



Office of the Pro-Rector (International Development & Quality Assurance)

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**Quality Assurance Committee  
Report of its workings: June 2017 – July 2018**

**BACKGROUND**

The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) is a committee set up by Senate at its meeting of 11<sup>th</sup> May 2017. The QAC is currently composed of the following members:

Professor Godfrey Baldacchino, in the Chair  
Ms Jo-Anne Attard  
Professor Maria Attard  
Professor Victor Buttigieg  
Dr Maria Cassar  
Ms Deborah Duca (as from October 2017)  
Professor Ing. Simon Fabri  
Ms Veronica Grech  
Mr Michael Piccinino (as from July 2017)  
Mr Daniel Vella (as from July 2017)  
Dr Peter A. Xuereb

In attendance                      Dr Sandro Spiteri  
   Ms Angela Tabone

Secretary                              Ms Marlene Debono

The Committee first met on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2017. At this meeting, the following *Terms of Reference* were proposed. They were approved by Senate on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2017:

- to make recommendations for the development and updating of the Quality Policy of the University so as to promote and foster its quality culture and support the implementation and the vision and strategy of the University;
- to identify quality indicators so as to monitor the implementation of the strategy and the fulfilment of the vision of the University;
- to access the necessary information so as to support the Committee's oversight and monitoring functions;

- to undertake the necessary research on ways of improving the implementation and fulfilment of the said strategy and policy respectively;
- to provide feedback for improvement to staff and entities, including training, and to recommend proposals for improvement to Senate;
- to undertake and monitor the Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) processes and procedures within the University, including the external component of the IQA;
- to prepare for and co-ordinate External Quality Assurance (EQA) procedures of the University, as an integral part of its quality culture.

The setting up of the QAC was one of the recommendations of the “proto-QAC” set up in 2015 by University Rector Prof. Juanito Camilleri.

The effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms at UM and the campus-wide support for the development of a ‘quality culture’ were both felt to require a formal structure. This body would also oversee the setting up of a comprehensive dashboard of Quality Assurance indicators to supply Rectorate, Council, Senate, Deans, Directors and any other administrators with time-critical updates and data. The QAC is also meant to identify any new QA mechanisms or refinements to complement or replace the ones already in place.

The QAC has met five times during the period under review.

This document is an overview of the work undertaken by the QAC since it was set up in June 2017.

## **KEY INITIATIVES**

### **QAC WORKSHOP**

The QAC organised a **workshop** open to all academic members of staff on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, to explain the quality process at UM, and to invite suggestions for improving the efficacy of the Self-Evaluation Document. Around 30 academics took part in this event. The workshop helped to inform interested staff about the quality architecture at UM, and the specific role of the Self-Evaluation Document, which is essentially an instrument to facilitate self-assessment. APQRU kindly supported this event.

It was proposed that the QAC should hold a similar workshop or event on an annual basis.

### **QUALITY SUPPORT UNIT (QSU)**

The former Quality Assurance Unit was renamed as the Quality Support Unit. In this way, the QSU staff can directly support the implementation of quality systems across campus. The QSU reports to Angela Tabone (Office of the Rector) for any HR matters; and to Pro Rector Prof. Godfrey Baldacchino for quality matters.

Throughout the period under review, the QSU has compiled a set of procedures/rules/guidelines that are in place with the different Faculties, Institutes, Centres and Schools, thus collating information on academic protocols and operating procedures.

The QSU is also supporting quality assurance initiatives underway at the Junior College.

### **QUALITY COORDINATING TEAM (QCT)**

Setting up the **QCT** was one of the initiatives of the QAC. The team consists of Ms Audrey Cascun (Office of the Secretary), Ms Deborah Duca (Research Support Services Directorate) and Dr Sandro Spiteri and Dr Jonathan Xuereb (Quality Support Unit), and with Pro-Rector Prof. Godfrey Baldacchino as Chair.

The **QCT** has played a central role in compiling and managing **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) across campus** and in liaising with the Office for the Human Resources Management and Development (HRMD) on **staff training requirements in relation to SOPs**. The QCT meets on a regular basis and sees to standardising UM procedures across the board.

### **STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES (SOPS)**

All SOPs have been uploaded on the AIMS portal by June 2018. Apart from the QCT, the Office for the HRMD and the AIMS Office were also involved in this project. The QSU contacted all F/I/C/S and, with their support, collected all available Academic SOPs; the Office of the Secretary managed the Administrative SOPs; while the Research Support Services Directorate (RSSD) managed the Technical SOPs.

