



L-Università
ta' Malta

Quality Assurance
Committee

QAC Report

AUGUST 2023 - JULY 2024



FOREWORD BY THE PRO-RECTOR

The Quality Assurance Committee's report for the academic year 2023/2024 reflects our unwavering commitment to upholding and enhancing educational quality. The pursuit of quality is not only a regulatory necessity but also a collective responsibility shared by all members of our institution. It is through collaborative effort that we continue to strive toward enhancing the educational experience we provide to our students. This requires the continuous effort and teamwork of faculty, staff, and students to maintain and raise standards that not only meet but exceed expectations.

Over the past year, the Committee has made significant strides in various areas. The successful External Quality Assurance (EQA) audit confirmed that UM meets all Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) standards, a testament to our rigorous approach. Following the audit, we have developed a comprehensive and collaborative EQA Audit Action Plan to address recommendations and drive ongoing improvement. UM's evolving and structured processes for the Annual Programme Review (APR) and Periodic Programme Review (PPR) have allowed us to stay proactive in maintaining academic standards while ensuring that UM's provision remains current and impactful.

The ongoing work in Learning, Teaching, and Assessment has been particularly noteworthy, as we have identified good practices that can be scaled across FICS while recognising areas for further enhancement. These insights will guide our efforts to refine teaching methodologies and assessment strategies to better support student learning outcomes.

The Committee has also made progress in enhancing our data analytics capabilities, as evidenced by the implementation of Power BI for quality monitoring. The implementation of Power BI for data-driven insights has been instrumental in supporting informed decision-making. The QAC is committed to further support the expansion of the use of data analytics to sustain quality. Additionally, we have maintained a presence in international university rankings, with our standing in THE, CWUR, QS, Clarivate, and Webometrics reflecting our ongoing pursuit of excellence.

Other initiatives, such as the Quality Mailshot, updates to the Quality Assurance website, and our commitment to Continuing Professional Development, demonstrate a holistic approach to quality enhancement. These initiatives have also enhanced communication and transparency within the University community.

While we celebrate these accomplishments, we are aware that there are areas where perseverance is needed to meet our full potential. As we look ahead, our shared values and commitment will be essential in driving further progress and sustaining quality across all aspects of our University.

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
- Prof. Nikolai J. Attard
- Professor Carmel Borg
- Dr Colin Borg
- Professor Victor Buttigieg
- Professor Isabel Stabile
- Ms Deborah Duca
- Dr Peter Xuereb
- Dr Jacqueline Vanhear
- Mr Andrea Cuschieri (Senate Student Representative)
- Mr Gerard William Zammit Young (Senate Student Representative)

The QAC met ten times in the period under review

Meeting 01	11 September 2023	Min. 001-031
Meeting 02	25 October 2023	Min. 032-065
Meeting 03	29 November 2023	Min. 066-087
Meeting 04	10 January 2024	Min. 088-128
Meeting 05	14 February 2024	Min. 129-177
Meeting 06	18 March 2024	Min. 178-199
Meeting 07	10 April 2024	Min. 200-221
Meeting 08	15 May 2024	Min. 222-238
Meeting 09	11 June 2024	Min. 239-260
Meeting 10	3 July 2024	Min. 261-278

Table 1: QAC meetings during academic year 2023/2024

This document is an overview of the work undertaken by, and under the auspices of, the QAC during this seventh 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 in 2023. The audit process was outlined in the previous **QAC Report (August 2022 – July 2023)**.³

UM succeeds in meeting all IQA Standards

Following the EQA audit process, UM received the draft Audit Report on 14 September 2023. The report established UM's success in meeting all eleven IQA Standards, in what is a marked improvement to the University's performance in the previous EQA audit in 2015.

IQA Standard	2015	2023
Standard 1: Policy for Quality Assurance	Standard not met	↑ Standard met
Standard 2: Institutional Probity	Standard met	= Standard met
Standard 3: Design and Approval of Programmes	Standard met	= Standard met
Standard 4: Student-centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment	Standard met	= Standard met
Standard 5: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification	Standard met	= Standard met
Standard 6: Teaching Staff	Standard met	= Standard met
Standard 7: Learning Resources and Student Support	Standard met	= Standard met
Standard 8: Information Management	Standard not met	↑ Standard met
Standard 9: Public Information	Standard not met	↑ Standard met
Standard 10: Ongoing Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes	Standard not met	↑ Standard met
Standard 11: Cyclical External Quality Assurance	Standard met	= Standard met

Table 2: UM's performance in the EQA Audit (2015 v. 2023)

On 27 October 2023, UM submitted to the MFHEA its feedback regarding the factual accuracy of the draft report, which led to a finalised version of the report that was received on 19 January 2024. The MFHEA also informed UM that it needs to submit an action plan by the end of July 2024, explaining how UM will address the report's recommendations. Once the action plan is submitted and endorsed by the MFHEA's QAC, the report will be published on the MFHEA website.

EQA Audit Action Plan

The EQA Audit Report sets out a number of recommendations which were made by the review panel to sustain continuous enhancement. The QAC and QSU were tasked with devising an action plan to address these recommendations, to be presented to the Senate at its meeting of 27 June 2024, so as to be submitted to the MFHEA by the end of July 2024. The categories of the recommendations are as follows:

¹ legislation.mt/eli/sl/607.3/eng

² mfhea.mt

³ um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/qualityassurance/QACReport2023.pdf

Category of recommendations	UM's performance
Mandatory Recommendations	UM has no mandatory recommendations.
Key Recommendations	UM has 8 key recommendations which need to be implemented within 12 months from the publication of the EQA report. Another key recommendation needs to be implemented within 18 months from the publication of the EQA report.
Recommendations	UM has 18 recommendations which are aimed to help the University sustain and improve current practices.

Table 3: Categories of recommendations in the EQA Audit Report

The QAC firmly believes that the wider University community should be involved in devising the action plan that will address the 27 total recommendations of the EQA audit report. This approach increases ownership and facilitates implementation.

Consequently, a number of working groups were set up, comprising academic and administrative members of staff as well as student representatives, to target specific recommendations. Whilst acknowledging that this would lengthen the process, the QAC believes that the contribution of such working groups will enable the creation of a more meaningful and relevant action plan, as befits the University of Malta.

The QAC would like to express its gratitude and appreciation to the below working group members, all of whom contributed to the drafting of the action plan over the course of several meetings.

Key Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 5

KR1: UM should decide on a formula for workload calculation that is widely disseminated to all academic units.

KR2: UM should implement a systematic mechanism for assessing students' workload across all academic units and consider students' workload in designing the programmes/courses.

KR3: UM should introduce formal mechanisms that enable the involvement of graduates in the design of new study programmes.

KR5: UM should ensure the appropriate correlation between the volume of time required for students' involvement in the learning process and the number of ECTS credits for all study units.

Prof. Noellie Brockdorff	Dean, Faculty of Media & Knowledge Science
Prof. Elizabeth Conrad	Associate Professor, Institute of Earth Systems
Dr Josef Trapani	Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Health Sciences
Prof. Odette Vassallo	Director, Centre for English Language Proficiency
Ms Jo-Anne Attard	QAC Member
Prof. Isabel Stabile	QAC Member
Dr Jacqueline Vanhear	QAC Member
Ms Maya Camilleri Sacco	Student, Faculty of Medicine & Surgery
Mr Jan Proscheck	Student, Institute of Earth Systems

Key Recommendation 4

KR4: UM should ensure that students from all faculties and study programmes receive timely feedback after each assessment.

Dr Anne-Marie Agius	Lecturer, Faculty of Dental Surgery
Dr Colin Borg	Academic Registrar
Mr Albert Debono	Head, Student Advisory Services
Ms Carmen Mangion	Deputy Registrar, Office of the Registrar
Prof. Paul J. Pace	Professor, Faculty of Education
Prof. Patricia Vella de Fremeaux	Associate Professor, Faculty of Laws
Dr Jacqueline Vanhear	QAC Member

Key Recommendation 6

KR6: UM should develop an information platform that integrates all the University data: students, faculty, research, etc., and provides the possibility to generate immediate reports for strategic decision-making.

