



L-Università  
ta' Malta

# Quality Assurance Functions at the University of Malta

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# 1. Quality Assurance Background and Orientation

## 1.1. Historical Background of Quality Assurance at the University of Malta

The emergence of quality assurance in education discourse at all levels of provision in Malta stems from the **Education (Amendments) Act of 2006**. The Act for the first time included in its remit the establishment of academic audit and quality assurance schemes (Art. 72(g)). However, the endeavours of the University of Malta with respect to quality assurance predate the 2006 Education Act. UM has had a long history of using external examiners to ensure appropriate standards in its undergraduate and postgraduate awards.

The University of Malta was one of the founding universities of the *Magna Charta Universitatum* that was signed on September 18th 1088 by 388 universities in Bologna, and has now been signed by around 900 universities from 88 countries. The *Magna Charta* enshrines the principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy as a guideline for good governance and self-understanding of universities in the future. It was the foundation for what, as from the year 2000, would become the Bologna Process, and the conceptual underpinning of the European Standards and Guidelines for Higher Education.

In 1996, the University of Malta set up its first Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) with the remit to gradually introduce the concept of quality assurance in the academic and administrative practices of the University. This QAC introduced the first mechanism for student feedback of courses, and undertook the University's first internal audit in 2000. In 2007, this Committee was replaced by the **Programme Validation Committee (PVC)** which set up rigorous processes for the approval and review of all University programmes of study. Through its administrative arm, the **Academic Programmes Quality and Resources Unit (APQRU)**, the PVC reformatted the student feedback mechanism, and in 2014 introduced the system of **Periodic Programme Review** for University faculties, institutes, centres and schools.

In 2015, the University experienced its first external quality audit (EQA) undertaken by the **National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE)**. Partly as a result of the recommendations of the EQA report, a proto-QAC was reconstituted in 2015 to recommend the structure and remit of a permanent QAC that would have oversight of the internal and external quality assurance processes at UM. Following these recommendations, the QAC was duly set up in 2017 with the leadership of the Pro-Rector for International Development and Quality Assurance. The QAC is supported administratively by the Quality Support Unit.

## 1.2. Purpose of this Document

The purpose of this document is to present the range of quality assurance functions that have developed organically within the University of Malta since 2006. Together, they form a network of semi-independent but interconnected functions that best addresses the dynamic balance

required between academic integrity and freedom on one side, and rigour and accountability on the other.

### **1.3. Mission Statement**

The motto, vision, mission and values of the University of Malta are driven by its community's desire to profess academic integrity, encourage learning and research, and support Maltese society and economy: in the present, but also moving forward, embracing new challenges and planning for transformations yet to come.

#### **Name**

As part of a rebranding exercise, the University of Malta is now referred to by its Maltese name: *L-Università ta' Malta*.

#### **Motto**

Serving students, scholarship and society, sustainably.

#### **Vision**

The University of Malta aims to be among the leading institutions in higher education in the region and to provide world-class research and education. The university community endeavours to strive for the benefit of the country in the context of social and economic wellbeing. Over the coming years we will continue to build on the university's long tradition of developing the knowledge required to help Malta flourish as a small island nation and a member state of the European Union.

#### **Mission**

The mission of the University of Malta is to serve the aspirations of the people of these islands through locally and globally significant research and the provision of quality higher education in the arts, sciences and the humanities as required for Malta's economic, social and cultural development, via the scholarship of discovery, teaching and service to the community. These functions shall be delivered in a sustainable manner that is responsive to this country's present and emergent needs.

## Values

The University of Malta is committed to the values of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, as a signatory of the *Magna Charta Universitatum*, the document that was signed by 388 rectors and heads of universities from Europe and beyond in 1988 in Bologna.

Furthermore, as a member of the European Higher Education Area and a proponent of the Bologna Process, the University of Malta upholds a set of values encompassing academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy and accountability, participation of students and staff in governance, and public responsibility.

### 1.4. University of Malta Strategic Plan (2020-25)

The University of Malta embarked on a Strategic Planning Process to update its vision and mission for the next decade. The Strategic Planning Process presents a set of overall goals and a roadmap for how to achieve them. The University's objective is to sustain and develop its position as a world-class education provider that also has a strong national role. The goals act as guidelines for day-to-day decision-making and operational activity by establishing a clear direction for the organisation and helping to define its priorities.

The planning process was a widespread effort that involved all voices within the University community and synthesised meticulously the wide variety of contributions, which were all aimed at building a dynamic and contemporary institution. In order to foster a culture of continuity and leave a legacy of strategic thinking, this document will serve as the blueprint for a strategic planning process that can be replicated and improved in future cycles.

The Strategic Planning Process spanned one academic year from September 2018 to July 2019, during which time the University engaged in a comprehensive set of activities that helped to evolve its thinking, knowledge and vision. The plan underwent three phases. In the first phase, the University focused on the involvement of internal stakeholders. Students, academics, administrators and technical staff contributed to the content of the plan through fora, working groups, committees and surveys. Their valuable input was instrumental to the plan. The second phase involved external stakeholders who helped shape a strategic direction for the University's effective impact on society, industry and the nation. The third phase captured the views of all stakeholders on the principles presented in the initial draft. The final version of the **Strategic Plan** is a result of a review by the Senate and Council.

## **1.5. University QA Organogram**

- **Governance Structure at UM**
- **Organisational Structure at UM**

## **1.6. Responsibilities in the Management of Quality and Standards**

Council is the supreme governing body of the University and has the following functions: to administer and control all the property of the University; to establish posts, Faculties, Departments, Institutes and other entities; to make Statutes, to appoint Heads of Departments; to appoint new members of staff in academic, technical and administrative positions; and to do all other acts or things not vested in any other governing body of the University.

