



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

**Report of the Quality Review Group
to the
Irish World Academy of Music and Dance**

Review dates	11 th to 14 th February 2019
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UL QSU Website	www.ul.ie/quality
Unit Website	www.irishworldacademy.ie
QQI Website	www.qqi.ie

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1 The UL Quality Review Process

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

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

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

The UL quality review process comprises the following three phases:

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

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

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

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

2 The Irish World Academy of Music and Dance

Mission, core principles, vision and values

From its inception, the mission of the Irish World Academy has been to be a creative, supportive and pioneering centre that provides global leadership in innovative approaches to arts practice through performance, education and research. Also since its inception, the Academy has adhered to the following core principles:

- The development of programmes that recognise the equal value of all performance genres, including classical, traditional and popular idioms, with particular reference to music and dance performance practices
- The development of an approach to performing arts pedagogy that combines performance tuition with academic scholarship
- The development of programmes of study within the context of professional artistic ensembles (e.g., the Irish Chamber Orchestra, Daghda Dance)
- The development of community relationships through practice at local, national and international level

In October 2017, the Academy rearticulated its vision and values as follows:

Vision

The Irish World Academy aspires to be:

- A world leader in transformative education, research and practice in Irish and global performing arts
- A space of dynamic, interdisciplinary, experimental, and cross-cultural dialogue and encounter, attracting the best Irish and international faculty and students
- A home to innovative approaches to research, practice and teaching in the area of arts and health that contributes to global wellbeing and social good

Values

The Irish World Academy:

- Cultivates an approach to performing arts education that is interdisciplinary and cross-cultural while respecting the specialist nature of individual practices and nourishing each person's unique creativity
- Promotes inclusive access to education and celebrates artistic and cultural diversity in a welcoming and inclusive community environment
- Recognises the equal value of the academic, artistic and professional practices of its staff and students, and the equal value of all performing arts genres, including classical, folk, contemporary and popular idioms
- Is committed to ethical engagement and a person-centred approach in its research and education activities
- Supports the wellbeing of all staff and students through the promotion of sustainable and fair work practices in an environment of trust, respect and mutual understanding

The Academy aims to be internationally recognised as such by:

- Providing a student experience that combines scholastic and performance opportunities in a student-centred environment
- Providing a research culture that is at the cutting edge of performance research worldwide, engaging with international organisations such as the ICTM¹
- Actively engaging with a wide network of professional and community-based artists, including professional orchestras, dance companies, Irish traditional musicians and dancers, artists from new migrant communities and the Traveller community and practitioners working within a variety of educational, community and healthcare settings.

¹ International Council for Traditional Music

3 Preliminary Comments of the Quality Review Group (QRG)

The Quality Review Group (QRG) wishes to thank the University of Limerick (UL) and the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance (IWAMD) for their welcome and their hospitality. In particular, we wish to commend the friendly and professional way in which Academy staff engaged in our discussions over the course of the review.

The QRG found the Irish World Academy self-assessment report (SAR) to be a clear account of the Academy's activities and a thoughtful analysis of its current environment and context. All members of the Academy had contributed to the compilation of the SAR. The report was supported by a wide range of relevant evidence and we are grateful for the helpful and timely way in which staff responded to our requests for additional documentation. The SAR formed a very helpful basis for our engagement with the Academy.

The QRG met with undergraduate and postgraduate students on Irish World Academy programmes. All spoke very highly of the professionalism, enthusiasm, responsiveness and commitment of staff; the support provided to learners; and the very positive relationships between staff and students within the Academy. We also met a selection of staff from external arts agencies, who described a wide range of collaborative activities which enhanced the learning experience of UL students and made a strong contribution to the cultural life of the University and the local community; however, they also felt that there was scope for closer and more systematic opportunities to engage with the Academy.

The QRG feels that the Academy is providing a wide range of high-quality teaching and research activity which is a credit to the University and makes a major contribution to the University's wider reputation. Academy staff have aspirations to provide an even wider range of provision and services and have ambitions to enhance and expand their range of international collaborators. However, it was not clear to us that these ambitions were embedded in a coherent or sustainable strategy for the future development of the Academy, which would link these admirable aspirations to the optimal use of physical, financial and staff resources.

Academy staff have ambitious aspirations for a new building which would allow them to implement a range of innovative developments. While we applaud this bold vision, we also feel that the Academy would benefit from a more selective and strategic approach to the use of existing space in their current building, working in partnership with UL's central services on an audit of accommodation use and, where necessary, taking difficult decisions about what to prioritise in the short and medium term.

We wish to commend the very positive role which the Director plays in managing and supporting the work of the whole Academy. We have some concerns, however, that the current model requires a very high level of commitment and stamina from a single key individual, and we think there is significant scope to provide greater sustainability and continuity of the Academy's work through a more extensive form of delegation of some functions, perhaps through the creation of additional associate director posts. We think that spreading the load of operational management more widely would also provide greater capacity for the Director to develop and deploy a more strategic and systematic approach to the future development of the Academy.

