

Institutional Review Follow-Up Report

University of Limerick



March 2022

Part 1: Overview of Progress Since Publication of the Institutional Review Report

The Institutional Review report and its recommendations were considered by the University Executive and presented to Academic Council prior to the report's publication. An initial implementation plan was approved by the Quality Committee, Executive Board and Governing Authority in Q1, 2021. This implementation plan has been incorporated into the University Quality Improvement Plan (UQIP) which is a standing item on the agenda of the Quality Committee. The report of the Quality Committee, including matters relating to progress on the UQIP is considered at the relevant next meeting of the University Executive Board.

The review team made specific recommendations to the University relating to its strategy and internal communications. These recommendations were immediately acted upon by the President through the creation of the Consultation Review Group.

Other recommendations made by the review team in relation to improving the feedback loop already been identified as areas for improvement by the University and were incorporated into existing actions. These actions were implemented in accordance with their relevant action plan.

The findings of the institutional review form part of the context in which initiatives are considered within the University. In planning for the next round of internal quality assurance reviews, we are cognisant of the review team's recommendation to enhance bottom up as well as top down quality assurance and enhancement activities. The outcomes of internal quality reviews are integrated into the UQIP where relevant so that these quality mechanisms can inform and drive institutional as well as localised enhancement.

The University has taken advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to bring about a speedier than perhaps anticipated move to a more digital environment. This has provided opportunities to enhance the digital literacy of both staff and students. The uncertainty of the pandemic continues to impact staff and students and some projects are not as advanced as initially planned. A lack of funding has inhibited the adoption of phase 2 of UL Enable.

Part 2: Update on published Institutional Action Plan

1. Strategic Planning

Rec. No.	Recommendation
4*	<p>The review team concludes that, in spite of the many good elements of this Strategic Plan, it is too high-level and possibly too ambitious, certainly given the impact of the Covid-19 crisis. The review team therefore recommends that the University reconsider the Strategic Plan and adapt it in the light of the present circumstances before the faculties start to develop their own plans in earnest. The University needs to develop processes for strategic planning that are clear enough and flexible enough to set a high-level course, while facilitating faculties, schools and departments to build their own aligned plans.</p>
5*	<p>The review team recommends that the University, in adapting its adapt Strategic Plan, ensure that it is considerably less high level and more detailed than the present one, and that it identify a clear time line with well-defined goals. It is important that measures of success are well articulated and that the goals are clearly prioritised, while maintaining a high level of flexibility and agility in the planning process, as the pandemic continues to disrupt ‘business as usual’</p>
12*	<p>The review team acknowledges the recent developments towards building management and quality dashboards, yet recommends that the University make an even stronger effort to identify key performance indicators/key information for decision makers and actors on different levels, and further recommends that the University create the necessary database (potentially also through revised methodologies of obtaining and analysing data generated throughout the student life cycle or related to the University’s different core processes) and IT (infra)structures and processes.</p>
Initial Commentary (March 2021)	<p>Institution wide consultation has commenced on re-calibration of UL@50 . See the commentary on Staff Engagement below for greater detail.</p> <p>This consultation will incorporate the findings of the institutional review report in its discussions.</p> <p>A suite of KPIs was developed to monitor the UL@50 Strategic Plan – these were agreed with EC and GA. This listing was prepared through extensive consultation with senior management, reviewing the new strategy, consideration of the KPIs used in previous strategies, data requested and reported on by the Higher Education Authority, and discussions with Governing Authority. As the strategy is now being recalibrated in response to institutional review recommendations, these KPIs and other measures of success will be considered and articulated</p>

Timeline & Actions	Action	Timeline	Status
	1. Consultative Forum constituted	1. November 2020	complete
	2. Phase 1 Consultations commenced	2. February 2021	complete
	3. Phase 2 Consultations to commence	3. April 2021	complete
Update March 2022	The Consultation Review Group report has been considered by Executive and Governing Body. Its findings, together with an emerging sustainability framework have further informed the recalibration of the UL@50 strategy and implementation plan. A set of distinct actions has been proposed and these were socialised and further consulted on through a series of communication events with faculties and professional support divisions during February 2022. The recalibrated UL@50 plan is was approved by Governing Authority in March 2022. A corresponding set of KPIs has been developed to accompany these actions.		
Revised timeline	Q1, 2022		