A separate exercise needs to be undertaken, whereby different SOPs at F/I/C/S dealing with the same subject will be examined for possible standardisation or streamlining, based on best practices.

The Office of the Registrar will also be identifying that set of SOPs that regulate campus-wide activities. These regulations would comprise the core of an eventual academic manual of procedures at UM.

The integration of the AIMS SOP portal with the UM Website will be completed by IT Services. The portal will show the entire list of SOPs. The system is designed to allow multiple tags (such as health & safety, academic, environmental, etc.): these tags will enable users to filter SOPs on the website interface. This function can eventually be used to filter SOPs that fit within academic, administrative or technical manuals.

In the interests of organisational transparency, the default principle is to make such standard operating procedures visible to all.

Access to SOPs will be given according to three levels of access:

- (i) Internal: SOP name will be visible to the general public through the UM website but the document can only be accessed by staff, and possibly students, having a university sign-in account.
- (ii) Specific: SOP name will be visible to the general public through the UM website but will only be accessible by pre-identified entities, that is, specific faculties, departments, institutes, schools or centres.
- (iii) Public: SOP will be accessible by the general public through the UM website.

The SOP portal has been integrated with the Employees' Training Folders on AIMS, so that when employees read SOPs or attend SOP-related training sessions, their respective training folders would be updated accordingly.

At the meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2018, it was recommended that Ms Veronica Grech, Ms Audrey Ann Cascun and Ms Deborah Duca would meet to work on those SOPs that involve the Office of the Registrar, and integrate these with the rest on AIMS.

It is hoped that, in the near future, manuals for different members of staff and at different stages of their career, would be available for perusal or download from the UM website.

#### **PERIODIC PROGRAMME REVIEW (PPR) & SELF-EVALUATION DOCUMENT (SED)**

The QAC has worked closely with the Pro-Rector for Academic Affairs, the Registrar and APQRU to facilitate the compiling of PPRs, to ensure that PPRs are held within the stipulated time-frames, and to streamline the processes related to this important exercise. The QAC Chair and Secretary coordinated the Stakeholders' Meeting (SM) for the PPR dealing with the Faculty of Medicine & Surgery and the Faculty of Laws (December 2017). Following these experiences, it was recommended that the respective Faculty Boards consider the outcomes of the Stakeholders' Meeting, and that these actions would be reported to Senate, and thus conclude their PPR exercise. These changes were approved by Senate.

These same entities have had crucial managerial and coordinative roles in seeing that the **Self-Evaluation Document (SED)** met and responded to the feedback made by different members of academic staff. The SED was therefore revised in such a way so as to provide a simpler, more streamlined and effective approach to undertaking the PPR, and reducing the obligation to submit copious paperwork in attachment. The revised version of the SED was approved by Senate on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2018.

#### **STUDENT EVALUATION FORM (SEF)**

The QAC, the Pro-Rector for Academic Affairs, APQRU, IT Services and the Marketing Communications & Alumni Office were involved in a joint effort to promote the importance of the end-of-study-unit **Student Evaluation Form** and to simplify the form, so that a higher response rate would hopefully be obtained.

Overall response rates to the end-of-study-unit student feedback form have been dropping in recent years, and are now below 30%.

The SEF was revised to consist of only one page (instead of two), reducing its former 29 questions to a more manageable 17.

An online system and/or application is also being identified by which students can evaluate their completed study units from their smart phones.

IT Services is also exploring how such a student-friendly evaluation tool can be incorporated into the **smart phone app** that UM is planning to launch in October 2018.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF TRAINING**

With the identification of SOPs in the various F/I/C/S, comes the need to ensure that those responsible for running such SOPs are suitably informed and trained. The QAC is liaising with the Office of HRMD to ensure that such staff members have the necessary training opportunities to acquire those skills and competences required to manage specific tasks safely, competently and effectively.

## **OFFICE OF PROFESSIONAL ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT (OPAD)**

The QAC recognises the importance of Professional Academic Development. Mr James Cilia was invited to the QAC meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2018 to report on activities and plans relating to OPAD. Through this meeting, the QAC was informed of developments relating to OPAD and members of the committee shared their views and gave suggestions in relation to academic continuous development.

The QAC also recognizes the importance of having both academic and administrative staff trained in the **use of social media for marketing** specific programmes of study at UM. Devolving marketing down to F/I/C/S level eases the pressure on central human resources and improves the fine-tuning of the marketing by those who are most familiar with the programme of study being offered. The first set of three sessions involving such training has now been held, and reviews from participants have been positive. The course has been oversubscribed and will be offered again in the autumn of 2018.