Mr Malcolm Bonnici	Assistant Registrar, Office of the Registrar
Mr Clayton Cassar	Senior Information Management Systems Support Officer, SIMS Office, Office of the Registrar
Mr Dave Mifsud	Head of Technical Services, IT Services
Mr Marco Tabone	Assistant Registrar, Office of the Registrar
Dr Jacqueline Vanhear	QAC Member

Key Recommendation 7

KR7: UM should increase the number of the staff working at the Health and Wellness Centre to cope with the increased demands from students and staff.

Prof. Alfred J. Vella	Rector
Mr Mark Debono	Administrative Director, Finance Office
Prof. Isabel Stabile	QAC Member
Dr Jacqueline Vanhear	QAC Member

Key Recommendation 8

KR8: UM should provide extended hours for reading at the library or any other available and suitable rooms for students.

Mr Kevin Joseph Ellul	Administrative Director, Library Services
Mr Robert Abdilla	Deputy Director, Office for HRM&D
Prof. Isabel Stabile	QAC Member
Dr Jacqueline Vanhear	QAC Member

Key Recommendation 9

KR9: UM should introduce feedback evaluation instruments specifically addressing the adequacy of infrastructure and administrative staff.

Mr Simon Sammut	University Secretary
Perit Christopher Spiteri	Administrative Director, Estates, Facilities and Capital Development Directorate
Mr Robert Sultana	Chief Information Officer & Director of IT Services
Ing. Reuben Mifsud	Deputy Director, Estates, Facilities and Capital Development Directorate
Mr Philip Gafa	Chief Internal Auditor, Internal Audit
Ms Laura Vassallo	Senior Auditor, Internal Audit
Prof. Isabel Stabile	QAC Member
Dr Jacqueline Vanhear	QAC Member
Ms Maya Camilleri Sacco	4th-year Student, Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, KSU

Recommendation 2

R2: UM could increase and formalise the practical component within the curricula across all faculties.

Prof. Alfred J. Vella	Rector
Prof. Frank Bezzina	Pro-Rector for International Development & Quality Assurance
Prof. Andrew Azzopardi	Dean, Faculty for Social Wellbeing

Recommendations 3, 10

R3: UM could continue its efforts to train academic staff to complete the mapping of learning outcomes for each study programme.

R10: UM could ensure that part-time and sessional teaching staff receive appropriate support and resources to deliver high-quality teaching and that this could be closely monitored to ensure the integrity of the student experience.

Dr James Cilia	Administrative Director, Office for Professional Academic Development
Ms Jacqueline Fenech	Administrative Director, Office for Human Resources Management & Development
Ms Amanda Borg Ciantar	Manager, Office for Human Resources Management & Development
Dr Jacqueline Vanhear	QAC Member

Recommendation 4

R4: UM could consider increasing the number of external experts for programme proposal review.

Prof. Joseph M. Caciottolo	Pro-Rector for Academic Affairs
Ms Jo-Anne Attard	QAC Member
Dr Jacqueline Vanhear	QAC Member

Recommendations 5, 9

R5: UM could identify solutions to convince students about the importance of their response to formal questionnaires.

R9: UM could reduce its reliance on end of unit student feedback and instigate different forms of student evaluation that are reliable.

Prof. Ing. Maurice Apap	QAC Member
Mr Lionel Attard	Administration Specialist, APQRU
Mr Malcolm Bonnici	Assistant Registrar
Ms Maya Camilleri Sacco	4th-year Student, Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, KSU
Dr Andreana Dibben	Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Social Wellbeing
Dr Jacqueline Vanhear	QAC Member

Recommendation 6

R6: UM could respect established appeals procedures to ensure a fair and reliable process.

Ms Romina Sammut	Assistant Registrar
Dr Jacqueline Vanhear	QAC Member

Recommendations 7, 11, 13

R7: UM could increase efforts to be an inclusive university by providing the necessary educational resources for those with special learning needs.

R11: UM could continue to improve the learning resources and equipment across all academic units.

R13: UM could increase efforts to improve further its educational resources for students with special needs.

Prof. Carmen Sammut	Pro-Rector for Student & Staff Affairs and Outreach
Dr Jonathan Borg	Lecturer, Faculty of Education
Prof. Ing. Victor Buttigieg	QAC Member
Dr James Cilia	Administrative Director, Office for Professional Academic Development
Mr Mark Debono	Director, Finance Office
Ms Marchita Mangiafico	Social Worker, ACCESS Disability Support Unit
Perit Christopher Spiteri	Administrative Director, Estates, Facilities and Capital Development Directorate
Dr Jacqueline Vanheer	QAC Member

Recommendation 8

R8: UM could increase student representation in the structures of the University.

Prof. Alfred J. Vella	Rector
Prof. Frank Bezzina	Pro-Rector for International Development & Quality Assurance
Ms Carmen Mangion	Deputy Registrar

Recommendation 12

R12: UM could consider increasing the number of green spaces for students.

Perit Christopher Spiteri	Administrative Director, Estates, Facilities and Capital Development Directorate
Prof. Maria Attard	Director, Institute for Climate Change and Sustainable Development
Prof. Nikolai J Attard	QAC Member
Mr Gerard-William Zammit Young	QAC Member
Dr Jacqueline Vanheer	QAC Member

Recommendations 14, 15

R14: The feedback platform could be separated from SIMS to discourage the perception that the feedback forms are not anonymous.

R15: An external site from the Msida Campus could also house data backups for better disaster recovery.

Mr Robert Sultana	Chief Information Officer & Director of IT Services
Mr Malcolm Bonnici	Assistant Registrar, Office of the Registrar
Prof. Ing. Victor Buttigieg	QAC Member
Ms Jo-Anne Attard	QAC Member
Dr Jacqueline Vanheur	QAC Member

Recommendations 16, 17, 18

R16: UM could conduct more campaigns abroad to attract international students.

R17: UM could introduce more science communication campaigns to attract more STEM applicants.

R18: UM should consider creating a central marketing budget which third parties can contribute to. Each FICS may access the resource equally.

Mr Pierre Cassar	Administrative Director, Marketing, Communications & Alumni Office
Dr Jacqueline Vanheur	QAC Member

Table 4: List of members who contributed to the EQA Audit Action Plan working groups

Further to the input of all working group members throughout the course of several meetings, the QSU finalised the action plan and it was presented to the Senate at its meeting of 27 June 2024. The Senate members endorsed the action plan and thanked the QAC and QSU team for their efforts. The action plan was submitted to the MFHEA on 30 July 2024.

Ongoing Monitoring and Review of Programmes

Periodic Programme Review (PPR)

FICS involved in the 2023/2024 cycle

Based on the **5–6-Year PPR Schedule**,⁴ the PPR of six Faculties, one Institute and two Centres were scheduled to take place during academic year 2023/2024.

All six Faculties regularly underwent their PPR process as per the agreed schedule. As regards the Institute and Centres, the below circumstances subsisted:

- **Institute for Tourism, Travel & Culture:** This Institute formally transitioned back to a Department within the Faculty of Economics, Management & Accountancy on 28 September 2023, when the UM Council approved the setting up of the Department of Tourism Management on the recommendation of the UM Senate. Consequently, the PPR process for the programmes previously offered by the Institute were conducted as part of the PPR process for the Faculty of Economics, Management & Accountancy.
- **Centre for Liberal Arts & Sciences:** Following discussions with the Centre's leadership, it was agreed that the Centre would conduct an APR by December 2023 rather than a PPR. This decision also stemmed from the fact that the current PPR SED template does not fit the Centre's operations, as it offers PLAS micro-credentials. Dr Chaker Mhamdi, the Quality Coordinator, conducted a number of meetings with the CLAS Director and administrator, and provided them with support and guidance on the APR process and how to fill in the templates. He also supported the CLAS administrator in the collection and analysis of student feedback and a total of 81 students provided their feedback on 23 study-units. Unfortunately, the Centre failed to submit an APR.
- **Centre for Resilience & Socio-Emotional Health:** Following discussions with the Centre Director, Prof. Carmel Cefai, it was agreed to postpone the PPR of the Master in Transdisciplinary Childhood Studies to academic year 2024–2025. By that time, the programme will have completed its first run, a first cohort will have graduated, a second cohort will have enrolled, an external examiner would have visited, and two APRs will have been conducted. In this way, by January 2025, the Centre will be in a good position to conduct a meaningful PPR process.

