



L-Università
ta' Malta

Quality Assurance
Committee

QAC Report

August 2022 – July 2023

Foreword by the Pro-Rector

It is with great pride and optimism that I share with you the Quality Assurance Committee's report of 2022/2023. The past academic year was, without a doubt, one filled with challenges that tested our mettle and resilience. However, it was also a year of immense reward, growth, and collective achievement.

One of the standout moments of the previous year was the intense scrutiny we faced during the External Quality Assurance audit by the MFHEA. The spotlight was on us, and it was a time of stress, but together, as a united team, we emerged successful. It was truly heartening to witness the UM community come together in solidarity to confront this challenge head-on. This experience reaffirmed our commitment to excellence and our ability to overcome adversity.

The lengthy report that encapsulates our journey over the past academic year is a testament to our unwavering dedication. Milestones such as the Student Feedback policy and the Assessment policy were no small feats, and they demonstrate our determination to provide our students with the highest quality tertiary education experience possible.

But let us remember that this journey is a continuous learning curve. The path ahead demands that we keep learning, evolving, and improving. The ongoing monitoring and review processes will present new challenges, but these are opportunities for us to grow and excel.

Our report also sheds light on the challenges that lie ahead, challenges we must tackle head-on. Setting up a BI (Business Intelligence) unit and maintaining our position in the University Rankings are among these challenges. We must embrace them with the same tenacity that has brought us this far.

Furthermore, the dedication and commitment of our QSU staff in pursuing their Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is truly commendable. I encourage them to continue on this path of growth and development.

As we embark on the next academic year, let us remember the strength we have as a community. Together, we can find solutions, achieve our goals, and continue to provide our students with an exceptional education.

As Henry Ford once stated, "If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself".

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to each member of the Quality Assurance Committee for their unwavering dedication and genuine passion in ensuring that the University of Malta maintains its prominent position as the central hub for fostering the social, economic and environmental development of our society. Your commitment is truly commendable.

Prof. Frank Bezzina
Pro-Rector International Development and Quality Assurance
Chair – Quality Assurance Committee

Preamble

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

- ❖ Professor Frank Bezzina, in the Chair
- ❖ Professor Ing. Maurice Apap
- ❖ Ms Jo-Anne Attard
- ❖ Professor Carmel Borg
- ❖ Dr Colin Borg
- ❖ Professor Victor Buttigieg
- ❖ Professor Isabel Stabile
- ❖ Ms Deborah Duca
- ❖ Dr Peter Xuereb
- ❖ Dr Jacqueline Vanhear
- ❖ Ms Emma De Gabriele (Senate Student Representative)
- ❖ Mr Thomas Galea (Senate Student Representative, until 26 January 2023)
- ❖ Ms Elisa Micallef Peplow (Senate Student Representative, from 26 January 2023)

Secretary: Dr Jonathan Xuereb

The QAC met eleven times in the period under review.

| | | |
|------------|------------------|--------------|
| Meeting 01 | 10 October 2022 | Min. 001-057 |
| Meeting 02 | 16 November 2022 | Min. 058-100 |
| Meeting 03 | 14 December 2022 | Min. 101-124 |
| Meeting 04 | 05 January 2023 | Min. 125-168 |
| Meeting 05 | 22 February 2023 | Min. 169-212 |
| Meeting 06 | 22 March 2023 | Min. 213-257 |
| Meeting 07 | 19 April 2023 | Min. 258-300 |
| Meeting 08 | 24 April 2023 | Min. 301-343 |
| Meeting 09 | 24 May 2023 | Min. 344-359 |
| Meeting 10 | 21 June 2023 | Min. 360-383 |
| Meeting 11 | 24 July 2023 | Min. 384-407 |

Table 1: QAC meetings during academic year 2022/2023

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

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External Quality Assurance (EQA) Audit

In line with **Subsidiary Legislation 607.03**,¹ Article 37 (1), the University of Malta (UM) was requested by the **Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA)**² to undergo an external quality assurance audit as part of its commitment to quality assurance. The different steps of the audit followed the procedures outlined in the MFHEA's **EQA Provider Audit Manual of Procedures**.³

UM's Profile

The MFHEA requested UM to submit a profile that would include the main information about the University such as its mission statement, governance, organogram, list of all programmes and key facts and figures. The QSU led this process and prepared a comprehensive document that was professionally designed and branded by the Marketing, Communications & Alumni Office. The UM profile was submitted in November 2022 and gave an excellent first impression of the highlights at the University in preparation for its second cycle of the external quality assurance audit.

Self-Assessment Report (SAR)

The QSU was entrusted with the task of coordinating with all the academic and administrative entities across the University in order to have the UM Self-Assessment Report (SAR) drafted, compiled, finalised and ready for submission as per the deadline. The process behind the compilation of the SAR undertook a self-evaluation of the practices currently in place vis-à-vis the National standards as established by the MFHEA thereby exhibiting the University's main strengths and its primary challenges. This information was used as the basis for the drafting of improvement action plans for the future in each area.

After the QSU completed the drafting of this SAR based on the information and supporting evidence provided by the relevant departments, the SAR was then reviewed by the concerned entities. The SAR was also shared with the students' representatives on QAC and with KSU who provided their feedback. Further information and clarifications were received and the draft was revised and amended accordingly. Afterwards, the draft document underwent a design and branding process, to be subsequently shared with the Rector, the QAC members and other concerned individuals for their final feedback and reflections. The QSU took all such feedback on board to produce the final SAR which was endorsed by the Rector, UM's top management and the QAC.

The UM SAR was a comprehensive 160-page document which included 379 Supporting Documents that were hyperlinked for ease of access. The SAR was submitted on 31 January 2023 as previously requested by the MFHEA.

¹ <https://legislation.mt/eli/sl/607.3/eng>

² <https://mfhea.mt/>

³ <https://mfhea.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/External-Quality-Assurance-Provider-Audit-Manual-of-Procedures.pdf>

Scoping meeting

It is worth noting that before the EQA audit onsite visit took place, there was a scoping visit whereby the audit panel chair and the MFHEA coordinators met with top leaders of the University during an online meeting that was held on 21 April 2023. The main aim of the scoping meeting was to clarify further steps of the audit process, discuss logistical aspects of the programme and to identify the people who will meet with the panel during the onsite visit. The meeting was successful and there was no issue to report with the exception of the dates of the audit onsite visit which were not suitable to UM because they coincided with an examination period, which would pose a real challenge to UM staff and students. This issue was reported to the panel so that in the future audit visits examination periods are avoided. The panel specifically requested UM to organise the meetings of 1 June at the Valletta campus.

Audit onsite visit

The EQA audit onsite visit took place on UM premises between 29 May and 2 June 2023. The panel spent four days at Msida campus and one day at Valletta campus. The panel met with around 280 people including top and middle management, academic and administrative staff, current students, alumni, and external stakeholders such as employers and industry representatives. The QSU planned and conducted a good number of information sessions with the people identified to meet the audit panel. During these sessions, the QSU briefed the target audience about the audit process and protocol and informed them about their respective meeting dates, times, and venues. These sessions were important for the efficient preparation and smooth running of the audit process.

All the audit meetings went according to the agreed plan and there were no unexpected changes. UM did its best to facilitate the whole process for the audit panel and offered whatever support was requested by the panel. The approach of both the University and the audit panel was constructive throughout all the stages of the audit.