Senate is responsible for academic governance: it regulates programmes of study, methods of assessment, entry regulations, examinations, and considers student requests, among other duties. Regulations and bye-laws enacted by Senate are promulgated by the Chancellor and published as Legal Notices.

Senate and Council are assisted in their mission by a number of Committees which are delegated with specific responsibilities.

There are 14 Faculties, around 30 interdisciplinary Institutes and Centres, and two Schools. The Boards of these entities direct the academic business of each entity and submit to Senate recommendations on teaching programmes and other matters, which may include research and extramural activities.

Boards of Studies for each course are appointed by Senate and are responsible for the implementation of regulations and bye-laws governing relevant programmes of study. They are also responsible for monitoring and evaluating programmes of study and making recommendations for improvement thereof, as well as monitoring assessment procedures and students' performance and progression.

Students are represented on every board involved in academic governance.

## 2. Quality Assurance in Academic Provision

### 2.1. Quality Assurance Committee

The membership of the current Quality Assurance Committee is available **here**. The terms of reference of the QAC are:

- 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 of the vision and strategy of the University;
- to identify quality indicators so as to monitor the implementation of the strategy and the fulfillment 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 fulfillment 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; and
- to prepare for and co-ordinate External Quality Assurance (EQA) procedures of the University, as an integral part of its quality culture.

The QAC has developed an information **website**. It also offers regular CPD opportunities to University staff on particular QA-related issues as per list provided in the **Events** section.

The 2015-2016 QAC submitted an annual report to Rector. Following a one-year hiatus due to the change of top administration at the University, the 2017-2018 QAC submitted its own annual report to Rector. Both these reports will be made available to the Expert Panel of the EQA.

The QAC has two administrative support arms: the **Quality Support Unit (QSU)**, and the Quality Coordinating Team (QCT). The QCT is discussed in more detail in **Section 4.6** of this document. The QCT is currently responsible for coordinating:

- the development of standard operating procedures for the academic, administrative and technical sectors;
- the IQA of the University, and
- the participation of the University in international university rankings.



## **2.2. Committee for Research Engagement**

A **Committee for Research Engagement (CRE)** was approved by Senate on 21st March 2019. Its terms of reference are:

- To establish and formalise a protocol for engaged research with societal actors;
- To support cohesion, synergy and co-responsibility among different actors involved in the process of responsible research and innovation (RRI) at UM;
- To connect, coordinate and facilitate the flow of information on existing RRI activities happening in different departments, centres, institutes & schools at UM;
- To collaborate with UM Library, Gender Issues Committee, Marketing, Communications and Alumni Office, Doctoral School, and UREC on RRI practices; and
- To advise Senate and Council on measures to foster a culture of RRI practice at UM beyond the scope of the H2020 NUCLEUS Project, currently underway, with UM as one of the partners.

## **2.3. Committee for Sustainability**

Concern for, and action in favour of, sustainability is a lynchpin of Professor Alfred Vella's Rectorate. The motto for UM for this period is 'Serving students, scholarship and society, sustainably'. It would not behoove a national university to observe shortcomings and weaknesses in our environmental fabric – from waste management to air pollution; from traffic lockjam to urban density – and not do something about it. Actions speak louder than words; and so, the educational experience – including at university level – must properly teach and nudge students to recognize and respond to the serious challenge of ensuring a sustainable future for Malta. The university community is thus called upon to employ its brains towards addressing, and devising solutions, to problems of sustainability, thus leading by example.

For this purpose, in 2018 an eight-person Committee for Sustainability at UM (C-SUM) was set up. It is tasked with championing sustainability actions at and across the university and its campuses. Its guiding principles are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) identified by the United Nations and which have been taken on board initially by countries but of late also by universities. These goals target both the physical environment (including potable water, power generation, air quality, green spaces) and the social (including inequality, peace, justice and well-being). Sustainability has also been deliberately included as one of the seven pillars or core themes from which has evolved the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan of the University of Malta.

With this development, UM has embraced a mission that goes beyond a narrow academic mandate. Concurrently, this means that a quality assurance exercise of/at UM would need to acknowledge and take stock of this initiative.

## **2.4. Academic and Administrative Support for QA Implementation at F/I/C/S**

### **Setting up of role of Programme Coordinator within F/I/C/S**

Heads of Department (or their delegate) and Directors of Institute/Centre/School (or their delegate) act as Course Coordinators for Bachelor courses and are responsible for:

- ensuring that the programmes are updated regularly to reflect developments in the area and recommendations made by various stakeholders;
- ensuring that all study-units within the programme contain all the necessary information with regard to learning outcomes, methods of teaching and learning, methods of assessment, and reading lists;
- ensuring that the course information on the online Course Finder are kept updated;
- liaising with academics involved in the delivery of the programme, and ensuring that the necessary resources (human and other) are available;
- promoting more effective use of the VLE, and ensuring that the quality of the documentation made available to students is of a consistently good standard and timely;
- organising promotion and recruitment campaigns in conjunction with the Faculty Office, the Student Advisory Services and the Marketing, Communications & Alumni Relations Office;
- providing programme-specific advice to students and prospective applicants;
- providing Students Advisory Services with programme information and advice regarding suitability of prospective applicants; as well as any labour market related information pertinent to the programme;
- monitoring the student experience and course delivery through analysis of study-unit and end-of-programme feedback data provided by APQRU, and other appropriate measures (e.g. conducting focus groups and meetings with study-unit coordinators); and
- coordinating annual programme reviews in preparation for periodic programme review.