## **ANNUAL REPORTS**

The QAC has approved the template in relation to **Annual Reports** by F/I/C/S at UM, as designed by Prof. Maria Attard in 2015. This will facilitate the process whereby academic members of staff compile these reports at the end of each academic year.

Meanwhile, the Chair of the QAC, together with the Office of the Secretary and the Marketing, Communications and Alumni Office, are compiling the 2015-6 and 2016-7 Annual Reports of the UM on the basis of this template.

## **INTERNAL AUDITING**

The QAC met Mr Philip Gafa' (Designate Chief Audit Executive) during its meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2018. Mr Gafa' explained the function of internal auditing at UM. The QAC recognises the importance of internal auditing, and the way that quality assurance and internal auditing complement each other, since they both work on evaluating and improving current practices at UM. Close cooperation between the QAC and the Internal Audit office at UM is expected.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN/KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)**

The QAC is encouraging members of the UM community to refer to *Forging ahead: Beyond 2016* – Prof. Alfred Vella's 2016 '**document**' for his election to Rector – as a strategic guide in the interim, and until the UM completes its Strategic Planning Exercise which was started in Spring 2018. The document includes around 60 deliverables which can be used to benchmark progress at UM on multiple fronts.

## **BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE DASHBOARD (BI)**

Dr Peter Xuereb is coordinating the **BI Dashboard**, meant to provide access to data in real - time in a devolved scenario across UM. He is following up for the necessary administrative support to be provided for this project. The UM has decided to adopt Microsoft Power BI for its business intelligence systems software. New recruits from the SIMS Office should be providing the required assistance; but other support was still needed, depending on recruitment by the AIMS Office (as at 03/07/18).

Dr Peter Xuereb and Dr Sandro Spiteri have conducted exercises to identify how the BI Dashboard can be useful to administrative and academic members of staff. Such a dashboard will also offer real time data and metrics involving any 'performance indicators' that UM may wish to adopt.

Corporate responsibility of the BI Dashboard lies with the Office of the Secretary whereas that for its technical infrastructure falls under AIMS.

## **SUSTAINABLE UNIVERSITY OF MALTA (SUM) INITIATIVE**

The role of SUM is to extend the remit of the QAC beyond strictly academic matters and to strive for a comprehensive, campus-wide sustainability relating to buildings and grounds as well as to the integration of research and outreach in sound environmental practices.

Dr Marie Briguglio is coordinating the SUM initiative and reports to the QAC Chair. She also keeps the QAC up-to-date with developments in relation to this initiative.

An *ad hoc* team was formed consisting of representatives of the QAC, representatives from the QSU, and a representative from the Estate & Works Office. This team used the Green Metric as a toolkit to identify stakeholders and the environmental practices already taking place at UM.

Meetings with various UM staff and other stakeholders were held to make people aware of the SUM initiative, and as a stocktaking exercise of current pro-environmental practices on the UM Campus.

A 'Greening the UM' Survey was carried out in Spring 2018 and assessed the environmental attitudes and behaviour of staff and students at UM in relation to both home and campus setting. The perception regarding environmental protection efforts at UM was also explored.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES AT UM**

The QAC is seeking to streamline procedures in relation to waste disposal and make members of staff more aware of the importance of having a pro-environment campus culture. The QAC is liaising with Estate & Works and Precincts Office in order to improve current **waste separation and recycling schemes** on campus, as well as to improve knowledge of the extensive environmental practices that are already in place.

Ways of improving parking issues on campus and the potential of introducing **shared demand responsive transport** (SDRT) to and from campus, have also being discussed.

## **UNIVERSITY RANKING EXERCISES & GOOGLE SCHOLAR PROFILE**

The QAC is seeking to raise awareness among members of staff of the importance of global ranking exercises which are also increasingly used by prospective students to guide their eventual decision as to where to study.

A 'Task Force' was also set up to discuss ways of improving UM's standing on global rankings, with the University Librarian as Secretary. The Task Force met twice and recommended various initiatives, including encouraging all UM academic staff members to post details of ALL their academic publications on their UM **website profile page**. To make this possible, since February 2018, the restriction to list only up to 10 publications under one's profile has been removed. UM academics can now add as many scholarly publications as they wish under their profile.