Following an examination of the UM SAR and a comprehensive five-day onsite visit, the panel gained a thorough understanding of the University's performance across all 11 Standards. This assessment allowed the panel to identify best practices as well as areas of concern. As a result, it is anticipated that UM will receive the audit report by September/October 2023. The University will then have the opportunity to respond to the report's content in relation to factual correctness before its final approval and publication.

The EQA audit visit demanded meticulous preparation and planning, from gathering the requested documentation to ensuring the success of the onsite inspection. Despite the considerable workload, UM can confidently declare that it achieved a remarkable feat in rallying its entire community. The exceptional collaboration exhibited by academic and administrative staff, as well as the enthusiastic involvement of students, deserves commendation. Regardless of the specific outcomes outlined in the forthcoming report, UM takes pride in the collegial and collaborative team effort that emerged throughout this process. Undoubtedly, this collective effort will leave a lasting positive impression on the external audit review panel, reflecting the University's commitment to excellence and continuous improvement. This also demonstrates UM's dedication to promoting collaboration and

illustrates that when we unite, pursuing a shared goal and pulling in the same direction, our achievements become more significant.

Challenges and future improvements

Though the process of preparing the UM SAR and coordinating the audit onsite visit was successful, there were a number of challenges that could be overcome in future similar audits if the following actions are taken into consideration:

- Ensure that the MFHEA avoids examination periods when planning audit onsite visits.
- Prepare a comprehensive action plan in response to audit reports at an early stage and involve all the concerned entities in the planning stage.
- Each recommendation should have a focal person driving the implementation.
- QSU/QAC are to conduct regular follow-up meetings with the concerned entities to check on the progress made for every recommendation.
- The progress should be recorded so that when the MFHEA performs the follow-up in 2024, UM will be in a robust position to demonstrate progress in the implementation of the recommendations.
- In 2025, UM should start planning for an institutional gap analysis to take place in 2026. This will facilitate the preparation for the next MFHEA EQA audit visit.
- Start drafting and compiling the SAR at an earlier stage to allow sufficient time for revision and editing before the final submission.
- Involve the concerned entities in the process of drafting, revising, and editing of their respective sections of the SAR at an earlier stage to allow sufficient time for corrections and double checking.
- Spread more awareness across the University about the QAC, QSU and external quality assurance audits.



Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)

Institutional gap analysis performed at UM by QAA experts

The **Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)**⁴ conducted a comprehensive onsite institutional gap analysis of the University of Malta on 25 and 26 October 2022. This evaluation aimed to assess the UM's internal quality assurance systems and identify areas requiring improvement.

The QAA gap analysis served as an opportunity for UM to critically evaluate the degree to which it is likely to meet the 11 Standards established by the MFHEA in line with the **National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education**.⁵

The review encompassed multiple phases:

1. **Desk-based analysis:** A thorough examination of UM's self-assessment document was carried out as part of the initial assessment.
2. **Review visit:** Over the course of two days, QAA experts Dr Demelza Curnow and Dr Julian Ellis engaged with various stakeholders. They met with the Rector, the senior management team, students (including alumni), academic staff, the QAC, and representatives from professional services and student support. Private meetings were also held with the QSU and its Senior Executive, and other QAC representatives. These interactions facilitated knowledge-sharing and readiness for the subsequent MFHEA EQA audit.

The resulting report conveyed a positive outlook for UM's ability to meet the National Standards, along with recommendations to enhance continuous improvement across each Standard. In response, the QAC devised an action plan to address these recommendations. While some recommendations were implemented, others remained pending, as the QAC's primary focus shifted towards preparations for the MFHEA EQA audit from November 2022 to June 2023.

It is anticipated that significant progress in implementing the action plan to address the recommendations will be made during the academic year 2023/2024. This ongoing commitment to quality assurance underscores UM's dedication to delivering excellence in higher education.

UM's application for QAA International Associate Membership

The UM is pleased to announce its official application through the QAC for International Associate Membership with the QAA. This strategic move reflects UM's commitment to enhancing its quality assurance practices and fostering international collaboration in the field of higher education.

The QAA is renowned as the custodian of the UK Quality Code, a pivotal reference point for higher education in the United Kingdom. Boasting approximately 300 UK members, the QAA has received accolades for its best practice approach to student involvement, as recognised by a **European**

⁴ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/>

⁵ <https://mfhea.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/National-Quality-Assurance-Framework-for-Further-and-Higher-Education-General-Public-1.pdf>

expert panel.⁶ Additionally, the QAA is registered within the **European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)**⁷ and undergoes periodic reviews by the **European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)**⁸ with the most recent being in 2023.

Aims of QAA International Associate Membership

The primary objectives of UM's application for QAA International Associate Membership align with the following aims:

1. **Building an international community:** UM seeks to join an international community of higher education institutions dedicated to excellence in quality assurance and enhancement.
2. **Sharing resources and best practices:** UM aims to share resources and best practices with like-minded institutions, fostering mutual growth in quality assurance approaches.
3. **Supporting continuous improvement:** UM is committed to supporting continuous improvement in its quality assurance and enhancement processes through international collaboration.

Benefits of International Associate Membership

UM anticipates several benefits from its QAA International Associate Membership, including:

1. **Access to resources:** UM will gain access to a plethora of resources, guidance, and networking opportunities, enriching its quality assurance practices through QAA's support.
2. **Informative resources:** UM will benefit from timely and responsive quality enhancement resources available on the QAA Membership Resources site, enhancing its ability to adapt to evolving quality assurance standards and practices.
3. **International collaboration:** UM's membership will enable participation in an array of activities designed to facilitate the sharing of best practices in quality assurance with international colleagues.
4. **Staff development:** UM recognises the potential for staff development through international training and networking events, further enhancing the competence of its academic and administrative personnel.

UM's application for QAA International Associate Membership signifies a crucial step towards strengthening its commitment to quality assurance and enhancement in higher education. The University looks forward to participating in the upcoming **calendar of events for 2023/2024**⁹ and anticipates fruitful collaboration with the QAA, as well as valuable training and networking

⁶ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/news-events/news/qaa-praised-for-best-practice-approach-to-student-involvement-by-european-expert-panel>

⁷ <https://www.eqar.eu/>

⁸ <https://www.engq.eu/>

⁹ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/international/qaa-membership/international-associate-membership>

opportunities for its staff and students. This membership is a testament to UM's dedication to academic excellence and continuous improvement.

University Policies

The Assessment Policy and Student Feedback Policy

The QAC has achieved significant milestones during the academic year 2022/2023 by developing and refining two important policies: the Assessment Policy and the Student Feedback Policy. This report provides a detailed account of the process, including the formation of working groups, the extensive consultation process, feedback collection and analysis, policy revisions, and the final outcomes.

Policy initiation

The QAC initiated a major effort during the 2021/2022 academic year to enhance the overall student experience at UM by focusing on the development of two crucial policies: the Assessment Policy and the Student Feedback Policy. These policies aimed to create a framework for effective assessment practices and feedback mechanisms, ultimately benefiting UM students. It is pertinent to note that the QAC perceives these two policies as pivotal for Annual Programme Reviews.

Policy development process

The process for developing these policies involved several key steps:

(a) Working group formation

Two working groups were established: one for the Assessment Policy and another for the Student Feedback Policy. These working groups comprised experts in their respective fields and student representatives, and were responsible for drafting the initial policy documents.

