



**Quality Assurance Committee**

**Report of its Workings: August 2019 – July 2020**

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

Professor Godfrey Baldacchino, in the Chair  
Ms Jo-Anne Attard  
Professor Maria Attard  
Professor Ing Victor Buttigieg  
Dr Maria Cassar  
Ms Deborah Duca  
Professor Ing Simon Fabri  
Ms Veronica Grech  
Dr Peter A Xuereb  
Ms Yasmine Ellul  
Ms Lara Attard (until 31.01.2020)  
Ms Elsa Cassar (from 01.02.2020)

In attendance: Dr Sandro Spiteri (until 30.06.2020)  
Dr Jonathan Xuereb  
Ms Angela Tabone

The QAC met six times in the period under review.

This document is an overview of the work undertaken by, and under the auspices of, the QAC during this third year of its operations.

**1. END-OF-STUDY UNIT STUDENT EVALUATION**

*Student Evaluation* is one of the few institutional mechanisms available for students-at-large to express an opinion about the quality of the teaching and learning they experience at UM.

The response rate for the 576 study units selected for evaluation at the January 2020 session was 12.7%.

The QAC has recommended a review of the *modus operandi* of this important evaluation and internal quality assurance exercise. It has also been urging a more decentralised approach, whereby different lecturers may and can take the initiative to carry out an evaluation of the study unit in their care, possibly using hard-copy versions of either the standard, 17-question student evaluation questionnaire or of a bespoke template developed specifically for the programme of study under review. Whichever instrument is used, results should be communicated to one's respective Head of Department; and any follow-up actions emerging from the student review that are deemed important and necessary are to be discussed and minuted at Board of Studies meetings.

In the wake of Covid-19, hard-copy versions of evaluation questionnaires are now discouraged. This reduces the room to manoeuvre in terms of available formats. A resort to web-based versions of the tool is inevitable.

## 2. UM STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2025

The QAC has met with all five Pro-Rectors and together with them has reviewed progress in the implementation of the UM Strategic Plan during its first year. The frank yet critical conversations helped to clarify some of the challenges in reaching targets and objectives, as well as to propose and review potential solutions to these challenges. The Pro-Rectors reported that the articulation of the strategic targets, and the rationale behind their significance, along with the frank discussion with QAC members, was deemed to be a useful exercise.

It is the intention of the QAC to continue monitoring and supporting developments in relation to UM's Strategic Plan in the course of the current academic year.

## 3. INTERNAL QUALITY AUDIT

In preparation for the looming 2<sup>nd</sup> External Quality Audit cycle of the University of Malta, the QAC launched a 'mock internal quality audit' during the 2019/20 academic year. Those Faculties which were amongst the first to complete their periodic programme review (PPR), and any additional Institutes/Centres/Schools that were interested, were invited to consider undertaking a structured internal quality audit. This served as a 'dry run' or rehearsal for 'the real thing' when and if that should face the FICS concerned; it also offered a mid-term review opportunity to those Faculties who had completed their PPR 2-3 years back. The exercise also served to build capacity within the members of the QAC itself: one member from the QAC participated in the exercise with each of the units involved, and in some cases chaired the proceedings.

Five units - three Faculties and two Institutes/Centres - accepted the QAC's invitation. Four of these (Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Laws, Centre for Labour Studies and Institute for European Studies) successfully went through the complete internal quality audit cycle, with the ensuing results and recommendations being discussed at F/I/C Board level. The Faculty of Health Sciences, with whom a number of scoping meetings were undertaken, regrettably had to pull out of the exercise with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in early March 2020.

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
ENTITY	QAC MEMBER/s	STUDENT MEMBER/s	STAKEHOLDER MEETING (optional)	SCOPING VISIT	INTRO MEETING WITH STUDENTS	PANEL PLANNING MEETING	MOCK AUDIT	POST-AUDIT PANEL MEETING	DEBRIEFING SESSION (optional)
Centre for Labour Studies	Dr Maria Cassar	Anabel Muscat, Yvette Grixti	Tues 25-2-20	Tue 26-03-20	Thu 27-2-20	Mon 27-4-20	Tues 28-4-20	Wed 20-5-20	
Institute for European Studies	Prof. Maria Attard	Elsa Cassar, Yasmine Ellul		Mon 27-4-20	Mon 3-2-20	Tue 12-5-20	Wed 13-5-20	Mon 25-5-20	
Faculty of Laws	Dr Peter Xuereb	Matthew Charles Zammit, Yasmine Ellul, Roberta Spiteri		Fri 7-2-20	Fri 21-2-20	Tue 3-3-20	Fri 6-3-2020	Thu 26-3-20	
Faculty of Engineering	Prof. Victor Buttigieg	Matthew Xuereb		Wed 15-1-20	Tue 10-1-20	Tues 4-2-20	Wed 5-2-20	Wed 19-2-20	Wed 25-3-20
Faculty of Health Sciences	Prof. Simon Fabri	Naomi Deguara, Francesca Sammut		Mon 20-1-20	Fri 10-1-20	Postponed			