The QAC encourages members of UM's academic staff to set up a public **Google Scholar User Profile** (GSUP). This enhances the visibility of individual scholars and of UM's collective research portfolio. The number of UM academics with a GSUP has risen from 194 in June 2017 to 432 as at 18<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

The UM is participating in the following ranking exercises: U-Multirank, Webometrics, QS University Rankings and UI Green Metric. UM will also take part in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings exercise as from January 2019.

The UM's position on **Webometrics** has improved from 1243<sup>rd</sup> place in June 2016, to 1099<sup>th</sup> place in January 2018, to 964<sup>th</sup> place in July 2018.

## **NCFHE**

Along with the Pro-Rectorate for Academic Affairs, the QAC is involved in the follow-up to the **external quality audit exercise**, which is being monitored by the *National Commission for Further & Higher Education* (NCFHE).

The external quality assurance audit of UM took place in 2015, and a self-assessment report was submitted by UM in 2016. An informal follow up meeting was held with NCFHE representatives on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2017, at which Pro-Rectors for both Academic Affairs and Quality Assurance attended. Another self-assessment report by UM to the NCFHE is due in October 2018. This report shall cover UM's activities up to the end of June 2018 and it will provide a solid basis and serve as preparation for the next external audit of the University.

## **REVIEW OF HUMAN RESOURCES (HR) OPERATIONS**

At a meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2018, the QAC agreed on the significance of reviewing HR operations and considered suggesting that a **human resource / personnel audit** be undertaken on campus. The suggestion is to be discussed with the HRMD Director.

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Prof. Godfrey Baldacchino  
(Pro-Rector, International Development and Quality Assurance)  
Chair, QAC Committee

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Date



## Entity Annual Report: Template

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All Faculties, Institutes, Centres and Schools (hereafter entities) of the University of Malta (UM) are required to complete an Annual Report and to submit it to the Secretary of the University by the end of September of each year. The purpose of this report is to ensure that all entities form part of a continuous, integrated system of evidence-driven policy and planning, budgeting and quality assurance at UM. These reports also feed into the University of Malta's *Annual Report* itself, which helps contribute to the positioning, quality audit and overall competitiveness of the University.

This template provides indications of the *minimal* requirements expected in such an annual report. Each entity can still expand and add details, including those specific to its own operations.

Entities are encouraged to make appropriate use of the output of this exercise to showcase their mission, activities and accomplishments, also by means of the Internet and social media. The approval of the UM's Marketing, Communications & Alumni Office is to be solicited before such publication.

### Completing the Annual Report

#### **Section 1: Summary**

Include the distinctive mission of your entity; a summary of its main activities and highlights for the year under review; any major developments/initiatives envisaged for the year ahead; and any other point(s) worthy of note.

#### **Section 2: Entity Profile**

Include data relating to your entity. Should you wish to comment on any aspect of the data, or point out any discrepancies or highlights, do so in the table below:

	Data report	
	<b>Category: Student information</b>	
2.1	Number of students in the entity	
2.2	Number of female students	
2.3	Number of male students	
2.4	Number of undergraduate students according to diploma/ degree being followed	
2.5	Number of 'taught Masters' students	
2.6	Number of 'Masters by research' students	
2.7	Number of doctoral students	
2.8	Number of post-doctoral students	
2.9	Number of international students (EU/EEA and non-EU/EEA nationals)	
2.10	Number of students with disability	
2.11	Number of mature students	

	<b>Category: Programmes offered</b>	
2.12	Number and type (FT/PT) of undergraduate programmes	
2.13	Number and type (FT/PT) of postgraduate programmes	
	<b>Category: Staff</b>	
2.14	Number and details of resident academic staff	
2.15	Number and details of visiting academic staff	
2.16	Number and details of support (administrative, technical and industrial) staff	
2.17	Number and bibliometric data of peer-reviewed publications (books, book chapters, journal articles ...)	
2.18	Participation by staff in conferences, seminars and other scholarly activities	

Comments, if any:

### **Section 3: Entity achievements**

Include achievements in teaching, research, community engagement, partnership with other entities, funded projects and administrative service (including quality assurance activities) to UM. Also include brief details of all projects in which your entity participated, giving an overview of the scope, value and timeframe of the project and the input made by your entity.

### **Section 4: Entity governance**

Include a list of Committee meetings for which minutes have been placed in the repository. Provide narrative in cases where the required number of meetings were not held or in the case of any discrepancies.

Committee	Required minimum per academic year	Dates of meetings held for which minutes are available	Comments

### **Section 5: Entity planning**

Provide a brief account of any strategy/planning initiatives held within your entity and whether there are major strategic initiatives planned for the forthcoming year.

*Endorsed by Senate on 20 September 2018.*