



# **TUS**

Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta na Sionainne:  
Lár Tíre, An tIarthar Láir

Technological University of the Shannon:  
Midlands Midwest

**TUS Policy on Strategic Review of Technological University Support Units  
2022 – 2025**



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## 1.0 Introduction

The quality of an activity or service is a measure of its *fitness for purpose*. Quality assurance and enhancement (QAE) refers to actions and processes taken to both monitor, evaluate and report on fitness for purpose and initiatives taken to improve the fitness for purpose of a specified activity or service. In the context of quality assurance of higher education provision in Ireland the statutory body with oversight responsibility is Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). QQI has noted that “*the term ‘quality assurance’ is used to describe the processes that seek to ensure that the learning environment reaches an acceptable threshold of quality* and further cite a UNESCO definition of quality assurance as “*an ongoing, continuing process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of an education system, institution or program*”<sup>[1]</sup>.

The Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (hereafter referred to as TUS or the Technological University) has identified Excellence and Quality as a shared Value. “*We will strive to continuously improve all our activities to ensure ongoing excellence and quality*”.<sup>[2]</sup> TUS is committed to quality assurance and enhancement and recognises that robust quality assurance and enhancement plays an important role in delivering on the mission of the Technological University in its aspiration “*to be a contemporary and engaged technological university distinguished by outstanding learner experience, international focus and impactful and applied research*”.<sup>[2]</sup> The diversity and complexity of the range of Technological University activities and of the contemporary student body in higher education requires the University to continuously improve and enhance support units in line with best practice nationally and internationally. TUS operates on the overarching principle that Quality Assurance and Enhancement is ‘*everybody’s business*’ in which all Technological University Staff, including Academic and Professional, Management, Support Services work in a collaborative and collegiate manner to ensure an integrated approach that fosters a quality culture. TUS recognises that Students are key stakeholders in the organisation and, in this quality culture, the importance of the whole student experience is prioritised to provide a student-centred, career-focused education, within a professional and supportive environment.

In delivering this *Excellence* to students, TUS is supported by a large number of Technological University Support Units that play key roles in the provision of an overall quality experience and supportive environment for students, staff and TUS community. Some examples of such functions include, President and Registrars Offices, Quality, Student Support Services, Academic Administration, Human Resources and Equality

Diversity and Inclusion, Research, Development and Innovation, Finance and Corporate Services, Campus Services and Capital Development, International, Work Placement, Teaching and Learning, Library & Information Services *inter alia*.

Taken together, Support Units provide a complex and coherent support structure which, despite a lack of visibility in some cases, consists of and involves a large volume of activity and personnel supporting the quality of the student experience in TUS. Both the Academic Departments and Technological University Support Units are essential to student success and the role that they play in ensuring a high-quality experience for students is increasingly recognised. This was reflected in the HEA Systems Performance Framework 2018-2020 <sup>[3]</sup> high level target that all higher education institutes develop a student success strategy in which a “*Whole of Institute Approach*” to student success is developed.

While periodic review of Academic Units/Programmes are deeply embedded in the Technological Higher Education sector, such reviews of Support units are relatively new and are in the process of being established and mainstreamed in line with national and sectoral policy. The policy framework outlined in this document helps support this objective.

## 2.0 Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to outline TUS’s approach to quality review of Technological University Support Units and to describe in detail the process as it applies to individual Support Units.

This policy provides details on the process of quality review for Technological University Support Units at TUS. The ethos of the quality review process is that the Support Unit would engage in a mutually supportive and constructive process conducted in a transparent and inclusive manner and be evidence based. The review process should provide scope for recognising achievement and good practice as well as identifying potential opportunities for quality enhancement. In this spirit, the review is not an inspection of individual performance, nor is it part of any performance management system. Rather it is an opportunity for all staff in each Support Unit to reflect on and highlight the quality of the service being provided to students, other Technological University staff and stakeholders and to the wider region and to plan for the development and enhancement of the service to contribute to the continued growth of the entire Technological University.