Specific Resident Academics (including Heads of Departments) may be appointed for Master courses offered by each Faculty/Institute/Centre/School. Responsibilities shall be as for Bachelor courses indicated above.

### **Appointment of Faculty Managers**

All the administrative work within faculties is managed by Faculty Managers in the post of Manager I (salary scale 6) or Manager II (salary scale 5). The terms and conditions of work for these posts are highlighted in the Collective Agreement for Administrative, Technical and Industrial Staff.

## 2.5. Approval of New and Revised Programmes

All new programmes offered by the University are subject to a **two-stage, validation process** established by Senate. This attempts to ensure that approved programmes are in line with the University's vision, strategy and resource possibilities.

The first stage concentrates on the aims of the programme and the rationale for its need, and is aimed at avoiding duplication of effort, ensuring that the intended learning outcomes are clear and achievable, and that resources are available to allow delivery of the programme to an acceptable standard. The involvement of stakeholders is encouraged at this stage, with a view to promote programmes which are responsive to emerging social needs or market demands.

Once a proposal is given first stage or 'in-principle' approval by Senate, programme originators are asked to focus on the details of the teaching and learning methods as well as the **assessment techniques** to be adopted in delivering the programme as required in the second stage of approval. This also involves **external peer review** which may lead to further tweaking and revision of the original proposal.

Existing programmes which undergo substantial revision are also subject to review and validation. Whilst there is no need for revised programmes to go through the formal two-stage approval process, Boards of Studies are required to provide a clear rationale for the restructuring of the programme together with revised learning outcomes and evidence of stakeholder involvement in the formulation of the revised programme, where such involvement is salutary to the process.

The validation of new and revised programmes falls under the responsibility of the **Programme Validation Committee (PVC)**, which was set up as a Sub-Committee of Senate in 2007. The PVC consists of Rector as Chair, the Pro-Rector for Academic Affairs who normally leads its fortnightly meetings, six senior academics, the University Registrar, the Director of Finance, and a student representative. It is given technical and administrative assistance by the **Academic Programmes Quality and Resources Unit (APQRU)**.

Click [here](#) for further details pertaining to the programme validation process.

## 2.6. Quality Assurance in Doctoral Education

The Doctoral School was set up by the resolution of Council and Senate in 2017 as a university-wide management unit with the aim of providing a support structure for doctoral researchers and supervisory staff at the University of Malta. The Doctoral School is responsible for implementing quality assurance systems for doctoral studies at the University of Malta. Conscious of the fact that quality assurance and doctoral education has been an element of the Bologna Process since 2003, and that doctoral research is a core element of the traditional identity of a university, the Doctoral School has embarked on a process to ensure that a genuine quality culture is associated with doctoral education. It will build on the checks that are

inherent in the current system where each student's doctoral journey is based on recommendations that are made to Senate's Doctoral Academic Committee through the Faculty/ Institute/ Centre/ School (FICS) Doctoral Committee and FICS Board.

Since its formal launch on 11 December 2017, the School has:

- run a Needs Analysis survey amongst the its doctoral researchers to assess the current situation in doctoral education generally (response rate of 47%) with the results highlighting several areas that demand attention;
- set up a **website** with the intention of serving as a one-stop shop for prospective doctoral candidates and current doctoral researchers and a place to showcase ongoing research;
- set up a network of Doctoral Committee Chairs of Faculties/Institutes/Centres/Schools to discuss matters pertaining to doctoral education on a regular basis;
- set up a network of Doctoral Committee Administrators to discuss administrative matters pertaining to the running of doctoral programmes on a regular basis;
- designed a professional development programme for doctoral researchers providing a suite of workshops that satisfactorily help them develop in order to be more competent academically and to prepare them for a future career with a skill set that employers look for;
- launched an annual symposium for doctoral researchers to serve as a medium to share experience and build collaborative networks;
- supported the gathering of data for a report that was commissioned by the Government of Malta from the European Commission to carry out within the Policy Support Facility (PSF) a peer review of Maltese Research and Innovation System with a focus on doctoral research;
- participated in all meetings and workshops of the European University Association – Council for Doctoral Education (EUA-CDE) and hosted the 11th Thematic Workshop, on “The Impact and Outcomes of Doctoral Education Reform in Europe”, held at the Valletta Campus on 18 and 19 January 2018.

Working together with all stakeholders (management, academic staff, students) the Doctoral School is intent on fine-tuning the procedural systems already in place and, where required, launch new systems to mandate accountability and transparency in:

- ensuring academic quality of doctoral education in terms of student progression and assessment;
- ensuring that the provision of continuous professional development training for students and staff responds to actual needs;
- assessing the research environments that form the basis of doctoral education;
- tracking the career of doctoral graduates at set intervals.

The Doctoral School will collaborate with structures internal and external to the University of Malta to ensure that its aims are achieved.

## **2.7. The Assessment Process**

In higher education, 'assessment' refers to any of the processes that appraise an individual's knowledge, understanding, abilities or skills. High quality assessment practices are an important element of the student experience and the outcomes of assessment clearly influence students' future wellbeing. Hence the University is committed to promoting good practice, consistency and rigour in assessment by ensuring that:

- assessment is reliable, with clear and consistent processes for the setting, marking, grading and moderation of assignments;
- assessment is valid and effectively measures student attainment of the intended learning outcomes;
- assessment is inclusive and equitable, ensuring that tasks and procedures do not put into a disadvantage any group or individual;
- assessment procedures are transparent, and criteria and methods by which students' work is being judged are made clear to students, staff and external examiners;
- the amount of assessed work is manageable and proportional to assigned credit value; and
- each programme includes a variety of assessment types, in order to promote effective learning and allow a range of learning outcomes to be appropriately addressed.

