



Quality Review Process

Guidelines for Quality Review Groups

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Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide comprehensive guidelines for members of the quality review group (QRG). General guidelines are outlined first for all reviewers, with additional roles and responsibilities included for specific role profiles.

Brief Overview of the Quality Review Process

UL's quality review process includes an initial self-evaluation by the unit followed by peer review, leading to the formulation and implementation of enhancement activities. The review of the unit is conducted by an independent quality review group (QRG) usually comprising a chairperson, two peers, an employer/industry representative or internal representative and a student representative. The group is supported by a recording secretary.

The review process has three distinct phases:

1. Pre-review phase, which includes:
 - i. A self-evaluation exercise conducted by the unit
 - ii. The production of a self-assessment report (SAR) by the unit
2. Review phase: A "site visit"¹ by the QRG to review the unit, culminating in the production and publication of a QRG report
3. Post-review phase, which is recorded in a quality improvement plan (QIP). Stages in this phase include:
 - Consideration of recommendations by the unit and initial response to recommendations
 - Formulation of an implementation plan
 - Ongoing implementation of the recommendations
 - Interim progress report to the Quality Committee
 - QIP Implementation review meeting with PDP
 - Annual monitoring by QSU of outstanding actions

All members of the QRG contribute to the final QRG report, which outlines preliminary findings from the chair, supported by detailed commendations and recommendations. Once the site visit concludes, no further contribution is required apart from the recording secretary, who finalises the report and sends it to Chair for sign-off. The report is then given to the unit under review to check for factual accuracy.

QRG Composition

The QRG usually comprises five persons. The profile of the membership is as follows:

- **Chairperson:** The chairperson is an external person and with knowledge of quality management systems (QMSs) generally and quality assurance processes in a higher education context. The chairperson does not need to be familiar with the work of the unit being reviewed and can be appointed on a once-off basis or can be drawn from a panel of standing chairs.
- **Either:**
 - **Cognates for support units:** These persons are typically directors or senior members of a similar unit in a leading international university or comparable educational institution outside Ireland. They will have experienced similar operational issues to the unit under review **or**

¹ Either an onsite, three-day visit or virtual site visit across a 4/5-day period.

- **Senior academics for faculty/research institute reviews** Both persons should be external to the Republic of Ireland and working in disciplines that provide them with a strong degree of familiarity with the core activities of the faculty under review. They would typically have a significant international reputation in research or teaching and would come from a prestigious international university or other appropriate institutional setting.
- **Either:**
 - **Employer/industry representative (Academic and Research reviews only):**
Employer representative: The employer representative is usually somebody who holds a senior position in industry, the commercial sector or a relevant public or private body. The person should represent an organisation that might reasonably be expected to recruit graduates from at least one of the programmes being offered by the unit under review. Ideally, such a person will have been involved in recruiting or supervising recent graduates and/or work placement students from the unit being reviewed. Employer representatives are not used for professional service (support unit reviews).
 - **Internal reviewer (professional services/support unit only):** This person is usually a quality team leader, a member of another unit's quality team or a trained QMS auditor from another UL unit. Internal representatives are only used for professional service (support unit) reviews.
- **A student representative:** This person is chosen to represent one of the student customer groups served by the unit under review. Selected on the basis of their experience relevant to the student group, the person can be a recently graduated alumnus (typically graduated within the last three years), a current student within or external to UL or an officer of the UL Students' Union.

QRG Roles and Responsibilities

Role of QRG Members other than the Chair

All reviewers will be required to declare any conflict of interest and to sign a confidentiality agreement prior to participation in the review.

Approximately 7 weeks before the site visit, reviewers will be given access to the self-assessment report (SAR) and supporting documentation.

Reviewers are asked to give their opinions based on their evaluation of the SAR and supporting documentation. They will be required to take the lead on one of the review topics (SAR chapter). It has been found that this task is much easier if each of the main topics is assigned a "topic coordinator" who takes responsibility for that topic. Tasks include:

- Reading the SAR and all supporting documentation
- Preparing a topic briefing for the rest of the group prior to the review
- Leading the questioning, on that topic, during the review
- Consulting with other members of the QRG to gather opinions/ideas
- Ensuring that relevant facts, answers, responses are recorded during the review
- Preparing the first draft of the "commendations and recommendations"

All reviewers contribute to the final QRG report.

Specific Role of the Chairperson

On a practical level, the chairperson typically carries out the following tasks:

- Approximately eight to ten weeks before the review, a near-finalised draft of the SAR is shared with the chair via MS Teams. The chair reads the SAR and usually speaks by phone to the unit head and/or the unit's quality team leader. The purpose of the phone call is to allow the chair to give initial impressions and feedback to the unit and to 'break the ice' in terms of contact with the people involved.
- With advice from the QSU, the chair contacts the QRG by email and assigns to the individual QRG members one or two chapters of the final version of the SAR for which they will act as topic coordinators during the site visit.