The purpose of the quality review of the Technological University Support Unit is to:

1. provide a systematic and structured opportunity for the unit to engage in periodic and strategic evidence-based self-reflection and self-assessment of the quality of its activities and processes and their alignment with the mission, goals and strategic objectives of TUS;
2. self-identify opportunities for quality enhancement and the improvement of the unit for its stakeholders;
3. provide a framework by which external peers, in an evidence-based manner, can independently review, evaluate, report upon and suggest improvements to the quality of the Technological University Support Units activities and processes;
4. provide a framework by which the unit can implement quality enhancements in a verifiable manner;
5. provide stakeholders with independent evidence of the quality of the Technological University Support Unit activities and processes;
6. satisfy best practice (national and international) in the context of quality assurance in higher education and meet statutory QA requirements as enshrined in national law.

### 3.0 Scope of the Policy

The Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest complies with Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012<sup>[4]</sup> which places a legal responsibility on providers of higher education to maintain and enhance quality assurance procedures relating to their activities and services (Part 3 *Quality Assurance*, Section 28, *Obligation of providers to prepare quality assurance procedures*). These quality assurance procedures must take due account of relevant quality guidelines published by the statutory body Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and/or its predecessor organisations. Higher Education Providers are required by QQI to review the effectiveness of both Academic and Support Units on a periodic basis.

The Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest is a Designated Awarding Body with awarding powers from Level 6 to Level 10 of the National Framework of Qualifications<sup>[5]</sup> and participates in Cyclical Review and Annual Institutional Quality Review (AQR) with QQI. TUS is required to update QQI annually of its review plans of its academic programmes through Programmatic Reviews and its reviews plans and cycle for other Technological University Support Units as part of its Annual Quality Review (AQR).

This Policy outlines the overall approach to the strategic review process that will be followed by TUS Support Units in carrying out their review. The policy does not outline the schedule or cycle of Support Unit Reviews. A separate process will be initiated by TUS Management for the development of the schedule of such reviews.

#### 4.0 The Strategic Review Process

The Technological University Support Unit review process has three distinct phases and these include:

1. Pre-review Phase;
2. Review Phase;
3. Post-review Phase.

The constituent elements of the phases are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1. The constituent elements of the 3-Phase Review process**

<b>Pre-review phase</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Establishing a Terms of Reference for the review.</li> <li>b) Conducting the self-evaluation.</li> <li>c) Production of a self-evaluation report (SER).</li> </ul>	Process begins approximately 6-9 months prior to visit and SER completed 2 months before the start of the visit.
<b>Review phase conducted by Peer Review Group (PRG)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) An onsite review by the visiting Peer Review Group (1- 2 day duration, depending on the Technological University Support Unit structure and requirements).</li> <li>b) Production and publication of a PRG Report.</li> </ul>	1 - 2 Day Review Visit.
<b>Post-review phase</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Formulation of Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).</li> <li>b) Ongoing implementation of recommendations.</li> <li>c) Implementation review meeting.</li> </ul>	Ongoing over the post review phase with implementation review meeting 12 to 24 months after receiving PRG Report.

## 4.1 The Pre-review Phase

### 4.1.1 Establishing a Terms of Reference for the Review

The review and self-evaluation shall include a broad range of considerations within the context and culture of the individual Technological University Support Unit. These considerations shall be broadly informed by the management principles specified in the ISO9001:2015 Quality Management Standard <sup>[6]</sup>. This Standard specifies seven quality management principles, and these include:

1. Customer Focus (Stakeholder focus in TUS context);
2. Leadership;
3. Engagement of People;
4. Process Approach;
5. Continual Improvement;
6. Evidence Based Decision Making;
7. Relationship Management.

Where relevant and appropriate, the review teams shall consider and take due account of these principles and be guided by the considerations specified in Table 2 in establishing their terms of reference for the self-evaluation. It is acknowledged that the Terms of Reference may vary depending on specific context and culture of the support Unit conducting the review.