4 QRG Commendations and Recommendations

4.1 Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

1	The commitment of the Academy staff to embody the best of Irish performing arts in fellowship with the world at large, and to the human connections that underpin their work.
2	The energy, commitment and constructive engagement of the Director of the Irish World Academy with staff, students and other UL units to the betterment of the Academy's position and reach.
3	The clear ethos of engagement by all Academy staff in important tools of continuing professional development, such as access to Erasmus staff mobility, which cultivates a positive environment where people are valued and enabled to reach their potential.
4	The culture of creativity characterised by inclusiveness, organic processes, collaboration, openness, initiative and agency.
5	Administrative and technical staff who despite the block on career progression continue to provide high-quality support services for students and staff, ensuring the smoothness of operations and the specialised learning that goes on in the Academy.
6	The diversity of teaching methods employed by experienced, research-active staff in purpose-built studios and theatres, which support multi-sensory learning and reinforce the intrinsic value of aesthetic, poetic, ethnographic and performance-based ways of knowing whilst enhancing the University as a creative place.
7	The streamlining of the BA Performing Arts structure, which has reinforced existing strengths whilst enabling better coordination and collaboration between specialist areas.
8	The unique relationship and dynamic interplay between traditional, heritage and contemporary arts pedagogies which resonate with local communities of practice as well as global cultures.
9	The commitment of Academy staff to providing a positive, person-centred student experience.
10	The inspiring influence on students arising from the active research and performance practice of Academy staff.
11	The exemplary and inclusive policies and practices which empower Academy staff research activities and development, support individual career development and enhance the Academy's teaching, learning, status and legacy.
12	The Academy's nurturing of a large and diverse doctoral student body and the engagement of almost all academic staff in doctoral supervision, cultivating a rich and holistic research environment.
13	The ongoing pioneering role of the Academy in the area of community engagement, where it is building important and valuable links and capitalising on opportunities to develop this work further.
14	The international profile and work of the Academy, which make a significant contribution to its reputation, sustainability and the esteem in which it is held within UL.

4.2 Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

4.2.1 Level 1 recommendations

	Recommendation	Justification
1	<p>Proactively build a strategic approach to the work and goals of the Irish World Academy that encompasses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) teaching and learning; b) assessment and feedback; c) research; and d) internationalisation and outreach. 	<p>The current responsive approach is evidence of clear strengths, flexibility and engagement, but in the absence of clear strategic planning there is a risk that the Academy's work is unsustainable at current levels.</p> <p>The Academy is required by the university to engage internationally and does so enthusiastically in order to inform its work, recruit students, develop staff and enhance pathways for its graduates. However, this has a financial cost and takes staff away from other work. An international strategy will ensure that international engagement can best serve the Academy's objectives and that human and financial resources are being used most efficiently.</p>
2	<p>Ensure that the teaching and learning strategy includes creative entrepreneurial skills appropriate to the graduate capabilities of performing artists and encourages sustainable connections with civic organisations and the creative arts industries.</p>	<p>Performing arts graduates emerge into working environments that require not just professional embodied skills but also skills in how to access and manifest opportunities for autonomous creativity in portfolio careers.</p>
3	<p>Develop an additional layer of management to enable the Director's Group to delegate responsibilities in the key areas of research, teaching and learning, and student and community engagement.</p>	<p>While the CoG group is a valued forum, management of key issues and strategic planning requires a more sustainable decision making structure to support the Director and to provide for effective succession planning.</p>
4	<p>Strengthen the artistic vision of the Academy through drawing upon the expertise and public profile of the Chair, defining a distinct role in leadership and innovation that complements the role of the Director and supports practice-led research aspirations.</p>	<p>There is a recognised need for greater clarity on the role of the Chair and an opportunity to leverage this in relation to the research aspirations of the Academy and greater recognition for its creative outputs.</p>
5	<p>Align and rationalise postgraduate curriculum development with teaching</p>	<p>The breadth of MA programmes indicates that staff research is supported in curriculum development. However, this has also led to a proliferation of</p>