Internal Quality Review panels

This year's IQR panels were composed as follows:

Faculty of Economics, Management & Accountancy	
External Dean	Prof. Dominic Fenech
External Dean	Dr Stephen Lungaro Mifsud
QAC Member	Prof. Ing. Maurice Apap

⁴ um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/qualityassurance/Proposed5-6YearPPRSchedule.pdf

QSU Member	Dr Chaker Mhamdi
Student Member	Mr John Paul Bayliss
Student Member	Ms Angela Debono

Faculty of Engineering	
External Dean	Prof. Emanuel Said
External Dean	Prof. Emmanuel Sinagra
QAC Member	Dr Peter Xuereb
QSU Member	Dr Chaker Mhamdi
Student Member	Ms Kyla Caruana Scicluna
Student Member	Mr Karl Andrew Schembri

Faculty of Health Sciences	
External Dean	Prof. Noellie Brockdorff
External Director	Dr Luke Fiorini
QAC Member	Prof. Ing. Victor Buttigieg
QSU Member	Dr Jacqueline Vanhearn
Student Member	Ms Maya Camilleri Sacco
Student Member	Mr Andrew Sciberras

Faculty of Laws	
External Dean	Prof. Andrew Azzopardi
External Director	Prof. Carmel Cassar
QAC Member	Ms Jo-Anne Attard
QSU Member	Dr Jacqueline Vanhearn
Student Member	Ms Kristina Felice Pace
Student Member	Mr Dragan Stojanovic

Faculty of Medicine & Surgery	
External Dean	Prof. Ing. Carl James Debono
External Dean	Prof. Ing. Andrew Sammut
QAC Member	Prof. Carmel Borg
QSU Member	Dr Jacqueline Vanhearn
Student Member	Ms Julia Pace
Student Member	Mr Nico Schiavone

Faculty of Theology	
External Director	Prof. Alessio Magro
External Dean	Prof. Alex Torpiano
QAC Member	Prof. Ing. Maurice Apap

QSU Member	Dr Chaker Mhamdi
Student Member	Mr Andrea Cuschieri
Student Member	Ms Dindora Mercieca

Table 5: Composition of the IQR panels in 2023/2024

Programmes reviewed

A total of 43 programmes have been reviewed during academic year 2023/2024, as per the table below:

Faculties	No. of programmes reviewed
Faculty of Economics, Management & Accountancy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master of Arts in Evidence-Based Management and Effective Decision Making • Master of Science in Strategic Management and Tourism • Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Business and Information Technology • Master of Science in Economics • Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Public Management • Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Politics and Governance • Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Public Sector Accounting • Master of Arts in Insurance and Risk Management • Master of Science in Insurance and Risk Management • Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Tourism Studies • Master of Arts in International Hospitality and Tourism Experience Management • Master of Arts in Tourism and Culture • Master of Science in Tourism Development and Culture 	13
Faculty of Engineering <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master of Science in Integrated Product Development 	1
Faculty of Health Sciences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor of Science (Honours) Health Science • Master of Science in Nursing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Master of Science in Nursing (Cancer Care) » Master of Science in Nursing (Cancer Care) » Master of Science in Nursing (Critical Care) » Master of Science in Nursing (Emergency Care) » Master of Science in Nursing (Infection Prevention and Control) » Master of Science in Nursing (Palliative Care) » Master of Science in Nursing (Skin and Wound Care) • Master of Science in Audiology • Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Mental Health Nursing • Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Physiotherapy • Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Podiatry • Master of Science in Medical Imaging (Ultrasound: Gynaecological and Obstetrics) 	14

Faculty of Laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bachelor of Laws / Bachelor of Laws (Honours) Master of Advocacy + Preparatory Programme Master of Notarial Studies + Preparatory Programme 	3
Faculty of Medicine & Surgery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Medical Biochemistry Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Pharmaceutical Science Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Pharmacology Master of Pharmacy Master of Science in Clinical Radiology Master of Science in Diabetes Care Master of Science in Pharmacotoxicology Master of Surgery 	8
Faculty of Theology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Theology Bachelor of Arts in Theology and Human Studies Licentiate in Sacred Theology Diploma in Religious Studies 	4

Table 6: Programmes reviewed as part of the 2023/2024 PPR cycle

As at September 2024, the final PPR reports for the **Faculty of Engineering**, the **Faculty of Health Sciences**, the **Faculty of Laws**, the **Faculty of Medicine & Surgery** and the **Faculty of Theology** were sent to the respective Deans, to be discussed by the respective Boards of Studies. The draft PPR reports for the **Faculty of Economics, Management & Accountancy** have been finalised and shared with the IQR panel for the members' feedback.

QSU reflections following this PPR cycle

- Positive outcome:** Overall, the QSU team is very satisfied with this year's PPRs, as a significant difference in the FICS' approach and attitude to the process was noted. One can confidently say that for the most part FICS are viewing the PPR process as something that needs to be done and they are embracing this process as a reflective tool for the continuous enhancement of their programmes.
- Contribution of IQR panels:** Mixed results subsist insofar as the IQR panel members' contribution to the PPR process:
 - External Deans/Directors:** Overall, the external Deans/Directors attended the necessary meetings this year. Most Deans/Directors went through the necessary PPR documentation, provided useful feedback and truly added significant value to the discussions during IQR panel meetings, Quality Collaboration Visits and Stakeholders' Meetings.

It has become evidently clear that when Deans/Directors embrace their pivotal role on the IQR panel they truly add significant value to the entire PPR process. Deans/Directors who took the time to read through the SEDs, attended meetings and participated in discussions have invariably enriched the reviewing process through invaluable insights and the sharing of good practices from their respective FICS.

On a separate note, it is being proposed that external Deans/Directors be excused from attending the PPR initial meetings, since it has been deemed that their presence at that stage is not required.

- **QAC/QSU Members:** This year, Dr Jacqueline Vanheer or Dr Chaker Mhamdi were present as QAC/QSU members on the panels, together with another QAC member as outlined in Table 4. As is always the case, the QAC/QSU members on the IQR panels effectively led the PPR process and provided the most consistent ongoing contribution throughout. Sincere thanks are due once again to all QAC/QSU members for their efforts in this year's PPR cycle.
- **Student Members:** The QSU is pleased to note that the students 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.

Unfortunately, in certain instances the FICS' students who were invited to attend the feedback session as part of the Quality Collaboration Visit with the student members of the IQR panel failed to attend, so for certain programmes no feedback could be collected by the IQR student members.

On a related note, the QSU often struggled to obtain a list of students from the respective FICS to be invited to attend the feedback session as part of the Quality Collaboration Visit. While student societies were contacted to solicit attendees, this often proved futile as emails were either left unanswered or replies were received too late. Consequently, the QSU decided to adopt a three-tiered approach in securing a good representation of students for this meeting:

- i. Liaising with the FICS Manager/Officer-in-charge for the details of the student representatives on the Board of Studies/FICS Board
- ii. Liaising with relevant student societies for their input
- iii. Requesting a randomised list of students from SIMS Office

c) **Number of programmes reviewed:** It has become abundantly evident that the number of programmes per FICS to be reviewed per year needs to decrease in order for this exercise to remain sustainable and meaningful. It has been noted through experience that more than four programmes per FICS per year jeopardises the focus of the entire PPR process for the

QAC/QSU team, the respective IQR panel members as well as the FICS in question. This year was particularly challenging with respect to the Faculty of Economics, Management & Accountancy, the Faculty of Health Sciences and the Faculty of Medicine & Surgery, which had 13, 14 and 8 programmes for review respectively.