(b) Collaborative efforts

The working groups held several meetings to deliberate and draft the policies. The collaborative and participative efforts of these groups were commendable, leading to the creation of a first draft.

(c) Senate presentation and consultation

On 26 January 2023, the policies were presented to the Senate for review and approval. However, the Senate decided to initiate a UM-wide consultation process for both policies. A memo requesting feedback was disseminated to all Faculties, Institutes, Centres and Schools by the Office of the Academic Registrar on 2 February 2023.

(d) Feedback collection and analysis

The QAC received feedback from all Faculties and some Institutes, Centres and Schools, including from student representatives until 10 April 2023. This feedback was meticulously analysed in collaboration with the respective Chairs of the Student Feedback and Assessment

working groups, Prof. Ing. Maurice Apap and Prof. Carmel Borg, and with Prof. Frank Bezzina, Pro-Rector for Quality Assurance and Chair of the QAC. The QSU supported and facilitated this process.

(e) Policy amendments

The feedback outcomes were discussed during dedicated meetings on 19 April and 24 April 2023, for the Student Feedback Policy and Assessment Policy respectively. Student representatives also provided comprehensive feedback and a position statement. As a result, both policies were amended to address concerns and suggestions arising from the feedback.

(f) Rector's involvement

On 4 May 2023, a meeting was held with the Rector to discuss the outcomes and amended policies.

Policy approval

The amended Student Feedback Policy was presented during the Senate meeting on 11 May 2023, and was approved with a minor addition related to Boards of Studies' responsibilities.

The Assessment Policy, however, faced challenges during the Senate meeting on 15 June 2023. Senate members requested more time for discussion due to the policy's length and technical language, which was deemed as making the policy too difficult to understand and implement.

Streamlining the Assessment Policy

Upon request from the Rector, Prof. Carmel Borg delivered a presentation to the College of Deans, attended by Prof. Frank Bezzina and Dr Jacqueline Vanhear. The meeting resulted in a decision to create a revised and leaner version of the Assessment Policy. Prof. Noellie Brockdorff undertook this task, with input from Dr Vanhear.

(a) Assessment Policy Resource Toolkit

During this process, information which was perceived as being additional in the original policy was organised into a secondary document, which will serve as a resource toolkit to facilitate the implementation of the Assessment Policy.

(b) Revised policy presentation and approval

The revised Assessment Policy was presented to the Rector and discussed during a College of Deans meeting on 4 September 2023. Following further discussions at the College of Deans, the QAC, and the working group, a leaner and more streamlined version of the policy was presented to the Senate on 20 September 2023 and was unanimously approved.

Conclusion

The QAC's efforts in developing and refining the Assessment Policy and the Student Feedback Policy demonstrate UM's commitment to enhancing the student experience. The Student Feedback Policy and the Assessment Policy along with its resource toolkit will provide a clear framework for assessment and feedback practices while aligning with institutional objectives and

current best practices. The policies are viewed as guiding visions, and the University is dedicated to providing the necessary training and support for their successful implementation.

It is noteworthy that the comprehensive and meticulous development process of these policies serves as a clear example that, even within a large and diverse institution like UM, there exists ample room for collaboration and extensive consultation. Such collaborative efforts ultimately result in beneficial outcomes for all stakeholders involved.

The QAC looks forward to the positive impact these policies will have on the UM community, promoting excellence in education and continuous improvement.

Composition of the working groups

| Assessment Policy Working Group | |
|--|---|
| Prof. Carmel Borg | QAC; Faculty of Education |
| Ms Jo-Anne Attard | APQRU |
| Dr Claude Bajada | DEC (e-assessment); Faculty of Medicine & Surgery |
| Dr Michael Buhagiar | Faculty of Education |
| Prof. Victor Buttigieg | QAC; DEC; Faculty of ICT |
| Prof. Marilyn Clark | PVC; Faculty for Social Wellbeing |
| Prof. Sandro Lanfranco | Faculty of Science |
| Prof. Doreen Spiteri | Faculty of Education |
| Prof. Isabel Stabile | QAC; UMASA; Faculty of Dental Surgery |
| Dr Jacqueline Vanhear | QAC; QSU |
| Dr Jonathan Xuereb | QSU |
| Mr Thomas Galea | Student Representative |
| Ms Elisa Micallef Peplow | Student Representative |

Table 2: Composition of the Assessment Policy Working Group

| Student Feedback Working Group | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Prof. Ing. Maurice Apap | QAC; Faculty of Engineering |
| Mr Lionel Attard | APQRU |
| Prof. Sandro Caruana | Faculty of Education |
| Dr Lourdes Farrugia | Faculty of Science |
| Rev. Prof. Mark Sultana | Faculty of Arts |
| Dr Jacqueline Vanhear | QAC; QSU |
| Dr Jonathan Xuereb | QSU |
| Ms Julia De Bono | Student Representative |
| Ms Elisa Micallef Peplow | Student Representative |

Table 3: Composition of the Student Feedback Working Group

Ongoing Review and Monitoring of Programmes

Periodic Programme Review (PPR)

The 2022/2023 Cycle

Based on the **5-6-Year PPR Schedule**,¹⁰ the PPR of four Faculties and two Centres were scheduled to take place during academic year 2022/2023.

Due to the significant number of programmes offered by the Faculty of Economics, Management & Accountancy and the Faculty of Health Sciences, following discussions and in agreement with the respective Deans, it was decided to split the number of programmes over multiple academic years beyond 2022/2023. This would better provide opportunities for increased focus, leading to more meaningful discussions and better engagement with both internal and external stakeholders during the whole process. This would prove advantageous for the Faculty, encompassing its staff and students, and provide additional time and room for reflection and ongoing enhancement, thereby rendering the PPR process more pertinent.

As regards the Centres, it was agreed to postpone the PPR of the Centre for Resilience & Socio-Emotional Health to the second semester of academic year 2023/2024, since the only programme currently offered by the Centre started in October 2021 and will finish in August 2024. Meanwhile, the PPR of the Centre for Molecular Medicine & Biobanking has been postponed indefinitely since the Director was finding this process challenging and by the time the QSU could further discussions, the programme had finished and the students graduated.

Consequently, a total of 26 programmes have been reviewed during academic year 2022/2023, as per the table below:

| Faculties | Number of programmes reviewed | Date of Stakeholders' Meetings |
|--|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Faculty for the Built Environment | 8 | 29/30 March 2023 |
| Faculty of Dental Surgery | 5 | 23 March 2023 |
| Faculty of Economics, Management & Accountancy | 5 | 19/20 June 2023 |
| Faculty of Health Sciences | 8 | 14 July 2023 |

Table 4: Programmes reviewed in 2022/2023

As at August 2023, the final PPR reports for all four Faculties have been finalised and shared with the respective Internal Quality Review (IQR) panels for their feedback. The Faculty for the Built Environment and the Faculty of Dental Surgery have discussed the reports at Board Level and reverted with their reactions. The reports of the Faculty of Economics, Management & Accountancy and the Faculty of Health Sciences will be forwarded to the respective Deans by September 2023.

