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# Internal Quality Review

## SAR Template for Academic Units and Postgraduate Training Faculties







## SAR TEMPLATE DOCUMENT CONTROL SHEET (To be completed by QEO)

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(To be completed by unit under review)

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## **OVERVIEW OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS UNDERTAKEN IN THIS REVIEW**

### **Academic Unit Co-ordinating Committee**

- List the name and grade of each member of the Co-ordinating Committee, Chair first.

### **Brief Methodology**

Provide a brief overview of the approach taken by the unit in developing the self-assessment report. This should include, for example:

- Number of meetings held by the Committee
- Allocation of tasks
- Level of communication with the Unit staff not on the Co-ordinating Committee



## **PROGRESS MADE SINCE THE LAST REVIEW**

(For units going through Cycle II of the Internal Quality Review process)

This section should include

- an outline of the progress and/or developments / enhancements made in the unit, and units reporting in, where relevant.
- an indication of how the Unit address the recommendations made by the Peer Review Group Report and Quality Improvement Plan in the last internal quality review and reflect on how well the recommendations were able to be addressed.

Where a Unit is reviewed by another process, including those relating to risk management, internal audit and external review of operations etc. an update on progress made outlining any subsequent relevant recommendations should be included here.

## **1 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF THE UNIT**

The SAR should provide a brief introduction to the unit and an overview of unit's history, functions and activities. If appropriate describe how the unit has grown and developed in recent years (this will help to provide greater context for the Peer Review Group). Details of the senior management structure, unit organisation chart and summary details of staff should also be included.

The aim of this section would include:

- Assessing the coherency of the Unit's strategy for the future
- Identifying factors which have contributed to the success of the Unit
- Identifying factors which have inhibited the or are likely to inhibit the success of the Unit
- Commenting on the adequacy of the Unit's risk analysis processes and risk management
- Commenting on the outcome of the benchmarking exercise undertaken for this review
- Monitoring the implementation of the institutional strategies and policies
- Reviewing how the Unit's provision takes into consideration national and international guidelines for example, QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines 2016 and European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) 2015, or equivalent local policy

### ***Points to consider***

- Outline the mission and strategy of the Unit as outlined in its Strategic Plan
- What evidence do you have that the Unit strategies, policies and processes are in harmony with RCSI Strategies, Policies and Guidelines?
- What is your strategy for teaching and learning, curriculum development and research? Are they complementary?
- What factors have contributed to and/or inhibited the success of the Unit?

### **1.1 Benchmarking exercise**

Comment on the outcome of the benchmarking exercise undertaken for this review. This might include the rationale for your choice of benchmark institutions, the particular focus of the exercise and the main outcomes of your benchmarking activity. The full details of the benchmarking exercise should be provided as an Appendix.

## **2 ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT**

Information should be provided in the SAR on committee structures within the Unit; mechanisms for budget allocation, workload measurement and assignment; means of communication with staff and students; relations with the University and Programme offices and other administrative and service units in RCSI.

The aim of this section would include:

- assessing the performance of the Unit against its own planning statements and the RCSI Strategic Plan
- assessing the effectiveness of the Unit's formal internal organisation and informal practices
- assessing the interaction of the Unit with RCSI structures
- reviewing how the Unit's provision takes into consideration national and international guidelines for example, QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines 2016 and European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) 2015, or equivalent local policy

### ***Points to consider***

- How is the Unit organised?
- Are the communication mechanisms effective? What evidence is there? Can they be improved?
- Could the organisation of the unit be improved? Are synergies realised?
- Are key staff roles and office functions clearly understood?
- How do workloads in the unit compare with those say, in other countries e.g. UK, Europe, USA?

### **3 STAFF AND FACILITIES**

Reports should contain summary profiles of all staff (usually in appendices); a description and analysis of staff composition and status, including gender balance and age profile; and the physical facilities available to the unit.

Details should be provided of how professional needs of staff are systematically identified and supported, particularly in relation to individual aspirations, and how the skill needs of the Unit are assessed. The report catalogues staff participation in professional development activities; evaluates the performance management systems in place; assesses the involvement of academic staff in teaching development activities and identifies where improvements should be made.

*A template for completing the staff profile is available from the QEO.*

The aim of this section would include:

- evaluating the adequacy of current resources
- reviewing the effectiveness of the Unit's use of available resources
- exploring the ways in which the Unit promotes staff development
- reviewing the level of engagement with relevant University Policies, such as widening access, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion and Athena Swan Award
- reviewing how the Unit's provision takes into consideration national and international guidelines for example, QfE Core Statutory QA Guidelines 2016 and European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) 2015, or equivalent local policy

#### ***Points to consider***

- How do staff keep abreast of the latest thinking in their subject, educational technology and pedagogy? Does this rely on individual motivation and interest or is there a Unit plan or strategy?
- What induction is offered to new staff?
- What professional development activities are offered to non-academic staff?
- Are the learning resources for the programmes poor/adequate/good? How are they managed to ensure that they remain or move towards being good or excellent?
- To what extent is teaching, learning and research constrained by the availability of resources and support provided at institutional level?
- Are the physical facilities sufficient to support the Unit's research, teaching and learning activities?