Having so many programmes to review poses a significant challenge to the IQR panel, given that the SED and additional documentation for each programme would need to be analysed. It also impacts the operations of the FICS in question, both for the academic staff and the administrative staff. Stakeholders' Meetings become difficult to organise, both logistically and in terms of the meeting's progression, due to the number of people involved. Indeed, in such cases two or even three separate meetings need to be organised to accommodate the number of programmes. In order to squeeze in several programmes while not overextending a meeting's duration, it often happens that as little as fifteen minutes per programme is afforded to external stakeholders for their feedback. This impacts on the comprehensiveness of the evidence and feedback collected.

Even after the PPR process would have concluded, it is pertinent to mention that the QSU conducts a follow-up on the action plans that would have been approved by the Senate with respect to the previous year's PPRs. Therefore, the more programmes are reviewed in a given year, the more follow-ups would need to be conducted the following year as well. A PPR process involving too many programmes would thus impact the QSU's operations not only during the PPR itself, but also in terms of its follow-up (when other PPRs would be ongoing for that year).

The QSU will be conducting an exercise during October 2024 to determine the effectiveness of capping the number of reviewed programmes per FICS per year. Since this would entail postponing certain PPRs to subsequent years, it will still need to be ensured that all programmes are reviewed within a cycle of 5–6 years. Through this exercise, the QSU will seek to strike a reasonable balance between the number of programmes to be reviewed per year, and a maximum of 5–6-year interval between the review of all programmes.

d) **Initial meetings:** With regard to the organisation of PPR initial meetings, the QSU reflected on the below suggested improvements:

- An internal checklist has been devised for the QSU to follow during such meetings, to ensure that all the required information and decisions that should be made at that stage of the process are in fact made.
- The initial meeting for all PPRs scheduled for a particular academic year will all be organised at the start of that academic year. This will do away with the distinction of scheduling some PPRs for the first semester and some for the second semester.
- As noted in point (b) above, external Deans/Directors will not be required to attend initial meetings any more.
- At the initial meeting stage, FICS will be requested to identify the list of external stakeholders that they will eventually be inviting to attend the Stakeholders' Meeting.

- e) **Self-Evaluation Documents:** A notable improvement has been observed in the compilation of the SEDs. Most of the SEDs exhibited realistic SWOT analyses, complemented by insightful reflections on potential areas for improvement, indicating a commitment to continuous development. On the other hand, many of the SEDs did not include the Assessment Brief requested during the PPR process. Compiling the Assessment Brief would provide an overview of the assessment methods and workload so as to be evaluated during the reviewing process.

Currently, IQR panel members are requested to read through all the SEDs and supporting documentation submitted by FICS as part of their PPR process. As noted above, for those PPRs with a significant number of programmes, this was turning out to be an unreasonably arduous request. Further to a suggestion proposed by the QSU, starting from the next academic year, a new system will be tested whereby IQR panel members will be requested to focus on one/two SEDs at most. This is envisaged to result in a more focused analysis of the submitted documentation, and hopefully more targeted feedback by the IQR panel members.

- f) **Logistics of Stakeholders' Meetings:** As regards the organisation of the Stakeholders' Meetings, the current system entails that the FICS identify the stakeholders (external experts, current student and alumni) to be invited and provide a list of their details to the QSU. The QSU administration would then send an invitation email, together with a calendar invite, to the identified stakeholders. This system is proving unnecessarily challenging and demanding for a number of reasons, particularly because the QSU is currently taking on the role of an unnecessary middleman in the logistical organisation of PPR Stakeholders' Meetings, which is making this process more complex.

Therefore, to simplify this process, it is being proposed that FICS will once again take charge of the logistical organisation of their PPR Stakeholders' Meeting/s. It is in the interest of the respective FICS to ensure that relevant external stakeholders are invited to participate in this meeting and provide valuable feedback.

- g) **Obsoleting the 'Stakeholders' Committee':** The QSU noted that the use of the term 'Stakeholders' Committee' is proving to be redundant and of no real value added to how the PPR process is currently being operated. This term is essentially a vestige of the old PPR process, prior to the inclusion of IQR panels. In actual fact there is a Stakeholders' Meeting that takes place, but no 'Stakeholders' Committee' operating as such. It is therefore being proposed that references to 'Stakeholders' Committee' could simply change to 'Stakeholders' Meeting' instead.
- h) **Students' presence during Stakeholders' Meetings:** The QSU brought to the QAC's consideration the possibility of reconsidering the presence of current students during the Stakeholders' Meeting. Current students share their feedback with the student members of the IQR panel during a feedback meeting as part of the Quality Collaboration Visit. The Stakeholders' Meeting could focus specifically on feedback from external stakeholders should current students be excluded.

Originally, the presence of current students during the PPR Stakeholders' Meetings was considered beneficial and contributory to their overall educational experience. However, recent developments during the Stakeholders' Meeting of one particular PPR this year have made the QSU question whether the presence of current students should be retained in such meetings.

This matter was discussed during the last QAC meeting of 3 July 2024, where it was noted that current students are UM's foremost stakeholders, and just because there was a one-off incident in the PPR of a particular FICS one should not let it dictate how the process should proceed. Even during past PPRs, while students might come across as wary at first, it is clear that they eventually feel that they have something valuable to contribute during such meetings. For the most part, FICS also appreciate students' input during such meetings. Furthermore, students value that their feedback is being recorded through the minutes of the Stakeholders' Meeting. Consequently, the QAC agreed to retain the presence of current students during PPR Stakeholders' Meetings.

- i) **Final PPR reports:** The QSU reflected that once the final PPR reports are presented to and approved by the Senate, they are to be uploaded on a shared online repository to which APQRU and the IAF will be granted access.

Conclusion of PPR exercise for the Institute of Aerospace Technologies

The PPR exercise for the Diploma in Aviation Maintenance offered by the Institute of Aerospace Technologies, which was part of the 2021/2022 cycle, was finally concluded. The Institute's Director, Prof. Ing. David Zammit Mangion, submitted the requested revised action plan on the morning of 11 April 2024. The revised action plan was subsequently presented to the Senate at its meeting of 23 May 2024.

Follow-up on 2022/2023 PPR Action Plans

Apart from working on this year's scheduled PPRs, the QSU also undertook a follow-up 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. This exercise's status as at August 2024 is as follows:

FICS	Status
Faculty for the Built Environment	Follow-up pending
Faculty of Dental Surgery	Follow-up received, reviewed and concluded
Faculty of Economics, Management & Accountancy	Follow-up received, reviewed and concluded
Faculty of Health Sciences	Follow-up pending

Table 7: Status of 2022/2023 PPR action plans follow-up, as at September 2024

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 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.

All FICS were expected to submit an APR report for all their taught programmes by December 2023, as per the circular issue from the Rector's Office on 14 December 2022. Programmes are exempted from an APR if they are undergoing a PPR process, or if they underwent a PPR process the previous year.

Teething problems were to be expected since this was the first time that FICS were asked to submit APRs through a formalised process, however, the QSU was overall pleasantly surprised at the level of cooperation and commitment shown by FICS in submitting their APRs. Indeed, a total of **124 APR reports** were received.

Launch of Academics for Quality Assurance (A4QA)

In February 2024, the QAC ideated a new initiative titled '*Academics for Quality Assurance*' (A4QA) as a means of strengthening the involvement of academics in the ongoing review of programmes through a peer-review model approach. This aims to foster a rigorous and collaborative process of reflective practice and evaluation. Within this framework, academics and experts within the same field critically review the educational practices and overall quality and standards of programmes. In this role, interested academics will collaborate with QAC members and fellow academics to provide crucial feedback on academic practices at UM through the APR by offering insights on an assigned programme through professional dialogue. Such contribution will play a vital role in identifying and disseminating good practices while pinpointing areas that require attention and improvement. The A4QA is thus a collaborative effort aimed to enhance learning and teaching methodologies, improve student outcomes and bolster the overall reputation of the University.