	and learning priorities by encouraging more collaborative teaching and cross-curricular modules.	programmes (with more in the planning stages) and a number of modules with low weighting that are potentially unsustainable.
6	Develop a student performance company that provides real-world experience in creation, devising, production, performance and touring and that can also be a hub for research and experimentation.	This could provide a valuable mechanism to raise the profile of the Academy and UL while meeting strategic priorities for vocational learning and community engagement.
7	Strengthen the relationship with the Cooperative Education & Careers Division (CECD) in order to improve advice given to students and to devise innovative opportunities for Co-op placements that ensure appropriate exposure within the arts.	Students will benefit from more relevant and current advice on vocational opportunities in the arts and related fields.
8	Make greater and more consistent use of Sulis for communication with, and feedback to, students to facilitate ownership and navigation of their learning journey.	There is need for a clearer process for the provision and management of student feedback and communication of course information, which Sulis can provide.
9	In addition to the current mentoring of PhD candidates by Academy staff, ensure that all postgraduates who teach are formally trained and supported to do so, in line with the expectations set by the Postgraduate Students' Charter.	It would benefit postgraduate students to have the opportunity to learn from Teaching and Learning educators as well as Academy staff.
10	In partnership with Buildings & Estates and architectural design consultants, conduct an audit of the use of space in the current building, with a view to optimising teaching spaces and enhancing social and informal study spaces for students.	This could identify solutions to the current shortage of teaching space and provide students with much needed social and study space.
11	Continue to work with the Research Strategy Board and other forums to develop a reporting and categorising	Research outputs of a performing arts-based nature are increasingly and internationally recognised in parity with text-based outputs, and it is essential that UL

	<p>system with internationally recognised research quality benchmarks that are appropriate to the modes of research undertaken by the Academy.</p>	<p>accordingly recognise this aspect of the Academy's work with regard to quality and impact for RAM purposes.</p>
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4.2.2 Level 2 recommendations

	Recommendation	Justification
12	<p>Review the memorandum of understanding between the Irish World Academy and the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) on a regular basis so that it can evolve and be adapted to the Academy's changing needs and priorities over time.</p>	<p>The Academy needs to have a strong and effective relationship with the wider Faculty.</p>
13	<p>Consider ways in which integration with AHSS can most advantageously promote the growth and sustainability of the Academy's work, autonomy and strategic vision.</p>	<p>There is scope for a wider use of shared best practice across the Faculty in areas such as programme and staff development.</p>
14	<p>Create a staff induction and development programme that provides all teaching staff with the necessary resources for the design and delivery of course programmes including their coordination and direction; use of learning management systems (Sulis); and expectations around assessment criteria, processes and feedback/feedforward.</p>	<p>More consistency across assessment feedback as well as course outline design and articulation of criteria would address student concerns that feedback is not always timely or tangible.</p>
15	<p>Develop a more strategic approach to planning and support for research funding applications and research cluster formation and impact.</p>	<p>As well as better managing the current approach to coordinating clusters, a more strategic approach would lead to greater recognition for the Academy's research culture and outputs.</p>
16	<p>Work with senior management to facilitate sabbatical leave for Academy staff within Ireland,</p>	<p>Current sabbatical arrangements normally require a period of residence overseas. This is a major</p>

	including rolling out the Special Research Leave as an opportunity for all academic staff.	disincentive for many members of staff, such as those with family or caring responsibilities.
17	Develop collaborative practice tools to enhance student employability.	As collaborative practice becomes increasingly ubiquitous and sought after, the Academy, with its considerable and diverse expertise, is well placed to equip its students who are not engaged in specific Arts & Health or Arts in Education specialisms with an awareness of the opportunities that exist and the tools to exploit them.
18	Develop and implement a methodology to review at regular intervals the purpose, efficacy and strategic value of community links and civic engagement.	Alongside important strategic links embedded into its programmes, the Academy has developed many further links with arts and community organisations. Given that new opportunities emerge all the time and considering the resources required to manage these, regular and proactive review and assessment of the purpose and efficacy of these links will be important.
19	Articulate a more coherent strategy to promote wellness, injury prevention and care for students.	Specific support for injury prevention and care should follow international best practice.

Appendices

A Membership of the QRG

Dr. Bill Harvey (Chair)	Former Director, QAA Scotland
Dr. Ailsa Crum (Deputy Chair)	Head of Quality & Enhancement, QAA, Scotland
Associate Prof Carol Mary Brown	Dance Studies Programme, University of Auckland
Prof. Joshua Dickson	Head of Traditional Music, The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS)
Mr. Philip Delamere	Arts Officer, Leitrim County Council, Ireland
Ms. Aimee McKenzie	Student Representative
Ms. Ailish O'Farrell (Recording Secretary)	Technical Writer, Limerick

B Membership of IWAMD Quality Team

Dr. Sandra Joyce	(Quality Team Leaders)
Dr Niall Keegan,	Associate Director and Director of Undergraduate Studies
Professor Mel Mercier,	Chair of Performing Arts
Paula Dundon	Academy Administrator
Jennifer DeBrún	Media and Performing Arts
Dr Hilary Moss	Course Director, MA Contemporary Dance Performance
Dr Jenny Roche	Course Director, MA Contemporary Dance Performance
Dr Niamh NicGhabhann	Course Director, Festive Arts/Assistant Dean Research, FAHSS
Dr Oscar Mascerenas	Lecturer, BA Voice & Dance
Professor Helen Phelan	Course Director, PhD Arts Practice