



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

Report of the Quality Review Group to the Centre for Teaching and Learning

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Quality Review Group (QRG)	Appendix A
UL QSU Website	www.ul.ie/quality
CTL Website	https://www.ul.ie/ctl/
QQI Website	www.qqi.ie

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1 The UL Quality Review Process

The University of Limerick (UL) follows an established process for quality assurance (QA) and quality improvement (QI) in line with that originally developed jointly by the Irish Universities Association (IUA) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB), the latter whose functions are now carried out by Quality and Qualifications Ireland ([QQI](#)). The review process involves an approximate seven-year cycle during which each unit works to improve the quality of its programmes and services and undergoes a rigorous self-evaluation prior to a quality review by internationally recognised experts in the relevant field.

The common framework adopted by the Irish universities for their QA/QI systems is consistent with both legislative requirements and international good practice. The process itself evolved as a result of the Universities Act, 1997, in which the responsibility for QA/QI was placed directly on the individual universities. The process now complies with the [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012](#). The UL Quality Support Unit (QSU) website (www.ul.ie/quality) provides details on the process.

Academic units are reviewed against international standards as described in the document *Quality Review Process for Academic Units*, which is available on the [QSU website](#). The planned schedule of quality reviews for both academic and support units is available on the [QSU website](#).

The UL quality review process comprises the following three phases:

1. Pre-review phase, in which the unit under review conducts a self-evaluation exercise and writes a self-assessment report (SAR).
2. Review phase, in which a quality review group comprising external experts, both national and international, review the SAR, visit the unit, meet with stakeholders and produce a report (this report), which is made publicly available on the [QSU website](#).
3. Post-review phase, in which the unit considers the recommendations of the QRG, devises plans to implement them and reports implementation progress to a Governing Authority subcommittee and UL senior management.

The recommendations made by the quality review group (QRG) form the basis of a quality improvement plan (QIP) prepared by the QSU for the unit under review. Once the site visit is over, the unit sets about evaluating and implementing the recommendations, as appropriate.

Approximately six months after receiving the QIP template from the QSU, the head of unit provides a summary overview of progress to the university's Governing Authority Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance (GASPQA) sub-committee. GASPQA members are afforded the opportunity to discuss and evaluate progress.

Approximately 12 months after receiving the QIP template, the head of unit, Vice President Academic & Registrar, Dean and Director of Quality meet to formally review progress and to agree on any remaining actions to be taken.

2 *The Centre for Teaching and Learning*

Established at UL in 1999 to enhance teaching and learning for students and staff, the [Centre for Teaching and Learning](#) (CTL) was the first such centre in any Irish higher education institution. Since then, the centre has established a national reputation for its leadership and innovation in higher education teaching and learning. Its mission is “to encourage and facilitate excellence in teaching and learning within and beyond the University of Limerick.”

CTL has four main aims:

- To help ensure that effective teaching is valued, supported and developed
- To encourage innovation in teaching and learning activities
- To enhance the learning and development experience for both teachers and learners
- To encourage scholarship and research in teaching and learning

Activities focus on facilitating cross-university initiatives and collaborating with individuals and groups. This collaboration is designed to energise and support teaching and learning at UL. Dedicated to heightening the profile and value of teaching activities, collaboratively engaging in evidence-based research and enabling key teaching innovations, CTL works to support, advise and encourage all those involved in teaching and learning at UL. An integrated series of teaching and learning development programmes and activities address the diverse challenges associated with third-level learning, and CTL works to create both formal and informal arenas within which academic staff can exchange pedagogical ideas and innovations.

The Dean of Teaching and Learning (Dean T&L) is the unit head of CTL. The Dean T&L reports directly to the Vice President Academic & Registrar (VPA&R) and is a member of the VPA&R’s Management Group. The Dean T&L will continue to report to the VPA&R until April 2018, after which time she will report to the Vice President Academic Affairs and Student Engagement within UL’s emerging senior management structures.

3 Preliminary Comments of the Quality Review Group (QRG)

The Quality Review Group (QRG) wishes to thank the University of Limerick (UL) and the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) for their welcome and their hospitality. In particular, we wish to commend the friendly and professional way in which CTL staff engaged in our discussions over the course of the review.

The QRG found CTL's self-assessment report (SAR) to be a clear account of the centre's activities and a thoughtful analysis of its current environment and context. All members of the centre 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 CTL responded to our requests for additional documentation. The SAR formed a very helpful basis for our engagement with the centre.

The QRG met with undergraduate and postgraduate students who had engaged with the services provided by CTL. All spoke highly of the professionalism of staff, the support provided to learners, and the very positive relationships between staff and students within the centre. We also met a selection of UL academic and support staff, as well as staff from partner institutions, all of whom clearly held the staff of CTL in very high regard.