An overview of the assessment process is available [here](#).

## **2.8. Role of External Examiners**

Foreign external examiners (the majority, so far, hailing from UK universities) are asked to participate in the examinations of the final year of all degree programmes offered by the University. In addition to providing students with an independent and external assessment of their work, this practice helps to ensure that the standards and quality of the qualifications awarded by the University are comparable to those of other reputable institutions.

External examiners' reports are sent to the Rector and Pro-Rector for Academic Affairs who then pass these on to Heads of Department for consideration by the respective Board of Studies. It is expected that due consideration is given to any concerns/recommendations for improvement highlighted in these reports when Boards of Studies are reviewing the respective programmes.

The Policy for the Appointment and Function of External Examiners for Bachelor's and Master's Programmes is available to staff on the University's intranet. This document will be made available to the EQA Panel.

## 2.9. Student Feedback

Students' evaluation of their learning experience is an integral and necessary component of any quality assurance system adopted by universities; such evaluation allows the institution to evaluate how its service provision is viewed 'on the ground' by its most important group of stakeholders, namely, its students. During their years at the University of Malta, students are asked to provide feedback with regard to both the individual study-units they are following, and their experience at the University, once they have completed the entire programme of study. Besides providing students with an opportunity to comment on the quality of the teaching and learning environment at the University, feedback ensures that lecturers and Boards of Studies are made aware of problems perceived or encountered by students and provides an opportunity for the conduct of self-evaluation and revision, where necessary.

During each semester, towards the end of the lecturing period, students are invited to complete an **online questionnaire** on the study-units they are following. The questionnaire consists of 17 close-ended questions and a free-text section which allows students to comment on any aspect they wish. Students can decide to submit their feedback either before or after they have been assessed and can do so either via the UM App or their e-SIMS portal.

The results of the feedback exercise are only communicated to the lecturer/s concerned after the results of the assessment have been made available to students. The main issues highlighted during any feedback exercise are communicated to the Rector and Pro-Rector for Academic Affairs and any urgent/serious matters are discussed with the respective Heads of Department. Study-units which elicit a pattern of recurrent problems are monitored for developments.

**End-of-programme feedback** is conducted after publication of the students' final classification and continues up until the graduation period. It targets both undergraduate and postgraduate students and aims to gather information about the students' experience at the University.

Data generated from the study-unit evaluation and the end-of-programme feedback feeds into the **Annual and Periodic Programme Reviews** and is used to improve the quality of service provision at the University.

An overview of the student feedback processes is available **here**.

## 2.10. Periodic Programme Review

All departments and other academic entities within the University which provide teaching services are required to undertake a Periodic Programme Review (PPR), which essentially involves an evaluation of the complete portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes on offer. This process is an important aspect of the University's quality assurance procedures, and serves to ensure that programmes on offer are and remain of acceptable quality, appropriate academic standard and relevant to the needs of society.

A detailed overview of the Periodic Programme Review exercise and its key benefits can be found [here](#).

### **2.11. Business Information Management System**

A number of Information Systems are used to administer the business of the university.

Key systems include AIMS (Administrative Information Management Systems) and SIMS (Student Information Management System), which have been integrated together to, among others, incorporate Financial, Procurement, Projects, Planning, Human Resources, Payroll, Student and Programme Information.

Besides providing administrative, faculty and departmental users access to a range of functionality available on these systems, an important objective is to provide management with an effective information tool on which business and operational decisions can be made. To this end, a Business Intelligence system is being developed to pull together information sourced from the university's various systems, and to display it in dashboard form so as to address the specific information requirements of the Rectorate and other supporting administrative functions, as well as those of Faculties, Institutes, Centres and Schools.

### **2.12. Ranking Exercises**

The University regularly participates in the following rankings: U-Multirank, GreenMetric, Times Higher Education and Webometrics. It also participates in European University Association (EUA) and other international higher education surveys. This data contributes to the University's self-reflection. It is also analysed by the QAC and executive summaries are presented to Senate on a regular basis.

## **3. Quality Assurance in Student and Staff Support**

### **3.1. Public Information**

The **Course Finder** is a guide to all courses offered by the University of Malta. This feature allows individuals to select any areas of study which are of interest to them from a drop-down menu. This will, in turn, lead the user to courses which are relevant to the search criteria.

For each individual search, the following information is available:

- Title of the award
- Level of the qualification
- Duration and mode of study
- Course overview

- Learning outcomes
- Details about career opportunities and access to further studies
- Target audience
- Admission requirements
- International qualifications (including specific information for **country-specific qualifications**)
- Programme of studies, including a detailed description for all study-units
- Fees and funding

### **3.2. Student Support**

There are various support structures in place at University aimed at helping students who encounter difficulties. Information about them can be found on the **University website**. A student who requires support can refer to one of the structures referred to in the sections below, depending on the nature of their issue. Many of these services are now offered from the **Health and Wellness Centre** located on Judge P. Debono Street, just outside the University entrance. The overall coordination for such services falls within the brief of the Pro-Rector for Student and Staff Affairs and Outreach.