2. Staff Engagement

Rec. No.	Recommendation
3	The review team recommends that special efforts be undertaken to improve communication where needed as soon as possible, and that the lines of transparent and timely internal communication be strengthened. Identifying the less effective elements of UL's communication architecture might be a productive first step. This will help the University to make progress and implement the Strategic Plan under the difficult times ahead
7	The review team recommends that the university put in place a regular staff survey in order to improve on the performance of staff and thus quality. Such a survey would give timely signals of dissatisfaction to senior management, pointing to the issues on which policy and strategy should be focused
14	The review team recommends that the University strengthen the role of bottom-up feedback by using staff and student feedback, and that the University give this feedback a more prominent position in the quality architecture.
Initial Commentary (March 2021)	<p>The University had appointed a Director of Internal Communications in May 2020 as it had identified a requirement to enhance communications. . In direct response to this recommendation, the President has created a Consultation Review Group to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop a process by which all UL staff are given the opportunity to feedback and contribute to looking at the emphasis and detail of what we do well, what we could do better and how this can be achieved in relation to the UL@50 Strategic Plan goals. • To recommend and oversee a series of consultative methods to engage with colleagues on a longer term basis and • To facilitate the feedback of information from consultations both to the Executive Committee and to the campus community. <p>Since September 2020 a range of initiatives in addition to the consultative process have been put in place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly updates to staff via HR Notices • Targeted communications to various areas e.g. Management Council / HoDs • More regular communications to all staff from Office of President/Regular Town Hall meetings • Regular Town Halls to all staff with Q&A to enable genuine feedback and two-way communication • Project to enable better 2 way communication via a UL Intranet is at its very early stages.

	<p>Arising from the consultation process described above, a staff survey or other consultative method will be aligned with existing staff feedback mechanisms including Athena SWAN activities. This mechanism will be used to evaluate improvement in communications</p>		
Action & Timelines	Actions	Timelines	Status
	1. Expressions of Interest Sought	1. Sept-October 2020	Complete
	2. CRG established	2. Sept-October 2020	Complete
	3. Terms of Reference Agreed	3. Sept-October 2020	Complete
	4. Meetings with: Head of Department Forum, Management Committee, UG Course Director Forum	4. Oct-Dec 2020	Complete
	5. Creation of open-ended consultative process focused on bottom-up information gathering concerning UL Strategic Priorities	5. Oct-Dec 2020	Complete
	6. 1 st phase consultations to take place	6. February – March 2021	Complete
	7. 2 nd phase consultations to take place	7. April – June 2021	Complete
	8. Staff survey on impact of remote working scheduled	8. April 2021	Complete
Update March 2022	<p>Following a call from the President for expressions of interest, the University established a Consultation Review Group (CRG) to recommend and oversee a series of consultative methods to engage with colleagues, and to facilitate the feedback of information from consultations both to the Executive Committee and to the campus community. The CRG membership reflects a balance: between early and advanced career staff; between administrative, support and academic roles; across faculties; and between disciplines. Insofar as possible, its composition tries to ensure diversity, inclusion and gender balance. The time period for consultation design, implementation, analysis of feedback, draft and final reports ran from</p>		

	<p>September 2020 to August 2021. A full and transparent documentation of all meetings, decisions, data and feedback is available for all University staff on the university's internal Sharepoint system.</p> <p>Following all group consultations, a written summary of the feedback received was circulated by the facilitator(s) to all participants for agreement before being sent to the CRG. Phase 1 consultation feedback, which was based on open-ended questions to staff about the strategic plan, was synthesised into an aggregate data set and made available the SharePoint site. Phase 2 of the consultation process used the feedback from Phase 1 to develop a more focused approach to the topics that arose in the first phase, identifying both strengths and challenges in current university organisation. Participants were encouraged to offer practical suggestions for positive change to enable the delivery of goals in the strategic plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CRG has issued a report with recommendations for action and feedback within the strategic plan and ongoing consultation methodologies within UL. This report has been considered by Executive and Governing Body in its recalibration of the UL@50 . Continued enhancement of internal communications systems and processes is an action item in the recalibrated strategic plan. • A new dedicated internal UL social media platform called UL Connect was launched in March 2022 to enable better 2 way communication
Revised timeline	n/a