**Table 2. Establishing the Terms of Reference for the Review Process**

	<b>Quality Management Principle<sup>[ref]</sup></b>	<b><i>Examples to assist for establishing Terms of Reference</i></b>
1	Customer Focus (Stakeholder focus in Technological University context)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The extent to which the Technological University Support Unit meets stakeholder requirements and strives to exceed them.</li><li>• Functions/Services supporting internal and external stakeholders.</li></ul>
2	Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Organisation and management of the Technological University Support Unit.</li><li>• Resources, roles and reporting structures.</li></ul>
3	Engagement of People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recognition of the role and engagement of people in achieving the objectives of the Support Unit.</li></ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technological University wide engagement, including participation in committees reviews and other internal and external activities/organisations.</li> </ul>
4	Process Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of processes to meet service delivery requirements.</li> <li>• Review and update of relevant policies and procedures.</li> <li>• Information management systems and communication tools shall be considered to ascertain their suitability.</li> </ul>
5	Continual Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The availability and suitability of staff training and support to facilitate Continuous Professional Development.</li> <li>• Innovation and quality in the culture of the Technological University Support Units.</li> <li>• Implementation targets for the Support Unit and their alignment with the Mission and Strategic Plan/Targets of the Technological University.</li> <li>• Quality assurance and awareness of relevant quality systems within the Support Unit</li> </ul>
6	Evidence Based Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence based decision making and communication</li> <li>• Information or input typically used to make decisions relating to the Support Unit, including staff/student input.</li> </ul>
7	Relationship Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal communication systems within the Support Unit.</li> <li>• Communication between the Technological University Support Unit and academic departments, other cross campus support units, the Student body and management structures shall be considered.</li> <li>• Managing relationships between the Technological University Support Unit and stakeholders.</li> </ul>

The Terms of Reference may also include review of specific areas or functions unique to the particular Technological University Support Unit. Appropriate emphasis should be placed on communication, inclusivity, and feedback. In this context, the Technological University Support Unit should strive to make the Technological University community aware of the review process and provide opportunities for all

stakeholders, both internal and external, to make submissions/commentary for consideration during the review process.

#### 4.1.2 Conducting the Self-Evaluation

The Technological University Support Unit shall nominate a Steering Group typically chaired by the head of the function or area. The Steering Group should be representative of the staff profile of the Support Unit. This group shall oversee the self-evaluation process, facilitate input from staff, and liaise with senior management as appropriate. The steering group shall assist with planning the self-evaluation process, review of documentation, project planning, implementation including the facilitation of any planned focus groups and organising the peer review panel. The Quality Office shall provide support, advice and guidance to the Support Unit undergoing review.

The Technological University Support Unit shall:

- a) detail the aims and objectives of the Support Unit in the context as aligned with the mission, goals and strategic objective of the Technological University;
- b) determine and detail the user experience of the Support Unit both internal and external via questionnaires, focus groups and surveys to gain feedback and identify areas which the Technological University Support Units may wish to develop;
- c) identify any areas for improvement and further development.

The self-evaluation process shall be conducted in a manner that promotes innovation and improvement and shall involve staff in the Technological University Support Units from the outset.

The self-evaluation shall be evidence based and this may involve some or all of the following:

- a) critical self-evaluation of Technological University Support Unit by staff and identification of areas for service improvement;
- b) analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis);
- c) use of surveys or questionnaires of users and key stakeholders including use of surveys and information already collated as part of ongoing QA and monitoring;
- d) use of focus groups to obtain in-depth feedback from specific stakeholder groups (focus groups can be facilitated by external consultants as necessary);
- e) use of interviews with specific stakeholders, other services providers and/or Technological University Management;

- f) benchmarking against best practice (national/international) in similar Technological University Support Units.

Each Technological University Support Unit shall consider all aspects of its function and how it operates and decide whether it is operating successfully and efficiently. Where appropriate, it shall identify any changes required and plan how and when identified changes shall be implemented. The Technological University Support Unit shall prepare a Self-Evaluation Report (SER).

