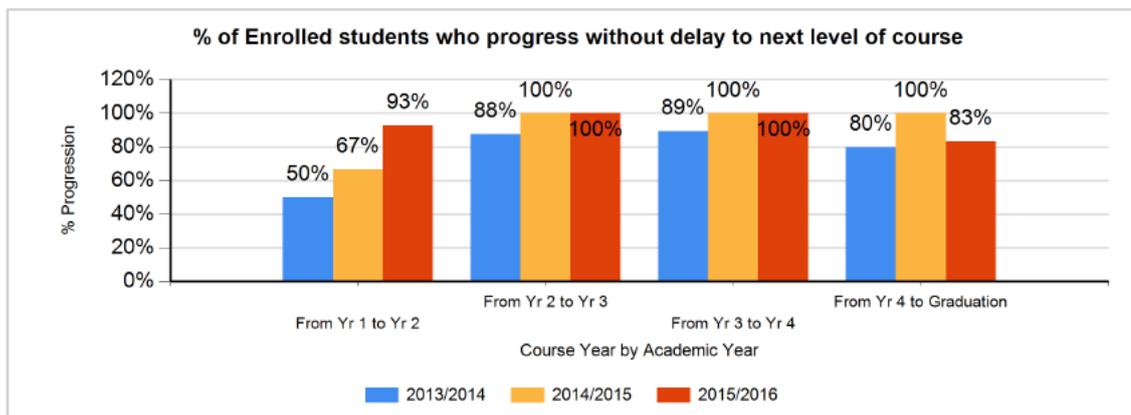
Academic Year	minimum Points	median Points
2013/4	425	475
2014/5	450	485
2015/6	475	485
2016/7	465	500

#### 1st year New Entrant Entry Mode (Access Course, DARE, FETAC, HEAR, Mature)

Academic Year	DARE	HEAR	MATURE
2013/2014			1
2014/2015			2
2015/2016		2	2
2016/2017	1		1

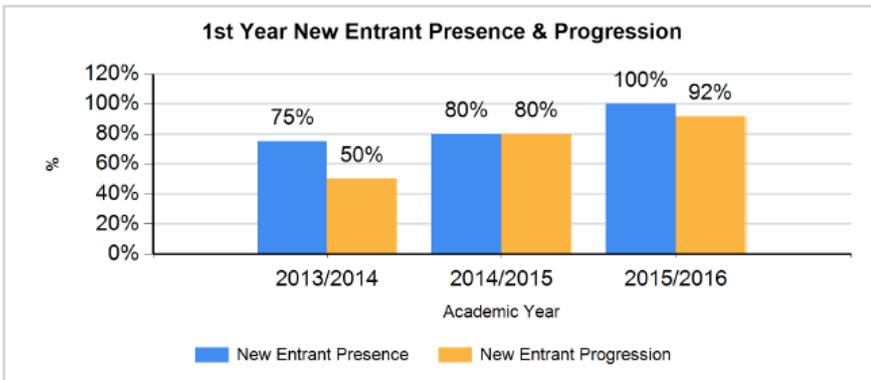
#### Student Enrolment and Progression without delay to next course year of course (based on November Returns to HEA)

Year of Course	Academic Year											
	2013/2014			2014/2015			2015/2016			2016/2017		
	Enrolled	Students who progress to next level of course	% Progress	Enrolled	Students who progress to next level of course	% Progress	Enrolled	Students who progress to next level of course	% Progress	Enrolled	Students who progress to next level of course	% Progress
1	4	2	50%	6	4	67%	14	13	93%	22	-	-
2	8	7	88%	9	9	100%	13	13	100%	33	-	-
3	19	17	89%	12	12	100%	9	9	100%	20	-	-
4	15	12	80%	18	18	100%	12	10	83%	10	-	-



