



**UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK**

**OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH**

**University of Limerick**

**Quality Policy**

Approved by Academic Council 2 October 2019

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## **1 Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to formally articulate the commitment of the University of Limerick (UL) to assuring and enhancing the quality of the institution's activities and to fostering a culture of quality throughout the institution.

## **2 Definitions**

### *Activities*

In the context of this policy, the term 'activities' includes any arrangement made by UL to support the achievement of its mission. Therefore, in addition to core activities relating to learning and teaching, research and enterprise and related services, the term incorporates, for example, governance, academic and organisational structures and arrangements.

### *Quality assurance*

The quality of an activity is a measure of the activity's fitness for purpose and functional excellence. 'Quality assurance' (QA) refers to actions taken to monitor, evaluate and report upon the fitness for purpose, functional excellence and effective implementation of a particular activity in an evidence-based manner.

### *Quality enhancement*

'Quality enhancement' (QE) (sometimes referred to as 'quality improvement') refers to initiatives taken to improve the fitness for purpose, functional excellence and effective implementation of the target activity. QA and QE are intrinsically linked.

## **3 Scope**

This policy applies to all functional units and to all employees of the University, hereinafter collectively referred to as 'the University' or 'UL'.

## **4 Quality Policy Statement**

To achieve the University's strategic objectives, we must continually strive for excellence in all of our activities. Assuring and continually enhancing the quality of these activities is a prerequisite to achieving excellence. An institutional commitment to quality is therefore central to realising our goals.

Accordingly, the University is committed to assuring and enhancing the quality of its activities and to fostering a quality culture throughout the institution. The University recognises the pursuit of quality, and hence excellence, as a core value. Responsibility for the quality of our activities rests at institutional, local and individual level.

## **5 Principles**

This quality policy is underpinned by statutory quality-related requirements and by the University's commitment to fostering a culture of quality and applying international best practice throughout the institution.

### **5.1 Complying with Statutory Requirements**

Part 3 of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 specifies QA requirements that must be met by Irish higher education institutions (HEIs). Section 6.2 below

specifies the core provisions of the Act and outlines how the University ensures that it complies with these provisions and associated statutory guidelines.

## **5.2 Fostering a Quality Culture**

The University is committed to fostering an authentic culture of quality throughout the institution. It does this by various means, including:

- Formally articulating a commitment to QA and QE via a formal policy document (this document)
- Explicitly and implicitly articulating the importance of quality as an underlying theme and core value in key documents, such as the UL strategic plan
- Ensuring this quality policy (and any other commitments to quality articulated in other UL documents or statements) are robustly pursued and implemented in practice
- Recognising that some activities may occasionally fall short of the highest quality standards and, in such instances, committing to reviewing and learning from such experiences and implementing change to minimise the risk of repeat occurrences
- Leading by example: Demonstrating an overt commitment in word and in deed to QA and QE at all levels within the institution, up to and including leadership at the highest levels
- Fostering a personal connectivity to quality by stressing personal responsibility for the quality of individual activities
- Providing tangible support for individuals in their pursuit of excellence through, for example, staff induction and continuing professional development
- Recognising and rewarding the demonstrable attainment of excellence through, for example, excellence awards, the Performance and Development Review System (PDRS) and progression and promotions processes, and reporting upon and acknowledging excellence in reports and communications
- Organising, facilitating or coordinating the periodic review of institutional activities to assure and enhance their effectiveness

## **5.3 Being Informed by International Best Practice**

In addition to national statutory requirements and guidance, UL's quality arrangements are informed by broader international best practice. Best practice can be identified by, for example:

- Participating in and learning from relevant national and international initiatives, organisations and publications, such as Irish Universities Association (IUA) committees, European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) conferences and activities, and European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) reports
- Engaging in benchmarking exercises with top-class international peer organisations
- Ensuring that quality review panels include top-class international reviewers from top-tier international peer organisations
- Drawing on relevant national and international experience of UL staff and stakeholders
- Considering international statutory or recognised good practice arrangements and publications, including the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and guidelines published by quality oversight or regulatory bodies, such as the UK's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)
- Remaining informed of evolving best practice relating to quality management systems through, for example, ISO (International Organization for Standardization) publications and updated standards

- Remaining informed of international trends and developments via global literature, conferences, and peer exchange and learning on quality in higher education

## **6 Institutional QA and QE Arrangements**

### **6.1 Overview**

UL's institutional arrangements for developing, monitoring, reviewing, enhancing and managing the quality of its activities are necessarily multi-layered and multi-faceted. They have evolved and are tailored to suit the institutional organisational structure and mission. They are informed by national acts, statutory quality guidelines and international best practice. They are developed and overseen by relevant institutional and local unit-level governance committees and are reviewed by various means, including internal quality reviews and periodic institutional (external) reviews.