¹⁰ <https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/qualityassurance/5-6YearPPRSchedule.pdf>

The Role of the IQR Panels

As per the **PPR Policy & Procedures**¹¹ which was revamped during the last academic year, this year's PPR cycle saw the introduction of an **Internal Quality Review (IQR) panel**¹² tasked with driving the PPR process and ensuring that the quality and standards of all programmes are maintained. The IQR panels were composed as follows:

| | Faculty for the Built Environment | Faculty of Dental Surgery | Faculty of Economics, Management & Accountancy | Faculty of Health Sciences |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| External Dean/Director | Prof. Joshua Ellul | Prof. Andrew Azzopardi | Prof. Noellie Brockdorff | Prof. Nikolai Attard |
| External Dean/Director | Prof. Emmanuel Sinagra | Dr Emanuel Said | Prof. Emmanuel Sinagra | Prof. Godfrey LaFerla |
| QAC Member | Prof. Isabel Stabile | Prof. Maurice Apap | Prof. Maurice Apap | Prof. Ing. Victor Buttigieg |
| QAC Member | Dr Jacqueline Vanhear | Dr Jacqueline Vanhear | Dr Jacqueline Vanhear | Dr Jacqueline Vanhear |
| Student | Mr Eric Abela | Mr Thomas Galea | Ms Rebecca Anastasi | Ms Alexandra Gaglione |
| Student | Mr Nicholas Galea | Ms Anneka Pace | Mr Luke Bonanno | Mr Thomas Galea |

Table 5: Composition of the IQR panels in 2022/2023

The introduction of IQR panels in the PPR process was based on the firm belief that such a panel is an absolute requirement if a meaningful analysis of the **Self-Evaluation Documents (SEDs)**¹³ and additional PPR documentation submitted by FICS is to take place. An IQR panel meeting is then held during which the members can further deliberate and discuss the pertinent issues arising from the analysis of the PPR documentation. Consequently, the main outcomes of the panel's deliberations are discussed with the Dean during a **Quality Collaboration Visit**.¹⁴ IQR panel members are also invited to participate in the **Stakeholders' Meetings**¹⁵ if they are available, and their feedback is sought on the draft **PPR reports**¹⁶ that are prepared by the QSU prior to sharing them with the respective FICS.

Unfortunately, it is to be noted that the introduction of the IQR panels for this PPR cycle did not have the positive impact that was envisaged. The external Deans/Directors were often unavailable to attend meetings, since understandably they have several other commitments as well. The QSU often found itself having to proceed without the presence of the external Deans/Directors so as not

¹¹ <https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/qualityassurance/PPRPolicyProcedures.pdf>

¹² <https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/qualityassurance/TheRoleoftheInternalQualityReviewPanel.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/qualityassurance/TheSelf-EvaluationDocument.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/qualityassurance/TheQualityCollaborationVisit.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/qualityassurance/TheStakeholders'Meeting.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/qualityassurance/ThePPRReport.pdf>

to stall the entire PPR process. The QAC discussed ways to overcome this, including the reduction to just one external Dean/Director, or the appointment of a delegate in their stead or the inclusion of other academics.

As regards the student members, the QSU is pleased to note that these have participated commendably for the most part. They have attended relevant meetings wherever possible and have been very professional in the way they oversaw the Quality Collaboration Visit with the students of the respective FICS. Useful feedback was collected and presented clearly while appropriately safeguarding anonymity. One hopes that the pool of such students can continue to be expanded over time so as to ensure willing student participants on these panels.

The QAC members on the IQR panels have also played a crucial role throughout this PPR cycle, and their efforts are highly appreciated. Due to the number of programmes to be reviewed yearly, QAC members' availability is highly solicited so as to ensure that the load is divided amongst as many members as possible. Starting from academic year 2023/2024, Dr Chaker Mhamdi as Quality Coordinator will also be available as an IQR panel member in representation of QAC/QSU.

One of the biggest challenges was to receive feedback from the IQR panels on the draft reports prepared by QSU staff. In almost all reports, QSU had to proceed without any feedback being received from any member of the IQR panel. It is opportune for QSU to express its gratitude to Ms Jo-Anne Attard for her availability when requested to be consulted before PPR reports were actually sent to the Deans/Directors.

Implementation Progress of PPR Action Plans for 2021/2022

Apart from working on this year's scheduled PPRs, the QSU also undertook an exercise to review the implementation progress of the action plans relative to last year's PPRs. This exercise aims to ensure that the recommendations listed in the actions plans that were subscribed to by FICS and presented to the Senate are progressively being implemented. If this is not the case, a justification is requested. Where necessary, the QSU reverted back to the concerned Dean/Director for further feedback, until the exercise could be deemed reasonably concluded. Most FICS cooperated throughout this exercise, as per the table below:

| FICS | Status |
|--|--|
| Faculty of Arts | N/A |
| Faculty of Science | Pending Dean's reply |
| Institute for European Studies | Concluded on 17 February 2023 |
| Institute of Aerospace Technologies | PPR report and action plan still not presented to Senate, pending feedback from Director |
| Institute of Maltese Studies | Concluded on 3 March 2023 |
| Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research | N/A |
| Centre for Distributed Ledger Technologies | Concluded on 12 June 2023 |

| | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Centre for Labour Studies | Concluded on 6 July 2023 |
| Centre for the Study & Practice of Conflict Resolution | Concluded on 14 February 2023 |

Table 6: 2021/2022 PPR action plans implementation progress

It is pertinent to note that the Institute of Aerospace Technologies never managed to close the PPR process. QSU provided feedback on the action plan presented by the Institute in relation to the recommendations. QSU deemed the action plan as not addressing the recommendations effectively or appropriately. When this was discussed with the Director, he acknowledged the weak action plan that was presented and committed to submit another action plan which he never did.

Annual Programme Review (APR)

The Annual Programme Review (APR) is a core evaluation process for the quality assurance and enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment at the UM. The University requires each FICS to conduct an annual review of its undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes as a complementary process to the more thorough PPR which is performed every five to six years as part of the University's ongoing monitoring and review of programmes.

During academic year 2022/2023, the QAC and QSU worked on redesigning the **APR template**,¹⁷ which was approved by Senate at its meeting on 28 October 2022. All FICS were informed of these developments by a circular issued from the Rector's Office on 14 December 2022, which provided further information and instructions with respect to compiling and submitting the APR template annually by the end of December of each year, starting from December 2023. An **online submission form**¹⁸ was created in an effort to streamline and facilitate the process. This form, together with the APR template and other relevant information has been made available online on a dedicated **APR webpage**¹⁹ on the Quality Assurance website.

Potential challenges

While the concept of an annual programme review has long been in place at UM, it is not clear whether FICS have been performing this in an adequate matter that addresses QA standards, or whether it has been documented at all. Even if this were so, the process was clearly vitiated by a lack of consistency across FICS, which is why the QAC sought to standardise the process through the abovementioned APR template. Naturally, since December 2023 will be the first time for FICS to make use of the new template, a number of potential challenges may be envisaged.

The most fundamental challenge that needs to be addressed is the misconception by a number of academics that the APR is merely an administrative task that can be performed by an administrator. This feeling has been seen emerging in various interactions between the QSU and Deans/Directors. While administrative staff can certainly assist in compiling the APR template, particularly the

¹⁷ <https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/qualityassurance/APRTemplate.docx>

¹⁸ <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe02qkS0rJ25QeQNI9nydWWSLMCwuRt0Dae5dqwxpCTbF2LVA/closedform>

¹⁹ <https://www.um.edu.mt/about/qualityassurance/apr/>

sections requiring quantitative data, the qualitative aspects of the template require the input of the academic members of staff involved in the programme. The whole scope of this process is to guide academics in reflecting about the programme's strengths and areas for improvement, so their delegation of this task to administrative staff would defeat the whole purpose of this QA mechanism. The QSU makes it a point to regularly highlight this whenever the subject is discussed with FICS. Administrative staff are encouraged to clarify to academic staff that it is not within their remit to express themselves on the reflective academic aspects of the APR, and that this is the academics' duty and prerogative as the whole *raison d'être* of the APR process.