3. Data and Digital Infrastructure & Capability

Rec. No.	Recommendation		
8	<p>the review team recommends that UL rapidly build further on the promising first steps taken in 2019 with the establishment of the Centre for Transformative Learning, both by making the necessary investments and stimulating these new technologies.</p>		
Initial Commentary (March 2021)	<p>It should be noted that this finding was in the context of the results of a survey on the movement to emergency remote teaching taken in June 2020. This survey represented the views of teaching staff who had experienced an unplanned for event due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Significant resources have been put in place to support teaching and assessment in an online environment since this survey took place. Throughout the University there has been a strong level of engagement with the support, training and resources provided to staff in the move to blended and online learning provided by members of the Centre for Transformative Learning (CTL) through the collaborative efforts of the LTF. CTL has been a critical driver of this community of practice (delivering much of its CPD, the curation development and curation of resources, social media).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Guidelines for online teaching and assessment have been developed 2. A repository of resource materials is available to teaching staff as well as live delivery of CPD activities 3. The University implemented the roll out of Panopto and designated MS Teams as its preferred platform to support online teaching. 4. The capacity of the Virtual Learning Environment has been enhanced to support time bound assessment where required by professional and regulatory bodies <p>Notwithstanding this ongoing activity, the University is developing a Digital Strategy to support teaching and learning. It is planned to adapt programmes within CTL to reflect the aspirations of the recalibrated strategy. The Graduate Diploma in Teaching, Learning and Scholarship includes three scholarship modules with a strong emphasis on SoTL. Scholarly teaching and research-led teaching is critical in the preparation of faculty in ensuring teaching is informed by research within their discipline and in informed pedagogy focused on active and engaged learning approaches.</p>		
Action & Timeline	Action	Timeline	Status

	Digital Strategy to support teaching and learning		
	It is planned to adapt programmes within CTL to reflect the aspirations of the recalibrated strategy		
Update March 2022	A university learning & assessment (LTA) strategy is being developed to encompass the digital strategy initially proposed.		
Revised Timeline	The LTA strategy is scheduled to come to the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee for consideration and approval by EC and Academic Council in October 2022		
Rec. No.	Recommendation		
12b*	further recommends that the university create the necessary database (potentially also through revised methodologies of obtaining and analysing data generated throughout the student life cycle or related to the university's different core processes) and IT (infra)structures and processes		
13	In order to obtain really meaningful and systematic enhancements, the review team recommends that the university put in place a much more complete and online data management system that provides data to central administration, as well as faculties and schools		
Initial Commentary (March 2021)	In order to fulfil recommendations 12 and 13, the University will continue to implement its programme of enhancements as outlined in the IT strategy 'UL Enable'. Phase 2 of the strategy is being re-examined to maintain consistency with the University strategy. Key actions to support that are outlined below.		
Timeline & Actions	Action	Timeline	Status
	1. Approve & Fund Stage 2 IT strategy business case	1. December 2021	In Progress
	2. Expand Business Intelligence team	2. December 2021	In Progress
	3. Define business requirements and priorities	3. Arising from strategic consultation	In Progress

	4. Improve underlying data quality, management & governance required across all systems through systems and process improvement e.g. SI tactical stabilisation, selection of new VLE	4. Ongoing	In Progress
	5. Continue with SI Tactical stabilisation (student record system) project	5. Current to Sept 2022	In Progress
	6. Development of institutional Digital Strategy		
Update March 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of initiatives have been delivered to enhance the availability of data to central administration and to schools and faculties. This has been progressed through the development of centralised reports and dashboards which have enhanced the availability of research data, postgraduate admissions data, graduate outcomes data and key programme data such as recruitment, progression and completion data. The University is currently implementing a new VLE which will have enhanced learning analytics capability. Proposals have been made and costed to support the implementation of UL@50. These will be mapped further and prioritised to the actions of the Strategic Plan. 		
Revised timeline	September 2022		