Primary institutional quality mechanisms and processes include:

- Maintenance of an appropriate institutional governance and organisational architecture
- Development and review of a cohort of institutional policies, statutes, regulations and supporting processes and verifiable implementation of same
- Application of a quality management system for UL support units (professional services)
- A system of internal quality reviews that focus on both QA and QE
- Inclusion of our programmes in the National Framework of Qualifications
- A system of programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review
- A system of external examination and advice
- Continually updated academic regulations and procedures and implementation of same
- Development and application of (i) mechanisms by which key stakeholders – and in particular students – provide feedback on the University's activities and (ii) mechanisms by which such feedback is considered, actioned and communicated
- Systems for the recruitment, induction, performance and development review and continuing professional development of staff

The University collaborates constructively with external agencies and bodies whose functions incorporate a quality remit. Most notable in this category are Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and professional statutory and regulatory bodies that accredit particular UL programmes.

### **6.2 Statutory Quality Requirements**

Cornerstone statutory quality assurance requirements, as enshrined in Part 3 of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, are summarised below. In each case, primary elements of UL's quality arrangements that specifically address these statutory requirements are included.

#### *1. Establish written quality assurance procedures for the purposes of assuring and enhancing the quality of activities and services*

An overview of the University's core QA procedures is given in the UL Quality Manual. Maintaining and periodically updating the Quality Manual is the responsibility of the Director of Quality, and the Manual is made publicly available on the website of the Quality Support Unit (QSU).

The University's core quality architecture is recorded in an Annual Institutional Quality Report (AIQR) submitted to QQI. The Director of Quality is responsible for coordinating the completion

and submission of the AIQR and for ensuring that the most recent AIQR is published on the QSU website.

2. *Periodically review the effectiveness of activities and quality assurance procedures*

The University reviews the effectiveness of its activities and QA procedures primarily through internal quality reviews. Working on a seven-year cycle, the implementation of the reviews is informed by statutory requirements and best international practice and is tailored to best suit the University's mission, needs and organisational structure. The review schedule is developed by the Director of Quality in consultation with relevant stakeholders and is approved by the Executive Committee. The overall review process, including the development of guideline documents, is coordinated and managed by the QSU and overseen by the Vice President Academic Affairs and Student Engagement (VPAASE). The QSU is responsible for publishing on its website the review schedule, process guideline documents, review reports and resulting Quality Improvement Plans.

Additional review mechanisms are used, as appropriate, to complement internal quality review activity. Such mechanisms include a programme-based review cycle, linked provider reviews and bespoke internally commissioned reviews of specific UL activities. The University proactively engages with periodic institutional quality reviews managed by QQI and uses the review findings to drive institutional-level quality enhancements.

3. *As a designated awarding body, approve, monitor and review the effectiveness of the QA procedures of linked providers<sup>1</sup>*

Institutional-level arrangements include (i) a policy statement in respect of linked provision; (ii) documented procedures for considering, establishing, reviewing and, where appropriate, terminating a linked provision relationship with linked providers; (iii) procedures for monitoring and reviewing the QA procedures of established linked providers; and (iv) documented governance and oversight responsibilities in relation to linked providers. The Director of Quality is responsible for coordinating quality-related activities in relation to linked providers, and quality documentation relating to linked providers is published on the QSU website.

4. *Take due account of relevant guidelines published by QQI, the statutory body that, amongst its other responsibilities, reviews and monitors the effectiveness of HEIs' QA procedures*

The QSU is responsible for coordinating internal exercises that assess the extent to which the University complies with specific statutory quality guidelines.

### **6.3 General Characteristics of Effective QA/QE Mechanisms**

The mechanisms designed to assure and enhance the quality of the University's activities are quite diverse. This renders it difficult to specify a definitive set of characteristics that define an effective mechanism. However, the more characteristics listed below that are displayed by the University's oversight mechanisms and institution-wide cornerstone processes, such as, for instance, internal quality reviews and student surveys, the more likely the mechanisms are to be effective.

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<sup>1</sup> The 2012 Act defines a linked provider as "a provider that is not a designated awarding body but enters into an arrangement with a designated awarding body under which arrangement the provider provides a programme of education and training that satisfies all or part of the prerequisites for an award of the designated awarding body".