Another potential hurdle that might materialise relates to the logistical challenge of dealing with the submission of hundreds of APR templates in the same period. In fact, all of UM's 800+ programmes are expected to have their APR template submitted in December 2023, with the exception of the programmes that are undergoing a PPR this year. Related to this is the fact that December is typically characterised by the absence of most of UM's staff complement. The QSU will subsequently need to see how to contact those FICS who would not have submitted their APR by the specified deadline. This leads to another reflection in relation to what will happen if an APR is not submitted.

While the QAC and QSU went to great lengths to devise a clear and solid APR process and template that would effectively address UM's obligation of having effective QA mechanisms in place, one will need to see how the FICS find this in practice. Some queries regarding aspects of the APR template were raised in the past months, which QSU sought to clarify. Now that the whole revised APR system will be put to the test, it remains to be seen how user-friendly it is perceived by FICS, and how manageable the workload will prove to be for the QSU. On the other hand, effective implementation will very much depend on how FICS' leadership teams will view this process as beneficial. The QAC has submitted a workshop proposal to HR and OPAD that would target Heads of Department to become more familiarised with the process and share good practices.

Annual Reports

The QAC and QSU continued to spread awareness among FICS about the obligation to submit an annual report to the Office of the Secretary by the established deadline. The PPR meetings, the information sessions with FICS and the internal audits carried out by the Internal Audit Function were an opportunity to refer to the importance of these annual reports.

As at July 2023, 7 of 14 Faculties have submitted all their departmental annual reports for the academic year 2021/2022 as compared to eight Faculties in July 2022. Furthermore, six other Faculties have submitted their annual reports, albeit not for all their departments as compared to four in July 2022. Just one Faculty (Health Sciences; for the second successive year) has still not submitted its reports as compared to two Faculties in July 2022.

In total, 11 of 18 Institutes (compared to 16 in 2021/2022), 12 of 13 Centres and all three Schools have also submitted their annual reports. Reports from Centre for the Liberal Arts & Sciences, the Institute for Sustainable Energy, the Institute of Aerospace Technologies, the Institute of Anglo-Italian Studies, the Institute of Earth Systems, the Institute of Space Sciences & Astronomy, and the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies are currently still pending. The Confucius Institute is exempted from submitting an annual report as per the reply received from the Office of the Secretary. The **University's annual report**²⁰ is in place and published on the UM website.

The process of collecting the annual reports for the academic year 2022/2023 starts by the end of September / beginning of October 2023. Based on the previous and current practices of FICS, it is expected to take up to March 2024 to receive most of these annual reports.

According to the Office of the Secretary, the FICS annual reports are consulted by the Rectorate and the Office of the Secretary when necessary. It is to be noted that the responsibility of FICS to submit annual reports is clearly indicated and included in the Collective Agreement.

The following table summarises the FICS annual reports' submission status up to July 2023 as compared to the status in July 2022.

| | Faculties with full submissions | Faculties with partial submissions | Faculties with NO submissions | Institutes with submissions | Centres with submissions | Schools with submissions |
|-----------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| July 2022 | 8/14 57.14% | 4/14 28.57% | 2/14 14.28% | 16/18 88.88% | 12/13 92.30% | 3/3 100% |
| July 2023 | 7/14 50% | 6/14 42.85% | 1/14 7.14% | 11/18 61.11% | 12/13 92.30% | 3/3 100% |

Table 7: Annual Report submissions

²⁰ <https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/factsandfigures/annualreport2022.pdf>

Challenges

1. A few FICS do not submit their annual reports on time, and in some cases they failed to submit for successive years. The Office of the Secretary keeps sending reminders to those FICS Deans, Directors and Managers urging them to submit, but in spite of these reminders in some cases this is not successful. It is not clear what actions are being taken for those who do not eventually submit their annual reports.

It is suggested that a certain type of action is taken with those FICS which do not submit annual reports even after sending a number of reminders.

2. A number of FICS Deans/Directors have repeatedly voiced out that they receive no feedback after they submit annual reports. This seems to have discouraged some FICS from submitting the said reports on time.

Since the Rectorate and the Office of the Secretary have the FICS annual reports submitted and consult them as deemed necessary, it is not required to provide FICS with feedback once they submit annual reports.

Business Intelligence (BI)

The QAC at our University has been instrumental in driving the Business Intelligence (BI) initiative, bringing together key stakeholders to formulate and execute an implementation plan. The core team formed through this initiative has made significant progress in achieving a comprehensive and centralised BI system. This section evaluates the key developments, discussions, and challenges faced by the core team in the context of the BI initiative.

Collaborative efforts towards comprehensive BI

The core team, composed of key players (see Table 7), has demonstrated a high level of collaboration and dedication to the goal of establishing a robust BI system. Recognising the importance of organised data information management, the team emphasised that data must be processed and made available in a user-friendly format to facilitate understanding. They acknowledged that failing to do so would render the initiative counterproductive and risk the quality improvement efforts of the University.

| Name | Office/Committee |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Mr Carl Vella | AIMS Office |
| Mr David Cilia | AIMS Office |
| Mr Walter Zahra | AIMS Office |
| Mr Joseph Bonello | Faculty of ICT |
| Mr Dave Mifsud | IT Services |
| Mr Edmond Formosa | IT Services |
| Mr Robert Sultana | IT Services |
| Dr Jacqueline Vanhear | QAC |
| Professor Isabel Stabile | QAC |
| Dr Peter Xuereb | QAC / Faculty of ICT |
| Mr Malcolm Bonnici | Office of the Registrar |
| Mr Clayton Cassar | SIMS Office |
| Ms Carmen Farrugia | SIMS Office |

Table 8: Composition of the BI Core Team

Defining the aims and scope of the BI system

The core team collectively agreed on the overarching objectives of the BI system. These objectives are as follows:

1. **Continuous quality enhancement:** The BI system aims to support the University's commitment to continuous quality enhancement through data-driven decision-making.
2. **Supporting and monitoring processes:** It will facilitate the monitoring of quality in both academic and operational processes, contributing to ongoing improvements.

3. **Global recognition:** The BI system will help the University obtain global recognition for the quality of its educational provision in international rankings.
4. **Enriching institutional research:** The system will play a vital role in enriching institutional research efforts.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Annual Programme Review

The core team's discussions also included an examination of KPIs related to the Annual Programme Review. This discussion aided in establishing a shared understanding of different indicators and addressing any queries or concerns.

