IUQB

IRISH UNIVERSITIES QUALITY BOARD

IRIU REPORT

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

~ MARCH 2012 ~

IRIU

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW OF IRISH UNIVERSITIES

THE IRIU OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK (UL)

## THE REVIEW REPORT

APPENDICES

FOREWORD BY THE IUQB

The Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) was established in 2002 to support and promote a culture of quality in Irish Higher Education and independently evaluate the effectiveness of quality processes in Irish universities, as required by the Universities Act, 1997.

In 2004, the IUQB and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) jointly commissioned the European Universities Association (EUA) to undertake a customised version of its Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) as the first cycle of institutional quality reviews of the seven Irish universities.

In 2009, following consultation with a range of key stakeholders, the IUQB finalised the process for the second cycle of institutional quality reviews. This process, which operates in line with national legislation and agreed European Standards, is termed the Institutional Review of Irish Universities (IRIU).

Reports arising from institutional quality assurance reviews of and by Irish universities, in accordance with the Universities Act, 1997, are published at: http://reviews.iuqb.net/.

IUQB

IRISH UNIVERSITIES
QUALITY BOARD

IRIU

Institutional Review
of Irish Universities
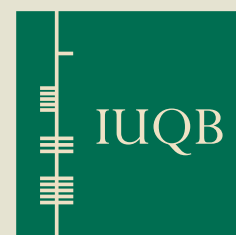
THE REVIEW TEAM

The UL Review was conducted by the following team of six reviewers selected by the IUQB Board from the IRIU Register of Reviewers in November 2010. The Review Team was trained by the IUQB on the requirements of the IRIU process on 7th November 2011. The Chair and Co-ordinating Reviewer undertook a Planning Visit to UL on 8th November 2011. The Main Review Visit was conducted by the full team between 5th and 8th December 2011. The IUQB Board approved the release of the UL report for publication on 12th March 2012.

Prof Giorgio Margaritondo, Dean for Continuing Education and former Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), Switzerland *(Chair)*
» Formerly responsible for all research and teaching activities
» Contributed to the implementation of the reform of EPFL whose objectives are excellence in research and teaching, the elimination of artificial barriers between disciplines, the promotion of junior colleagues, and links between scientific culture and the artistic, social and humanistic culture
» President of the Politecnico di Torino Evaluation Board – responsible for collecting and certifying all statistical data required by the Italian Government

Prof Malcolm Cook, Retired Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Professor of French, University of Exeter, UK
» Worked for 30 years at the University of Exeter as Head of Department, School and Deputy Vice-Chancellor
» Has undertaken numerous UK QAA Audits and AERES (French QA Agency) evaluations
» Member of the EUA Panel of Experts; undertaken three EUA IEP evaluations
» International Expert on two rounds of HEA SIF applications
» Extensive knowledge of European QA systems and former UK Bologna Expert

Dr Danny O'Hare, Founding President, Dublin City University, Ireland
» Chaired national and local boards including the Government Task Force on the Physical Sciences, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, and the Governing Authority of Milltown Institute
» Member of the Irish Medical Council, Director of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust, and Member of the Board of Digitary. Life Fellow of the Irish Management Institute
» Has undertaken international work for the OECD, EU and the World Bank
» Honorary Doctorates from NUI, TCD, DCU, Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster

Ms Jane Denholm, Director of Critical Thinking, a public policy consultancy, Scotland, UK
» Public Policy specialist in further and higher education training and skills
» Over 20 years' experience of strategic policy analysis (11 years as a consultant)
» Former Deputy Director, Universities Scotland and former Deputy Director, Scottish Funding Council (SFC)
» Policy adviser to the Burgess Group on UK Degree Classifications and the Dearing Committee Review, and Secretary to the Garrick Committee
» Member of the SPARQS Steering Committee (Student participation in quality Scotland)

Mr Jonas Andreas Heikkila, Masters Student in Environmental Biology, Åbo Akademi University, Finland
» Study Advisor at the Department of Biosciences & the Department of Natural Sciences at Åbo Akademi University.
» Student auditor on two FINHEEC panels
» Former secretary of Educational Affairs, Students' Union, Åbo Akademi University.
» Within Åbo Akademi University, has worked as a project planner, editing and publishing quality manuals, updating websites and assisting in the planning of audit visits. Also undertaken work on activating students in quality activities and in the planning and analysis of student questionnaires

Ms Stephanie Maurer, Scientific Collaborator, Swiss Centre of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (OAQ), Switzerland *(Co-ordinating Reviewer)*
» Organises accreditation and evaluation procedures at OAQ
» Led the development of the Quality Audit process for Swiss Universities
» Secretary to two ENQA co-ordinated national quality assurance agency reviews
» Engaged with and given presentations at international networks including ECA, ENQA, EUA and EAIE
» Administrator for the Quality Network of the Rectors Conference of the Swiss Universities
» Held posts prior to OAQ in the Swiss Federal Government, Federal Chancellery, and the Ministry of Education in Basel-town and Solothurn

REVIEW REPORT

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

THE UNIVERSITY

The University of Limerick(UL) was established in 1972, as the National Institute for Higher Education, Limerick, in response, in part, to a century-old desire for a University in this important city. Under the leadership of its founding President, Dr. E.M. Walsh, the institution was inaugurated as the University of Limerick (UL) in 1989. Thomond College of Education - a post-primary teacher education college already on the same campus - was absorbed into UL in 1991. UL accredits programmes and awards degrees to students of Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick - a primary-level teacher education college that also offers a BA in Liberal Arts - and, from 2012, of St Patrick's College, Thurles - formerly a college for the education of Roman Catholic priests that now issues degrees in religion and humanities.

The University is situated on a single 140-hectare campus that spans the Limerick and Clare Counties, the two parts being divided by the River Shannon. The campus has a very attractive landscape and incorporates excellent student housing plus modern cultural, recreational, sporting and coaching facilities, including the Arena and a state-of-the-art dry-play area, pavilion and boathouse. These facilities are available to students, staff and the general public. Four major art collections and many pieces of outdoor sculpture enhance the campus environment and encourage contemplation and appreciation. The Bourn Vincent Gallery, situated in the Foundation Building, is dedicated to contemporary exhibitions. The University Concert Hall, which seats some 1,000 people, hosts a great variety of events. The University is home to the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, the Irish Chamber Orchestra and the Association of Irish Choirs. Regular performances by these groups and their guests are a feature of campus life.

UL offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes to more than 12,000 students, including candidates from all continents and an increasing number of part-time students who combine study with work. A feature of the undergraduate curriculum is the co-operative education programme whereby students spend approximately eight months of the programme in external employment; this has been a specific feature of UL since the beginning of NIHEL and the Review Team heard from students that this feature was a major attraction for them. The Review Team commends UL for having had the foresight to recognise the importance of employability skills from the outset.

At the time of the review, approximately 12,000 full- and part-time students were enrolled at UL and its linked colleges, with 8,476 FT enrolments at undergraduate level and 1,718 FT enrolments on postgraduate awards, including 600 PhD candidates. The gender balance - female to male - amongst the student population was at 45%/55% (43%/57% at the undergraduate level and 47%/53% at the postgraduate level). As of December 2010, the University employed approximately 1,400 staff, including 790 permanent staff members, of whom 340 are academic staff. 250 temporary/contract staff (academic and non-academic) are also included in the staffing compliment alongside 205 contract research staff, of whom 165 are academic (full- and part-

time). The UL staff/student ratio is 1:16.4, compared to an average ratio provided to the Team of 1:16.9 for the seven Irish universities. UL delivers its programmes through four faculties: Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences; Education and Health Sciences; Science and Engineering; Business. There are 26 departments divided among the Faculties. Overall responsibility for each Faculty resides with its Dean. In 2007/8, the academic structure of the University was fundamentally changed. The existing structure of six colleges was re-arranged into the present four faculties. The rationale for this restructuring was the University's objective to broaden its curriculum and to strengthen the role of the Deans and middle management. The previous structure was considered by the University to be a limiting factor in this regard. The Review Team found evidence that this new structure operates effectively.

MISSION AND STRATEGY

In December 2010, the Governing Authority approved the University Strategic Plan for 2011-2015. The Strategic Plan is entitled "Pioneering and Connected" and sets the following mission and vision:

The UL mission is to be:
"A distinctive pioneering and connected University that shapes the future through educating and empowering people to meet the challenges of tomorrow".

The UL has the vision to be:
"Internationally known as a distinctive, pioneering and connected institution that provides outstanding student experiences, actively engages in research and is globally and locally connected in terms of its contribution to economic, social and cultural life".

The University aims to implement this mission and vision through four strategic goals. These goals focus on the student experience, the research profile, the international focus and the contribution of the University to the development of the nation and the region. The Review Team noted that, with this strategic line, the University had addressed one of the main governance and management recommendations arising from the first institutional review conducted by the European University Association (EUA) in 2004.

During the Review Visit, the Review Team found evidence that the realisation of the Strategic Plan had already triggered a series of concrete actions within the University. One of the most noteworthy is the strategic commitment to improve research quality. In practical terms, there is a campus-wide campaign to encourage staff involved in research to enhance the quantity and quality of their publications and the level of the journals selected for publication.

The University management team was conscious that research excellence can only be achieved in a limited number of domains. The Review Team found evidence that efforts are focused on research directions that are relevant to the University's traditionally strong areas and to the broad regional economy, while keeping the door open to new initiatives and opportunities. The Review Team noted with interest that the University was developing an initiative - the "Bernal" plan - to recruit ten new professors with outstanding research records in three targeted areas that are close to its interests; the recruitment will use chairs with partial

external support. The Review Team strongly endorses this approach and recommends considering in the "Bernal" plan, if possible, appointments of outstanding candidates at the junior level.