1.	Entity undertaking the Mock Internal Quality Audit
2.	QAC academic on Panel (apart from the students, and Prof. Baldacchino who chairs each Panel, except CLS, since he is CLS Board Chair; Prof. Ing. V. Buttigieg acted as chair on this occasion).
3.	Student members of each Panel
4.	For CLS only, the process included a meeting with stakeholders to collect further feedback that will further inform the Mock Audit process
5.	The Scoping Visit is with the members of the entity who will be fronting the Mock Audit Panel, and was intended to help them understand the scope of the Mock Audit, what types of questions will be asked and how to answer them. It also helps the Panel get a feel of the preparedness and disposition of the entity towards this process, and can help inform the interview focus during the Mock Audit itself. Typically, Prof Baldacchino led the visit, accompanied by Dr Spiteri, but the other academic member of the QAC is also welcome to join.
6.	A short introductory meeting is held with the student members to brief them on what is expected from them throughout the mock audit procedure.
7.	A few days before the Mock Audit interview proper, the respective Panel (including the students) meets to plan the way of proceeding during the interview.

8.	Each Mock Audit interview takes around 2 hrs. Immediately after the Audit, the head of the entity is asked for his/her own feedback of the process just undergone. Minutes are kept and a document is prepared, listing commendations, recommendations, and actionable items.
9.	The QAC members of the Panel meet some days after the Mock Audit to review the experience and decide on the main thrusts of the feedback to be given to the entity. This meeting will be based on a doc prepared by the QSU as an outcome of the audit, and which is presented to the QAC for discussion
10.	After discussion at QAC and formal adoption of the doc mentioned in point 8 above, this doc is sent to the entity, with an offer of a debriefing session in which the doc and whole Mock Audit experience is discussed and reflected upon.

A [Standard Operating Procedure](#) describing this mock Internal Quality Audit has been prepared. Such documentation builds institutional memory and allows the exercise to be replicated more easily, when and as required.

#### 4. EXTERNAL QUALITY AUDIT

The QAC requested the Quality Support Unit to critically examine the progress reports that had been compiled by UM and submitted to the NCFHE as a sequel to the External Quality Audit exercise started in 2016. The subsequent remarks of the QSU were used as a basis for reflection by the various UM units that are directly involved and implicated in the suggestions and concerns made by the EQA Panel. These units include APQRU/PVC, OPAD, Office of the Registrar, the Communications Office, IT Services and the QAC itself. An updated progress report by UM will be submitted to NCFHE in November 2020.

Meanwhile, and in anticipation of UM's 2<sup>nd</sup> EQA, the document outlining the quality assurance functions at UM had been revised by the QSU and approved by Senate at its June 2020 meeting. This is now available [here](#).

#### 5. SHARING AND CELEBRATING GOOD PRACTICE

As from October 2019, the QAC started identifying good practices at FICS level, based on data collected from meetings with Deans and Directors in previous years, as well as from ongoing reports submitted from time to time from the academic community.

These 'good practices' were used as the content for the *Quality Mailshot Initiative*, a series of one-page, succinct news flashes, that were shared with the UM community once every fortnight throughout the whole 2019/2020 academic year. A total of 13 mailshots were sent out and 49 distinct feedback responses were received, and replied to, over the eight months of its operation.

The repository for the Quality Mailshot Initiative is available [here](#).

## 6. PERIODIC PROGRAMME REVIEW

The QSU was tasked by Rector to continue supporting the periodic programme review process with those faculties who had yet to complete the first PPR cycle. The QSU supported the preparation of relevant documentation, its sharing with identified stakeholders, the organisation of the stakeholders meeting, and the preparation of both the minutes of that meeting and of the actionable items identified in that meeting, which would then go to Faculty Board for discussion and possible approval.

The Faculties of ICT, Theology, Education and Social Wellbeing completed their PPR. Their final reports were presented and approved by Senate during 2019/20.

These Stakeholder Meetings have been held, or are planned in the short term:

10<sup>th</sup> September 2020: Faculty for Media & Knowledge Sciences

The Faculty of Arts is planning two stakeholder meetings as part of its PPR.

No progress has been reported with the ongoing PPRs of the Faculty of Science and the Faculty for the Built Environment.