4. Access, Transfer & Progression

Rec. No.	Recommendation		
15	The review team recommends that the University clarify its objectives in relation to access and diversity to which the policies already in place are related. In order to satisfy itself of the success of these policies and the achievement of its objectives in this regard, the review team further recommends that the University consider developing an appropriate data set that will allow it to monitor trends in student entry, progression and achievement.		
16	The review team recommends that the University clarify its objectives in relation to access and diversity and, as part of this planned review of recognition of prior learning, it should consider what monitoring data would enable it to determine the effectiveness of its access policies in meeting the objectives identified with particular emphasis on social deprivation and diversity		
Initial Commentary (March 2021)	<p>University of Limerick has strong track record within the Irish University sector of attracting and supporting under-represented groups at undergraduate level. Recent data published by the HEA shows that UL has the joint lowest score (with NUIG) of the Irish Universities on the Mean deprivation index; indicating that a far greater number of UL students come from disadvantaged backgrounds and our score still remains below the National Mean for Universities and IoTs combined</p> <p>UL has the highest number of students (42%) from the lowest 2 of the 4 socio-economic bands ('Disadvantaged' and 'below average' bands) as well as the lowest rate of 12% from the highest band ('Affluent') when compared with the other universities.</p> <p>Notwithstanding this, the University recognises that further work is required to ensure that admissions pathways for students in the further education sector can be streamlined and more analysis of its data on the success of students from underrepresented groups would add value to its equality and diversity objectives. The following actions will support that endeavour</p>		
Timeline & Actions	Action	Timeline	Status
	1. UL@50 consultation will inform these objectives and the information required to implement and evaluate their effectiveness	1. June 2021	In Progress

	2. In order to support its Access Transfer and Progression mission and obligations, the University has recently appointed a Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	2. March 2021	Complete
	3. The University has created a post to support UL's role in the IUA/Human Capital Initiative for the development of a sectoral RPL /RPE approach to support mobility in the HE system and life long learning	3. March 2021	Complete
	4. As part of the implementation of periodic programme review the streamlining of advanced entry and RPL pathways to UL programmes from alternative routes will be investigated. (See Quality Assurance & Enhancement Actions)		
Update March 2022	The University's objectives with respect to diversity and widening participation are articulated in the recalibrated strategic plan. A series of KPIs relating to these measures have been developed. However, it should be noted that these objectives and measures may be amended subject to the publication of a new national Access Plan which is due for publication in 2022.		
Revised timeline	2022		

5. Student Engagement

Rec. No.	Recommendation		
14	The review team recommends that the University strengthen the role of bottom-up feedback by using staff and student feedback, and that the University give this feedback a more prominent position in the quality architecture		
10*	Given the central position that student surveys have in the total QA system, the review team recommends that UL continue work with students to close the loop by improving student response rates, using all means possible, including new channels of communication to renew enthusiasm for the process. In particular, the review team recommends that UL pilot, identify and follow up best practices in improving student feedback together with students, and, at the same time, work with students on how to address the feedback, including consistently reporting back to students how their feedback is used and in which changes it resulted.		
Initial Commentary & Action	The University had identified the need to strengthen its use of student feedback and data in general in order to enhance teaching and learning and service delivery. The StELA project was funded under the SATLE fund in 2019. The project was paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic and it recommenced in September 2020. and is currently in progress		
Timeline & Actions	Action	Timeline	Status
	1. Student focus groups complete	1 November 2020	Complete
	2. Staff focus groups complete	2 December 2020	Complete
	3. Interim reports and recommendations	3 March 2021	Complete
	4. Consultation with stakeholders	4 Mar-May 2021	Complete
	5. revised policies on student evaluation and use of data for enhancement of teaching and learning to be presented to AC.	5 June 2021	Complete