The review process shall normally take 6 to 9 months from initiation to completion of the SER. The timeline shall reflect the capacity of the Technological University Support Unit to complete the review and shall be agreed at the commencement of the self-evaluation process.

#### 4.1.3 Production of the Self Evaluation Report (SER)

The self-evaluation process shall result in the completion of a SER. The SER shall normally be completed a minimum of 2 months prior to the site visit of the Review Phase. It shall comprise of an evidence- based report and be broadly based on the Terms of Reference established for the review.

Where relevant and appropriate, the SER should make reference to the seven management principles specified in the ISO9001:2015 quality management standard<sup>[6]</sup>. In this context the SER shall normally contain the Sections listed in Table 3. The SER should normally be a maximum of 40 pages (approximately 15,000 words). In the interests of a balanced SER no one section relating to the seven quality management principles should exceed 5 pages (with the exception of Section 9, Appendices).

**Table 3. The Typical Sections and Content of the SER \***

Section	Outline Content
1. Overview of the Support Unit	Brief description of the Technological University Support Unit highlighting key aspects of the units mission and objectives and how these relate the TUS Strategic Objectives.
2. Stakeholder Service Delivery Focus	Account of how the Technological University Support Unit meets the respective quality management principles (section 2-8) as outlined in ISO9001:2015. <sup>[6]</sup>
3. Management and Leadership Structures	

4. Engagement of People	This should be described in an evidence-based manner. The report may identify strengths and achievements with respect to these. It should also detail gaps, weaknesses or issues for improvement identified during the review. It should specify clear action plans and timelines for resolving these issues and these should be clearly summarised at the end of the relevant section. Reference to relevant strategic plans should be made throughout.
5. Evidence of Process Approach	
6. Approach to Continuous Process Improvement	
7. Evidence-Based Decision Making	
8. Relationship Management	
9. Relevant Appendices	<p>Details of surveys, focus groups and other evidence described/referenced in the relevant sections (2 to 8).</p> <p>Appendices may also be used to present items such as Strategic Plans, Audit Reports, Relevant Technological University Support Unit Policies/Annual Reports and Quality Improvement Plans.</p>

\* It is acknowledged that the contents of the SER may vary depending on the specific support and in particular context and culture.

#### 4.2 The Review Phase Conducted by the Peer Review Group (PRG)

The review phase of the process refers to the time during which the external panel comprising the Peer Review Group (PRG) visits the Technological University to meet with the Technological University Support Unit under review and representatives of its stakeholders. The PRG is responsible for performing an independent evaluation of the Technological University Support Unit based on the SER and a site visit to meet with staff and stakeholder representatives.

The PRG shall be independent and typically comprise six members the majority of which are external to the Technological University. It shall typically consist of:

- a Chairperson experienced at senior management level in Irish higher education;
- two external experts with experience in the Support Units area at least one of which should be at University management level;

- where possible an international specialist with experience in the Support Unit area;
- a Technological University Support Units' stakeholder representative;
- a Student representative;
- secretary to the panel.

Every effort shall be made to ensure gender balance in the PRG and an international specialist shall be included where possible.

The TUS Vice President with management responsibility for the Technological University Support Unit shall contact PRG nominees to confirm their participation and independence and shall act as liaison between the PRG and the Technological University Support Unit. The relevant Vice President shall oversee the organisation of the review panel and their site visit. The PRG should receive the SER at least one month prior to the site visit.

The output following the panel visit shall be a Peer Review Group Report (PRGR) which shall be considered by the Technological University Support Unit.

#### 4.2.1 Review by the Visiting Quality Review Group

The visit of the Peer Review Group will be of 1 - 2 days in duration depending on the Technological University Support Unit structure and requirements. If appropriate the Peer Review Visit may take place virtually.