### **3.3. Student Advisory Services (SAS)**

Students who have problems related to the course they are following or their career path can make use of the services of the **SAS**. The office operates in close liaison with the Admissions and Records Office and the other offices of the Registrar. This service is also available to prospective students.

### **3.4. Committee for the Implementation of the Student Charter**

The brief of the **Students' Charter Sub-Committee** is to safeguard the rights of students as defined in the Students' Charter. The Committee strives to provide support to students and staff in interpreting this Charter and in implementing it in ways that do justice to both parties' rights and responsibilities.

### **3.5. ACCESS – Disability Support Unit (ADSU)**

Students and members of staff experiencing problems due to physical, sensory or mental impairments, medical conditions and specific learning difficulties can seek help from this **Unit** which is the operating arm of the **ACCESS Disability Support Committee**.



The team of the ADSU includes a coordinator of students with disabilities on campus, a senior executive, an occupational therapist, and an administrator. Further detailed information can be accessed [here](#).

### **3.6. Sexual Harassment Policy**

Students who are experiencing sexual harassment, be it verbal or physical, can seek help from the Sexual Harassment Committee.

### **3.7. Harassment and Bullying Policy**

Students who may feel bullied or harassed may contact an advisor so that action could be taken. The policy is available [here](#).

### **3.8. Counselling Services**

Personal counselling is provided for students experiencing problems of a more personal nature.

### **3.9. Mental Health**

Mental Health services are provided by a psychiatrist and a social worker.

### **3.10. E-learning and IT Services**

The University **IT Services** maintains the IT infrastructure of its various campuses and offers a range of facilities and services for staff and students in support of teaching, learning, research and administrative operations.

IT Services is responsible for the management, operation and support of the University's wired and wireless networks, server infrastructure, IT training rooms, audio visual services, videoconferencing, lecture capture, technologies in research laboratories and open learning spaces, software site licenses and hardware, email and calendaring, the virtual learning environment, web services, and desktops used by staff.

Working in collaboration with other University departments, IT Services supports the various corporate systems such as those running the University's student records (electronic Student Information Management System - eSIMS), financial and human resources (Administrative Information Management System - AIMS), the Library information system, the portal for UM policies and procedures (see **Section 4.6**), and the Business Information Management System (see **Section 2.11**).

### **3.11. Office of Professional Academic Development (OPAD)**

The newly set up Office for Professional Academic Development (OPAD) provides UM academic staff with:

- a) courses and workshops intended to help them become better and more effective teachers;
- b) information and training on course design, curriculum reform and testing, including the proper construction, implementation and validation of assessment;
- c) workshops to develop research supervision skills.

OPAD plays a key role in promoting digital education at UM by training and helping the staff create multimedia materials for educational use, including conversion of class-based courses to blended/online courses.

### **3.12. Library Services**

The **Library** with its outlying branches comprises nearly a million monographs, extensive runs of journal literature, a wide range of electronic resources, and prestigious legacy collections of archival and rare book material. It is the hub for information retrieval, a priceless repository for Melitensia, and supports the teaching and research programmes of the University through services which include excellent reference facilities, library and information literacy instruction, bibliographical consultancy, online compilations of bibliographical guides, overseas document supply, online searching, and a dynamic web portal.

To support Open Access to scientific publications, the Library has implemented the first Institutional Repository on the island - **OAR@UM**. The underlying principle of this project is to provide an electronic platform whereby academics and researchers can upload their research output in Open Access. This enhances the visibility of the scholar and their work, as well as ensures long-term preservation of the intellectual output of the UM. The Library has also implemented and is managing the **University's Open Access policy**. This policy is, so far, a recommendation policy and provides standard guidelines for academics and researchers in making their research output available in Open Access via OAR@UM.

### **3.13. Committee on Race and Ethnic Affairs (CREA)**

The **Committee** was set up to serve as the University's focal point for monitoring and addressing issues related to race and ethnic prejudice. The remit of CREA includes Awareness, Access and Integration, and Safeguarding and Enforcement. In order to meet this mandate, CREA liaises with the relevant University structures and stakeholders as necessary.

In order to implement its mandate to ensure Access and Integration CREA:

- evaluates current practices and procedures that have an impact on the access to the University and/or its programmes and services by current or potential staff and students belonging to diverse racial and ethnic students and staff;
- carries out an ongoing appraisal of the integration of staff and students from diverse racial and ethnic groups within the university community; and
- makes recommendations to the relevant university authorities and stakeholders for the development or improvement of current policies and practices concerning the access and integration of staff and students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

In order to implement its Safeguarding and Enforcement mandate, CREA:

- periodically and regularly (at intervals of five years or less) appraises existing policies and procedures for safeguarding members of the university community against racial and ethnic harassment and discrimination, as well as reviewing the current mechanisms for reporting and enforcing such policies and procedures (including disciplinary procedures).
- as and when appropriate, of its own initiative, propose to the relevant university authorities the establishment and development of new policies, structures and procedures to safeguard against racial and ethnic disparity, harassment and discrimination; and
- when requested to do so, provide specialist advice about its domain of expertise to the Rector and/or other university authorities on any complaints of racial or ethnic harassment and/or discrimination referred to it.

### **3.14. Gender Issues Committee**

The **Committee** was originally set up in 1991 in order to act as a focal point on gender issues on the recommendations of the Women in Society Secretariat. Its terms of reference are to advise the University Council on issues of gender equality. The Committee works on several areas including the identification of sources of unequal opportunities or treatment with respect to gender, and promotes a policy of equal opportunity.