Pilot training and feedback

A significant step in the initiative was the organisation of pilot training sessions for Deans and Directors from seven identified FICS (see Table 8). A comprehensive manual was created and disseminated for feedback. The overwhelmingly positive feedback and reactions from the pilot training sessions boosted motivation for further progress. It became evident that different FICS had varying needs, prompting the core team to agree to address these requests on a case-by-case basis.

| FICS |
|--|
| Faculty of Dental Surgery |
| Faculty of Economics, Management & Accountancy |
| Faculty of Media & Knowledge Sciences |
| Institute for European Studies |
| Institute of Earth Systems |
| Centre for Labour Studies |
| International School for Foundation Studies |

Table 9: FICS participating in the pilot training

Wider dissemination and challenges encountered

Following the evaluation of the pilot training, the core team discussed a broader dissemination plan. Information sessions were organised on 24 and 25 July 2023, with the theme '*Using Power BI Data for Quality Enhancement*'. The initial session presented challenges, as some academics exhibited resistance. However, the second session was notably positive and encouraging. Administrative staff expressed a preference for separate training sessions from academics.

The QSU has developed a new **Business Intelligence section**²¹ on the QA website, where relevant up-to-date information and resources will be published for the staff's reference. The **training manual**²² used in the abovementioned information sessions has been made available here for use by UM staff.

Challenges ahead

One notable challenge identified for the upcoming academic year is the potential shortage of originally planned licenses. The core team anticipates the need to explore alternative solutions, including providing licenses to additional staff, such as Heads of Departments, to ensure the successful continuation of the BI initiative.

Conclusion

The QAC-led BI initiative, with its core team of committed stakeholders, has made significant strides towards enhancing data-driven decision-making and quality improvement efforts at our University. Despite challenges, the collaborative spirit and positive feedback received indicate that the initiative is on the right track to achieving its objectives and contributing to the University's global recognition for educational quality. Continued efforts and adaptability will be key in overcoming upcoming challenges and ensuring the successful implementation of the BI system.

²¹ <https://www.um.edu.mt/about/qualityassurance/businessintelligence/>

²² <https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/intranetstaff/qualityassurance/UsingPowerBIdataforqualityenhancement-manualv1.pdf>

International University Rankings

Times Higher Education (THE)

In the **Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings 2023**,²³ the UM retained its ranking band of **801-1000**, even as the number of universities ranked in this exercise continues to grow year by year. Indeed, the latest ranking included 1,799 universities across 104 countries, up from the 1,600 universities across 99 countries of the 2022 ranking. Furthermore, UM improved its score overall and across all five indicators when compared to last year, as evidenced by the table below:

| | 2022 | 2023 |
|------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Overall Score | 27.2-31.9 | ↑ 29.8-33.9 |
| Teaching | 19.4 | ↑ 19.6 |
| Research | 16.3 | ↑ 16.7 |
| Citations | 52.9 | ↑ 53.4 |
| Industry Income | 35.2 | ↑ 37.5 |
| International Outlook | 59.1 | ↑ 62.6 |

Table 10: UM's institutional score in the THE World University Rankings in 2022 and 2023

The University also secured a ranking in seven subject areas, seen below in comparison to last year's ranking:

| Subject Area | 2022 Ranking | 2023 Ranking |
|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Arts & humanities | 401-500 | = 401-500 |
| Education | 301-400 | ↓ 401-500 |
| Social sciences | 601+ | = 601-800 |
| Computer science | 501-600 | = 501-600 |
| Engineering | 601-800 | ↓ 801-1000 |
| Clinical & health | 501-600 | = 501-600 |
| Physical sciences | 601-800 | = 601-800 |

Table 11: UM's rankings in the THE World University Rankings by subject area

As in previous years, UM failed to feature in the rankings for four other subject areas, namely (1) *Business & Economics*, (2) *Law*, (3) *Life Sciences* and (4) *Psychology*. During academic year 2022/2023, the QSU sought to better understand the reasons why UM was failing to feature in these rankings through liaison with the THE as well as through internal meetings with Library Services and other professionals in this field.

The main reason behind this is the lack of fulfilment of certain minimum thresholds that are required for a university to be ranked in specific subject areas, mainly as regards the number of publications over a five-year period and the absolute number of academic staff (FTE) in each

²³ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2023/world-ranking#!/length/25/name/malta/>

subject area.²⁴ These thresholds are quite arbitrary, and if an institution reports even one staff member beneath the required minimum, this would result in an exclusion from the ranking. This situation had the most adverse effect on the *Business & Economics* subject area, for which UM was failing to have the figures for the Faculty of Economics, Management & Accountancy included due to the fact that the 48 academic staff members that were being reported fell short of the required 50.

Consequently, the QSU embarked on a process to evaluate which Institutes, Centres or departments could reasonably be shifted from their current subject area to another one, in order to ensure eligibility as per the minimum required thresholds. This exercise also served to review certain decisions taken in this regard by previous leadership to verify that the arrangement makes sense in the context of the University's reality. As a result, the following changes were proposed, to which the QAC agreed:

| Institute / Centre / Department | From (subject area) | To (subject area) |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies | <i>Arts & Humanities</i> | <i>Social Sciences</i> |
| Mediterranean Institute | <i>Arts & Humanities</i> | <i>Social Sciences</i> |
| Institute for Tourism, Travel and Culture | <i>Arts & Humanities</i> | <i>Social Sciences</i> |
| Centre for the Study and Practice of Conflict Resolution | <i>Arts & Humanities</i> | <i>Social Sciences</i> |
| Centre for Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health | <i>Education</i> | <i>Psychology</i> |
| Department of Technology & Entrepreneurship Education | <i>Education</i> | <i>Business & Economics</i> |

Table 12: Relocation of UM FICS under different THE subject areas

Through this initiative it is expected that UM will start featuring in the rankings of more subject areas as from the *THE World University Rankings 2024*.

U-Multirank

Following communication from **U-Multirank**²⁵ received on 20 June 2022, the University was informed that after ten years of operation, the current funding period of U-Multirank had ended. Consequently, no data collection was done during academic year 2022/2023 as U-Multirank had to undergo a restructuring and redesign. The University will be duly informed once a new data collection cycle commences.

Center for World University Rankings (CWUR)

Since 2019, UM is ranked by the **Center for World University Rankings (CWUR)**,²⁶ a leading consulting organisation focused on educational and research outcomes headquartered in the United Arab Emirates. Starting from 2012, CWUR publishes a global academic ranking of universities without relying on data submissions by the latter. Their ranking takes into account the quality of education, employability of graduates, the quality of academic staff and research. While it

²⁴ [Methodology for overall and subject rankings for the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2023](#), pg. 7

²⁵ <https://www.umultirank.org/>

²⁶ <https://cwur.org/>

was first meant to feature the top 100 universities worldwide, it soon gained traction and was expanded to cater for the top 2,000 in 2019, which is when the UM first made the list.

UM was once again ranked in the **Global 2000 List for the 2023 edition**,²⁷ which considered 20,531 institutions. The University was ranked in 1,684th place, registering an improvement of 18 places compared to last year, and securing a place among the top 8.3% of institutions worldwide. A more detailed comparative analysis is available below.

| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------------------|-------|-------|--------|--------|----------|
| World Rank | 1,659 | 1,762 | 1,696 | 1,702 | ↑ 1,684 |
| Score | 67.1 | 66.7 | 66.9 | 66.8 | ↑ 67.1 |
| Participants | N/A | N/A | 19,788 | 19,788 | ↑ 20,531 |

Table 13: UM in the CWUR 2019 - 2023

QS Rankings

- **QS World University Rankings 2024**²⁸ was released in June 2023.
- **QS Europe University Rankings 2024**²⁹ was released in September 2023.
- **QS Southern Europe University Rankings**³⁰ 2024 was released in September 2023.