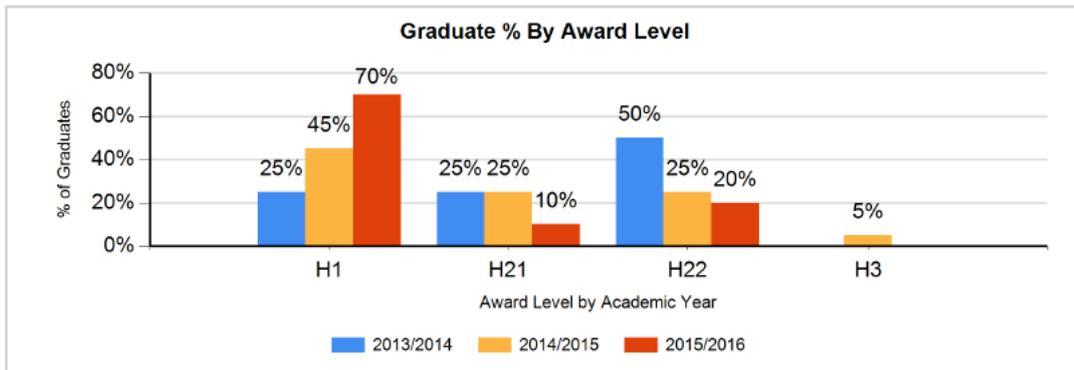
**First year New Entrant Presence & Progression on Course after 1 year (based on November Returns to HEA)**

		Academic Year								
		2013/2014			2014/2015			2015/2016		
Year of Course	New Entrants Enrolled	New Entrants Present on course after 1 Yr	New Entrants who progress to the next course yr without delay	New Entrants Enrolled	New Entrants Present on course after 1 Yr	New Entrants who progress to the next course yr without delay	New Entrants Enrolled	New Entrants Present on course after 1 Yr	New Entrants who progress to the next course yr without delay	
1	4	3	2	5	4	4	12	12	11	
as % of total New Entrants		75%	50%		80%	80%		100%	92%	



**Graduates by Award Level (based on March Returns to HEA)**

		Academic Year					
		2013/2014		2014/2015		2015/2016	
Award Level							
H1		3	25%	9	45%	7	70%
H21		3	25%	5	25%	1	10%
H22		6	50%	5	25%	2	20%
H3			0%	1	5%		0%
Total		12		20		10	

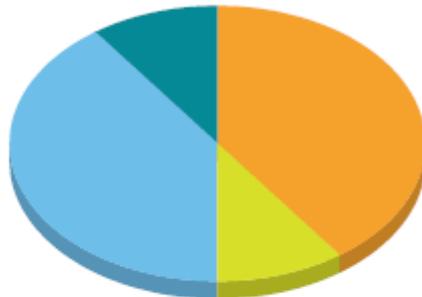


# Appendix Five

## Sample First Destination Report

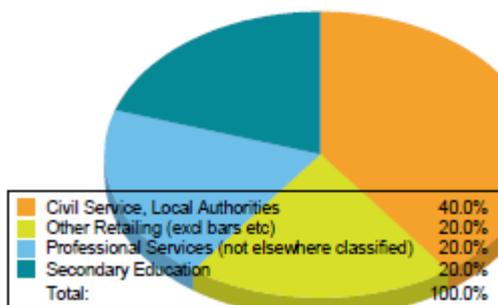
No. of Graduates	15
Total Respondents	10

### Current Situation

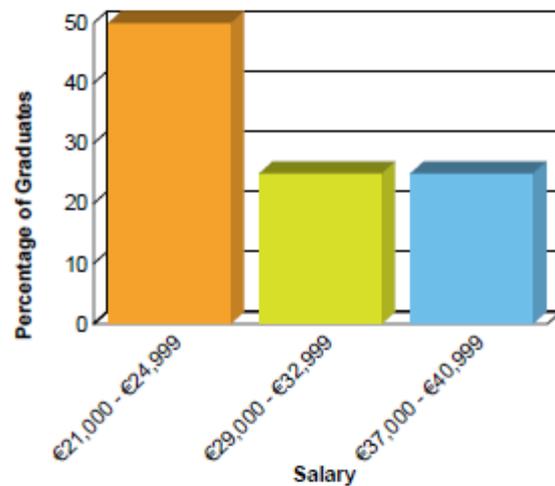


In Employment-Ireland	4	40.0%
In Employment-Overseas	1	10.0%
In Further Study or Training	4	40.0%
Not available for employment	1	10.0%
Total:	10	100.0%