The Gender Issues Committee (GIC) also receives and monitors complaints from University staff and students regarding sex discriminatory practices with the recommendation of appropriate action, and liaises closely with the Sexual Harassment Advisors and is in fact planning to launch a campaign next academic year against Sexual Harassment. The Gender Issues Committee also promotes teaching and research that reflects the knowledge, experience, and aspirations of both men and women.

Ongoing work includes the establishment of networks with individuals and organisations with similar objectives, from outside the University and from the international scene. The GIC is seeking ways of raising the profile of university employees and students. One of the initiatives of the GIC was a Mentoring Scheme for students. The GIC has also collaborated with the

Government's Health Promotion Department to create a Degree Plus Module for students. The students will participate in interactive discussions about different aspects of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

### **3.15. Chaplaincy: Spiritual Support and Pastoral Care to Staff and Students**

The **Chaplaincy** aims at assisting students and staff of the University of Malta in their growth as individuals and in their search for God. This is done by focusing its ministry through distinct areas of action around the three pillars of Community, Spirituality and Service.

More specifically, this is done through:

- dialogue with all sectors
- commitment to justice, especially where the 'poor' are concerned
- worship
- education opportunities for faith development
- the discernment of God's will

The Chaplaincy is also supported by the Jesuit Community at Dar Manuel Magri, which is open all day for students to meet up, study and work in groups.

## **4. Quality Assurance in Administration**

### **4.1. Admission and Progression of Students**

The University is open to all those who have the requisite qualifications as outlined in the **Admissions Regulations** of the University and the relevant regulations or bye-laws for the course of their choice.

Regulations and bye-laws governing all courses offered include important details concerning the programmes, among which those pertaining to progression and these are available on the Office of the Registrar's **webpage**.

This webpage also contains separate general regulations pertaining to assessment and the exercise of discipline as well as guidelines and policies concerning plagiarism, and supervision of bachelors' and masters' dissertations and doctoral theses. The Consanguinity / Affinity / Dual Relationship Policy is also available to staff on the University's intranet, and will be made available to the EQA Panel.

### **4.2. Resourcing**

In order that the University is better informed of what resources (human) are available, and how these are being utilised, members of the academic staff are each year asked to confirm

details pertaining to their lecturing activities for the academic year in question. This exercise is intended primarily as a management tool for Heads of Department to enable them to make full use of available resources, provide for equity amongst staff and to ensure that the necessary resources to deliver programmes are available while, at the same time, taking into consideration the other needs which permit staff and their students to enhance the research profile of their department.

The University strives to enhance quality in its educational outcomes by offering employment as Resident Academics to those persons who are already in possession of a Ph.D. (or an equivalent research-based doctorate), and who preferably have teaching and additional research experience. Employment may also be offered, as Assistant Lecturers, to promising candidates who do not yet possess a Ph.D. but have other qualifications and attributes that are recognized as important although these appointees are required to obtain a Ph.D. in the field of interest within eight years from the date of their appointment after which they are promoted to Lecturer. Once appointed to this grade, all resident academic staff are required to follow a series of seminars organised by the University on pedagogy, educational technologies and lecturing methodologies before they attain the grade of Senior Lecturer.

All other resident academics are provided with the opportunity to follow short courses on the deployment of the latest educational and distance learning technologies and courseware development.

### **4.3. Internal Audit**

The main objective of the Internal Audit is to provide the Council, Rector and other senior management of the University with an objective assessment of the adequacy and effectiveness of Management's internal control systems.

The University sets out a long term strategy which defines the business objectives to meet the strategy. Management is responsible for driving the business and for identifying and dealing with risks which may threaten the achievement of its objectives. In order to mitigate risks, managers set up a system of internal controls which the Internal Audit's main role is to assess these controls.

The scope of Internal Audit covers all the activities of the University and its group of companies. It includes all the University's operations, resources and staff, services and responsibilities to other bodies, although its remit does not extend to the academic process. The internal audit is concerned with all aspects of the University's operations, including strategic planning, people management, collaborations with other organisations, Information Technology, procurement and finance amongst others.

The Internal Audit Office (IAO) is headed by a Chief Audit Executive (CAE), and is independent of all functional areas of the University. Although the Internal Audit reports to the University Secretary for administrative purposes, the function reports directly to the Audit and Risk

Committee, which is a sub-committee of the Council. The Committee consists of a group of non-executive specialists selected for their first business knowledge and expertise.

The IAO develops a Quality Assurance and Improvement Program (QAIP), the main objective of which is to develop an internal audit activity with a scope and quality of work that includes conformance with the applicable Standards and application of Code of Ethics.

The CAE is accountable for implementing processes designed to provide reasonable assurance to the various stakeholders that the internal audit activity:

- Performs in accordance with the internal audit charter, which is consistent with the Definition of Internal Auditing, the Code of Ethics, and the Standards.
- Operates in an effective and efficient manner.
- Is perceived by those stakeholders as adding value and improving the University's operations.

These processes include appropriate supervision, periodic internal assessments and ongoing monitoring for quality assurance, and periodic external assessments.

The purpose of the internal quality assessment is ongoing internal evaluations of the internal audit activity coupled with periodic self-assessment and/or reviews. The internal quality assessment obtains objective evidence through ongoing internal reviews as well as through separate periodic self-assessments or reviews to support an assessment of the internal audit activity charter. The internal assessment includes the following:

- Routine and continuous supervision and testing of performance of audit and consulting work.
- Ongoing measurements and analyses of performance metrics including audit plan and recommendations accepted.
- Periodic validations of compliance with applicable laws and regulations.
- Periodic validations of compliance with the Standards and Code of Ethics, including timely corrective actions to remedy any significant instances of noncompliance.
- Evaluation of the adequacy of the internal audit activity's charter, goals, objectives, policies, and procedures.