UM's rankings were as follows:

| Rankings | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---------------------------|----------|----------|----------|---------|
| QS World | 801-1000 | 801-1000 | 801-1000 | 851-900 |
| QS Europe | N/A | N/A | N/A | 344 |
| QS Southern Europe | N/A | N/A | N/A | 75 |

Table 14: UM in the QS Rankings 2021 - 2024

UM will submit updated data to QS by November 2023 for the next rankings which will be released in June and September 2024. The intended QS World University Rankings 2024 indicators weighting is shown below:

| Pillar | Metric | Weighting (in %) |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Research and Discovery | Academic Reputation | 30.00 |
| | Citations per Faculty | 20.00 |
| 2. Employability and Outcomes | Employer Reputation | 15.00 |
| | Employment Outcomes | 5.00 |
| 3. Learning Experience | Faculty Student Ratio | 10.00 |
| 4. Global Engagement | International Faculty | 5.00 |
| | International Research Network | 5.00 |
| | International Students | 5.00 |

²⁷ <https://cwur.org/2023.php>

²⁸ <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2024>

²⁹ <https://www.topuniversities.com/europe-university-rankings>

³⁰ <https://www.topuniversities.com/europe-university-rankings-southern-europe>

| | | |
|--------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| 5. Sustainability | Sustainability | 5.00 |
| | | 100.00 |

Table 15: QS World University Rankings 2024 intended weighting

Clarivate Global Institutional Profiles Project

UM data was submitted for the **Clarivate Global Institutional Profiles Project**³¹ by the end of May 2023. This is the first time that UM will take part in this project. The Clarivate Global Institutional profiles subject categories are:

- Arts & Humanities
- Clinical, Pre-Clinical & Health
- Engineering & Technology
- Life Sciences
- Physical Sciences
- Social Sciences

For every subject category UM submitted the following:

| INDICATOR | SUB-INDICATOR (IF APPLICABLE) |
|--|--|
| Number of academic staff | Of which are international/overseas origin Of which are women |
| Number of research staff | No sub-indicator |
| Number of students | Of which are international/overseas origin Of which are women |
| Undergraduate - new student intake | No sub-indicator |
| Number of undergraduate degrees awarded | No sub-indicator |
| Master or equivalent – new student intake | No sub-indicator |
| Number of master’s degrees awarded | No sub-indicator |
| Doctoral – new student intake | No sub-indicator |
| Number of doctorates awarded | No sub-indicator |

Table 16: Indicators for each category submitted by UM

For the *whole institution level*, UM submitted the following:

| INDICATOR | SUB-INDICATOR (IF APPLICABLE) |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Institutional income | No sub-indicator |
| Research income | No sub-indicator |
| Research income from industry and commerce | No sub-indicator |

Table 17: Indicators for the whole institution submitted by UM

³¹ <https://clarivate.com/webofsciencegroup/globalprofilesproject/>

Webometrics Ranking Web of Universities

From being ranked 1,324th in its first appearance in 2015, UM is now ranked 872nd in the world as compared to 888th last year (2022), placing it in the top 2.85% of more than 31,000 higher education institutions worldwide in the **Webometrics Ranking Web of Universities**.³²

UM is also ranked in 350th place in the continental European ranking as compared to 361st place last year (2022). This makes it in the top 5.80% in the continental European ranking as compared to top 6% in 2022.

Challenges

It is evident that there are a number of challenges for UM to advance in the different global and European university rankings. First of all, there is no dedicated office/unit/staff to deal specifically with this important task which requires a lot of efforts and time to collect the necessary data and make sure it is accurate and up-to-date to be then submitted on time. Currently it is QSU, with its limited resources, that coordinates this task.

Another challenge is the increasing number of universities worldwide participating in the various rankings which makes it difficult for UM to advance or even to keep its current rank, even though it advances in a number of indicators.

In addition to this previous external factor, it has to be admitted that UM faces a recurring challenge in the rankings criteria/indicators which take the highest weight when calculating the scores. These are the research output and author citations criteria. It is common among the different university ranking agencies that research and citations take the highest weight compared to other indicators. Hence, the research output and author citations scores of every university have an important impact on its rank.

University ranking agencies rely on **Web of Science**³³ and/or **Elsevier's Scopus**³⁴ to directly collect data related to publications and citations for every higher education institution being ranked. Publications which are not indexed in Web of Science and/or Elsevier's Scopus are not taken into consideration by university ranking agencies. This criterion of indexed publications seems to be a palpable barrier currently faced by UM to advance its rankings. This is due to that fact that UM academics/researchers/staff do not always publish in indexed journals/publishers. What makes the situation even more challenging is that there is no policy or regulation that necessitates publications in indexed journals even for academic promotions. In this same vein, not all UM academic staff are aware of the importance of indexed publications for their own author profiles and citation scores as well as for the university rankings.

Eventually, the lack of understanding of the different university rankings methodologies and the best ways to organise and present the University's data is another challenge.

In spite of the previously discussed challenges related to global and European university rankings, the QSU will continue exerting its efforts to find the best possible ways to improve UM's rankings.

³² <https://www.webometrics.info/en>

³³ <https://www.webofscience.com/>

³⁴ <https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/scopus>

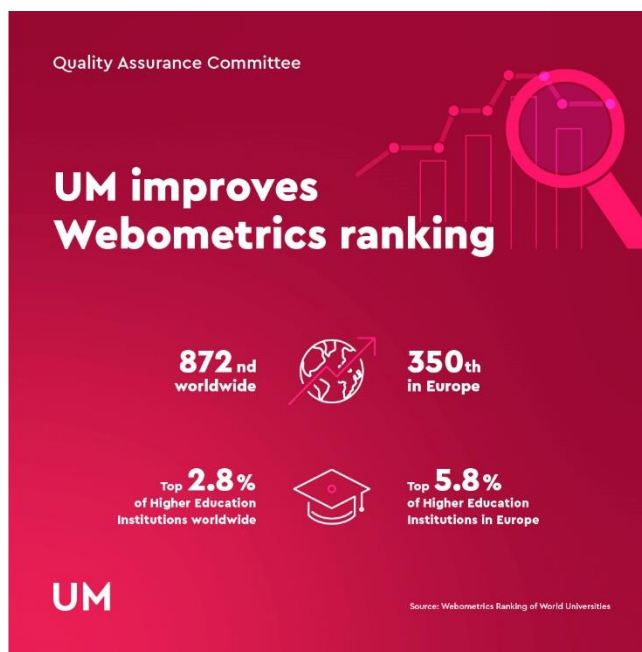
For instance, the QSU has already embarked on a process of reclassifying its FICS and programmes to better match the categories and areas of the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings 2024 and its eligibility criteria. In this way, the Faculty of Economics, Management & Accountancy which was not previously featuring due to the lack in total number of academic staff will now feature in the ranking of 2024 because of the reclassification of FICS. Similar exercises will follow to make sure UM data is presented in a way that better reflects the actual status and hence meet the ranking eligibility criteria.

- It is expected that more training on university ranking methodologies will be attended by the QSU team.
- More accurate and up-to-date data will be submitted for future ranking tasks.
- The QAC in liaison with the the UM Library needs to plan some initiatives to increase awareness about the university rankings and the importance of indexed publications and authors' site scores as two of the most important criteria/indicators which heavily impact the general university score and its final ranking.
- The QAC is in the process of forming a working group that will include persons who are specifically designated to manage the data for rankings. This will increase consistency and accuracy impacting on the overall ranking.