## 4 TEACHING LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

The report describes and analyses all taught programmes, teaching and learning evaluations, feedback from student questionnaires, external examiners and employers/professional bodies. Student statistical data for all programmes is provided also. Examples of assessments, student questionnaires, minutes of Staff/Student Consultative Committees and marked scripts should also be made available.

The aim of this section would include:

- exploring the ways in which the Unit has generated, considered and acted upon feedback from students; is there scope for improvement? How?
- exploring the Unit response to reports from external examiners and Professional Statutory Bodies – how have these been used to enhance provision (examples)? Could more be done?
- discussing the Unit's use of relevant external and internal benchmarks in the design and delivery of its programmes (for example the Qualifications Framework)
- admissions – quantity/quality of student intake, geographical, socio-economic distribution; also distribution of gender, mature age and where appropriate, disability and ethnic minority
- discussing the links between teaching and research activity
- reviewing how the Unit's provision takes into consideration national and international guidelines for example, QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines 2016 and European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) 2015, or equivalent local policy

### ***Points to consider***

- How does the Unit know it's teaching methods promote student learning? What evidence is there?
- What evidence is there that teaching is of a high standard? What mechanisms are employed to collect feedback – questionnaires? Peer Review? How is feedback on teaching quality processed?
- What do the student programme statistics tell you about the match between intake profile, assessment criteria and student achievement? If they show areas of concern what action has been taken (or will be taken)?
- Does the assessment criteria demonstrate the achievement of the intended learning outcomes? What evidence is there to support this?
- How are students informed about assessment requirements, submission deadlines, etc.
- Are the academic and other supports given to students satisfactory? If so, explain why - if not, what is being done to improve it?
- If things go wrong in a module or programme how and when would this be known?
- What does the Unit consider to be good practice in it's provision? What evidence is there? Is there evidence that programmes have been enhanced by the sharing of good practice?

- Is the feedback given on formative assessment adequate? Are students happy with it? How does the Unit know?
- How does the Unit consider feedback from external examiners?

Where factual, descriptive information is necessary – e.g. samples of questionnaires or student work, this is best presented in annexes, along with statistical data on the student profile. Essential statistical data would include:

- Staff-student ratio
- Intake profile – age, gender, entry qualifications/points
- Level of applications for entry against acceptances
- Progression statistics – number of students progressing, repeating, transferring, withdrawing and completing at each level for all taught and research programmes
- The SAR should present an evaluation of this data as evidence to support the progression and achievement of students.

## 5 CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW

Provide details of programmes and modules, including specific reference to the positioning of each associated qualification in the National Framework of Qualifications, with sufficient information provided to allow the reviewers to understand the appropriateness of the level and type of the award. The unit also describes the processes by which the curricula of its programmes are developed and reviewed on a periodic basis. It is also important to demonstrate the benchmarking of the programmes against similar programmes elsewhere in Ireland and internationally. Units should also describe how all stakeholders (internal and external) are involved specifically in this review process and how often this is undertaken.

The aim of this section would include:

- considering the continuing appropriateness of the Unit's programme specifications with particular attention to curriculum content and learning outcomes
- commenting on the quality of educational provision and the standards of academic awards
- commenting on the academic coherency of the programmes
- reviewing how the Unit's provision takes into consideration national and international guidelines for example, QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines 2016 and European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) 2015, or equivalent local policy

### **General Prompts**

- Why is the curriculum constructed and presented in this way? Does it promote progression in student learning? Does it facilitate the achievement of intended learning outcomes?
- What evidence does the Unit have that standards of the programme are appropriate?
- Has the Unit mapped together the curriculum, learning outcomes, and assessments? Are there any gaps or significant overlaps? If so, what changes are planned and when?
- Does the Unit have a formal process to evaluate and review modules/programmes? How have these processes improved provision?



## 6 RESEARCH ACTIVITY

Where appropriate provide evidence of research activities in the previous three-five years, and brief outlines of the research interests and summarised outputs of each staff member are included. Data should include information on all publications, research grants obtained, research degrees awarded and the research strategic plan for the Unit.

The aim of this section would include:

- assessing the coherency of the Unit's research strategy
- assessing the degree to which the Unit promotes a research culture
- assessing the management of the Unit's research activity
- discussing the links between research and teaching activity
- commenting on the strengths and challenges of the Unit's research output
- assessing the Unit's research performance in relation to those that it sees as its national and international peers
- commenting on the levels of research grant income and research productivity
- commenting on the extent to which the Unit engages in commercialisation and knowledge transfer activity where that is applicable
- assessing the Unit's performance in attracting and supporting doctoral students
- commenting on the effectiveness of the support provided for probationary staff and new researchers

### **Suggested Format for the Research section of the SAR**

*Not all the following elements may be relevant for all academic areas, and additional elements may of course be added.*

#### **Research Strategy and Plans**

The goals, actions and performance indicators selected by the Unit and their implication; analysis of stakeholder requirements; benchmarking partners selected and criteria for comparison; etc.