This is a time of major transition for the centre, and indeed for the wider context of learning and teaching at UL - a new Vice President for Academic Affairs and Student Engagement takes up office in April 2018, and the Dean of Teaching and Learning ends her secondment in July of this year. These changes have created some uncertainties for staff in CTL, but also offer great potential for wide-ranging institutional reflection about the strategic role of the centre and its future management and operation. The QRG encourages the university to fully grasp this opportunity, not only to ensure that the current strengths of CTL are fully nurtured in future, but also to review and refresh relevant wider considerations about the university's future strategy for learning and teaching. In particular, we think there is scope for significant strategic change in areas such as the role of teaching qualifications and support for pedagogic innovation.

The QRG feels that CTL is providing a wide range of high-quality resources and support services which are a credit to the university and which make a major contribution to the quality of students' learning experience. However, CTL currently relies heavily on the impressive professional commitment of a small staff cohort, working with a large number of academic staff and postgraduate students. We have concerns that much of this excellent work relies too heavily on goodwill, which is neither sustainable nor capable of ensuring that the centre can fully meet the strategic needs of the university. Our recommendations below are framed to guide improvements which will increase the visibility and impact of the centre, and embed its activities more fully in the wider strategic priorities of the university.

4 *QRG Commendations and Recommendations*

4.1 *Commendations*

The QRG commends the following:

1.	The high motivation of CTL staff to contribute to UL strategy.
2.	The contribution of CTL to the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, which is recognised and praised by relevant external and internal stakeholders.
3.	The hard-working and dedicated CTL staff, who have positively impacted on the staff and student experience.
4.	The goodwill which staff in CTL and the academic directors of the learning centres have established within the current structures.
5.	CTL's collaborative activities, including those of the Technology Enhanced Learning Unit (TELU) and the Student Engagement and Success Unit (SESU), which work across organisational boundaries to support both staff and students.
6.	The impressive array of CTL activities that support academic staff and students, which is extraordinary given the relatively small number of CTL staff.
7.	The passion and commitment of CTL staff members as recognised by external stakeholders.
8.	The work of the five learning centres operating within CTL, which data confirm contributes to the improved learning outcomes and success of students who engage with the centres.
9.	The dedication and enthusiasm of staff in the learning centres as highlighted by students.
10.	The First Seven Weeks programme, which was praised by staff and students as a distinctive and effective approach to induction which engages the whole university community.
11.	The quality and quantity of scholarly outputs from staff in CTL and the learning centres.
12.	CTL's partnership work with the Students' Union (SU) to initiate the National Student Enhancement Programme (NStEP).
13.	The contribution of CTL staff to regional and national policy as evidenced by their work and influence within the Shannon Consortium and the National Forum.
14.	The CTL leadership team which has built up an impressive level of loyalty and goodwill across academic and professional services staff.

15.	The leadership role of CTL in the National Forum project Take 1 Step which produced an engaging and effective set of resources for teachers taking their first steps in online teaching.
16.	The partnership between CTL, the Information Technology Division (ITD), Continuing & Professional Education (CPE) and the Library and Information Services Division (LISD), which resulted in the formation of TELU and an extensive set of online resources for teachers.
17.	The development of the blended learning modules for teachers as part of the suite of professional development offerings.

4.2 Recommendations

4.2.1 Level 1 recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

No.	Recommendation	Brief Justification (Level 1 only)
1.	Align CTL's goals with the goals in the current and upcoming UL strategic plans.	Although it is true that CTL's current aims are so broad and generic that they fit UL's strategy, a realignment will result in a clearer direction for CTL in the future, as well as fostering recognition by the UL Executive Committee of the contribution of CTL to the strategic goals of the university.
2.	Review CTL priorities in order to contribute substantially to the focus at UL on internationalisation.	It is already clear that future investments will be made by UL to promote internationalisation. A proactive, strategic approach by CTL on how to contribute will strengthen CTL's position.
3.	Raise the visibility of CTL by developing a common brand across CTL and the learning centres.	Academic staff and students hold CTL and the learning centres in high regard but many are unaware that the latter are part of CTL.
4.	Strengthen the links between CTL and academic staff by forming a prestigious Learning and Teaching Leadership Academy that is recognised at the highest level.	Academic staff and centre staff have so much goodwill and freely give of their time to lead and support centre activity without recognition. This is not a sustainable model unless recognised and supported at the highest levels within the institution. Once an academy is established, academic staff could, for example, be seconded to CTL for specific projects to support the strategic plan.
5.	Work with senior management to ensure that one assistant dean within each faculty has lead responsibility for learning and teaching within their job description and is active in the organisation and management structure of CTL.	In order for CTL to align its activities with the university strategy, it needs to work more closely with assistant deans to better align resources across and between the structures.