	6. The University commits to the review of the appeals procedure will be reviewed in conjunction with UL Student Life and ULPSU	6 During AY 2021/22	In progress
Update March 2022	<p>The StELA project was completed in June 2021. 3 reports were issued from the project outlining the feedback from students, staff and the final report which makes recommendations to the University. The policy on student surveys and feedback mechanisms provides a policy basis on which surveys and other feedback mechanisms should be managed by the University. This includes approval of feedback mechanisms, publication of a survey calendar and requirements to ensure that feedback mechanisms include an obligation to close the feedback loop. Monitoring of this process is undertaken by the Quality Committee.</p> <p>The StELA project also recommended the creation of a working group to evaluate the effectiveness of existing feedback mechanisms. The terms of reference of the working group have been approved by Executive Committee and the working group will commence its work in Q1 2022. The outputs of the project can be viewed on www.ul.ie/quality/stela.</p>		
Revised timeline	N/A		

6. Quality Assurance & Enhancement System

Rec. No.	Recommendation		
1	The review team recommends that there be a clear line of accountability for QA, including the ultimately accountable person, who should be the VPAASE		
Timeline & Actions	Action	Timeline	Status
	1. A graphical description of the QA/E architecture has been developed. 2. Clarification on roles and links to formal documents such as the (i)descriptors of academic roles and other roles and (ii) terms of reference of key committees with respect to quality assurance and enhancement will be made and included in the descriptor of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement system.	June 2021	Complete
Update March 2022	This information has been published on the university's website at www.ul.ie/quality . The quality assurance and enhancement site has been revised and updated providing additional information to internal and external stakeholders.		
Rec. No.	Recommendation		
2*	The review team recommends re-analysing the QA and QE system to obtain a more balanced top down/bottom up attribution of responsibilities, which, in the view of the review team, will lead to greater engagement and ownership from all involved.		
9*	The review team recommends that UL revise the processes involved in programme design and annual review in order to identify the critical steps and remove the less important ones		
6	the review team recommends devolving minor revisions to faculty boards, thus making the process more lean and delegating responsibility to the work floor.		
Initial Commentary	Recommendations 2,9 and 6 relate to the revision of procedures relating to the programme lifecycle and devolution of responsibility to Faculties. Work had commenced in this regard in March-May 2020. This was suspended due to COVID-19		

Timeline & Actions	Action	Timeline	Status
	1 The Working Group is to be re-instated.	1 Academic year 2021/22	In progress
	2 Planning for implementation of the programme Review Process has begun. a. The initial phase is a scoping process to detail the process and resources required to support it.	2 February – June 2021	Complete
	3 The Curriculum Framework Working Group which has representation from a range of stakeholders has been created with a remit to develop of recommendations for the development of an institutional Curriculum Development Framework for UL	3 Commenced March 21 to report during AY 2021/22	In progress
	4 The review group report implies that the 'complexity of the QA/E system' goes beyond the programme lifecycle so other aspects of the system will be examined through a longer engagement with the university	4 During AY 2021/22	In progress

	community on the effectiveness of the QA/E system		
Update March 2022	<p>A representative cross functional working group was created in March 2021 to propose an appropriate curriculum development framework (CDF) for the University. This group deliberated between March and November 2021. The proposed Integrated Curriculum Development Framework (ICDF) was agreed in principle subject to the implementation of feedback received by Academic Council in December 2021.</p> <p>The implementation of the CDF will require the reinstatement of the Curriculum Review and Innovation Committee (CRIC) Working Group which will work to integrate the CDF with existing programme development, approval, monitoring and evaluation processes. This will include clarification of responsibilities and where they are devolved to faculty and departmental level.</p> <p>The approval of the ICDF is a prerequisite for the implementation of the remaining actions linked to this group of recommendations. Detailed planning for the University's periodic review of programmes will commence once the CDF and a new academic model is approved. This programme review process will be linked to the university's statutory obligations review of education, research and activities and to sectoral work in the area of aligning the quality assurance processes of institutions and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.</p> <p>Throughout this update, reference is made to the use of cross functional working groups or other collaborative groups to respond to these recommendations or to develop other enhancements identified through the university's quality assurance mechanisms. Their use demonstrates the University's commitment to the development of bottom up feedback channels through which policy and processes can be streamlined and enhanced.</p>		
Revised timeline	February 2022- June 2023		