Accordingly, those with responsibility for developing and reviewing an institutional QA mechanism should seek to (relevant to context):

- Ensure the mechanism has a clear and documented purpose or aim as well as a clear and documented scope or terms of reference.
- Ensure the mechanism is informed by and compatible with this quality policy.
- Where relevant, ensure the mechanism is informed by (i) other UL policies, (ii) statutory laws and guidelines, (iii) international best practice and (iv) institutional mission and strategy.
- Consult with end users and relevant stakeholders during the developmental stage.
- Be mindful of the practicalities involved in implementing the mechanism effectively. For example, the mechanism should place an appropriate but not unreasonable burden on UL resources, be they financial or human.
- Avoid or minimise overlap or duplication with pre-existing QA processes during the developmental stage.
- Ensure the mechanism is evidence-based and analytical; include benchmarking and longitudinal data trend analysis, as appropriate.
- Ensure the mechanism displays a clear focus on driving quality enhancement.
- Take into account the concepts of risk and value for money.
- Ensure the mechanism has a clear, appropriate and documented operational process that avoids using excessive quality jargon.
- Ensure the mechanism has a clear and documented reporting structure or template, which provides scope for recognising achievement and good practice as well as identifying opportunities for enhancement.
- Ensure the mechanism has a clear reporting pathway in the context of findings generated.
- Reference those who are responsible for considering and implementing findings or recommendations and how such follow-up activity is project managed and monitored.
- Ensure the mechanism includes provision for closing the feedback loop, such as how findings and resultant actions (or planned actions) are made known to core and other relevant stakeholders.
- Where relevant, ensure the mechanism has a clearly documented overall governance structure, indicating operational, oversight and ownership responsibilities.
- Design the mechanism to be adaptive to changing context by, for example, containing inbuilt provision for process modification and sign-off.
- Include in the mechanism a consideration of 'obligations and consequences', indicating the responsibilities or expected contributions of those involved and the consequences of not appropriately meeting those contributions or responsibilities.
- Ensure the documented mechanism is accessible to stakeholders, as appropriate to context, by placing it on SharePoint or publishing it on the UL website.
- Ensure that participating stakeholders or other interested parties can provide feedback on the effectiveness of the mechanism, and use this feedback to improve the mechanism.
- If the mechanism is not itself automatically subject to periodic review (via, for example, an internal or external quality review), include a provision for its periodic assessment or review.

## **7 Roles and Responsibilities**

Every individual UL employee bears a personal responsibility for the quality of their endeavours. As a corporate entity, the University is responsible for supporting and resourcing those endeavours.

The multi-layered, multi-faceted and complex nature of the institutional quality architecture renders it impossible to comprehensively outline individual roles and responsibilities in this document. In overview, institutional-level QA and QE predominantly rests with:

- Governing Authority
- Academic Council
- Executive Committee
- University Quality Committee
- Faculty boards and deans
- Course boards
- VPAASE
- Director of Quality
- Academic and support unit managers

## **8 Sanctions**

Sanctions for non-compliance with this policy will be applied in line with relevant UL statutes and HR policy.

## **9 Related Documents**

- [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012](#)
- [QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, 2016](#)
- [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(2015\)](#)
- University of Limerick Quality Manual

## **10 Contacts**

Director of Quality

## **11 Quality Policy Control, Review and Distribution**

1. The Director of Quality is the owner of this policy. The Director of Quality shall ensure that this quality policy is a true and accurate representation of the applicable policies and procedures and that it is kept up to date at all times.
2. This policy shall be made available in a non-editable format on the UL portal. All employees who are involved in the quality policy and related activities shall have a thorough understanding of the policy. UL's Quality Assurance and Enhancement processes shall be executed in accordance with this policy.
3. All requests for revisions shall be addressed to the Director of Quality. This policy shall be reviewed every two years. Amendments, if required, shall be made after formal approval by the relevant authorisation body (Executive Committee/Academic Council/Governing Authority), and superseded versions of the policies shall be retained for future reference.
4. Compliance with this policy is mandatory and any exceptions shall be reported to the relevant authorisation body (Executive Committee/Academic Council/Governing Authority).



## 12 Version History

This quality policy replaces the UL quality statement, as originally published in 2004 and revised in 2011.

<b>Rev.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Details of change</b>	<b>Policy owner</b>	<b>Policy approval pathway</b>
1	20 April 2019	Initial release	Director of Quality	Executive Committee Academic Council Governing Authority
2	2021			