## 7. GOOGLE SCHOLAR PROFILES

The number of UM academics with a public [Google Scholar User Profile](#) (GSUP) has increased steadily from 196 (July 2016); 450 (September 2018); 572 (June 2019) and to 660 (July 2020).

The complete link, in order of citations, for scholars with a public GSUP and a um.edu.mt email address, is available [here](#).

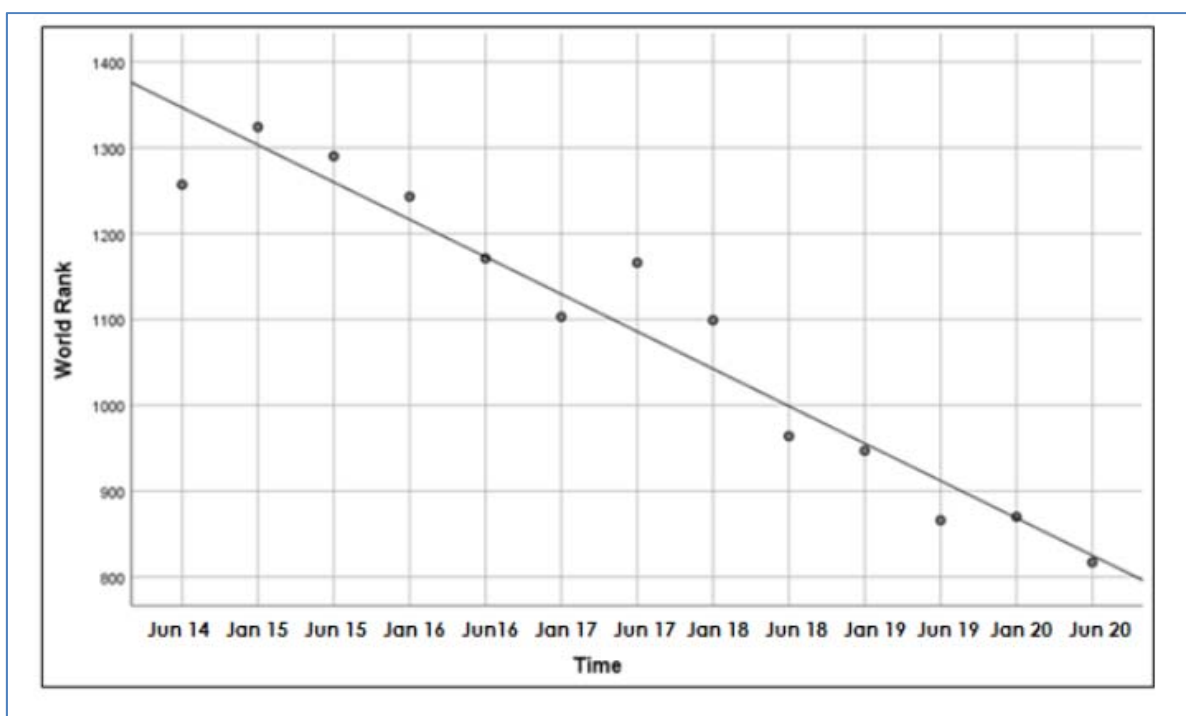
[Prof. Stephen Montefort](#) is the most cited UM Scholar (12,330 citations as at the time of writing); while [Prof. Giorgios Yannakakis](#) has the highest [h-index](#) within the UM community: 53.

Google Scholar Profiles are powerful expressions of the visibility of research output by scholars (when taken individually) and institutions (when taken collectively), and of the value of that output as measured by citations. The significance of such Profiles and their pivotal role in university rankings was highlighted in the 'best practice' promotional campaign underway during the 2019/2020 academic year (Item 5 above.)

## 8. UNIVERSITY RANKING EXERCISES

UM proactively takes part in these ranking exercises by collecting and submitting pertinent statistical data: Webometrics, U-Multirank, UI Green Metric and (from 2019) the UK's Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings.