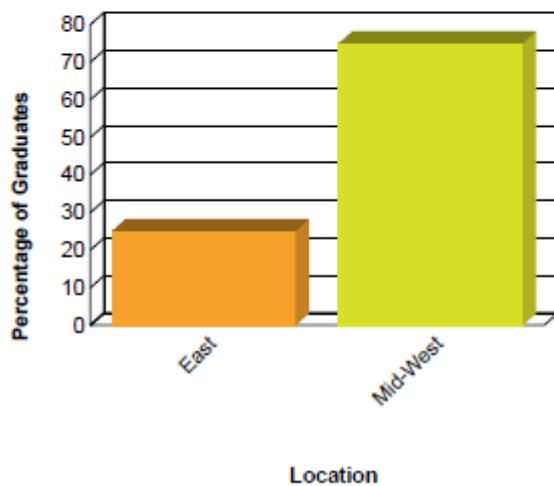
### Sector of Employment



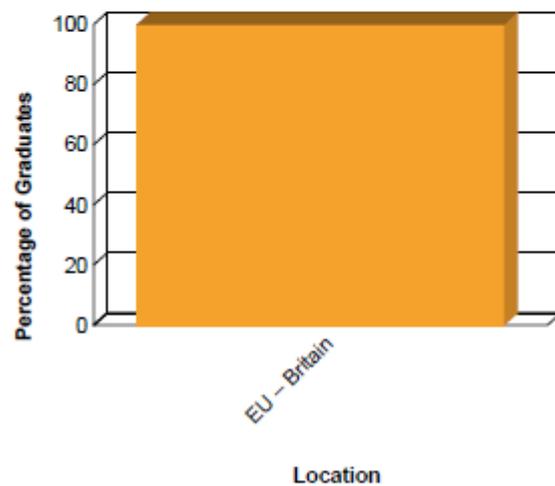
### Salaries (Ireland)



### Region of Employment (Ireland)



### Region of Employment (Overseas)



**Appendix Six**

**Faculty Commentary and Action Plan**

<b>FACULTY / SCHOOL</b>		
Name of Dean	Signature of Dean:	Date:
Academic session under review		<b>Stage 2: Faculty Report</b>

<b>NAME OF DEPARTMENT / SCHOOL</b> <i>(with Head of Dept in brackets)</i>	<b>TAUGHT PROGRAMME PROVISIONS</b> <i>(with mode of study in brackets)</i>	<b>COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMMES</b> <i>(with name of partner/s in brackets)</i>

**A. DETAILS OF FACULTY STRENGTHS:**

COMMENTARY ON FACULTY STRENGTHS:

Best Practice Example/s for University wide Dissemination

<b>B. DETAILS OF FACULTY WEAKNESSES</b>				
<b>COMMENTARY ON FACULTY WEAKNESSES</b>		<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
<b>C. DETAILS OF FACULTY OPPORTUNITIES</b>				
<b>COMMENTARY ON FACULTY OPPORTUNITIES</b>		<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				

**D. DETAILS OF FACULTY THREATS AND CHALLENGES**

COMMENTARY ON FACULTY THREATS AND CHALLENGES		Action	Responsibility	Deadline
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				

**E. ACTIONS FOR PROGRAMMES WITH OVERALL RETENTION BELOW AGREED TARGETS**

Programme Code and course title	Key Action	Responsibility	Deadline	How this will be monitored at Faculty level?
1				
2				
3				

**F. ACTIONS FOR PROGRAMMES THAT DO NOT MEET PROGRESSION TARGETS**

Programme Code and course title	Key Action	Responsibility	Deadline	How this will be monitored at Faculty level?
1				
2				
3				
4				

## **Appendix Seven**

### **Membership of the Periodic Programme Review Panel**

The review will be carried out by a panel external to the department and will include:

- Chair (to be appointed by the VPAA&SE or nominee)
- At least one representative from the university external to the Faculty
- Two external academic subject experts
- At least one employer representative
- At least one graduate, preferably from the programme

The Dean of Faculty in consultation with the VPAA&SE (or nominee) will approve the panel members.

### **The Terms of Reference of Periodic Programme Review Panel**

- Quality and sustainability of the programme(s) including electives and specialist options.
- Graduate progression and employability trends.
- Consideration of external and other stakeholder input, e.g. alumni, employers, accrediting bodies.
- Consideration of student feedback and the students' learning experience.
- Effectiveness of structures for responding to annual programme reports. Particular attention will be required for inter-departmental and interfaculty programmes
- Programmes outcomes aligned with NFQ Levels
- Effects of changes and revisions to programme since last review.
- Alignment with University strategy and policies (e.g. teaching and Learning strategies, Graduate Attributes, Plagiarism guidelines,)