The University acknowledged that the shift from a "regional" University that is very teaching oriented to a multi-disciplinary research University can create tensions within its staff and student populations. The Review Team was confident that the University had sufficient plans in place to provide for a smooth transition in its approach. The leaders of UL were also found to have a clear desire to improve the University's position within the international rankings. The Review Team believes that, while rankings are important for any University, UL must not detract from its unique and strong national and regional position by over-emphasising its strategy towards better international rankings.

Overall, the Review Team was impressed by the strong strategic vision at UL that emerged, in particular, from the discussions during the Review Visit, particularly with President Barry.

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

GOVERNING AUTHORITY

The Governing Authority (GA) of the University of Limerick is a 34-member board. Its main responsibility is to approve high-level strategies, policies, statutes and regulations as well as the annual budget of the University. In accordance with the Universities Act, 1997, GA members are appointed for five years. The President is appointed by the GA as the chief officer of the University for a period of 10 years and is responsible to this body. President Barry was appointed in 2007.

Members of the GA include senior University officers, elected representatives of staff, students and graduates, representatives of the wider community (industry, business, the professions and the regional community) and nominees of local and national government. The GA has nine sub-committees that deal with such topics as strategic planning and quality assurance, audit, finance, campus development, access to UL, student affairs, human resources and honorary doctorates, each of which reports to GA on a regular basis. The GA meets on average once a month.

The Review Team met with a small group of members of the University Governing Authority and analysed examples of the minutes of both the GA itself and its sub-committees. The Executive Committee makes recommendations to the specific GA sub-committees regarding strategic issues. From the evidence available to the Review Team, there appeared to be duplications between the work of the GA and its sub-committees. Substantive deliberations appear to be handled at the sub-committee level. This may limit the valuable contributions of external GA members on strategic matters. It is presumed that the rather large size of the GA is, at least in part, the cause of the devolution of matters to sub-committees, and the Review Team recommends that a critical review be undertaken of the effectiveness, composition and size of the GA and of its sub-committees, in accordance with national developments with the implementation of the Hunt Report and the National Strategy for Higher Education in Ireland to 2030. Within this process, the University may also consider reducing the overall size of the GA and the number of its sub-committees while also enhancing the presence of the regional business community.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, MANAGEMENT COUNCIL AND ACADEMIC COUNCIL

The Executive Committee is the senior management committee and includes the President, Vice-President Academic & Registrar, Vice-President Research, Director of Finance, Director of Human Resources and Deans of Faculties. The Executive Committee is responsible for the development of strategic policies and procedures, the monitoring of corporate performance and ensuring that all aspects of the corporate function operate with optimal efficiency and effectiveness. The Executive Committee meets approximately once a week.

The second tier in the management structure is the 70-member Management Council including the President, Vice-Presidents, Deans, Directors of support divisions, Heads of academic departments and faculty management. The mission of this body is to advise the Executive Committee and support the implementation of the University strategic plan. The Management Council meets four or five times per year.

The Academic Council "controls the academic affairs of the University"; this includes, in practice, the approval of all new programmes and changes to existing programmes. Chaired by the President, the Academic Council includes senior officers, Deans of faculties, heads of academic departments, Student Union officers, assistant deans of academic affairs and elected staff representatives. The Academic Council has delegated some of its responsibilities to a number of sub-committees, whose reports are considered at the Academic Council monthly meetings.

The Review Team was impressed by its discussions with members of the Executive Committee and the Academic Council. Their role and remit appears effective and well understood within the University. However, the Review Team feels that both bodies would benefit from a better integration of the "student voice". The Review Team understands that these responsibilities fall under the remit of the Vice-President Academic & Registrar. However, this should be communicated more effectively internally and externally.

The frequency of the Academic Council's monthly meetings is ambitious in many respects. However, the Review Team believed this increases the already heavy involvement of academics and University officers in committee meetings, thereby reducing, in particular, their time for research. The Review Team encourages the University to explore the strengths and weaknesses of moving towards a less intensive Academic Council meeting schedule, e.g. once per quarter.

Overall, the Review Team finds the UL management structure to be clearly organised with a good separation of responsibilities and domains of activity.

ACADEMIC FACULTIES AND DEPARTMENTS

The University is structured in four Faculties and 26 academic departments. The leadership for each Faculty is provided by its Dean, who reports directly to the President. Each Dean is supported in his/her role by heads of academic departments, the faculty manager, the assistant dean of academic affairs and the

assistant dean of research. All academic members of a faculty, together with student representatives, are members of a faculty board, which meets regularly to discuss academic matters, such as proposals for new programmes. In 2010/11, a new resource allocation model (RAM) was developed that attributes resources to the Faculties based on the following four criteria:

- Weighted full-time equivalent student
- Research performance
- International student enrolment
- New programme development

The Review Team found that, within this management structure, the Deans have broad responsibilities and a reasonable degree of autonomy. The roll-out of this new approach appears to have been implemented since 2007/08 without major strains and appears not only complete but also well embedded across the entire campus. This structure seems to work well, particularly the delegated responsibility of the Deans for the financial and other resources allocated to them. However, the Review Team saw little evidence that UL has a standard committee structure established across its Faculties and Departments, and would recommend UL doing so to underpin and strengthen the effectiveness of the new structure.

Overall, the Review Team considers the approach to the delegation of responsibilities and authority within the University as a very positive factor. There appears to be a lot of freedom for Faculties and Departments to make their own decisions.

The apparent lack of standard management models was found, though, to have a negative effect on the levels of student engagement in decision-making processes. The consequence is that overall formal involvement of students in decision making appears to vary across the University. The Review Team found several examples of this phenomenon and the ISAR itself states that 'some programme directors, Heads of Departments, academic advisers and student representatives are more proactive than others, concluding that 'there may be some merit in developing institutional codes of good practice for programme directors and boards, which would include guidelines on receiving and acting on student feedback'.

The Review Team has the impression that each Faculty works separately in creating systems and mechanisms, and therefore recommends that the University, in line with a set of standard expectations regarding student engagement, should provide common templates, e.g. terms of reference and membership for teaching and learning committees and student representation. The Review Team considers that stronger central guidance would ensure a more consistent and equitable student experience and, in general, would enhance the effectiveness of its internal processes. The varying character of the student role and engagement across campus is not a positive feature and should be addressed.

The Review Team also heard, during several meetings, of problems in the internal communication of strategic issues. The process of passing down information from the Executive Committee through the Deans to Heads of Schools and Services and ultimately to staff and students has significant breakdowns. The Review Team noted that the University had, in September 2011, introduced a new communication tool of "team briefings" and encourages the University to monitor the effectiveness of this new approach regularly, as part of a wider

ongoing review of its communication channels for conveying strategic information to the entire University community.

EXTERNAL CONTEXT

The Review Team noted that UL, indeed most Irish universities, receives a large proportion of funding from the State. UL sources of funding in 2010 can be summarised as follows: State grants €49m (30%); student fees €64m (40%); other income €7m (4%); contract research €25m (16%); self-funded projects €17m (10%). (Total income was €162m). This high dependence on public funding is especially pertinent at this time of financial crisis nationally and internationally. Throughout discussions with staff at all levels and students, the Review Team was made aware that the continuing cuts in resources, as a result of ongoing national resource restrictions, are affecting the management and autonomy of the University and are endangering the maintenance of quality. There is also the danger that they may have a negative impact on staff and student morale and experience, due to the national recruitment moratorium in particular. The Review Team felt confident that the institution was responding to the funding cuts with a reasonable and balanced strategy combining re-allocation and optimisation of resources and the search for new financial sources. As a result, the impact, thus far, on the operation appears to be limited. One can detect, however, some symptoms of the effects of the continuing cuts on staff members. Although not major at the present time, there was some evidence that these effects could negatively impact in the medium term on the morale and the motivation of employees.

The Review Team was impressed by the attachment and loyalty of the staff to the University. The team considers this as one of the strong points of UL. This loyalty is, at present, limiting to a certain extent the ongoing negative phenomena, but a protracted negative situation should be carefully monitored.

APPROACH TO QUALITY

The University's quality statement identifies a commitment to "enhance the quality in all of the University's academic programmes, teaching, research and service to the community, to maintain and improve, in all of the University's activities, processes that address the quality of the total learning environment and experience of students and staff, the service provided both in the University and industry, commerce and professions, the services to the community." Supporting this quality statement is the University strategic plan, which explicitly recognises "that a commitment to and a development of the highest standards of quality assurance and quality improvement is essential to the realisation of its visions and goals".

In line with the statutory requirements of the Universities Act, 1997, the organisation and management of internal quality is the responsibility of the GA. The GA delegated the responsibility for different quality assurance measures to different groups, departments and committees. In 2008, the GA Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance Committee (GA-SPQAC) was created. This body is a sub-committee of the GA and is responsible for institutional strategic planning and quality assurance matters.

Again, in compliance with the Universities Act, 1997, the system of external evaluations at the University is twofold. The University conducts its own internal reviews of academic departments and other units (e.g. administrative and support units). This leads to the publication of departmental/unit 'improvement plans'.

Also, the University, as a whole, undergoes external reviews, such as the external evaluation by the European University Association in 2004, commissioned by the IUQB and the Higher Education Authority (HEA). Additionally, there are subject-specific external accreditations, mainly conducted by professional bodies (e.g. for its programmes in Nursing and Engineering).