Following a period of online registration, a significant total of 80 academics expressed their interest in joining the A4QA pool of reviewers. This was a very encouraging outcome, which goes to show how the academic community at UM is genuinely interested in contributing to QA processes. Two workshops were subsequently organised on 11 April and 30 May 2024, in collaboration with the Office for Human Resources Management & Development. The workshops were well-attended, and covered the APR process and how the A4QA is envisaged to enrich it. Both workshops included a vibrant groupwork session which served to collect exceptionally useful feedback on the digital rubric that reviewers will be using throughout the reviewing process. Through the A4QA, the QAC aims to cultivate a culture of continuous improvement, ensuring that educational provision meets the highest standards of excellence. Peer review not only validates the credibility of academic institutions but also encourages innovation and best practices, ultimately enriching the educational landscape and ensuring that students receive a high-quality learning experience.



Picture 1: The groupwork session during the first A4QA workshop (11 April 2024)



Picture 2: Introducing the second A4QA workshop (30 May 2024)

Digital APR platform

In collaboration with Dr Joel Azzopardi (Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Information & Communication Technology), the QSU have been working on establishing a digital platform for the operation of the APR process. Through this online platform, both the submission of APR templates by FICS as well as their review by the A4QA reviewers is envisaged to shift to a more streamlined and dedicated online system.

The feedback received from academics during the two A4QA workshops has now been integrated in the revised rubric, which has been added to the digital platform. A pilot session with a select group of academics will be organised in September.

The screenshot shows the 'Form Review System - Admin' interface. On the left is a sidebar with 'Admin Actions' (Admin Options, Form Definition, Form Submission Management, Reviewer Management, Rubric Definition, Rubric Review Task Management, User Management) and 'Account' (Logout). The main area is titled 'Main Menu' and contains six sections with 'Enter' buttons: 'Admin Options' (View System Options, Edit System Options), 'Form Definition' (View current form, Define new form, Update form definition), 'Form Submission Management' (View submitted forms, Review submitted forms, Update form status, Export forms), 'Reviewer Management' (Add New Reviewer, View Reviewers, Edit/Update Reviewers), 'Rubric Definition' (View current rubrics, Define new rubric, Update rubric definition), and 'Rubric Review Task Management' (View current review tasks, Define new review tasks, Update rubric review tasks). Each section has a list of tasks with checkmarks.

Picture 3: Backend of the digital APR platform

The screenshot shows the 'Form Review System - Reviewer' interface. On the left is a sidebar with 'Reviewer' (Pending Tasks, Completed Tasks, All Tasks), 'Lead Reviewer' (Pending Individual Reviews, Pending Aggregate Reports, Completed Reviews, All Reviews), and 'Account' (Logout). The main area is titled 'Section 1: Action points addressed from the previous Annual or Periodic Programme Review' and contains a section '1.1 The response to recommendations is effective, and its implementation is likely to have a positive impact in the relevant context:'. It includes radio buttons for 'Target Not Met', 'Target Met', 'Target Exceeded', and 'Not Applicable', each with a description and a list of bullet points. Below this is a 'Additional Comments' text area.

Picture 4: Reviewer's perspective of the APR rubric

Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Introduction

Throughout the periodic programme reviews conducted during the academic year 2023/2024, a number of programmes implemented commendable practices that contribute significantly to the overall quality of academic programmes and that meaningfully impact the students' tertiary education experience. Nevertheless, a number of key areas for improvement have been identified to further enhance the quality of educational provision. Most of the recommendations focus on ensuring students are well-supported through student-centred practices, assessments are fair and varied, and feedback processes are clear and constructive.

Good practices

- **Practice component:** A number of programmes have been enriched with industry placements and/or workshop-based lectures. The practice element has been highly valued by students as it effectively bridges academic learning with future professional endeavours. By engaging with authentic experiences, students develop essential skills and enhance their readiness for professional roles.
- **Contemporary curriculum:** Most programmes remain adaptive and content is relevant to current trends. This ensures that students are abreast of evolving challenges, preparing them for the demands of their sector.
- **Learning outcomes:** Some programmes exhibited the exemplary use of roadmaps to map learning outcomes while others had clear and specific learning outcomes that provided students with a well-defined academic path, enhancing their engagement. A number of study-units make use of assessment rubrics that indicate clear expectations that are linked to the learning outcomes.
- **Students' handbooks:** A number of programmes provided student handbooks that indicated clear communication of assessment criteria, requirements and other essential information to students. Students praised this resource since it enhanced their learning experience. Similarly, some programmes had a placement handbook with defined expectations and standards for placement, offering students clear guidance throughout their practical experience. Furthermore, one notable strength was a handbook which is completed collaboratively by students and mentors during placements, fostering regular and documented feedback that ensures transparency and continuous student progress.
- **Blended learning and flexibility:** Students from a few postgraduate programmes expressed their appreciation for a better-balanced workload and timetable compared to their undergraduate programme. Students value a blended approach to programme delivery. This increased flexibility for students, allowing them to better manage their work-study-life balance. Furthermore, it appears that blended learning could also accommodate different learning preferences, thus facilitating learning while allowing students to better manage critical reflection. The availability of asynchronous sessions has been particularly valued by students, as it offers the flexibility needed to maintain a healthy work-study-life balance,

particularly in an online learning environment. Despite a programme being delivered entirely online, students praised the availability and approachability of academic staff, underscoring the Faculty's commitment to providing strong support and guidance even in a virtual setting. The variety of modes of study target a diverse student audience with varying needs and aspirations.

- **Innovative assessment methods:** A number of programmes make use of different assessment methods and communicate assessment rubrics to students well in advance. Innovative assessment methods that include case-study analysis, problem-based or project-based such as maintaining a website or participating in radio shows are particularly appreciated by students. Creative approaches to assessment not only enhance learning but also boost students' confidence and practical skills. Very often these are complemented with learning and teaching methods that encourage active learning through debates, discussions, etc.
- **Student feedback:** Student feedback plays a central role in some programmes, with students expressing appreciation for the excellent communication with the programme coordinator and the Faculty's responsiveness to their concerns. These programmes generally implement a student-centred approach, effectively addressing students' comments through an action-centred feedback approach. Some programmes have student societies that effectively collect student feedback.

Areas for improvement

- **Practical component:** Wherever possible, a number of programmes would benefit from a practical component to increase exposure to industry. This will increase opportunities for students to gain practical hands-on experiences while providing an alternative way of learning, teaching and assessment.
- **Enhancing practice placements:** A number of programmes need to improve the quality of practice placements. The practical component would be more effective if clear expectations and learning outcomes are communicated to placement sites. Establishing clear learning outcomes, expectations and assessment criteria would provide greater consistency, transparency and fairness. Linking placements to well-defined learning outcomes will ensure that students' progress is continuously tracked and recognised as part of their assessment. This approach will also ensure that placements are integrated more meaningfully into the students' learning journey.
- **Curriculum content evaluation:** While most programmes offer students a broad range of topics, a review of content in certain programmes would help ensure greater exposure to more current themes. Curriculum content evaluation would help streamline the content and focus on essential competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication. By redefining the intended learning outcomes and mapping them to study-units, programmes can align learning, teaching and assessment, reduce overlap, enhance coherence, and ensure that the curriculum aligns with the programme's overall goals.