The internal quality assessment is conducted by persons in the University's internal audit activity including the CAE.

The purpose of the external quality assessment is to:

- assess the effectiveness of an internal audit activity in providing assurance and consulting services to stakeholders;
- assess conformance to the mandatory guidance and provide an opinion as to whether the internal auditing activity generally conforms to all the Standards;

- identify opportunities and offer recommendations to the CAE and staff for improving performance and services and promoting the image and credibility of the internal audit function.

External quality assessment evaluates internal audit activity conformance to the Definition of Internal Auditing, the Code of Ethics, the use of best practices, and internal audit activity efficiency and effectiveness. The external quality assessment is conducted by a qualified independent reviewer or review team from outside the University. The external assessment will be carried out once every five years.

#### **4.4. Academic Promotions**

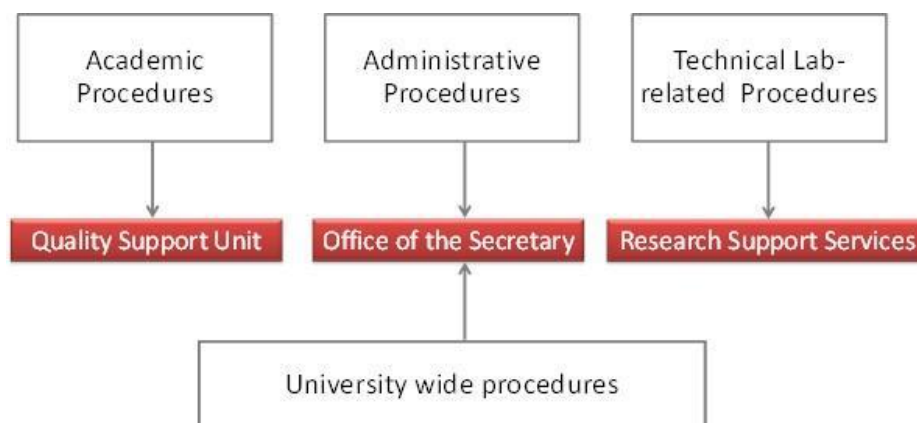
The University seeks independent external peer reviews brokered through the **Association of Commonwealth Universities** (ACU) as an integral part of the promotion process to the rank of Associate Professor and Professor. This ensures that the standard of scholarship maintained by the University of Malta compares well with its international peers. (The Promotions procedure is outlined in article 25 of the Collective Agreement for Academic Staff of the University of Malta and Academic Staff of the Junior College. It is available to staff on the University's intranet.)

#### **4.5. Collective Agreement and Manual of Conduct and Procedures**

Academic staff members of the University of Malta enjoy the conditions of work set out in the Collective Agreement and are expected to adhere to the Manual of Conduct and Procedures also available to staff on the University's intranet.

#### **4.6. Portal with UM Policies and Procedures**

The University recognizes three operating divisions. The Academic division includes the academic functions of all faculties, departments, institutes, schools and centres at University. The Administrative division comprises all the administrative facilities and services at the University, whilst the Technical division covers all laboratory-related and Health and Safety procedures. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are being written by, with, for and within all three divisions to strengthen and document the University's Quality Assurance System. These official documents are being managed by three separate entities as illustrated below:



Representatives from each entity formed the Quality Coordinating Team (QCT) which was chaired by Pro-Rector Prof. Godfrey Baldacchino. The QCT developed a Standard Operating Procedure for the writing and approval of administrative and technical SOPs. It also adapted this to academic procedures to take into account the particular contexts of diverse academic realities within the University. This adaptation respects academic freedom, whilst ensuring that the oversight function of the Registrar’s Office, where applicable, is retained, and key information is available to the SOP users.

The main objective of the QCT’s meetings, which were concluded in June 2019, were to introduce and monitor the efficacy of a new infrastructure to make these procedures accessible to both staff and students of the University, as applicable. To this end, the QCT worked with AIMS and IT Services at UM to design a document management system that will allow SOPs to be managed more effectively in line with the requirements of a reliable and efficient quality assurance system. All SOPs can be viewed on the University's **website**, are labelled according to their scope or originating F/I/C/S and are updated regularly.

It is also envisaged that this document management system will eventually also give access to the University’s policies.

## 5. The Role of University in Society

### 5.1. Research, Innovation and Knowledge Transfer

The University of Malta continues to invest significantly in its research infrastructure and in the technical expertise to support it. Through its participation in external research projects, both local as well as international, and thanks to funds it has generated itself from the provision of services, the University has managed to build and equip a growing portfolio of laboratories and research facilities. In tandem with these initiatives, the University has recruited technical support staff who, apart from supporting and maintaining undergraduate teaching laboratories,



are now also required to take on technically complex tasks in the provision of research support to postgraduate students, post-docs and resident academics.

Furthermore, the **Corporate Research and Knowledge Transfer Office**, set up in 2009, drives the Corporate Research agenda of the University in harmony with and in response to:

- National, social and economic outlooks and requirements
- The needs of local industry
- Emerging expertise and intellectual properties
- Funding opportunities,

in order to assist the University and its academic members of staff:

- To define and protect Intellectual Property and commercially exploit research results
- To participate in externally funded and collaborative research projects
- To seek financing for corporate research initiatives

The **Project Support Office** provides administrative and technical support to researchers during the contracting phase management and conclusion of externally funded projects. It also maintains an audit trail of projects to ensure that the University honours the commitments that are contracted for.