The UL approach to quality encompasses all levels of the University and responsibilities have been assigned accordingly. The Review Team was impressed by the commitment of all members of the University to the enhancement of quality in all respects. It perceived, in the numerous meetings with staff, a spirit of belonging to the University and of pride in its achievements that contribute to a good working environment and to a genuine and widespread desire to improve quality.

The details of the UL approach to quality and its different quality assurance measures will be discussed in Chapter 3 and 4 of this report.

COMMENDATIONS

The Review Team commends the University on:
- the strong strategic vision of President Barry
- the vision and scope of its strategic plan
- the proposed use of the "Bernal" plan as a proactive instrument to enhance the University research performance
- the commitment and loyalty of its staff and students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Review Team recommends that the University:
- guarantees that student issues are continuously raised in the meetings of the Executive Committee through the VPA & R who has specific responsibility for student affairs.
- reviews the number and the functions of the sub-committees of the Governing Authority with the objective of significantly reducing their number.
- undertakes a critical review of the effectiveness, composition and size of the Governing Authority, in accordance with national developments such as the implementation of the Hunt Report and the National Strategy for Higher Education in Ireland to 2030. As part of this process, the University might also consider reducing the size of the Governing Authority while also enhancing the presence of the regional business community drawn from its most senior ranks.
- ensures that students are systematically and uniformly involved in all aspects of the governance and operation of Faculties and Departments.

SECTION 2

INSTITUTIONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT (ISAR)

ENGAGEMENT WITH THE IRIU

The University participated in the development of the IRIU process through the engagement of the Quality Support Unit (QSU), its President's membership in the Irish Universities Association (IUA) and the membership of its Vice-President Academic & Registrar on the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB). The Review Team verified that UL staff actively participated in IUQB and other quality improvement activities. Overall, the Review Team is satisfied that the University and its staff are entirely engaged with the IRIU process, and are playing a full role in the interactions with IUQB and other quality networks in Ireland and beyond.

THE INSTITUTIONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT

The University established a core team to co-ordinate the preparation of the ISAR. The steering group was selected by the Vice-President Academic & Registrar (VPA&R). The steering group was chaired by a UL Professor specifically appointed for this task. The University deliberately selected a person to chair the steering group who was not part of the UL management structure but had had experience of the core activities of UL for many years. The steering group comprised twelve people, eight staff members and four students, who represented a good cross-section of the campus. The steering group was supported by the VPA&R, the members of the QSU and a technical writer. The core team oversaw the collection and analysis of data for the development of the ISAR.

A management group was established to lead and support the core team. This group included the chair of the core team, the core team deputy chairperson, the Director of Quality and another member of the QSU. The group was responsible for the co-ordination of the project and for directing the work of the core team as well as for drafting the first version of the ISAR.

The core team met with the Chair and the C-ordinating Reviewer of the Review Team during the IRIU Planning Visit and with all members of the Review Team during the Main Review Visit. It was clear from these discussions that the collaboration among team members worked extremely well and that the preparation of the ISAR was based on a wide consultation across the University.

Overall, the Review Team was very favourably impressed by the ISAR: this document presents very extensive, detailed and documented information. It provides an excellent picture of the present situation of UL and of its components. Furthermore, the ISAR is written in a co-ordinated way, without fragmentation. The diligence and the thoroughness of the University in preparing the ISAR and the composition and effectiveness of the core team demonstrate the commitment of UL to this process and its willingness to profit from it for a broad improvement of quality.

COMMENDATIONS

The Review Team commends the University for:

- its staff being fully engaged with the IRIU process.
- the organisation of the ISAR, assuring the institutional participation throughout the University and for its conscientiousness and diligence in writing the ISAR, thus assuring its final quality.

QUALITY ASSURANCE/ ACCOUNTABILITY

EXTERNAL REVIEWS

The IUQB conducts a series of annual institutional reviews and dialogue meetings with the seven Irish universities. These dialogues have furnished UL with external input into quality assurance. In particular, the EUA review of 2004 was considered by UL very useful in terms of its external input and the internal reflection it engendered through the self-evaluation process. The President confirmed that UL benefitted from each external review and recommendations resulting from such reviews were implemented by UL.

INTERNAL QUALITY REVIEWS

Under the terms of the Universities Act, 1997, universities in Ireland are required to undertake reviews of each department and, where appropriate, of faculties and any service provided by the University. These reviews must be conducted no fewer than once every ten years. The Act also states that universities in Ireland must publish reports arising from internal reviews. The purpose is to inform the public and stakeholders of how quality is being assured in higher education in Ireland.

ACADEMIC UNIT REVIEW

At UL, the current system for departmental reviews has been in place since 1997. The UL internal review process responds to the requirements of the Universities Act, 1997, and consists of a self-assessment by the unit under review, an external review by a peer review group, and a published report and action plan.

The UL internal review process includes:
- The development of a self-assessment report by the unit under review.
- A review by a panel of peers. The peer review group for an academic department consists of six persons: one chairperson, two senior external academics, an employer representative, a professional representative and a technical secretary. The chairperson is chosen from a panel of five international candidates. The chairperson is usually not an expert in the disciplines of the reviewed departments. For support departments, the composition of the peer review team is slightly different and usually consists of an international chairperson, also chosen from the above-mentioned panel of five, a quality expert, an international representative and a "stakeholder".
- A three-day review visit in which the reviewing panel meets staff and students.
- A formal report to the department and the University on the findings and recommendations of the review. The peer review group normally presents its report on site, at the end of the three days, using a template provided by the UL Quality Support Unit.

- A Quality Improvement Plan in response to the recommendations of the review report, established by the unit under review.
- Consideration of the PGR Report and departmental QI plan by the GA Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance Committee
- Publication of the report (including the department's response) on the website of the Quality Support Unit.
- A progress meeting between the Dean, the Vice-President Academic & Registrar, the Director of Quality and the Head of the department one year after the site visit.

SUPPORT SERVICE REVIEWS

The quality review process for support departments is generally similar to that for the academic reviews. The main difference is that the support review is undertaken through a bespoke quality management system (QMS), integrating best practice internally, and core elements of the ISO9000, Baldridge and EFQM systems. All support departments are required to introduce a QMS that is developed according to the department's specific needs. Furthermore, the Review Team noted that two departments elected to pursue the full ISO accreditation. As a consequence, the quality reviews of the support departments mainly focus on the effectiveness of the Quality Management System. In the discussions with the support unit staff, it became clear that the introduction of the QMS made a positive impact on the internal processes and their management.

Whereas all academic departments are reviewed under the periodic quality review process, the Review Team noted from the ISAR that several administrative units are not. These include the offices of the President, VPA&R and Corporate Secretary and the Quality Support Unit, the Department of Lifelong Learning & Outreach and Corporate Affairs. While these omissions are justified in the ISAR based on the size and the distinct services provided in these units, the Review Team questions these exclusions and believes that such units should be included in the next schedules of internal service unit reviews, with a customised methodology applied, if deemed necessary.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE UL INTERNAL QUALITY PROCESSES

During the on-site visit, the Review Team discussed in depth the above system of departmental reviews for academic and non-academic areas. The issue of most concern was that the University systematically uses the same small core group of international persons to chair its departmental review panels. The justification for this approach was the considerable benefits to the University of a generic chair that is familiar with the University, the UL review methodology and, in some cases, with the unit under review. This approach is claimed to be efficient in reducing the need for preliminary briefings.

Such advantages notwithstanding, the Review Team believes that the University should avoid using the same chair more than once. In addition, the Review Team recommends that UL adopt the practice of using a specialist, rather than a generic chairperson for review panels. The contributions of an independent specialist as chairperson, with extensive knowledge of the area both nationally and internationally, who could also act as an advocate and an advisor for the department and the University during and after the process, far

outweighs the advantages of the present system. Furthermore, the Review Team specifically recommends that the Executive Committee be responsible for the appointment of all chairpersons to review panels and their membership. The University should also consider the introduction of a student member to the panel, selected from a national pool. The Review Team commends UL for including, systematically, representatives from the local business community in the panels.

The Review Team also detected some issues in the review panel reporting process. The present system includes a brief oral report from the panel at the end of a review visit and a written report with a series of bullet points. The peer review group normally completes the report on site at the end of the visit. Whereas this process is straightforward to manage and oversee, and results, neatly, in 'closure' at the end of the visit, the Review Team believes that it cannot adequately deal with the complexity of the review experience, the analysis of the data and the background, thinking and reflections of the peer groups in arriving at the recommendations. It urges the University to consider the reporting process against national and international best practice and adopt a new template and reporting format to acknowledge the high-level nature and importance of the review procedures and maximise the quality of information and potential advice that arises from the review processes.

UL has consistently published reports of internal reviews on its website, but historically, due to the need to wait for authorisation by a GA meeting, this typically occurred rather a long time (usually 12 months) after the completion of the review. The Review Team is of the opinion that this timeline is too lengthy in providing stakeholders and the general public with useful and up-to-date information on the quality of the units reviewed. Having acknowledged this issue itself, since 2011, UL has delegated the authorisation for publication from the GA to the Executive Committee. This move is designed to ensure that the time between completion of the report and its publication on the university website is cut to between three to six weeks after the site visit. The Review Team commends this step as a positive, albeit somewhat late, improvement. As for the reports themselves, the University is advised to keep in mind that they are not only targeting an internal readership but also an external one. For external readers, the University must provide more evidence of the thoroughness of its reviews in generally understandable terms.