- **Communication of learning outcomes:** The Boards of Studies and programme coordinators of some programmes are encouraged to assume a more proactive role in managing the academic programmes. This includes reviewing study-units' learning outcomes and reading lists and ensuring that learning outcomes are clearly communicated to all teaching staff, both full-time and part-time, involved in lecture delivery. Clear communication will enhance consistency and alignment between teaching practices and the programme's overall learning outcomes.
- **Workload evaluation and balance:** A number of programmes would benefit from a comprehensive evaluation of the student workload. This includes considering direct contact hours, assessment-related activities, and independent study requirements such as reading, research, and preparation. The goal is to achieve a balanced distribution of workload across the three semesters to ensure a more manageable academic experience, allowing time for reflection and deep learning.
- **Innovative assessment methods:** While a number of good assessment practices have been observed, a number of programmes would benefit from a review of assessment practices to identify areas for enhancements. The exploration of a balanced mix of assessment methods, which may better capture student learning and competencies, is encouraged. This will ensure that the assessment methods used are varied and reflective of the programme's learning objectives. The use of rubrics is recommended to clarify expectations and ensure alignment with intended learning outcomes.
- **Student feedback and improvement:** A student-centred learning environment thrives when students receive constructive feedback on their performance. Some programmes need to improve on effective feedback that not only evaluates students' current progress but also provides clear, actionable steps for improvement. This approach fosters a more supportive learning environment and promotes ongoing student development.
- **Student mobility:** A number of programmes are missing out on ERASMUS+ opportunities. Integrating ERASMUS+ mobility and traineeships would enrich the students' holistic educational experience. This would offer valuable international exposure and practical experience, fostering lifelong learning and professional development.

Conclusion

A significant number of good practices were identified throughout the academic year 2023/2024 and some of them were shared through the QAC's Quality Mailshot Initiative. Details on the good practices and areas for improvements pertaining to each programme are available in the PPR reports. By addressing the above areas of development, UM's academic programmes can make substantial strides in enhancing the overall quality, relevance, and appeal of its programmes.

Annual Reports

The process of collecting the annual reports for the academic year 2022/2023 started by the end of September / beginning of October 2023. As at July 2024, similar to July 2023, 7 of 14 Faculties have submitted all their departmental annual reports for the academic year 2022/2023. Two other Faculties have submitted their annual reports, albeit not for all their departments as compared to six in July 2023. Five Faculties have still not submitted their reports as compared to just one Faculty in July 2023.

In total, 9 of 16 Institutes (compared to 11 of 18 in July 2023), 10 of 13 Centres (as compared to 12 in July 2023) and 1 School (as compared to 3) have also submitted their annual reports.

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 2023	7/14	7/14	7/14	7/14	7/14	7/14
	50%	42.85%	7.14%	61.11%	92.30%	100%
July 2024	7/14	2/14	5/14	9/16	10/13	1/3
	= 50%	↓ 14.28%	↓ 35.71%	↓ 56.25%	↓ 76.92%	↓ 33.33%

Table 8: Annual Report submissions (July 2023 v. July 2024)

According to the Office of the Secretary, the FICS annual reports are consulted by the Rectorate and the Office of the Secretary when necessary.

The **University's Annual Report for 2023⁵** has been published on the UM website.

As part of its annual audit plan for 2024, the Internal Audit & Risk Management Function has recently carried out an audit that involved annual reporting at UM. The objective of this internal audit was to review the main processes that UM applies to oversee and disseminate information about its range of services. The audit involved various services and activities, including entity annual reporting. The final audit report is expected to include recommendations on how to improve annual reporting at UM in a way that addresses the current lacunae and challenges.

Challenges

The submission of annual reports is still a challenging task for a number of FICS which either do not submit their annual reports on time or, in some cases, fail to submit for successive years. This is a recurring challenge over the years and the same action is repeatedly taken by the Office of the Secretary which is sending reminders to those FICS Deans, Directors and Managers/ Officers-in-charge urging them to submit, but in spite of these reminders in some cases this is not successful.

⁵ um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/factsandfigures/annualreport2023.pdf

One of the reasons behind this reluctance to submit annual reports may be that no feedback is received by FICS upon the submission. A number of FICS Deans/Directors have repeatedly voiced out this concern which seems to have discouraged some FICS from submitting the said reports. It is not clear what actions are being taken for those who do not eventually submit their annual reports.

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.

The QAC and QSU have been seeking 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 & Risk Management Function were an opportunity to refer to the importance of these annual reports.

It is to be noted that the responsibility of FICS to submit annual reports is clearly indicated and included in the Collective Agreement. 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. The QAC has no authority over FICS to enforce the submission of annual reports nor does the follow-up of annual reports submission fall under its remits. This task is undertaken by the Internal Audit & Risk Management Function. At the time of writing, the Internal Audit & Risk Management Function has not released its final audit report yet.

Progress of Power BI Implementation

Introduction: The Business Intelligence (BI) initiative

The University has embarked on a Business Intelligence (BI) initiative, spearheaded by the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), aimed at enhancing the efficiency and accuracy of data management and analysis processes. Power BI has been selected as the central platform for this initiative. The primary focus has been on supporting the Annual Programme Review (APR) by streamlining data retrieval, analysis, and reporting. Despite the successful implementation in this area, overall development progress has been somewhat slow due to resource constraints and the dual responsibilities of key personnel.

Progress update

The QAC-led BI initiative has made significant strides, particularly concerning the Annual Programme Review. Power BI has been instrumental in transforming how data is accessed and analysed within the University. Before the implementation of BI, users had to manually request specific data, which was then provided in Excel format. This process was often laborious, time-consuming, and prone to human error. With Power BI, data retrieval has become significantly more efficient, and the intuitive Graphical User Interface (GUI) has made it easier for users to interact with and analyse data.

Mr Clayton Cassar and Mr David Cilia have played pivotal roles in driving this progress. Despite their full-time duties, they have continued to address incoming user queries and perform necessary enhancements to the BI system. Their contributions have been vital in ensuring the ongoing success of the BI initiative, even as it faces development challenges due to limited resources. However, the dual responsibilities of these key individuals have inevitably slowed the pace of further development.

User feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with many praising the ease of use and the improved ability to observe trends through BI-generated graphs and charts. This has facilitated more informed strategic decision-making and has enhanced the University's capacity to sustain improvements through the Annual Programme Review.

Challenges and key recommendations

The 2023 MFHEA EQA audit report identified the development of a BI suite as one of the University's good practices. It also highlighted a key recommendation for the University to develop an integrated information platform that would encompass all University data, including students, faculty, research, and more, with the capability to generate immediate reports for strategic decision-making. MFHEA has given UM 18 months to implement this key recommendation.

This recommendation is ambitious but fitting for the University of Malta's stature. The BI working group has thoroughly discussed this recommendation and fully agrees with its importance. However, to effectively address this recommendation, the group believes that the establishment of a dedicated Data Intelligence Unit is essential. This unit should comprise full-time staff focused exclusively on data management, analysis, and reporting. Additionally, the working group has proposed the establishment of a comprehensive Data Management Policy to guide these efforts.

Feedback and user experience

Feedback from users has been instrumental in shaping the ongoing development of the BI system. Some users have suggested updates to certain dashboards, such as incorporating different chart formats and including data segmented by academic year. These enhancements would allow users to better understand trends and compare data across multiple years, further improving the utility of the BI system.

Currently, the University has 112 licensed Power BI users, including 43 Deans and Directors and 69 administrative staff members. However, there is justified increasing demand for access from other stakeholders, such as Heads of Department. Expanding the user base poses challenges both in terms of addressing queries and managing the financial implications of additional licences. Moreover, we consistently receive requests for specific data extraction such as data per study-unit. These requests would require the creation of more dashboards which currently can neither be catered for nor sustained. Consequently, users are disappointed since they are now aware of the Power BI potential and yet they are being requested to collect data manually. Establishing a dedicated Data Intelligence Unit could help mitigate these challenges by

streamlining data provision, reducing the recurrent costs associated with licensing, facilitating data extraction and increasing accuracy and efficiency.

Future direction

The use of Power BI has the potential to significantly improve the accuracy and comprehensiveness of data provided for University Rankings. Currently, data is managed using Excel, which is susceptible to human error and may not always be presented comprehensively. Expanding the use of Power BI to include dashboards tailored for ranking data could address these issues. However, further development in this area is currently constrained by the limited capacity to create additional dashboards.

In conclusion, while the implementation of Power BI at the University has achieved significant successes, particularly in relation to the Annual Programme Review, there are several areas where progress has been hindered by resource limitations. The establishment of a dedicated Business Intelligence Unit and the development of a comprehensive Data Management Policy are crucial steps to accelerate progress and fully realise the potential of BI across the University. These steps will ensure that the University can meet the ambitious recommendations set forth in the MFHEA EQA audit report and continue to enhance its data-driven decision-making capabilities.