The chairperson's work is facilitated as follows:

- The QSU emails two default letters to the chair and advises when the letters are to be emailed by the chair to the QRG.
- The first letter, sent to the members of the QRG prior to their receiving the SAR, is essentially an introductory letter. The second letter, sent at the same time as all members of the QRG are given access to the SAR on MS Teams, assigns the QRG members specific SAR topics and asks the members to complete one page of homework in a pre-visit summary of initial findings for their topic(s) in an online template on MS Teams by a specified date.
- The chairperson may wish to personalise these letters prior to forwarding them to the other QRG members.
- The chairperson meets with the review coordinator and Director of Quality for an introductory meeting and briefing. During this meeting, the review coordinator provides the chair with a virtual tour of the MS Teams review platform and outlines practical aspects of the review arrangements.
- The chairperson and the review coordinator give an online briefing to the QRG prior to the start of the site visit on MS Teams.
- The chairperson chairs all sessions during the quality review 'site' visit.

The role of the chairperson during review sessions is essentially a coordinating one. At the beginning of each session, the chair typically introduces the QRG to the other session attendees, after which the appropriate QRG topic leader kicks off the questioning and discussions. Other QRG members may wish to contribute or pose supplementary questions. The chair does not typically play a substantive role in this process but s/he may wish to interject in order to clarify some issue or to ensure that the discussion is balanced, objective, evidence-based, focused upon the session topic and in line with the general ethos and principles of the quality review process.

The chair usually provides a time alert to the session participants approximately 10 minutes prior to the end of each session to ensure that remaining issues are discussed. Strict timekeeping is essential because the schedule is so full. At the end of the session, the chair may wish to summarise salient points and thank the session attendees. The chair should also remind the QRG member acting as session topic leader to draft topic commendations and recommendations as soon as possible after the session using the online QRG report template; these will serve as a starting point for finalising the report's commendations and recommendations on the final day. On the eve of the final day, all of the QRG will have drafted their commendations and recommendations in the online QRG report template.

In addition to all of the above, it is the responsibility of the chairperson to:

- Write the introductory section of the QRG report.

- Facilitate the completion of commendations and recommendations for the QRG report on the final day. During this session, the content for each section is shared on screen on MS Teams for all of the QRG to see, discuss and finalise. In advance of this, if necessary, the recording secretary will have tweaked the material into the house style so that the members of the QRG can focus on the content of the report.
- Read out in its entirety the QRG report or assign sections of the report to members of the QRG to read out at the final meeting with the unit.
- In the days following the visit, read and approve the QRG report after it has been proof-read and finalised by the recording secretary.
- In the days following the visit, communicate, if necessary, any suggested changes in the report to the QRG.

Role of the Student Representative

The student perspective is an integral part of the University's approach to ensuring the quality of the student experience and academic standards within the University. This is facilitated by the appointment of student quality reviewers who participate in University Quality Review Process. In addition to the roles and responsibilities outlined above, student representatives are expected to give their opinions based on their experience as a student and be prepared to discuss and share those experiences. Student representatives are full members of the review team.

Role of the Recording Secretary

The recording secretary generates summary notes during the quality review site visit meetings to serve as a memory aide to the group during its deliberations. The notes are confidential to the QRG and are destroyed at the conclusion of the visit in line with UL's [Records Management and Retention Policy](#).

The recording secretary helps to collate and finalise the QRG report.

Review Documentation

All documentation and knowledge shared with and by the QRG must be treated in strict confidence by all members of the QRG. Reviewers are asked not to download review documentation from MS Teams, but to work individually and collaboratively on the online review platform.

Time commitment

The following is a guideline to the time commitment required for participation in the Quality Review Process:

- Reading of Self-Evaluation Report and Appendices – 1 day
- Preparation of preliminary comments – ½ day
- Site Visit:
 - 3 days for onsite visit or
 - Up to 5 x ½ days for virtual site visit

Payment of Fees

An honorarium fee of €1,600 is paid to quality reviewers to acknowledge their participation in quality review activities. An honorarium fee of 2,000 is paid to the QRG chairperson. This is subject to tax/considered as income by Revenue.

Supporting Documentation

Supporting information on the review process include:

- Quality Support Unit [Website](#)
- [Quality Review Guidelines](#)
- Previously published QRG Reports ([Current Cycle](#), [Previous Cycle](#))