The Review Team was also concerned that by the statement in the ISAR that approximately half of the respondents to the UL staff survey shared with the Review Team stated that they had not been involved in developing or implementing a quality improvement plan, an essential as well as statutory component of the departmental review process. The University should address this problem and ensure that each quality improvement plan is supported and implemented by the entire department. This would avoid the risk of plans with limited impact being developed only as a minimal response to a statutory requirement.

In summary, the Review Team advises the University to reconsider several aspects of its process for departmental reviews. Whilst the present system does comply with the requirements of the Universities Act, 1997, the Team felt that this system is not entirely satisfactory and its effectiveness, in terms of both quality assurance and accountability, could be enhanced. In addition to the issues identified above, the length of the current cycle, although formally in conformity with national requirements, should also be reconsidered; a 5-year cycle is likely to be more suitable and effective and even shorter cycles could be considered for certain areas.

THE UNIVERSITY'S RESPONSE TO THE FINDINGS OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL REVIEWS

The Review Team saw evidence that the University regularly evaluates the effectiveness of its quality processes. It carefully monitors such processes and tries to identify issues that require improvement. However, UL states great ambitions in its strategic plan. Therefore, quality procedures and processes must be adapted and enhanced accordingly. The Review Team felt that the University responses to the results of its internal and external reviews did not always reflect a common view on quality shared by the University as a whole. This could also explain why the perception of certain issues - notably teaching performance, research strategies, student participation and links to business - vary significantly across the campus. In addition to requiring specific actions, this may suggest some communication challenges that should be addressed. The Review Team recommends that the University evaluates its communication lines and tests their effectiveness by verifying through spot checks and *ad hoc* interviews that key pieces of information effectively reach the relevant members of its community.

Furthermore, an analysis of the documentation available to the Review Team brought to light the very extensive work done by the University in collecting data about its situation, evolution, students, personnel and quality-related issues. The resulting records are very extensive and accompanied by detailed and accurate statistical analysis. This extensive documentation is a valuable instrument for management action based on facts and trends. Discussions undertaken during the visit, however, suggested that the information elicited, and analysis undertaken, are not adequately disseminated throughout the University community. Some significant disparities of opinion exist, for example, on placement and teaching/studying space. They may not necessarily imply substantial issues, but do suggest breakdowns in communication, occurring somewhere between the Faculty Deans and the corresponding staff members and students. A comprehensive review of the effectiveness of communication processes around knowledge and information management would be desirable.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AT LINKED COLLEGES

The University has formal relationships with two linked colleges – Mary Immaculate College (MIC) and St. Patrick's College, Thurles. Whereas the affiliation with MIC dates from 1991, the formal collaboration with St. Patrick's only started in May 2011. MIC offers programmes in Education and the Liberal Arts at undergraduate and postgraduate level. Approximately 3000 students study at MIC. St. Patrick's College, Thurles was formerly a Roman Catholic seminary and has at present around 230 students.

The University accredits the degree programmes of the two linked colleges and their graduates hold their awards from the University of Limerick. Both institutions are, however, independent and have their own governing structures and budgets. The relationships between UL and the linked colleges are regulated by separate Memoranda of Understanding (MOU). The MOU regulates the required quality assurance processes of the linked Colleges *inter alia*. Specifically, MIC is required by UL to conduct regular quality reviews in accordance with the Universities Act, 1997, and other legislative requirements. In addition, MIC uses the UL exit survey for its students and the data is shared with UL. According to its MOU, St Patrick's College, Thurles, is required to fully facilitate the UL quality assurance procedures and UL is entitled to include St Patrick's students in its student surveys. UL intends to conduct an institutional review of St Patrick's every five years.

From discussions between the Review Team and representatives from both colleges, it was clear that the Colleges view the collaboration with the University of Limerick with enthusiasm and as very beneficial. They both separately commended the support received from the University. The Review Team noted that the relationship between UL and MIC was longstanding and has developed very strongly in recent years; while UL was at the beginning of its collaboration with St. Patrick's College,, this relationship looks very promising. The Review Team was able to confirm that the quality assurance processes in the linked colleges appeared to mirror those in the University, and this gives the Review Team confidence that the quality assurance processes, and other formal arrangements with the University, enable the linked Colleges to fully participate in, and benefit from, the University's experience.

EVALUATION OF TEACHING

The Centre for Teaching and Learning provides, in the view of the Review Team, a commendable but voluntary teaching evaluation service that gathers and examines students' opinions on the quality of the module content and delivery. This service is known as SET (student evaluation of teaching). The SET Reports provide teachers with quantitative ratings and qualitative student comments on teaching, on module content and delivery and on the student learning experience. The SET process is confidential and voluntary, with academic staff encouraged to consider it as part of their continuous professional development.

The University has no comprehensive data on teaching quality since there is no mandatory systematic evaluation across the campus. During the interviews, the Review Team heard a variety of opinions, ranging from positive to negative, with no factual data to support any of them. The lack of data makes it difficult to deal with possible problems and it is therefore a problem by itself.

The University is currently considering introducing a generalised "smoke-detector" test. This would require students to complete a short survey halfway through each module, thus providing "a light assessment" of the quality of teaching. From its knowledge of positive experiences elsewhere, the Review Team strongly encourages the implementation of this plan. UL should emphasise that the students will assess the modules as a whole, not just the teacher quality or the resources.

The results of the "smoke-detector" test should not be confidential to the teacher. If students, staff, departments and the University cannot compare opinions, spot trends and mean values and discuss the results, the exercise will be of limited use. At a time when the Review Team was told that students feel "surveyed to death", this would also decrease student motivation to participate and, in turn, affect response rates adversely.

The Review Team, in summary, recommends a universal and mandatory teaching evaluation implemented as a simple "smoke-detector" followed by deeper analysis in the case of any concerns or problems indicated. This would provide an accurate measurement of teaching quality across the University and, where necessary, would facilitate prompt action.

COLLECTING STUDENT FEEDBACK

The UL Quality Support Unit (QSU) surveys all students to assess their level of satisfaction with the University programmes and the services. The survey has been conducted five times in the last ten years.

In 2009, UL organised an exit survey. The survey was run as a pre-pilot project in 2009 and a pilot in 2010 and surveyed students registered in the final year of all UL programmes. The findings of the surveys are summarised in individual reports for each programme and for support departments. The responsibility for corrective action and quality improvements belongs to the department heads. In addition to the QSU survey, students can provide feedback by different routes: contacts with the academic advisor, the class representative, the programme director, the department head or department co-ordinator, and with the lecturers.

The Review Team notes that this is an impressive amount of student surveying; however, it identified a few problems. As acknowledged by the University in the ISAR and the Review Visit, this approach is retrospective; often, the students do not see the changes they suggest when it matters to them. The Review Team found problems in all four of the 'immediate' routes for conveying student feedback identified by the University in the ISAR. The Review Team recommends that the University provides appropriate training for student representatives to strengthen their input and that it should enhance the student membership of relevant committees These and other initiatives would help to correct such problems, and would also ensure that students would be aware of the results of the exit surveys one year before graduation and that they would be in a position to observe and experience the corrective action taken.

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF RESEARCH

UL included in its strategic plan the explicit goal to "further enhance (the) research profile and strengthen the impact of (UL) research nationally and internationally." The targets identified include increasing the enrolment of doctoral students by 40%, implementing a structured doctoral model and personal development plans for research students by the end of 2010/11, increasing the number of publications in the ISI Web of Knowledge and the number of books by prestigious publishers by 20%, and increasing the number of publication citations by 50%.

Overall, institutional research is evaluated based on a set of 5 Ps – Publications, Proposals, Postgraduates, Practice Impact and Prestige. This is reported in the Research Office Annual Review Report, which is presented to the Executive Committee and the Management Council. Furthermore, research quality is monitored through the periodic review of academic departments. The Management Council's quality taskforce recommended in June 2011 that UL "develop and implement an internal benchmarking system for research."

The Review Team was very impressed by the clear strategic vision of UL concerning its research stature and by the efforts to increase its presence in quality research journals. The Review Team commends the articulated definition of research activities and quality recently elaborated by UL. However, during discussions with academic staff, the Review Team noted some uncertainties as expressed by some academics concerning the expectations of the University in relation to the range of publication activities which are recognised by

the University. The Review Team recommends that UL reviews the effectiveness of its communications processes for disseminating and communicating such expectations more effectively throughout the entire institution.

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF STAFF

The University has a staff appraisal scheme whereby each staff member should be reviewed annually. This performance and development review system (PDR) has the goal to "translate the University's objectives into College/Division/Department/Team/Section and individual objectives and to outline the role and contribution as an Individual and Team member to the overall achievement of the College/Division/Department Objectives." However, according to an employee survey conducted in 2010, the Review Team noted that only 35% of staff had a PDR in the previous year. This could be explained by industrial relations issues that occurred during that year. However, the University must ensure that it has sufficiently robust structures in place to monitor that the PDR procedure is implemented in full and consistently across the University since it is a very valuable tool for improving the University quality.

Through discussions with staff at all levels during the Review Visit, the Review Team received evidence of the consequences of the cuts and constraints on financial and physical resources imposed across the Higher Education Sector in Ireland. The Review Team commends the University for the measures adopted to deal with these reductions and restraints, but also feels, as already mentioned, a potential morale and motivational problem of its staff because of the continuing nature and extent of the resource restrictions. The Review Team recommends that UL carefully monitors this situation and continues to press Government to devise and implement additional streams of financial support for the University.

COMMENDATIONS

The Review Team commends the University for:
- its use of employers in internal review teams
- the quality of the relationships with its linked colleges.
- the extent and detailed level of the procedures with which the University monitors its processes
- the quality assurance processes employed for managing research ("the 5Ps").

