UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

POLICY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT
MISSION STATEMENT

To transform the University into an international Third Generation University built on three pillars:

Teaching and Learning – including distance and e-Learning
- To promote a humanism based on scholarship and understanding
- To educate graduates for today’s jobs

Research and Innovation
- To promote excellence and discovery
- To help create tomorrow’s jobs for graduates

Outreach Services – to industry and civil society
- To stimulate economic development and resilience
- To promote sustainable living, entrepreneurship and social solidarity

Conscious of its public role, the University of Malta strives to create courses which are relevant and timely in response to the needs of the country. The programmes on offer at the University are designed to produce highly qualified professionals, with experience of research, who will play key roles in industry, commerce and public affairs in general. Our institutional pride and responsibilities push us to review our taught programmes to ensure their relevance, appropriateness and utility in relation to progress in the respective fields, the needs of the local economy and also the wider calling of the University in a global context.

Quality assurance at the University is a shared responsibility between the Rectorate, Faculties, Institutes, Centres and School of the University. In order to ensure that its awards and service provision are of the highest standards, the University has in place a number of mechanisms which are described presently.
Responsibilities in the Management of Quality and Standards

Council is the supreme governing body of the University and is responsible for appointing new members of staff in academic, technical and administrative positions.

Senate is responsible for academic governance and thus, it regulates programmes of study, methods of assessment, entry regulations, and considers student requests, among other things.

There are 14 Faculties, a number of interdisciplinary Institutes and Centres, and a School of Performing Arts. 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 area 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.

Approval of New and Revised Programmes

The Programme Validation Committee (PVC), a Sub-Committee of Senate, was set up in 2007 to guide the process of quality assurance: it implemented a new process for the approval and maintenance of new and existing programmes. 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). This unit has a full-time staff complement of 10 and is headed by an Assistant Registrar who reports directly to the Pro-Rector for Academic Affairs.

A two-stage approval process for new courses is employed. 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 of the original proposal.

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

**Admission and Progression of Students**

The University is open to all those who have the requisite qualifications as outlined in the [Admission 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 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 masters’ dissertations and doctoral theses](#). [The Consanguinity / Affinity / Dual Relationship Policy](#) is also available to staff on the [University’s intranet](#).

**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
• 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](#).

**Role of External Examiners**

Foreign external examiners (the majority 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.

**Student Feedback**

Students’ evaluation of their learning experience is an integral and necessary component of any quality assurance system as adopted by universities as it allows the institution to evaluate how its service provision is viewed by its most important group of stakeholders, namely, its students. Besides providing them with an opportunity to comment on the quality of courses, feedback ensures that lecturers are made aware of problems perceived or encountered by students and affords an opportunity for tutors to conduct self-evaluation and introspection for improvement.

In each semester, towards the end of class in selected study-units, students are invited by an email to complete an online questionnaire, on an anonymous basis. This process
occurs firstly towards the end of the first semester, in January, and again in June. To eliminate bias, feedback is collected after students have been assessed on that particular unit, but prior to publication of results. Similarly, the results of the feedback exercise are only communicated to the lecturer/s concerned after the result of the assessment has been published.

The main issues highlighted during any feedback exercise are communicated to the Rector & Pro-Rector for Academic Affairs and any urgent/serious matters are discussed with the respective Heads of Department. Results are monitored and study-units which elicit a pattern of recurrent problems are re-assessed for any developments.

An overview of the study-unit feedback process is available [here].

**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].

**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 doctorate 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.

**Academic Promotion**

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 scholarships 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 available to staff on the University's intranet).*

**Collective Agreement and Manual of Conduct and Procedures**

Academic staff 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.

**Public Information**

Information pertaining to courses offered by the University is publicly available through the Course Finder facility which is available on the University’s main portal. This feature allows individuals to select, from a drop-down menu, the areas of study which are of interest to them, and this will in turn lead the user to courses which are relevant to the search criteria.

The information which is available under each of the individual searches is as follows:

- Title of the Award
- Level of the qualification
- Duration and mode of study
- Course overview
- Learning outcomes of the programme
• Details of career opportunities and access to further studies
• Target audience
• Admission requirements
• Programme of Studies including a detailed description for all study-units

Student Support

There are various support structures in place at University aimed at helping students with problems. These structures have been in place for a number of years and information about them can be found on the University website. A student with a problem can refer to one of the structures below depending on the nature of their problem.

Students Advisory Services (SAS)
Students who have problems related to the course they are following 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.

Students’ Charter Sub-Committee
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.

ACCESS – Disability support unit (ASDU)
Students experiencing problems due to physical or cognitive problems can seek help from this Unit which works closely with the ACCESS Disability Support Committee.

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

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

Pro-Rector for Students and Institutional Affairs
If a student has not found help from any of the above bodies, they can make an appointment with the Pro-Rector for Students and Institutional Affairs.
**E-Learning and IT Services**

The University [IT Services](#) is responsible for the University IT infrastructure and offers a range of facilities and services to assist members of staff and students with their IT-related needs.

The campus network connects together into one virtual campus all offices, laboratories, buildings and wireless hotspots that are located across the various University sites in Malta and Gozo. The University intranet provides access to the Internet, Library online periodical, electronic Student Information Management System (eSIMS) and the Administrative Information Management System (AIMS). Other services that are provided to the campus community include [e-learning](#), [videoconferencing](#), [academic software site licences](#) and [training](#).

**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 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.

**Research, Innovation and Knowledge Transfer**

In the past decade, the University has invested 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 through funds it has generated itself through 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 are no longer solely deployed to support and maintain undergraduate teaching laboratories, but are now increasingly required to take on technically complex tasks in the provision of research support to postgraduate students, postdocs and resident academics.
Furthermore, the Corporate Research and Knowledge Transfer Office which was set up in 2009, aims to drive the Corporate Research agenda of the University in harmony with and in response to:

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

To assist the University and 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 application phase, contracting phase, and management of externally funded projects. It also maintains an audit trail of projects to ensure that the University delivers the commitments that are contracted for.

The Research & Innovation Facilities Support Unit (RIFSU) set up recently under the aegis of the Pro-Rector for Research and Innovation, coordinates the research resources of the University and amongst other things strives to upgrade the skills of technical and laboratory staff.

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, facilitates 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 socio-economic development of the Maltese Islands.

CEBI offers a Masters programme in knowledge-based entrepreneurship aimed at graduates and professionals who aspire to launch successful knowledge-based entrepreneurial ventures. It is also responsible to promote entrepreneurship on Campus.
Malta University Holding Company (MUHC)

MUHC is the commercial arm of the University. Amongst other things, MUHC supports and brokers various consultancy and outreach services to industry.

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