

# INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK (UL)

MARCH 2012 ~ SUMMARY REPORT

## Background to the IRIU Process

Irish universities are required under Section 35 of the Universities Act, 1997 to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance and arrange for a review of the effectiveness of these procedures “from time to time and in any case at least every 15 years.” In 2002, the governing authorities of all seven universities authorised the establishment of the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and delegated to the IUQB the function of arranging regular reviews of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures, which are institutional in their scope. The IUQB operates an institutional review process every five-six years. The IUQB’s Institutional Review of Irish Universities (IRIU) process is designed to confirm whether Irish universities are compliant with the requirements of (i) Section 35 of The Universities Act, and are (ii) consistent with the Part One requirements of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area 2005 (ESG). The IRIU process is undertaken by a team of six independent national and international reviewers selected by the IUQB Board.

## Background to the University

The University of Limerick was established in 1972 as the National Institute for Higher Education, Limerick, and was inaugurated as the University of Limerick (UL) in 1989. Thomond College of Education, which was already on the same campus, was absorbed into UL in 1991. With the River Shannon as the unifying focal point, UL is situated on a single 140-hectare campus that spans County Limerick and County Clare. UL is an independent, internationally-focused university that provides undergraduate and postgraduate programmes to more than 12,000 students, including students from all continents and an increasing number of part-time students who combine study with work. UL accredits programmes for Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick and, from 2012, St Patrick’s College, Thurles, and these students are graduates of the University of Limerick. The University currently employs 1,400 academic, research, support, management, administrative, maintenance and technical members of staff.

## The Review Team

The review was conducted by the following team of six reviewers, trained by the IUQB on Monday 7th November 2011. The Planning Visit to the University of Limerick was undertaken on Tuesday 8th November 2011. The Main Review Visit was conducted by the full team between Monday 5th and Thursday 8th December 2011.

### **Professor Giorgio Margaritondo,**

Dean for Continuing Education and former Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), Switzerland (**Chair**)

### **Professor Malcolm Cook,**

Former Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Professor of French, University of Exeter, UK

### **Dr Danny O’Hare,**

Founding President of Dublin City University, Ireland

### **Ms Jane Denholm,**

Director of Critical Thinking, a public policy consultancy, Scotland, UK

### **Mr Jonas Heikkila,**

Masters Student in Environmental Biology, Abo Akademi University, Finland

### **Ms Stephanie Maurer,**

Scientific Collaborator, Swiss Centre of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (OAQ), Switzerland (**Co-ordinating Reviewer**)

## Review Team Conclusions

Based on the Review Team’s evaluation of the Institutional Self-Assessment Report, supporting documentation and meetings conducted during the Planning and Main Review Visit, the Team found sufficient evidence to confirm:

CATEGORY	KEY REVIEWER FINDINGS
Statutory Requirements	<b>The Review Team found that the University’s activities comply with statutory requirements.</b>
European Standards	<b>The Review Team found the University’s quality assurance arrangements to be overall consistent with Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG).</b>
National, European and International best practice	<b>The University is taking account of national, European and International best practice.</b>

### Review Team Commendations\*

The Team found sufficient evidence to commend the following examples of good practice for further promotion internally, nationally and internationally:

1	A clear understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the University and a strong strategic vision as shown, in particular, by the Strategic Plan.
2	A clearly-organised management structure with a good separation of responsibilities and domains of activity.
3	The long tradition of strong ties with the local economy and community and the continuing promotion of such ties.
4	The excellent support services for students, in particular the office for mature students, the "First Seven Weeks" programme for new students and the effective and committed Centre for Teaching and Learning.
5	The clear vision for the quality enhancement of research and its strategic implementation through the recently-developed, articulated definition of research quality in different domains and the "Bernal Plan" for targeted chairs.

### Review Team Recommendations\*

The Team found sufficient evidence to recommend the following activities to the University for its attention and development:

1	Review the effectiveness and membership of the Governing Authority with a view to a possible size reduction of the Governing Authority and of its sub-committees.
2	Ensure that students are systematically and uniformly involved in all aspects of the governance of the university at all levels; guarantee that student issues are continuously present in the Executive Committee through the Vice President Academic & Registrar.
3	Modify the procedures for departmental reviews, appoint (preferably by the Executive Committee) specific experts as chairpersons without using them more than once, lengthen and develop the format of the reporting, shorten the report publication time and decrease the length of the review cycles.
4	Guarantee in practice the use of the PDR (Performance and Development Review) for all employees.
5	Adopt a simple, generalised and mandatory teaching evaluation. Strengthen the Centre for Teaching and Learning in order to develop more initiatives to promote good teaching practices across the University.

*\*The five key commendations and recommendations are presented in the Summary Report. A comprehensive list of all commendations and recommendations made by the Review Team is presented in the Conclusions Section of the Full Review Report.*

### IUQB Board Ratification

The IUQB Board received and considered the Review Team's report on the review of the University of Limerick at its meeting on 12th March 2012. The Board formally signed off the report for publication, having satisfied itself that the review process was completed in accordance with published criteria.

### Further Information

The full University of Limerick review report, alongside the institutional response to the IRIU, is published in the Quality Reviews Catalogue on the IUQB website at: <http://reviews.iuqb.net/>. Further information on the IRIU review process, internal and external reviews of Irish Universities, and the range of quality assurance and enhancement activities undertaken by the IUQB can be found on the IUQB website [www.iuqb.ie](http://www.iuqb.ie)



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