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Review Team recommends that the University:
- reviews and revises its procedures for departmental reviews through the engagement of the Executive Committee, specifically in relation to:
  » the composition of the review panels to include a student
  » the selection and appointment of the chairperson
  » the reporting template and timelines
  » the length and scope of the review cycles
- conducts regular quality reviews of all central and support departments and divisions, with no exceptions

22

- introduces a mandatory and universal "smoke-detector" evaluation of teaching
- undertakes a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of communication processes around knowledge and information management
- strengthens student input generally through structured training of student representatives

SECTION 4

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

STUDENT REPRESENTATION

A major key to quality enhancement in universities is to listen to learners. This is especially the case for an institution that has as its first Strategic Goal 'to provide an outstanding and distinctive experience for every one of our students'. Within UL, students are extensively used as a source of data, i.e. by responding to questionnaires; and while positive in itself, the Review Team noted, in fact, a certain "survey fatigue" in several of its discussions with students. While appreciating that, from a student perspective, this could be a problem, Review Team members were of the opinion that students can and should be used as a far more dynamic resource. Student representation, at all levels and in all committees, should be more uniform, systematic and, above all, widespread. The Review Team commends the inclusion of students in the faculty teaching and learning committees. As was said above, UL should ensure that the student experience is continuously reflected and reinforced in the Executive Committee through the VPA & R.

During the Review Visit, the Review Team heard some University staff members expressing doubts about the ability of students to represent themselves constructively in matters related to teaching and learning. On the other hand, the Review Team found, in meetings with students, that they consistently demonstrated that they were very capable of articulating their opinions effectively. UL is advised by the Review Team to involve students more extensively and systematically as natural partners in decision-making, reviews and committees. In order to further enhance student skills in that regard, the Review Team recommends that specific training and support be made available to maximise the effectiveness of student contributions.

ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING QUALITY

The University utilises several mechanisms to enhance the quality of teaching. The Centre for Teaching and Learning is considered by the Review Team excellent in that regard but, unfortunately, not all the staff members appear to be using it. The Review Team finds this regrettable since it received very positive comments about the Centre's work and was impressed by the quality of its staff members and by the presentation by them of their activities during the Review Visit. The Review Team considers the Centre to be a major asset that could provide a solid base for the University to improve its teaching quality. However, this strength should be more extensively and systematically exploited.

University-wide lunchtime seminars featuring high-quality teachers and faculty teaching days – both promoted and supported by the Centre – appeared effective and popular ways of sharing good practice. However, the Review Team noted that good teaching practices identified through these processes were often not shared across the four Faculties. The Review Team recommends that the University considers strengthening the Centre for Teaching and Learning and develops more initiatives to promote good teaching practices across the University. In addition to the already recommended mandatory centralised teaching evaluation, this would be a positive step towards achieving the University's strategic goal to give students "an outstanding experience".

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

ACADEMIC GUIDANCE

Recently the University introduced the so-called "First Seven Weeks" programme designed to "provide strong, enhanced and targeted support to students during the very early weeks of their time as UL students". Each of the first seven weeks has a theme designed to focus students on different issues. The Review Team considers this to be an excellent initiative. In addition to the "First Seven Weeks" programme, students are assigned an academic advisor as they enter the University. The Review Team learned that the advisor process is not universally successfully implemented. Some students stated that they had no contact with their advisor and, in a few instances, did not even know his/her name. The Review Team recommends that the University analyses the entire process of student advice and academic support in order to guarantee that students are adequately supported, further enhancing the effects of the good measures already in place.

POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION

The Graduate School supports the development and delivery of postgraduate programmes across UL and provides a range of support services for postgraduate students. Each research postgraduate is assigned a supervisor, approved by the head of department and the Postgraduate Research Committee. There is an increasing tendency for postgraduates to be co-supervised.

A meeting of the Review Team with postgraduates identified that, in their personal experiences, support was not entirely consistent with the University's guiding principles. Not all students had two supervisors at PhD level and, in some cases, the supervisor was difficult to contact. Since the University is committed to expanding its postgraduate student population, it must carefully review and monitor the effectiveness and consistency in application of its processes and transform the option of co-supervision into a formal requirement. The Review Team also suggests that UL initiates a dialogue between postgraduates from different disciplines. Such an exchange would be beneficial, in particular, for the sharing of good practice across the University. Furthermore, the Review Team members were advised that not all postgraduate students with teaching responsibilities had received pedagogical training in advance of teaching; the Review Team advocates that this should be a mandatory requirement across the University.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENTS

UL has an excellent support service structure for its students. In particular, the Mature Student Office, the Office for International Students and the Disability Support Service were highly praised by students. The Review Team was impressed by the sense of "belonging" to the University expressed by the students and feels that this is due, to a large extent, to the excellent support system provided by UL.

The Co-operative Education Programme (CoOp Programme) at UL is one of the specific and traditional strengths of UL and is for many students an incentive to choose UL over other Irish universities. Co-operative Education means that students can experience a real work environment before they graduate. Students are placed with employers, both in Ireland and internationally. The Co-operative Education & Careers Division (CoOp Office) at UL is responsible for the CoOp Programme.

The Review Team heard differing views and experiences from a range of staff and students about the CoOp programme as well as the work of the CoOp Office. While positive views prevailed, they were not universal, and some students questioned the usefulness of the Office in finding hosts for the CoOp programme; some stated that they were expected to arrange their own work placements and that some placements were not relevant to the study programme being followed. However, the Review Team felt unable to comment on the quality of the CoOp Office and passes the judgement to the University. Given the longstanding importance of the CoOp programme to UL, the Review Team recommends that the University undertakes an early review of the Office and the programme to clarify the reasons for the mixed perceptions (above) and to take remedial action if deemed appropriate.

THE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS

The University is located on a very beautiful campus with a lot of green space and room for possible future expansion of the building infrastructure. This infrastructure is of excellent quality and, in recent years, was substantially expanded and qualitatively improved, in part through philanthropic donations. UL's sports facilities are particularly remarkable, notably the swimming pool and the indoor track. The footbridge on the Shannon River is an architectural landmark that has become one of the symbols of the institution to both staff and students.

This physical environment is accompanied by an equally positive social situation. Campus life is quite vibrant, in particular thanks to the significant portion of the student population that is housed on campus and adjacent to it in student halls of residence. The housing facilities are considered to be of high quality. The social environment of UL appears specifically excellent for overseas students, including doctoral candidates. A high level of integration is evident, as well as a friendly atmosphere for young people coming from abroad.

With regard to the Library, the Review Team was advised that there was a shortage of books at crucial times and that space was sometimes hard to find. Neither of these issues is unique to Limerick but the University should nevertheless be concerned about them and perhaps communicate more clearly the presence of other formal and informal learning spaces throughout the campus to its students. Budgetary constraints obviously impact on these problems as the plans to increase the size of the Library to provide additional study space have been put on hold due to national restrictions. This is understandable but regrettable and the Review Team urges the University to expand its Library as soon as finances permit. It also encourages UL to undertake a review of all learning and teaching spaces throughout the campus, taking into account changing methods of studying and the corresponding needs and to assess if available spaces are fit for their purpose. This might require financial investment, so the planning must be careful and comprehensive and fully take account of the views of undergraduates, postgraduates, mature and part-time students and staff.

Some students commented that the use of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) by the staff was not systematic; they could appreciate its potential but believe that it was "not used effectively". The Review Team, therefore, recommends that the University considers standardising and monitoring VLE use across the campus.

Overall, the University must be congratulated for its campus environment. The Review Team feels that the campus is one of the major strengths of UL and should not be taken for granted. It is the result of continuing work, vision and motivation and should be promoted as such, maintained and expanded.

FEEDBACK TO STUDENTS

An important aspect of the student learning experience is the commitment on the part of the institution to provide timely feedback to students. The Review Team learned from the discussions with students that the feedback from teaching staff on assessments and other examinations was sometimes too slow and often too late to be of value to the student. Students also stated that feedback was "at the discretion of the lecturer" so there was little they felt they could do about improving the quality, quantity or timeliness of it. Complaints voiced by students did not appear to trigger corrective actions by UL. The Review Team had the impression that there was no University-wide policy on the timing and frequency of feedback, an impression confirmed by discussions with the members of the Academic Council whom it met. The Review Team recommends that the University adopts a more uniform approach to providing feedback to students on their work and that this is clearly communicated to staff and its implementation systematically monitored.

The Review Team also learned that the evaluation of student work is not always anonymous. UL is advised to review the effectiveness of its current procedures and to consider implementing in the future a University-wide policy of anonymous evaluation and grading.

THE UNIVERSITY'S INTEGRATION WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

UL appears to be well integrated with the regional and national economies and with the local community. It is, in fact, one of the elements of reference for the City of Limerick and its area. The most visible aspect of this synergy is the strong local and national job market for UL graduates. Reinforcing its regional links is high on the list of priorities of University management; this is very desirable and is commended. However, the Review Team formed the impression that this emphasis may not be as central to the University as it had been earlier in its history. Notably, this point was reinforced in the Review Team's discussions with representatives of the local business community. Comments provided to the Review Team were that the vision of the University of Limerick is becoming "blurred".

The Review Team commends UL for its long tradition of strong ties with the local economy and community and for its initiatives to stimulate regional discussion and development. However, UL is encouraged to build on its strengths and explore possibilities to further develop such ties. The University could also invite employers and business people as lecturers and establish an advisory board/employer forum that would include members of the local, national and international business community.

DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

The improvement of research quality is at the centre of the new UL strategic plan. A key action of the President in that direction is the already cited "Bernal" plan to recruit ten new professors in three targeted research areas. The Review Team commends the clear vision and ambition that underlie this strategy and is convinced that these initiatives will enhance the quality of research at UL. Discussions with the staff during the visit alerted the Review Team to some concern about the pressure this new approach was creating.

Individual staff members cited tensions in balancing teaching and research activities and workloads. The Review Team recognised that such tensions were quite common in research-intensive universities; nevertheless, UL is advised to carefully monitor staff experiences to avoid obstacles towards the successful achievement of its strategic goals.

COMMENDATIONS

The Review Team commends the University for:
- the excellent campus environment for staff and students.
- the Centre for Teaching and Learning
- its creative and innovative "First Seven Weeks" programme for new students
- the excellent support services for students
- the long tradition and strong ties with the local economy and community.
- its clear vision for the quality enhancement of research

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Review Team recommends that the University:
- assures that students are represented at all levels of the University's decision-making structures and are systematically included as members on departmental and faculty committees.
- provides training and support to student representatives to maximise their contribution to the management of the University.
- introduces a mandatory training for students who have teaching responsibilities
- reviews its "academic advisor" system and formally introduces co-supervision for all PhD students.
- strengthens the Centre for Teaching and Learning.
- reviews the CoOp Office and programme in order to clarify the reasons for the mixed perceptions of its performances amongst staff and students.
- introduces a mandatory and monitored approach to student feedback and, in particular, to assure a timely response to the student
- reviews the effectiveness of its current procedures for evaluation of student work and grading and considers the future introduction of anonymous marking across the University.
- reviews all learning and teaching spaces throughout the campus, taking into account the changing methods of studying and the corresponding needs, and to assess if available spaces are fit for purpose and responsive to student needs.

COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 35 OF THE UNIVERSITIES ACT, 1997 AND CONSISTENCY WITH THE PART 1 ESG

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

The statutory requirements for quality assurance processes of Irish universities are presented in The Universities Act, 1997, and they can be summarised as follows:

- Regular evaluation (not less than once every ten years) of each department and, where appropriate, faculty and any service provided by the University by persons competent to make national and international comparisons
- Regular assessment – including students – of the teaching, research and other services provided by the University
- Publication of findings of reviews
- Implementation of findings arising from reviews, providing the resources are available, and the findings are reasonable and practical.

The Review Team found sufficient evidence to confirm that the UL reviews its departments and services regularly. In all cases, the review panels include external and international peers that are competent to make national and international comparisons. Reports from reviews are published by the University on the Website of the Quality Support Unit. The University seeks student assessment of their experiences of teaching and learning through surveys and student representation in selected committees. The University monitors its processes carefully and tries to identify issues that need improvement. From the evidence provided by the University and its discussions with members of staff and students, the Review Team is confident that UL is complying with these statutory requirements

CONSISTENCY WITH PART ONE OF THE ESG

The Review Team does find that the University's quality arrangements are consistent with Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG Part 1). In line with what was stated in Chapters 3 and 4 of this report, the Review Team finds that the University should improve the role of students and other stakeholders within its policies and procedures for quality assurance (ESG 1.1). Additional actions are also required by UL to guarantee, through performance appraisals and teaching evaluations, that staff members involved in teaching are competent and qualified (ESG 1.4). However, the Review Team saw sufficient evidence to confirm that the University is working consistently towards achieving full compliance with the ESG.

ENGAGEMENT WITH NATIONAL, EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL GOOD PRACTICE

The Review Team found sufficient evidence that the University is taking account of national, European and international good practices. At present, this is mainly achieved through an external examiner system, research co-operations, collaborations and various other kinds of projects or informal contacts with colleagues from other universities. The Review Team learned that the University is planning to include external benchmarking as a required part of the quality review processes for academic departments and to join an international benchmarking programme.

CONCLUSIONS

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

CATEGORY:	KEY REVIEWER FINDINGS
Statutory Requirements	**The Review Team found that the University's activities comply with statutory requirements**
European Standards	**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)**
National, European and International best practice	**The University is taking account of national, European and International best practice**

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

6.1	A clear understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the University and a strong strategic vision as shown, in particular, by the Strategic Plan
6.2	A clearly organised management structure with a good separation of responsibilities and domains of activity
6.3	The efforts to continue the excellent record in the employment of graduates
6.4	The commitment and loyalty of staff and students and the corresponding actions by the University management
6.5	The long tradition of strong ties with the local economy and community and the continuing promotion of such ties
6.6	The clear vision for the quality enhancement of research and the recently developed, articulated definition of research quality in different domains
6.7	The "Bernal" plan for targeted chairs to enhance research quality
6.8	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
6.9	The continuing efforts to exploit the magnificent campus to create a vibrant atmosphere and an excellent work, study and social environment for staff and students
6.10	A high-quality infrastructure – notably in the sports domain – with remarkable recent expansions
6.11	The quality of the collaboration with the linked colleges
6.12	The prudent measures adopted to deal with reductions in resources
6.13	The thoroughness in monitoring the University processes

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

6.14	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.
6.15	Ensure that students are equipped and expected to be 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 VPA & R.
6.16	Modify the procedures for departmental reviews, specifically to appoint (preferably by the Executive Committee) specific experts as chairpersons without using them more than once, to lengthen the format of the reporting, shorten the report publication time and decrease the length of the review cycles.
6.17	Perform regular quality reviews of all support departments and divisions with appropriate cycles.
6.18	Adopt a simple, generalised and mandatory teaching evaluation.
6.19	Strengthen the Centre for Teaching in Learning and developing more initiatives to promote good teaching practices across the University.
6.20	Introduce mandatory training for all students who participate in teaching
6.21	Review the procedures and requirements for feedback to student work and for evaluation and grading, and consider the future introduction of universal anonymous marking.
6.22	Guarantee in practice the use of the PDR (performance and development review) for all employees.
6.23	Stimulate entrepreneurship by bringing employers into the classroom and involving them in curriculum development.

APPENDICES

MAIN REVIEW VISIT - TIMETABLE

SUNDAY 4TH DECEMBER 2011

TIME	ATTENDEES	PURPOSE
18:15 - 18:30	Adrian Thomas, Director of Quality & Institutional Co-ordinator	Team gather together in advance of attending dinner with the University – welcome by Institutional Co-ordinator
18:30 – 21:30	Don Barry, President Anna Ryan Paul McCutcheon, Vice-President Academic & Registrar Mary Shire, Vice-President Research Gary Walsh, Chair Core Team Adrian Thomas, Director of Quality	Brief campus tour en-route to dinner, including short walk across living bridge to north campus. Dinner at the President's residence on campus.

MONDAY 5TH DECEMBER 2011

TIME	ATTENDEES	PURPOSE
08:00 – 10:00	IRIU Team	Private meeting
10:00 – 10:45	Don Barry, President Paul McCutcheon, Vice-President Academic & Registrar	Private discussion with President and the VPAR
10:45 – 11:00	IRIU Team	Coffee break
11:00 – 12:00	Don Barry, President Paul McCutcheon, Vice-President Academic & Registrar Philip O'Regan, Dean, Kemmy Business School John Field, Director, Finance Tommy Foy, Director, Human Resources Kieran Hodnett, Dean, Faculty of Science and Engineering Tom Lodge, Dean, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Mary O'Sullivan, Dean, Faculty of Education and Health Sciences Mary Shire , Vice-President Research	To discuss institutional mission, goals, strategic aims, direction and recent and proposed developments in quality management and its link to strategic planning. How outputs of QA activities are used to inform strategic planning and decision-making processes, and how quality assurance measures are used in wider contexts.

12:00 – 12:15	IRIU Team	Private time for IRIU Team
12:15 – 13:15	Tadhg Kearney , GA member nominated by the Limerick Chamber of Commerce Bobby O'Connor, GA member. Graduate of the University of Limerick, elected by alumni Breda Deedigan, GA member nominated by Limerick Paul Partnership Callista Bennis, Corporate Secretary Sarah Moore, Member of GA-SPQA (also Associate Vice-President Academic) Sean McGrath, GA member elected by academic staff (also Assistant Dean Research, Faculty of Science and Engineering	Discussion of the mechanisms employed by GA for monitoring quality assurance and enhancement within the University in line with the Universities Act requirements. To discuss how the University monitors the effectiveness of its quality management processes and structures and ensures the outcomes of QA processes are enacted in an appropriate manner.
13:15 – 14:00	IRIU Team	Private time for IRIU Team & lunch
14:00 – 15:00	Huw Lewis, Dean of Graduate Studies Mary Shire, Vice-President Research Philip O'Regan, Dean, Kemmy Business School Mary O'Sullivan, Dean, Faculty of Education and Health Sciences Pat Phelan, Associate Vice-President Academic Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, Director, Irish World Academy of Music and Dance	Discussions on strategic management and quality assurance structures, including the roles and responsibilities for quality assurance and management between the senior management, faculties and schools/departments.
15:00 – 15:15	IRIU Team	Private time for IRIU Team & coffee
15:15 –16:15	Derek Daly, President, Students' Union Tara Feeney, Deputy President and Welfare, Students' Union Aoife Kenny, Education, Students' Union Paddy Rocket, Campaigns, Students' Union Kelly O'Brien, Communications, Students' Union Sarah Jane Hennelly, President, Postgraduate Students' Association	Session on student engagement in the University, particularly the role of students in quality assurance, strategic planning and decision-making processes and the effectiveness of student feedback, student representation and complaints processes
16:30 – 17:30	IRIU Team	Private discussion to exchange first impressions and identify key findings, commendations and recommendations from Day 1. Also assist in preparations for the meetings undertaken on Day 2