6.	Work with senior management to establish mandatory continuing professional development (CPD).	The current voluntary nature of CPD is not in line with international developments where CPD is seen as an integral part of academic performance and hence part of a university's HR policy.
7.	Move to a more standardised offering for academic staff, including, for example, online resources developed by CTL and train-the-trainer modules.	Given the pressure of work at CTL, the current model that includes individualised support and bespoke workshops is not sustainable.
8.	Work with senior management to redesign the implementation of the Personal Advisor Support System (PASS).	The current implementation of PASS has not been effective in every department. Redesign should include formal timetabling for an introductory meeting, training for staff and provision for staff time to be included in the workload allocation model.
9.	Prioritise the systematic collection of data relating to student use of the learning centres; use the data to prioritise services offered and work with faculties to improve programme modules and assessment tasks which are generating high levels of student demand.	Current year-on-year increasing demand within the centres is not sustainable without reviewing the content and teaching of relevant modules. This process will allow a more strategic investment of centre funding to continue to support those students in greatest need.
10.	Develop more online self-service and interactive resources for students based on data collected on the most common issues faced by students visiting the learning centres.	In order to scale the provision of support for increasing student numbers, the learning centres should develop more self-service resources for students. Students could be directed to use these resources first and then come to the centres for more intensive personal support as required.
11.	Work with senior management to make the transition module, 'Taking the Leap', mandatory for all first-year students.	The transition module quantifiably improves the retention rate of first-year students.
12.	Devise further incentives to motivate students to participate in PASS.	Student participation is currently low. This could be improved by promotion within a longer orientation period or, for first years, by embedding promotion within the First Seven Weeks programme.

13.	Work with senior management to close the feedback loop to students by sharing information on actions taken in response to all student survey findings.	Student survey response rates are currently low. These may improve if students are informed of changes made because of survey feedback.
14.	Work with senior management to review the role of Dean of Teaching and Learning to ensure that this is an influential leadership role and that the holder is positioned to drive the learning and teaching strategy within the upcoming UL strategic plan.	The holder of the dean's role has to lead by influence. This influence can be established by strong executive commitment to a learning and teaching strategy led by the dean.
15.	Develop an evidence base and an outcome-focused approach to support selective strategic interventions to ensure that resources are committed and the impact sustained.	An outcome-based approach would strengthen the business case for additional resources which are needed by CTL. Currently the centre has multiple initiatives and limited resources, which is not sustainable in the current model. CTL might address this by focusing on achieving selected KPIs related to the university's strategic priorities. This would enable it to make a stronger case for additional resourcing.
16.	Work with senior management to develop an implementation plan for achieving the blended learning goals of the university, which includes the resources and timelines required to achieve specific measurable outcomes.	The university has a stated priority to enhance the use of technology in teaching but does not have a well-articulated implementation plan that prioritises the specific technologies and includes the measurable outcomes required to achieve this priority.
17.	Work with relevant areas of the university to establish a dedicated space for teachers to discover and test teaching technologies.	Many teachers are unaware of the technologies currently available to enhance student learning. By establishing a dedicated drop-in space for teachers to discover and test new technologies, TELU could facilitate increased awareness and uptake of digital technologies in learning and teaching.
18.	Develop a visible community of practice for staff engaged in designing and delivering blended and online programme modules.	A visible community of practice would bring together staff in faculties and service areas to share case studies and experiences. This would facilitate dissemination of good practice in the use of technologies in teaching.

4.2.2 Level 2 recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Brief Justification (optional)
19.	Promote the learning centres to students in Week 5 of the First Seven Weeks by working with faculties to initiate specific communications to students in classes.	Students are overwhelmed with information in the first week of semester and by Week 5 are more likely to be in a position to benefit from the resources and services of the learning centres.
20.	Develop a series of case studies outlining different discipline approaches to formative and summative online assessment.	
21.	Establish a wider range of communities of practice to focus on learning, teaching and assessment.	
22.	Work with senior management to align with international best practice by using the phrase 'learning and teaching' instead of 'teaching and learning' across the university.	

Appendices

A Membership of the QRG

Dr. Bill Harvey (Chair)	Former Director, QAA Scotland
Prof Harm J Hospers	Vice-Rector Education, Maastricht University
Professor Geoffrey Crisp	Vice Rector for Education, The University of New South Wales
Professor Clare Mackie	Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Birmingham City University
Ms. Aimee McKenzie	President, Postgraduate Students' Union, University of Limerick
Ms. Ailish O'Farrell	Technical Writer

B Membership of the Unit's Quality Team

Ide O Sullivan (Co-Chair) Mary Fitzpatrick (Co-Chair)	Senior Educational Developer & Co-Director Regional Writing Centre Lead Educational Developer
Fiona Farr	Dean, Teaching and Learning
Maura Murphy	Manager, Teaching and Learning
Clem O'Donnell	Manager, Information Communication Technology
Richard Walsh	Manager, Maths Learning Centre
Liam O'Reilly (TELU)	Director, Information Technology Division
Bernadette Walsh (SESU)	Director, Student Affairs