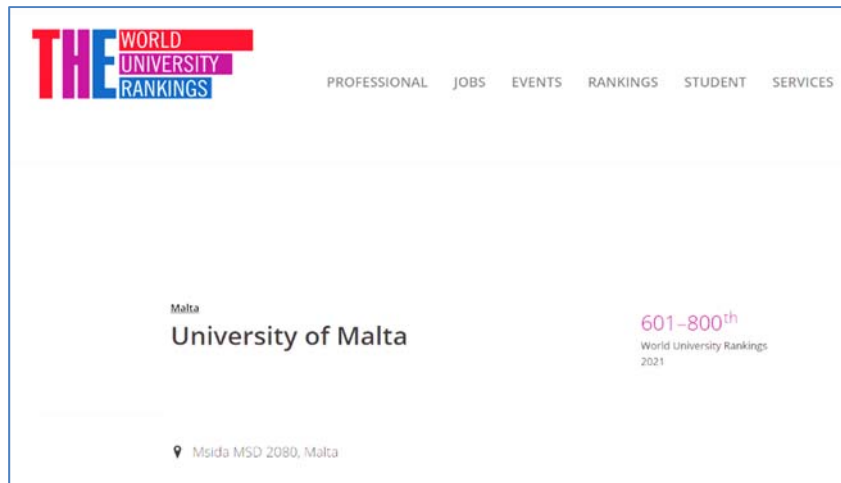
UM's position on **Webometrics** – a ranking system based in Madrid, Spain - has improved 50 places between July 2019 and July 2020, even as the number of universities and other higher educational institutions that participate in this ranking exercise continues to grow. UM's position has now *improved by 500 places in five years*: from 1324<sup>th</sup> place in January 2015 to 820<sup>th</sup> in July 2020. This puts UM in the world's top 2.4%. UM is also ranked as 352<sup>nd</sup> best in Europe (or 313<sup>th</sup> within the European Union).



(Graph courtesy of Prof. Liberato Camilleri)

Interestingly, the Webometric exercise ranks [seven institutions based in Malta](#). These include MCAST and ITS, apart from UM.

UM's position on the **THE** index remains stable at the '601-800' band – the same score secured in 2019 – even as the number of universities covered by the exercise continues to grow:

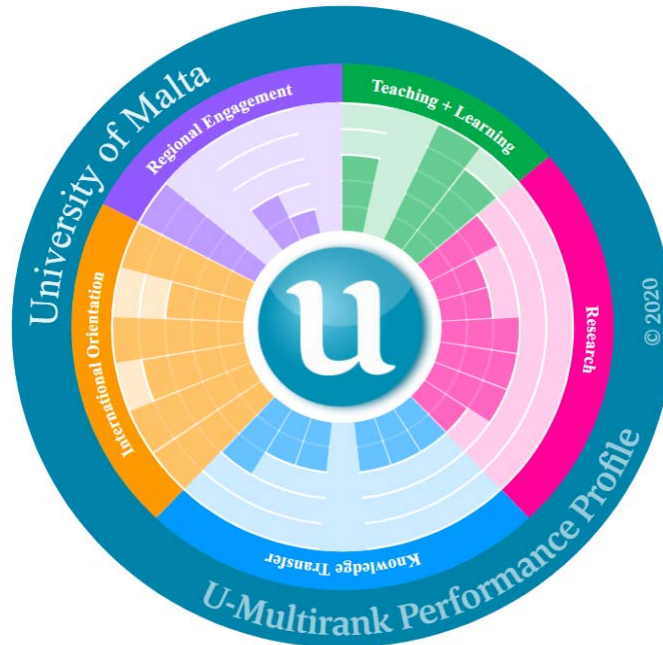


**THE** also undertakes rankings by subject. Here UM scored as follows in 2020:

Education:	301-400 band of best universities
Clinical, Pre-Clinical & Health / Computer Science / Arts & Humanities:	401-500 band
Social Sciences:	501-600 band
Physical Sciences / Engineering & Technology:	601-800 band

**THE** had also [reported in 2019](#) that Malta was the European country with the highest rate of graduates in employment (94.5%) in recent years.

UM's performance on **U-Multirank** – an initiative of the European Commission - is measured by means of a 'sunburst' graphic, organised in terms of five dimensions. UM consistently scores very highly on the international dimension (orange); highly on teaching and learning (green); and below average in regional engagement (purple), research (red) and knowledge transfer (blue). (The higher each column, the better the score.)



Starting from 2019, UM is also being ranked by the [Centre for World University Rankings](#), headquartered in the United Arab Emirates. In this case, UM does not proactively submit data to the ranker. UM placed 1659<sup>th</sup> with a score of 67.1 out of some 20,000 institutions in 2019 and placed 1762<sup>nd</sup> in 2020 with a score of 66.7. This ranking procedure has various missing elements for UM and the QAC will seek to rectify this in the coming weeks.

Also starting from 2019, UM is ranked by **UI Green Metric**, based at the University of Indonesia. This ranking provides information about the current conditions and policies related specifically to ‘greening the campus’ and sustainability initiatives in universities all over the world. UM was ranked in 325<sup>th</sup> place, out of 659 institutions, in 2019. A rank for 2020 is not yet available.

*12 October 2020*