#### **Publications**

Number of publications for the Unit; the ratio of publications versus staff complement; the quality of publication outlets (e.g. journal impact factors, etc.); number of citations for staff within the Unit; action plans for change; etc.

#### **PhDs**

Number of PhD and research Masters Students within the Unit; ratio of research students to staff complement; PhD completion rates; number of Post-docs within the Unit, etc.

### Research Income

Annual research budgets of the Unit; research projects currently ongoing; research proposals in progress; sources of income (e.g. EU vs. National); etc.

### Staff Engagement

Appropriate engagement of academic staff in research; individual research work plans as appropriate; work load balance between research and teaching; research informed teaching; etc.

### Impact and Related Activities

Public impact of research including conferences, events, patents, license agreements, company spin-offs, exhibitions, documentaries, industry interaction, etc. Contribution to the disciplines of the school or institute e.g. membership of research councils, grant awarding bodies, positions of esteem, editorship (or board member) of prestigious journals, external examiner for research degrees, membership of professional association committees, other prizes and awards.

### ***Points to consider***

- What is the publication rate in the unit and how does it compare with international peers?
- How does the size of the Unit affect the rate of publication? Does the rate reflect the extent of the research activity of the staff? Are publications submitted to the full rigours of peer review in internationally recognised peer reviewed journals?
- Comment on the level of take-up of sabbatical leave in the Unit.
- Are the research support structures in place adequate?
- If appropriate, how effective is the relationship between the School and relevant Research Institutes?
- What is the level of research funding? What are the sources of funding?
- Does the Unit regularly monitor the effectiveness of research student supervision and the outcome of research degree examinations, and with what result?
- What provision and support is given to research students?
- What is the Unit's' overall plan for graduate recruitment?
- What is the staff/student ratio in graduate research?
- What is the level of interaction between staff and postgraduate students to discuss research e.g. regular research seminars?

## **7 MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY AND ENHANCEMENT**

What mechanisms exist to improve the quality of the activities of the Unit with particular reference to teaching and learning and enhancing the quality of research?

The aim of this section would include:

- providing assurance about the quality of educational provision and standards of academic awards
- considering the effectiveness of current monitoring processes – are the processes applied consistently across the Unit; what evidence is there? How do they contribute to quality improvement?
- discussing the Unit's approach to innovation and enhancement
- commenting on levels of participation in internal and external training and quality enhancement events
- reviewing how the Unit's provision takes into consideration national and international guidelines for example, QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines 2016 and European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) 2015, or equivalent local policy

### ***Points to consider***

- How are the various quality processes (e.g. external examiner reports, module evaluation, staff/student consultative committees etc.) integrated to enhance provision?
- Discuss how good practice is identified and disseminated within the Unit and identify any particular elements of good practice in teaching and learning within the Unit.

## **8 SUPPORT SERVICES**

This section details the views of the Unit on the effectiveness of the student and staff support services in the University including Admissions, Student Academic & Regulatory Affairs, Communications Office, Fees Office, Human Resources, IT, Library, Student Services. Units may include reference to their involvement in collaborations with these services with the objective of assisting their improvement.

The aim of this section would include:

- assessing how effective the support services are
- commenting on how the Unit plans and manages learning resources – both local and central

### ***Points to consider***

- What is the acquisition and updating policy for texts and journals?
- How does the unit work with the Library/IT to match texts, periodicals and IT support to the needs of the curriculum and the overall teaching strategy?
- Are the arrangements for the training and induction of students adequate? Is there scope for improvement?
- How effective are the central support services in supporting the activities of the Unit? Are there any improvements that could be made?
- Reviewing how the Unit's provision takes into consideration national and international guidelines for example, QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines 2016 and European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) 2015, or equivalent local policy

## 9 EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Describe relations with other groups within the University and the wider community, with other educational institutions in Ireland and abroad, private businesses, public agencies, professional bodies and employers. Evidence of the views of external stakeholders should be provided.

### ***Points to consider***

Comment on:

- Appointment of School staff to senior University positions, College committees and professional bodies
- Contributions of staff and students to public debate and formulation of public policy
- Engagement with the public through seminars and extra-mural programmes
- Local outreach activities of the School
- External relations with the wider community, including other educational institutions in Ireland and abroad, industry, public agencies, and professional bodies

## **10 SUMMARY OF SWOT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

This chapter should include an overall analysis of the Unit's activities

Strengths should be emphasised, effective Unit responses to concerns should be considered, and challenges discussed. Strategies for improvement should be formulated.

Since the goal of this process is quality enhancement the formulation of strategies and recommendations for improving the work of the Unit should be highlighted.

## **11 APPENDICES**

List of appendices included here. Appendices might include the following examples however Units should include other relevant information appropriate to their individual review.

Examples:

RCSI Organisational Structure

Individual Staff Profiles

Unit planning documents

Committee meeting minutes

Report on benchmarking exercise

SWOT Analysis

Survey Data

Previous internal or external review reports

(See also Appendix 4 in Internal Quality Review Guidelines for Academic Units document)