International University Rankings

Times Higher Education (THE)

In the **Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings 2024**,⁶ 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 1,907 universities across 108 countries, up from the 1,799 universities across 104 countries of the 2023 ranking. Furthermore, UM improved its overall score when compared to last year, as evidenced by the table below:

	2023	2024
Overall Score	29.8–33.9	32.7–36.9
Teaching	19.6	23.4
Research	16.7	16.2
Citations	53.4	60.6
Industry Income	37.5	20.5
International Outlook	62.6	53.8

Table 9: UM's institutional score in the THE World University Rankings in 2023 and 2024

⁶ timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2023/world-ranking#!/length/25/name/malta/

The University also secured a ranking in nine out of eleven subject areas, seen below in comparison to last year's ranking:

Subject Area	2023 Ranking	2024 Ranking
Arts & humanities	401–500	↓ 501–600
Business & economics	Unranked	↑ 401–500
Clinical & health	501–600	↓ 601–800
Computer science	501–600	↓ 601–800
Education	401–500	= 401–500
Engineering	801–1000	= 801–1000
Law	Unranked	= Unranked
Life Sciences	Unranked	= Unranked
Physical sciences	601–800	= 601–800
Psychology	Unranked	↑ 401–500
Social sciences	601–800a	= 601–800

Table 10: UM's rankings in the THE World University Rankings by subject area

The QAC notes with pleasure that the exercise undertaken during the previous academic year has borne fruit, in that UM successfully managed to achieve a ranking in two subject areas in which it was previously unranked (i.e., *Business & economics* and *Psychology*). Further efforts were made this year in order to continue fine-tuning as much as possible which FICS are grouped under which subject areas. The QSU was assisted in this exercise by Dr Carl Camilleri and Mr Stephen Agius, from the Faculty of Economics, Management & Accountancy. Dr Camilleri also joined the QSU in an online meeting with Ms Rosie Sanniti (THE Regional Manager) on 19 April 2024, wherein UM's performance in the THE ranking was discussed in more detail.

There are now only two subject areas in which UM is not featured, namely *Law* and *Life Sciences*. Following on from last year's relocation of certain FICS under different subject areas, this year the QSU focused on ensuring that the remaining two unranked subject areas at least manage to meet the minimum thresholds required for academic staff. This was already the case for *Law*, but not for *Life Sciences*. Therefore, to address this lacuna the following changes were effected:

Institute / Centre / Department	From (subject area)	To (subject area)
Department of Applied Biomedical Science	Clinical & Health	Life Sciences
Department of Food Sciences & Nutrition	Clinical & Health	Life Sciences
Department of Physiology & Biochemistry	Clinical & Health	Life Sciences
Department of Health, Physical Education & Consumer Studies	Education	Life Sciences
Institute of Earth Systems	Education	Life Sciences

Table 11: Relocation of UM Departments and Institutes under different THE subject areas

Center for World University Rankings (CWUR)

Since 2019, UM is ranked by the **Center for World University Rankings (CWUR)**,⁷ 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 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 2024 edition**,⁸ which considered 20,966 institutions. The influx of 435 new institutions likely resulted in the University of Malta dropping 21 places (1,705th compared to last year's 1,684th place), despite registering its best score from 2019 to date (67.2). UM is now ranked in the **top 8.2%** of institutions worldwide. A more detailed comparative analysis is available below.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
World Rank	1,659	1,762	1,696	1,702	1,684	↓ 1,705
Score	67.1	66.7	66.9	66.8	67.1	↑ 67.2
Participants	N/A	N/A	19,788	19,788	20,531	↑ 20,966

Table 12: UM in the CWUR (2019-2024)

QS Rankings

Through a collaborative internal review by the Quality Support Unit focused on enhancing the quality of the data provided, UM has achieved a significant milestone in the 21st edition of the QS World University Rankings, which included over **1,500 institutions** from **106 locations** worldwide. UM has managed to place in the ranking band **751-760** as compared to last year's ranking band **851-900**. Similarly, UM ranked **306th** in the QS Europe and 59th in the QS Southern Europe as compared to **344th** and **75th**, respectively, in 2024.

UM's QS rankings over the last five years are as follows:

Rankings	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
QS World	801-1000	801-1000	801-1000	851-900	↑ 751-761
QS Europe	N/A	N/A	N/A	344	↑ 306
QS Southern Europe	N/A	N/A	N/A	75	↑ 59

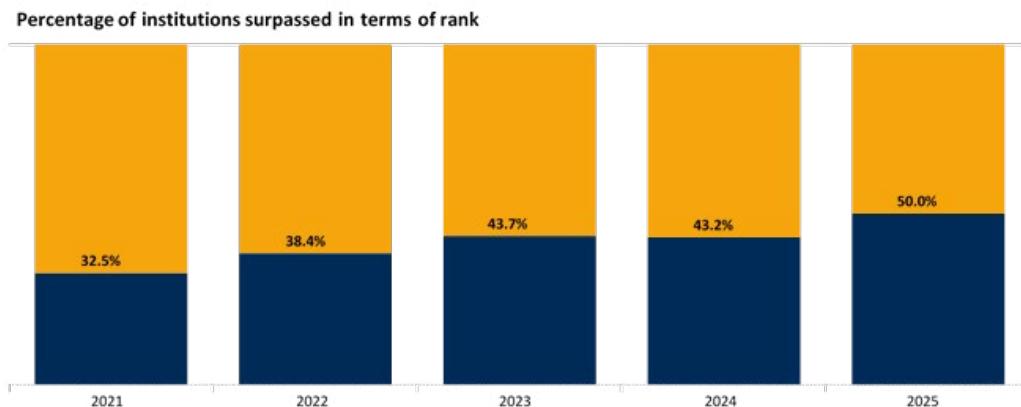
Table 13: UM in the QS Rankings (2021-2025)

⁷ cwur.org/

⁸ cwur.org/2024.php

With this outstanding result UM surpassed **50%** of the institutions in terms of the overall rank and has notably performed well in **Employment Outcomes** with outstanding scores raising its rank in this indicator to **45th** place which places it in the top **3%** worldwide.

Similarly, UM has risen to **391st** place in **International Research Network** leaping **25** positions and surpassing **74%** of the ranked institutions in this important indicator.



Picture 5: Percentage of institutions surpassed in terms of rank in the QS Rankings

UM will have to submit the required data to QS by November 2024 for the 22nd edition of the rankings which will be released in June 2025. The QS World University Rankings 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
	International Faculty	5.00
4. Global Engagement	International Research Network	5.00
	International Students	5.00
5. Sustainability	Sustainability	5.00
		100.00

Table 14: QS World University Rankings 2026 intended weighting

Clarivate Global Institutional Profiles Project

It was the first time for UM to take part in the **Clarivate Global Institutional Profiles Project**⁹ and data was submitted by the end of May 2023. Higher Education Institutions are ranked according to their performance across a set of widely accepted indicators of excellence. The rankings were revealed in September 2023 and UM featured among the **best 2000 HEIs** and was ranked **1128th** in Best Global Universities and **411th** in Best Global Universities in Europe.

⁹ clarivate.com/webofsciencegroup/globalprofilesproject

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
	Of which are international/overseas origin
Number of students	Of which are women
	Of which are international/overseas origin
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 15: 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 16: Indicators for the whole institution submitted by UM

Webometrics Ranking Web of Universities

From being ranked 1,324th in its first appearance in 2015, UM is now ranked **869th** in the world, improving on its 872nd position of last year. This places UM in the top **2.8%** of more than 31,000 higher education institutions worldwide in the **Webometrics Ranking Web of Universities**.¹⁰ The University of Malta is also ranked in 345th place in the continental European ranking as compared to its previous 350th place. This positions it in the top 5.7% in the continental European ranking.