The primary function of the PRG visit shall be:

- a) to review and consider in detail the SER in context;
- b) visit the Technological University Support Unit to meet with staff, user representatives, other stakeholders of the function and Technological University Senior Management and to observe the facilities and consider the activities of the Technological University Support Units in the light of the SER;
- c) consider analysis provided in the SER and discuss any relevant areas which may not have been addressed in the report;
- d) verify and report on how well the aims and objectives of the Technological University Support Unit are fulfilled having regard to the available resources;
- e) comment on the appropriateness of the Support Unit mission, objectives and/or strategic plan;
- f) consider the suitability of the working environment and facilities;
- g) make recommendations having due regard to resource implications;
- h) present any key findings at the end of the visit and prepare a peer review report.

#### 4.2.2 Production and Publication of a Peer Review Group Report (PRGR).

The PRG shall produce a Peer Review Group Report using the template provided in Appendix 1. The PRGR shall comment formatively on the Technological University Support Unit and make any recommendations which shall support the quality enhancement of the unit. It shall comment on the SER and provide an overview of the Technological University Support Units and its activities. It may acknowledge achievement and highlight examples of best practice. It should also identify any critical resource limitations and comment on any strategic plans by the Technological University Support Units. It may also comment on any other items deemed appropriate by the PRG.

The objectives and functions of the PRG are as follows:

- a) the PRG Panel Report shall be sent by the PRG Chairperson to the TUS Head of Quality within 6 weeks of the site visit. The TUS Head of Quality shall forward the report to the relevant Vice President with responsibility for the Support Unit.
- b) The Vice President shall issue to each Manager of the Technological University Support Unit for consideration and response;
- c) the Technological University Support Unit shall prepare a detailed response to the PRGR using the template provided in Appendix B. The completed response shall be submitted, by the Manager of the Technological University Support Unit to the Vice President and to the TUS Executive;
- d) the TUS Executive shall consider the PRG Report and response from a strategic perspective across the Technological University and how the alignment of the support with the strategic vision, mission and objectives of the Technological University can be enhanced.
- e) it shall then be presented to Academic Council and Governing Body as appropriate, for noting.
- f) the Final Report and Technological University Support Unit Response shall be published on the TUS website under the Quality Assurance and Enhancement section.

### 4.3 The Post Review Phase

#### 4.3.1 Formulation of Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)

The Technological University Support Unit meets formally within four weeks of receiving the PRGR to formally consider and respond to each recommendation and the commendations. It finalises a formal response to the PRGR in the form of a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). This should normally be completed within 6 to 9 months after

receiving the report and before the end of the Academic Semester subsequent to the Semester in which the review was undertaken. The unit records its response to the recommendations by completing the template provided in Appendix 2. This can form an integral part of the QIP and includes reference to specific implementation plans including ownership where appropriate.

#### 4.3.2 Ongoing Implementation of Recommendations

The Technological University Support Unit works to implement the Quality Improvement Plan during the subsequent 12–18 month period. The Technological University Support Unit shall carry out a brief, interim self-assessment of progress made in relation to the implementation after a period of 12 to 18 months. An interim self-assessment report shall be sent to the relevant Vice President with responsibility for the Support Unit.

#### 4.3.3 Implementation Review Meeting

The Technological University Support Unit shall subsequently convene a review meeting and prepare a short update 24 months after the production of the final report and response outlining progress made, any significant and relevant changes in circumstances within the Technological University Support Unit in the intervening period. It will develop timelines for the implementation of any remaining targets.

An updated version of the Response to the PRGR is produced. In particular, the *status of implementation column* of the actions associated with each recommendation is updated and any revised implementation timelines and parties responsible are updated. This updated report is sent to the TUS Quality Office who forwards to the relevant Vice President with responsibility for the Support Unit. The PRG Report, Technological University Support Units Response and Interim Report shall be made available to subsequent PRG Panel members during the next review cycle.