TUESDAY 6TH DECEMBER 2011

TIME	ATTENDEES	PURPOSE
08:30 – 09:00	IRIU Team & Adrian Thomas, Director of Quality	Private time & meeting between the IC, C & CR to clarify issues from Day 1 that might impact on Day 2
09:00 – 10:00	Adrian Thomas, Director of Quality Natalie Nic an Ghaill, Quality Support Unit Sarah Moore, Associate Vice-President Academic, Maura Murphy, Manager, Centre for Teaching and Learning Mary Fitzpatrick, Regional Teaching and Learning Advocate, Centre for Teaching and Learning	QA processes, student feedback mechanisms, student satisfaction surveys, exit surveys, smoke test etc
10:00 – 10:15	IRIU Team	Private time & coffee
10:15 – 11:00	IRIU Team & Pat Phelan, Associate Registrar Frédéric Royall, Head of the School of Languages, Literature, Culture and Communication Michele O'Dwyer, Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs, Kemmy Business School Derek Daly, President, Students' Union Aoife Kenny, Education, Students' Union Ross Anderson, Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs, Faculty of Education and Health Sciences	To discuss how the Academic Council and APRC monitor and improve programme quality and standards and the role of teaching quality evaluations and external examiner system in this process.
11:00 – 11:15	IRIU Team	Private time & coffee
11:15 – 12:15	IRIU Team, HODs, ADAAs, ADRs Helen Phelan, Associate Director, Irish World Academy of Music and Dance Sinéad Eaton, Head, School of Law Seán Arkins, Head of Department, Life Sciences Lisa O'Malley, Head of Department, Management and Marketing Alan Donnelly, Assistant Dean Research, Faculty of Education and Health Sciences David Atkinson, Assistant Dean Academic Affairs, Arts, Humanities and Social Studies	To discuss how academic department's own quality systems and systematic quality reviews impact on departmental plans and procedures. Also, to discuss how external examiner comments, student feedback mechanisms, PDRs and teaching evaluations are used to influence policy.
12:15 – 12:30	IRIU Team	Private time for IRIU Team

12:30 –13:15	Bernadette Walsh, Director, Student Affairs Tony Considine, Engineering Services Manager, Buildings and Estates Gobnait O'Riordan, Director, Library and Information Services Patrice Twomey, Director, Co-operative Education and Careers Division Neasa O'Donnell, Senior Executive Sports Administrator, Sports Department	To discuss the QMS system, the role of student support services in academic reviews, and the ability of support services to identify and respond to user (staff and student) needs
13:15 – 14:00	IRIU Team	Private Lunch
14:00 –15h00	Karen McCreesh, Lecturer in Physiotherapy, Department of Physiotherapy, Faculty of Education and Health Sciences Deirdre O'Loughlin, Senior Lecturer in Marketing, Department of Management and Marketing, Kemmy Business School Gary Walsh, Professor of Industrial Biochemistry, Department of Chemical and Environmental Sciences, Faculty of Science and Engineering Niall Keegan, Course Director, MA Irish Traditional Music Performance, Irish World Academy Niall Deloughry, Lecturer in Product Design, Design and Manufacturing Technology Department, Faculty of Science and Engineering Una Woods, Lecturer in Law, School of Law, Faculty of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences	To discuss how academic staff engage with, participate in and respond to decision-making, strategic planning and quality assurance processes within UL.
15:00 – 15:15	IRIU Team	Private time for IRIU Team & coffee
15:15 – 16:15	Marian Dinneen, Architecture, 5th Year Teresa Tierney, Pharmaceutical and Industrial Chemistry, 4th year Brian Treacy, Aeronautical Engineering, 4th year Peter Campion, Business Studies and German, 2nd year Patrick Fitzgerald, Business Studies, 2nd year Shelly Tobin, Physical Education, 4th Year Patricia Pond, Physiotherapy, 3rd year Lena Gutke, Economics and Sociology, 1st year Orla Walsh, Journalism and New Media 4th year	Discussions with a range of UL students on the consistency and opportunities available for them to contribute to the quality of their learning experience.
16:15 – 16:30	IRIU Team	Private time for IRIU Team
16:30 – 17:30	Mary Sweeney , Head of Careers Patrice Twomey, Director, Co-operative Education and Careers Division Catherine Duffy, General Manager, Northern Trust, Limerick Andy Clery, Director, Audit, Ernst and Young Cathal Treacy, Partner, Audit Services, Deloitte & Touche Alan O'Donnell, Analog Devices Adrian Beatty, HR Director, Dairygold	To discuss the range and quality of placements provided for UL students, the quality of UL graduates and the contribution of the University to the regional community and business within the region.

WEDNESDAY 7TH DECEMBER 2011

TIME	ATTENDEES	PURPOSE
08:30 – 09:00	IRIU Team & Adrian Thomas, Director of Quality	Private time & meeting between the IC, C & CR to clarify issues from Day 2 that might impact on Day 3
09:15 – 10:00	Dir HR, HR and UNITE reps	To discuss staffing issues, including national frameworks and constraints, alongside policies and procedures for staff promotion, diversity, recruitment and appraisal
10:00 – 10:15	IRIU Team	Private time for IRIU Team
10:15 – 11:15	Mary Shire, Vice-President Research Puneet Saidha, Director, Research Support Services Noel O'Dowd, Director of Materials and Surface Science Institute (MSSI) Huw Lewis, Dean of Graduate Studies Kieran Hodnett, Dean, Faculty of Science and Engineering Helena Lenihan, Assistant Dean Research, Kemmy Business School Pepijn van de Ven, Ambient Wireless Assisted Living (AWAL)	To discuss the development of research in the University, research centres, recent centre reviews and support for research active staff and the PG research experience. To discuss staff experiences of research management and supervision within the University, the relationship between teaching, research and innovation, and the effectiveness of quality management processes for ensuring the quality of the Postgraduate and Post-Doc experience.
11:15 – 11:30	IRIU Team	Coffee
11:30 – 12:30	Louise Lehane, PhD, Faculty of Education and Health Sciences. IRCSET funded Anne Gaul, PhD, Politics and Public Administration Stephen Buggy, PhD, Politics and Public Administration Paddy Finn, Post-Doc SEN Sajid Hashmi, PhD The Lero Graduate School in Software Engineering (Lero), The Irish Software Engineering Research Centre Noelle Blake, MA Integrative Psychotherapy Programme Tim Vandenhoek, MA in English Language Teaching Saimir Molla, MSc in Financial Services Yanxin Gong, PhD SEN, Carbolea Research group working on the biomass project DIBANET	Discussions with a range of taught postgraduate students, Postgraduate research students and Post-Doc researchers including those that engaged with recent internal reviews, management and feedback processes on the consistency and quality of their experiences within the University
12:30 –13:15	IRIU Team	Private Lunch
13:15 –13:55	Eugene Wall, Registrar, MIC Emma Barry, Quality Officer, MIC Michael Breen, Dean of Arts, MIC Teresa Doherty, Dean of Education, MIC	To discuss the effectiveness of quality assurance arrangements between University and MIC linked colleges.

13:55 – 14:10	IRIU Team	Private time for IRIU Team
14:10 – 14:30	Paula Hourigan, Registrar, St Patrick's College Fr Tom Fogarty, President, St Patrick's College	To discuss the proposed quality assurance arrangements between the University and St Patricks College from 2012 onwards.
14:30 – 14;45	IRIU Team	Private time for IRIU Team
14:45 – 15:30	John O'Rourke, Campus Life Services Manager Brian Considine, Buildings and Estates Kim O'Mahony, Quality Officer, Information Technology Division (ITD) Michelle O'Shea, Compensation & Benefits Officer, HR Nuala Cullimore, Student Academic Administration Officer Patricia White, Executive Administrator, Department ? of Nursing and Midwifery	To discuss the effectiveness of the UL Quality Processes used in non -academic departments, their impact and how effectively the units have responded to outcomes of the reviews.
15:30 – 15:45	IRIU Team	Private time for IRIU Team & coffee
15:45 – 16:15	Stephen Buggy, PhD, Politics and Public Administration Anne Gaul, PhD, Politics and Public Administration Brendan Halpin, Lecturer in Sociology Louise Lehane, PhD, Faculty of Education and Health Sciences Paul McCutcheon, Vice-President Academic & Registrar Natalie Nic an Ghaill, Quality Support Unit Neasa O'Donnell, Senior Executive Sports Administrator, Sports Department Gráinne O'Donovan, Quality Support Unit Kim O'Mahony, Quality Officer, Information Technology Division (ITD) Lisa O'Malley, Head of Department, Management and Marketing Pat Phelan, Associate Registrar Puneet Saidha, Director, Research Support Services Adrian Thomas, Director of Quality Gary Walsh, Chair, Core Team	Opportunity for clarification of generic issues or ISAR matters not adequately covered by the schedule with members of the UL ISAR 'Core Team'
16:15 – 16:30	IRIU Team	Private time for IRIU Team
16:30 – 17:00	Don Barry, President Paul McCutcheon, Vice-President Academic & Registrar	Brief private meeting with President & VPAR
17:30 – 19:30	IRIU Team & Karen Jones, IUQB Reviews Manager	Preparations for oral report

THURSDAY 8 DECEMBER 2011

TIME	ATTENDEES	PURPOSE
08:00 – 09:30	IRIU Team & IUQB RM	Preparation for Exit Presentation/Oral Report Finalise PowerPoint presentation and confirm the key findings and the experiences of the Review Team
09:30 – 10:30	IRIU team, IUQB RM, Core Team, Exec.	CONFIDENTIAL Oral Report - Chair gives an oral presentation of the key findings and recommendations of the Review Team and confirm actions and timescales associated with the finalising and publication of the reports and any follow-up actions.
10:30	Departure	Five members of the Review Team are on the 12:50 flight from Shannon

OVERVIEW OF THE IRIU PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

Universities have requirements under Section 35 of The Universities Act 1997 to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance and, more relevantly to the IRIU, to arrange for a review of the effectiveness of internal procedures "from time to time and in any case at least every 15 years". These reviews of effectiveness are designated in The Act as the responsibility of the individual governing authorities. In this way, the autonomy permitted in the organisation of internal reviews is complemented by accountability. 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.