Quality Mailshot Initiative

For the fourth year running, the QAC and QSU have been identifying good practices at FICS level, to be shared through the Quality Mailshot Initiative – a series of mailshots disseminated across the UM community roughly every fortnight during the 2022/2023 academic year. A total of 13 mailshots were sent, garnering 11 responses.

A positive development in relation to the most recent series of mailshots concerns a greater outreach secured through the redesigning and sharing of certain mailshots on UM’s social media accounts. This initiative was done in collaboration with the Marketing, Communications & Alumni Office in an effort to increase the reach of such mailshots beyond staff and students, to include the general public that follows the University on social media. An example of the redesigning of one such mailshot shared on **Facebook**³⁵ can be seen on the right.



Furthermore, the latest series of mailshots also sought to make relevant connections between the mailshots’ content and the UM’s Strategic Themes, as per the **Strategic Plan 2020-2025**.³⁶ These links serve to reinforce UM’s various strategic commitments while showcasing how the latter are being achieved in practice.

The report on the Quality Mailshot Initiative for 2022/2023 is available **here**.³⁷ This report was discussed by the QAC at its meeting of 21 June 2023, where it was noted that the UM community’s interest in these mailshots has been consistently declining since the first series in 2019, based on the number of email responses received:

| Academic Year | 2019/2020 | 2020/2021 | 2021/2022 | 2022/2023 |
|----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Number of mailshots | 13 | 15 | 12 | 13 |
| Number of email responses | 49 | 29 | 27 | 11 |
| Responses per mailshot | 3.77 | 1.93 | 2.25 | 0.85 |

Table 18: Number of responses to Quality Mailshots

³⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=574362791391468&set=pb.100064532566492.-2207520000.&type=3>

³⁶ <https://www.um.edu.mt/about/strategy/>

³⁷ [https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/qualityassurance/ReportontheQualityMailshotInitiative\(2022-2023\).pdf](https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/qualityassurance/ReportontheQualityMailshotInitiative(2022-2023).pdf)

Following further discussions, the QAC and QSU agreed to explore other means of showcasing good practices, such as through an annual one-day seminar, conference or workshop. Discussions will be held with the Finance Office as regards a budget for these proposed events. Meanwhile, the QSU will also be requesting FICS to share any relevant good practices suitable for dissemination during PPR exercises.

An online repository of all mailshots sent to date is available on the Quality Assurance **website**.³⁸

³⁸ <https://www.um.edu.mt/about/qualityassurance/qualitymailshots/>

Quality Assurance Website Update



Following on the QA dissemination strategy first mentioned in the previous **QAC Report (August 2021 – July 2022)**,³⁹ the QSU redesigned the **Internal Quality Assurance webpage**⁴⁰ of the QA website to feature a separate tile for each of the 11 IQA Standards, thus providing comprehensive information and resources through a clear interface. The information published on the webpage reflects the content of the Self-Assessment Report that was submitted by UM to the EQA audit review panel as part of the documentation requested. The website serves as a notable achievement for the University as a public institution, as it openly shares information to promote transparency and foster a sense of ownership. Its primary goal is to instil a culture of excellence, ultimately enhancing the overall student experience.

In August 2023, a new **Business Intelligence section**⁴¹ on the QA website was also introduced. This will be populated with relevant information and resources pertinent to the University's ongoing BI efforts.

The QSU plans to further update other sections of the QA website to ensure it is in line with the current situation and all information presented is relevant and up-to-date.

³⁹ <https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/qualityassurance/QACReport2022.pdf>

⁴⁰ <https://www.um.edu.mt/about/qualityassurance/internalqualityassurance/>

⁴¹ <https://www.um.edu.mt/about/qualityassurance/businessintelligence/>

Continuing Professional Development

Listed below are the main training/development events attended by members of staff of the QSU in the last academic year 2022/2023, in chronological order.

ASIIN Global Conference 2022

The ASIIN Global Conference was held in Malta on the 18 and 19 October 2022, with the theme: *'Reinventing Higher Education Quality Assurance for our time - no stone left unturned'*. Dr Jacqueline Vanhear was invited to deliver a ten-minute presentation on the state of play in relation to QA policies, procedures and framework at UM. This global conference discussed framework conditions for international higher education.

Global Virtual Summit on Future of Quality in Higher Education (QiETT Summit)

In December 2022, Dr Chaker Mhamdi attended the QiETT Summit organised by the Quality in Education Think Tank of the International Academy of Quality (IAQ). The summit included a number of speakers with vast experience in quality assurance in higher education.

Basic Notions of Data Protection and Data Protection Law

In February 2023, Dr Jacqueline Vanhear and Dr Jonathan Xuereb attended a training session on data protection delivered by the University's Data Protection Officer. For Dr Xuereb this was a refresher of a previous session attended in 2019, to better stay abreast of newer developments in this field. This training provided an overview of the General Data Protection Regulation and its practice, and assisted in developing an in-depth knowledge of methods and notions required in actual alignment with GDPR as well as an understanding of the requirements brought by the GDPR and how to implement such requirements.

Emerging Quality Standards, Practices and Supports for the Quality Assurance of Digital Higher Education

In March 2023, the QSU team participated in an online conference with the theme *'Ensuring Quality Digital Higher Education in Hungary: The Path to Modernisation'*. This event was organised by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), in cooperation with Széchenyi István University, the Hungarian Ministry of Culture and Innovation and the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (MAB), as part of the European Union-funded project *'Ensuring Quality Digital Higher Education in Hungary'*.

PRINCE2 Foundation and Practitioner Course

Throughout March and April 2023, Dr Jacqueline Vanhear attended the PRINCE2 (PROjects IN Controlled Environments) course, organised by IDEA Academy. This course is a globally recognised structured project management method and practitioner certification programme, which advocates the division of projects into manageable and controllable stages. This was a highly intensive course with a 3-hour open book online exam for each of the Foundation and Practitioner courses. Given the nature of the work performed at the QSU, instilling these principles in its management is envisioned to further streamline the Unit's operations.

Using Power BI Data for Quality Enhancement

In April 2023, the QSU team attended introductory sessions together with FICS Deans, Directors and Faculty Managers. The sessions aimed at introducing attendees to using the interactive data dashboard Power BI to collect and manage student data utilizing various filters. This will facilitate a major part of the Annual Programme Review (APR) process, namely that which is related to data collection. This will assist FICS to analyse data in order to be in a position to make evidence-based decision making.

Oxford University Press Professional Development Events

Dr Chaker Mhamdi attended the Oxford University Press professional development events for the year 2023. The training sessions cover various areas and themes related to teaching and learning, assessment, student feedback, learning driving forces, project management, and teacher/student wellbeing.

Future Improvements

As an integral part of its self-reflection and continuous improvement approach, a number of areas for improvement for the QSU team that can be further enhanced and developed have been identified. These are summarised as follows:

1. Attending training sessions related to programme reviews and report writing.
2. Attending training sessions and webinars related to university rankings.
3. Joining the Quality Assurance Agency as an International Associate Member which will provide training opportunities for both students and staff and enable QA-related staff to enrich their QA expertise by participating in the myriad collaboration and networking opportunities reserved for member universities.