## 5.0 References

- [1] [QQI: Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines, April 2016.](#)
- [2] [Application for Designation as a Technological University. AIT-LIT Consortium](#)
- [3] [HEA Systems Performance Framework 2018 - 2020](#)
- [4] [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act \(2012\)](#)
- [5] [Technological Universities Act 2018](#)
- [6] [ISO9001:2015.](#)

## 6.0 Appendices

Appendix 1, Peer Review Group Report (PRGR) Template

Appendix 2: Technological University Support Unit Quality Improvement Plan and Response to PRGR

## Appendix 1, Peer Review Group Report (PRGR) Template

### **Section 1. Introductory Details**

- a. Technological University Support Unit title
- b. Membership and affiliation of the Peer Review Group
- c. Technological University Support Unit Manager(s)
- d. Members of the Self Evaluation Team

### **Section 2. Brief description of the Support Unit**

This provides an introductory context to the report and describes in summary form the function and roles of the Technological University Support Unit in the context of the Technological University.

### **Section 3. Overall comments on the Technological University Support Unit Review and the SER**

This section of the report will consider and comment on the:

- a. achievements and examples of best practice evidenced;
- b. extent to which the Support Unit has implemented a quality management system;
- c. extent to which the Support Unit is fulfilling the needs of its stakeholders;
- d. extent to which the Support Unit engaged effectively in the self-evaluation exercise;
- e. quality of the self-assessment report (SER) including stakeholders' feedback;
- f. engagement of the Technological University Support Unit during the peer review group site visit.

### **Section 4. PRG Commendations and Recommendations**

This section of the report details the commendations and the recommendations of PRG. The number of commendations and recommendations is at the discretion of the PRG and will be driven by the quality of the review and the findings of the group. As a general guideline 5 to 8 commendations and 10 to 15 recommendations may be appropriate.

Recommendations should be clear, concise, evidence-based and, as far as possible, be focused on a single issue. Recommendations are divided into two categories, Grade 1 and Grade 2 and should be addresses solely to the support unit under review rather than other units or the Technological University as a whole. While recommendations are addressed solely to the Support Unit under review, resolving some recommendations may involve the Support Unit working with other

organisational units within the Technological University. The Head of the Support Unit will be responsible for ensuring that all recommendations are considered for implementation so they should be written in an appropriate, concise action orientated manner.

- Grade 1 recommendations are those that the PRG believes to be particularly significant in assisting the Technological University Support Unit to better meet the needs of its stakeholders and/or enhance the quality management system.
- Grade 2 recommendations reflect general improvements to enhance the overall effectiveness and quality of service delivered.

### Commendations and Praiseworthy Practices

Number	Commendations
1	
2	
3	
<i>Add rows</i>	

### Grade 1 Recommendations

Number	Recommendations
1	
2	
3	
<i>Add rows</i>	

### Grade 2 Recommendations

Number	Recommendations
1	
2	
3	
<i>Add rows</i>	

### Section 5. Concluding Comments

This section may include any overall final comments and summation that the Peer Review Group may wish to provide.

## Appendix 2: Technological University Support Unit Quality Improvement Plan and Response to PRGR

### **Section 1. Introductory Details**

- a. Technological University Support Unit title;
- b. Membership and affiliation of the Peer Review Group;
- c. Technological University Support Unit Manager(s);
- d. Members of the Self Evaluation Team;
- e. Date of Receipt of PRGR;
- f. Date of sensing response to PRGR to relevant Technological University Vice President.

### **Section 2. Brief description of the Support Unit**

Brief comment(s) by the Technological University Support Unit on noteworthy points

### **Section 2. Overall comments on the PRGR**

Brief comment(s) by the Technological University Support Unit on noteworthy points

### **Section 3. PRG Commendations and Recommendations**

This section of the report details the considered response of the Technological University Support Unit to the commendations and the recommendations of PRG.

### **Section 4. Concluding Comments**

Brief comment(s) by the Technological University Support Unit on noteworthy points

**Section 3. PRG Recommendations Response Template**

**Grade 1 Recommendations**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Implementation Status</b>
1					
2					
3					
<i>Add rows</i>					

**Grade 2 Recommendations**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Implementation Status</b>
1					
2					
3					
<i>Add rows</i>					