¹⁰ webometrics.info/en

Challenges

In the last two years, the QSU exerted its efforts to find the best possible ways to improve UM's rankings in spite of the existing challenges. The starting point was for the QSU staff to explore the various ranking bodies' websites and read about their different ranking methodologies and criteria in order to be well equipped with the necessary knowledge. There were a lot of fruitful discussions and exchange of ideas among the QSU staff on the various ranking exercises. Additionally, more training on university ranking methodologies was attended by the QSU team.

In this same line, the QAC successfully established a working group dedicated to support UM in ensuring the quality, consistency and accuracy of data submitted for university rankings purposes. The working group comprised representatives from the QAC and the QSU and academics with expertise in strategic information analysis and management, statistics and research. The purpose of this group is to enhance the quality of information provided to ranking organisations, thereby promoting the integrity and reputation of UM in global rankings. The QSU provided administrative support to the working group.

As a result of these initiatives, a better understanding of the several ranking methodologies was reached and more accurate and up-to-date data was submitted for the ranking exercises which had a positive impact on UM's rankings.

Despite the improvement of UM's global ranking this year, there are still a number of recurring challenges for UM to keep advancing 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 still QSU, with its limited resources, that coordinates this task.

Another challenge is that research and citations take the highest weight in rankings 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**¹¹ and/or **Elsevier's Scopus**¹² 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.

¹¹ webofscience.com

¹² elsevier.com/products/scopus

Seeking to overcome the previously stated challenges and advance in global rankings, the QAC and QSU will continue their efforts in regard and more actions will be taken including the following:

- Continue the excellent work of the ranking working group
- Continue quality assuring the accuracy of data to be submitted for future ranking tasks
- This task may be facilitated and enhanced if UM follows the EQA Report (2023) recommendation and sets up a Business Intelligence Unit that can purposefully manage UM's integrated data. This will enhance the accuracy and efficiency of data collection and submission.
- Involving the various concerned entities in the process of quality assuring the data before submissions
- QSU staff and the working group members will attend QS and THE online sessions on ranking methodologies
- The QAC in liaison with 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
- It is suggested that the Pro-Rector for Research & Knowledge Transfer supports in spreading awareness among UM researchers on the importance of indexed publications.

Quality Mailshot Initiative

For the fifth 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 2023/2024 academic year. A total of 14 mailshots were sent, garnering 20 responses. This was a positive improvement from the previous year, and exhibits a stronger level of engagement with the mailshots' audience.

	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Number of mailshots	13	15	12	13	14
Number of email responses	49	29	27	11	20

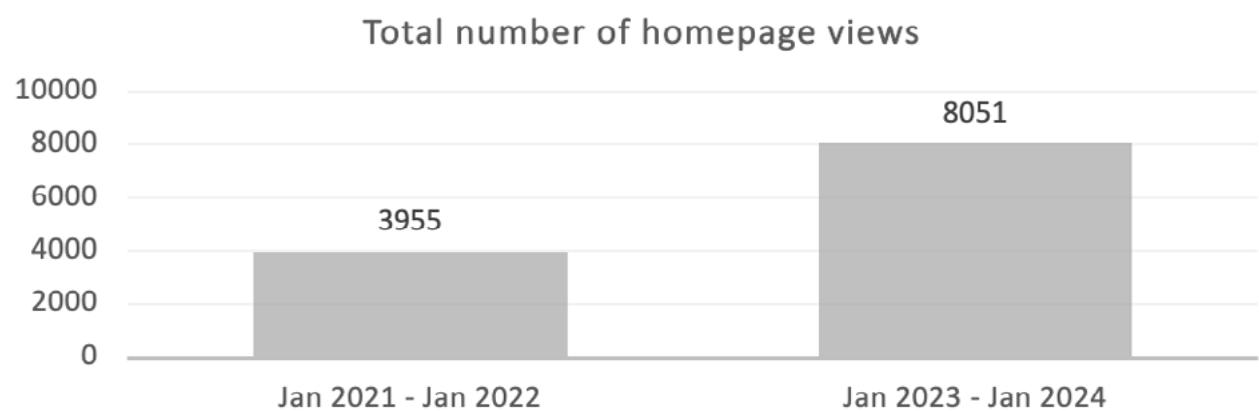
Table 17: Number of responses to Quality Mailshots

The latest series of mailshots continued to make relevant connections between the mailshots' content and UM's Strategic Themes, as per the **Strategic Plan 2020–2025**.¹³ These links serve to reinforce UM's various strategic commitments while showcasing how the latter are being achieved in practice.

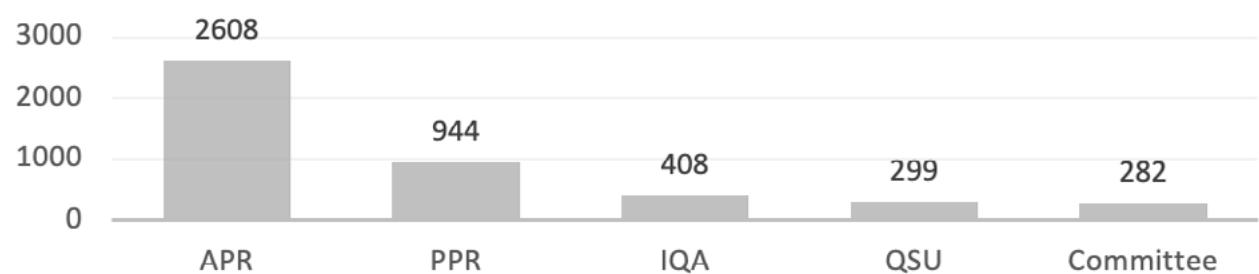
The report on the Quality Mailshot Initiative for 2023/2024 is available [here](#).¹⁴ An online repository of all mailshots sent to date is available on the Quality Assurance [website](#).¹⁵

Quality Assurance Website Update

The QSU requested an updated Google Analytics report for the Quality Assurance website, from January 2023 to January 2024. This information was provided by the Marketing, Communications & Alumni Office in February 2024, and the following key takeaways were noted:



Jan 2023 – Jan 2024: Most viewed webpages (excluding homepage)



¹³ um.edu.mt/about/strategy

¹⁴ [um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/qualityassurance/ReportontheQualityMailshotInitiative\(2023-2024\).pdf](http://um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/qualityassurance/ReportontheQualityMailshotInitiative(2023-2024).pdf)

¹⁵ um.edu.mt/about/qualityassurance/qualitymailshots

Jan 2023 - Jan 2024: Other pages

Quality
Mailshots

244
views

Assessment
Policy

119
views

Student
Feedback Policy

84
views

The QSU will be liaising with the MCAO to explore how best to promote the Assessment Policy and the Student Feedback Policy.

Continuing Professional Development

Listed below are the main training/development events attended by members of staff of the QSU between August 2023 and July 2024.

Event	Type	Organiser	Date
Student Participation in Enhancement – Roles and responsibilities: contributing to quality assurance	Webinar	QAA	03/10/2023
THE's World University Rankings 2024 Masterclass	Webinar	THE	03/10/2023
Negotiation and the Art of Persuasion	Training	UM	11/10/2023
Overcoming Barriers to Interdisciplinary Scientific Research in EMEA with a data Led Approach	Webinar	THE	18/10/2023
ELTOC: Chapter 7, Block 1	Online Conference	Oxford University Press	27/10/2023
Student Participation in Enhancement – Building Evidence: Engagement and Consultation	Webinar	QAA	02/11/2023
An Introduction to International Quality Review	Webinar	QAA	07/11/2023
How QAA Can Support Providers with Regulatory Compliance, Key Challenges and the Student Experience	Webinar	QAA	08/11/2023
Build a Successful Student Recruitment Strategy	Webinar	THE	08/11/2023
Time Management	Training	UM	14/11/2023
European Quality Assurance Forum	Conference	EUA	23/11/2023
Academic Integrity: Introduction and Overview	Webinar	QAA	12/12/2023
Quality Insights Conference	Online conference	QAA	22/02/2024
Exploring Generative AI for Teaching and Assessment	Training	UM	01/05/2024

Table 18: List of the main training/development events attended by QSU staff (August 2023 - July 2024)