The mission of the **Research Support Services Directorate (RSSD)** is to provide comprehensive support to academics on all aspects of undertaking excellent research, from applying and obtaining funding to undertaking experimental work. To this end, the RSSD supports activities that are similar across all Faculties, Institutes, Centres and Schools through the provision of core services. The Directorate aims to raise all research facilities at the University to world class level. One of the ways this is being done is through the development and adoption of Standard Operating Procedures that have introduced suitable industry-standard practices and procedures in the University's labs and in the proper handling of hazardous products and waste.

**TakeOff** is the University business incubator that helps technology and knowledge-based entrepreneurs and startups transform their ideas and innovations into market- and investor-ready businesses. Its main aim is to provide facilities and expertise to knowledge intensive start-up companies. TakeOff acts as a catalyst and functions on the one hand as a broker between young entrepreneurs and startups, and on the other as a facilitator for joint ventures between business angels and entities supporting entrepreneurship.

The **Centre for Entrepreneurship and Business Incubation (CEBI)** was set up in 2013 to promote the development of a knowledge-intensive, entrepreneurial culture in Malta, with the wider aim of fostering the country's socio-economic development.

CEBI offers a Master's programme in knowledge-based entrepreneurship aimed at graduates and professionals who aspire to launch successful knowledge-based entrepreneurial ventures. It is also responsible for promoting entrepreneurship on the UM Campus.

## 5.2. Societal Impact

As Malta's only national and state funded university, UM cannot avoid its responsibilities towards national and social development. Apart from providing the range and diversity of graduates required by society and economy, now and in the foreseeable future, UM is also a national hub and engine for creativity and innovation in all branches of knowledge, business, art and science. UM is also committed to work with Malta-based employers and investors in supporting their specific labour market and research needs. These external stakeholders include the Malta public service, the largest employer in Malta: through the **Institute for Public Services (IPS)**, UM collaborates with the public service to provide education, specialist training and other CPD opportunities to public servants and officers.

UM's remit to Maltese society also involves making itself available to 'non-traditional' students. These include:

- Adult learners, who would typically follow courses on a part time basis, and/or be interested in audit a few specific study-units which may or may not lead to the award of a degree;
- Students who are themselves, or who are the children of, recent immigrants who have now settled in Malta. This is a highly diverse category of people: it is a demographic 'bulge' that is currently working its way through the primary and secondary school sector and will soon knock on the gates of higher education institutions.
- Persons with disability or other kinds of mental, psychological or physical health issues and disorders;
- Communities and localities where the population does not have a high density of graduates. The **Cottonera Resource Centre** is one such facility;
- Communities challenged by problems of mobility and connectivity, in spite of the smallness of the country. The Xewkija Campus in Gozo is one such satellite campus of UM that can offer physical, live stream or on-line teaching and learning services to the Gozo-based population.

## 5.3. Malta University Holding Company (MUHC)

**MUHC** is the commercial arm of the University. The Company and its subsidiaries provide quality support services to local and international students including accommodation, language tuition, leisure, and sports activities. It also supports and brokers various consultancy and outreach services to industry.

## 6. Future Developments in Quality Assurance

Following ongoing reflection and internal discussion within the various University structures, the following developments in the QA structure and practices of the University are envisaged in the near future:

### ***a) Setting up of administrative and academic QA dashboards at institutional and F/I/C/S levels through a 'University Intelligence' provision***

The University is working to implement a Business Intelligence System that, using the university's corporate information systems as data sources, will be able to integrate this data so as to provide custom 'dashboards' to address the specific information requirements of the Rectorate and other supporting administrative functions, as well as those of Faculties, Institutes, Centres and Schools.

The dashboards are intended to provide an overview of the current status (whilst not providing a real time picture, it is envisaged that an accurate daily update can be provided) of the 'business' for each of the entities concerned, thus contributing key information for administration, management and planning at all levels.

### ***b) Identification of focal academic in F/I/C/S to promote QA measures***

Deans/Directors of F/I/C/S are to identify a focal academic person for the respective F/I/C/S as a reference point to fellow academics and to work in tandem with the Faculty Managers to promote and implement QA measures in the respective F/I/C/S.

### ***c) Review of Study-unit Feedback following 2018/2019 piloting***

As part of our commitment towards ensuring quality in the service we provide to our students, students are asked to submit feedback on the study-units they cover at the end of each semester of studies. Over the past two years, students' participation in these exercises declined considerably, and in order to engage our most important group of stakeholders in our mission, in February 2019 we sought to revamp the exercise by undertaking the following changes:

- the size of the questionnaire has been reduced drastically – instead of the previous 29 questions, the questionnaire now includes 17 questions
- students can submit their feedback via the UM App
- the vast majority of study-units are now included in the feedback exercise
- none of the questions are mandatory

- students are now invited to give feedback two weeks prior to the start of the official exam period and can submit their feedback at any point – either before or after they are assessed, and also before publication of the assessment results

The first piloting of the revised feedback exercise indicates that these changes did not bring about the desired results as students' participation continued to decrease from 25.62% in February 2018 to 10.17% in February of this year. In order to encourage more students to participate in the current exercise, following a decision of the Programme Validation Committee, academics are to be asked to assist in promoting this initiative by asking students to submit their feedback via the UM App during the last 10 minutes of the last lecture for the semester.

#### ***d) Internationalisation***

The University of Malta is on the cutting edge of internationalisation, and it would be pertinent to consider policies and safeguards to ensure good practice when recruiting international students.