In 2004-05, the IUQB and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) jointly commissioned the European University Association (EUA) through its Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) to undertake the first cycle of external reviews of the seven Irish universities. The resulting sectoral report, published in April 2005, found *"the systematic organisation and promotion of quality assurance at the initiative of the universities themselves"* as being *"unparalleled in any other country in Europe, or indeed in the United States or Canada"*. The reviewers deemed the system *"to strike the right tone and combination of public interest, accountability, and University autonomy. It encourages a greater focus on quality and improvement than some systems worldwide, while at the same time being less intrusive than some other systems in Europe"*. The report concluded that it was, however: *"time to move to a new phase"* that *"should build on the existing system, linking it more closely to strategic management and feeding its outputs into the ongoing development of the universities, individually and collectively"*.

In October 2006, after consultation with the universities, it was agreed that a second cycle of institutional reviews would be initiated in 2009/10. The Institutional Review of Irish Universities (IRIU) process was approved for publication by the IUQB Board in March 2009. By the end of this rolling cycle of reviews, independent reviewers will have confirmed whether Irish universities are operating in line with the requirements of (i) Section 35 of the Universities Act, 1997, and are (ii) consistent with the Part 1 requirements of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area 2005 (the ESG).

IRIU METHOD

The aims and objectives of the IRIU method are:

- to operate an external review process consistent with The Act, and the Part 2 Standards outlined in the ESG
- to support each University in meeting its responsibility for the operation of internal quality assurance procedures and reviews that are clear and transparent to all their stakeholders, and which provide for the continuing evaluation of all academic, research and service departments and their activities, as outlined in The Act, incorporating the Part 1 ESG Standards

- to provide evidence that each University continues to engage with national, European and international guidelines and standards, particularly in accordance with the Bologna process
- to support institutional strategic planning and ownership of quality assurance and enhancement to operate as part of the Framework for Quality in Irish Universities
- to support the availability of consistent, robust, and timely information on the effectiveness of quality assurance and enhancement processes operating within Irish universities
- to provide accountability to external stakeholders in relation to the overall quality of the system and thereby instil confidence in the robustness of the IRIU process

There are four elements to the IRIU method:
- Element 1: Institutional Self-Assessment Report (ISAR)
- Element 2: The Review Visit(s) – Planning Visit and Main Review Visit
- Element 3: Review Report
- Element 4: Institutional and Sector Level Follow-up

Institutions can expect to undergo IRIU normally every six years. The schedule for the second cycle of institutional reviews (2009/10 – 12/13) is published on the IUQB web site and was developed in consultation with each Irish University and approved by the IUQB Board in June 2009.

THE REVIEW TEAM

The recruitment of national and international experts to the IRIU Register of Reviewers is conducted bi-annually. Each Team of reviewers is selected by the IUQB Board from the Register of Reviewers based on the reviewer's ability to demonstrate current or recent experience in at least three of the seven criteria categories published in the IRIU Handbook. Reviewers are trained, deployed and paid on a per review basis. IRIU Reviewers are not IUQB employees. As part of the nomination and selection process, reviewers sign to confirm any conflicts of interest. Additionally, universities have an opportunity to comment on the proposed composition of their Review Team in advance of deployment, to ensure there are no conflicts of interest in the proposed Review Team, and thus the IUQB Board will ensure that an appropriate and entirely independent team of reviewers is selected for the institution being reviewed. The IUQB Board has final approval over the composition of each IRIU Review Team.

The IRIU Review Teams will normally consist of:
- two international reviewers (one of which will also act as Review Chair)
- an Irish reviewer
- a student representative
- a representative of external stakeholders
- a Co-ordinating Reviewer

REVIEWER TRAINING AND DEPLOYMENT

Each Review Team will receive institutionally-specific training in advance of deployment. The purpose of reviewer training/briefing is to ensure that all reviewers:

- understand the social, cultural, economic and legal environment within which Irish universities are operating
- become familiar with the Framework for Quality in Irish Universities
- understand the aims and objectives of the IRIU process as well as the key elements of the method
- understand the statutory requirements placed on Irish universities in relation to quality, as outlined in The Act and the ESG
- understand their own roles and tasks and the importance of Review Team coherence and delivering a robust, evidence-based report in a timely manner

REPORTING

In the interests of equity and reliability, the Review Team's findings and recommendations presented in the review reports will be based on recorded evidence. In line with ESG guidelines, the Review Team will be asked by the IUQB Reviews Manager on the final day of the Main Review Visit to confirm that the review procedures used have provided adequate evidence to support the Review Team's findings and recommendations on the University's procedures and practices in relation to:

- its fulfilment of its statutory requirements, which includes the:
- regular evaluation of each department, and, where appropriate, faculty and any service provided by the University by persons competent to make national and international comparisons on the quality of teaching and research and the provision of other services at University level
- assessment by those, including students, availing of the teaching, research and other services provided by the University
- publication of findings arising out of the application of those procedures
- implementation of any findings arising out of the evaluation, having regard to the resources available to the University
- its consistency with the Part 1 Standards of the ESG
- operating in line with national, European and international best practice
- identifying and enhancing good practice in the management of quality assurance and enhancement
- identifying issues for further development in relation to the management of quality assurance and enhancement

Two review reports arise from the IRIU - a brief non-technical summary report and a full review report for specialist audiences. Both reports are prepared by the Co-ordinating Reviewer and are signed off by the Chair following consultation with all Review Team members. The University will be given an opportunity to comment on factual accuracy and, if they so wish, to provide a 1-2 page institutional response to the report that will be published as an appendix to the review report. Each IRIU report will be formally signed off and

approved by the IUQB Board once satisfied that the review process was completed in accordance with published criteria. Reports will be published by the IUQB thereafter. In accordance with Section 41 of the Universities Act, 1997, the IUQB will submit review reports to the Minister.

FOLLOW-UP

One year after the Main Review Visit, the University will be asked to produce a follow-up report (incorporating the institutional action plan), normally submitted alongside the Annual Institutional Report (AIR) and discussed as part of the Annual Dialogue (AD) meeting with the IUQB. Within the report, the University should provide a commentary on how the review findings and recommendations have been discussed and disseminated throughout the University's committee structure and academic units, and comment on how effectively the University is addressing the review outcomes. The report should identify the range of strategic and logistical developments and decisions that have occurred within the institution since the review reports' publication. Institutions will continue to have flexibility in the length and style of the follow-up report but should address each of the key findings and recommendations that the reviewers presented. The follow-up report will be published by the IUQB.

If an IRIU Review Team identifies in its review report what it considers to be significant causes of concern, particularly in relation to the institution's fulfilment of its statutory requirements, (in accordance with the IUQB's Memorandum of Association, 2006), the IUQB will consult with the University in question to agree an immediate action plan to address the issue(s) of Review Team concern, including the time-frame in which the issue(s) will be addressed. The University will report to the IUQB every six months on progress against the action plan for the duration of the plan. Where the IUQB considers that progress in implementing the action plan is inadequate, the IUQB may, in consultation with the University and the HEA, intervene to secure a revision or acceleration of the plan, or to arrange a further Review Visit, ideally involving most or all of the original Review Team.

The IUQB will regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the IRIU process, as part of an organisational commitment to actively contribute to the broader enhancement of a culture of quality across the Irish Higher Education sector and as required by Part 3 of the ESG.

UNIVERSITY _of_ LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

45

UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO THE IRIU

The University of Limerick welcomes the publication of the report of the IRIU which was conducted by an external review team. We wish to acknowledge the extensive efforts of the review team and the courteous manner in which they dealt with members of the University community both before and during the review visit to Limerick.

Our commitment to maintaining the highest standards of quality assurance is reinforced by the review team's conclusion that the University of Limerick is in compliance with statutory requirements, that our quality assurance arrangements are consistent with the European Standards and Guidelines and that we take account of national, European and international best practice. We are gratified by the team's commendations on the University's strategic vision, our clearly organised management structures, our ties to the regional economy and community, our support services for students and our strategic research direction.

We note the various recommendations made by the team. It is incontestable that quality assurance is a dynamic process and that no institution can afford to stand still. We welcome the opportunity that the IRIU process has had both for the self-reflection that was the focus of our institutional self-assessment report and the critical evaluation of our peers in the form of the IRIU report. The team's recommendations provide us with much food for thought and we are confident that they will further enhance our quality processes. With this in mind the University will put in place an action plan and will carefully consider all recommendations in the report, paying particular attention to the evidence given to support them, and will take appropriate action.
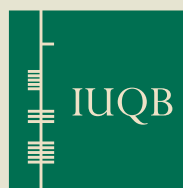
IUQB

IRISH UNIVERSITIES
QUALITY BOARD

IUQB 10 Lower Mount St. Dublin 2.

TEL 353-1-644 9774   **EMAIL** info@iuqb.ie

FAX 353-1-661 2449   **WEBSITE** www.iuqb.ie