



Higher Education Policy as it applies to EIE programmes at the University of Malta¹

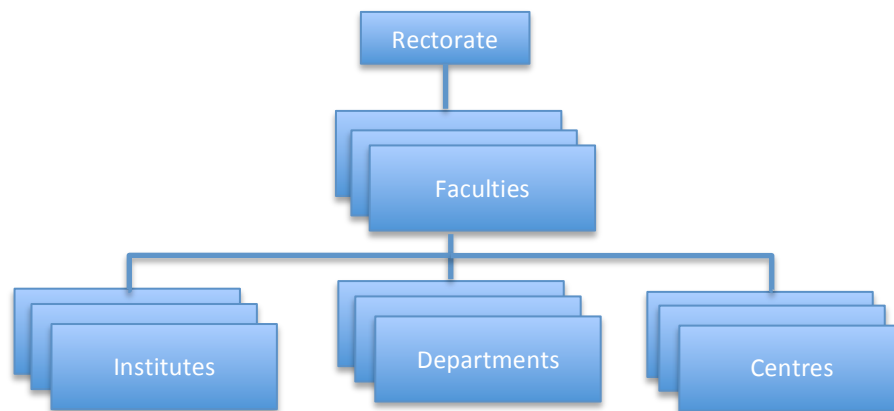
Preamble

All terms used in this document have the meaning specific for in Malta, and even more specifically, within the University of Malta, and may have different meaning when used in any other country and applied to any other educational and/or research institution. This document relates to education policy and procedure at EQF level 6 and higher.

Overview of Quality Assurance

The University of Malta (Maltese: *L-Università ta' Malta*) is the highest educational institution in Malta. It offer undergraduate bachelor's degrees, postgraduate master's degrees and postgraduate doctorates (PhD). It is a member of the Association of Commonwealth Universities [3].

The University of Malta (UoM) is the highest teaching institution in Malta. It is publicly funded and is open to all those who have the requisite qualifications. Over the past few years, the UoM has reviewed its structures in order to be in line with the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area. The supreme governing bodies of the University are the Council and the Senate [4]. The structure used within the UoM is the following:



All procedures within the UoM are subject to the following regulatory documents in order of increasing specificity and decreasing scope:

- 1) The National Education Act;
- 2) The University of Malta General Harmonised Regulations;
- 3) Faculty Bye-Laws;
- 4) Degree Board of Studies guidelines.

None of the above documents contradict any preceding one, but defines more meaning to the more

¹ *The University of Malta is the only local university in Malta. This document does not cover procedure and policy that could be in place within local private establishments offering external qualifications or non-university tertiary education institutions.*



generic ones.

The UoM maintains its own internal quality structures and processes, it is auditable only through its transparent internal procedures and quality assurance bodies. Through such audit and transparency, it adheres to the Maltese national quality assurance body, The National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) [2]. So basically, there is accountability of procedure, process closure, and due diligence, rather than direct control of action, decision or standard imposition. The UoM is fully compliant with the Bologna Process.

External Evaluation

The UoM makes use of external examiners at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. External examiners are academics of standing that hail from other universities of repute, within or without the European Union. It is usually up to each separate Chairman of the respective Board of Studies under whose remit and responsibility the degree programme falls, to select external examiners as the need arises. The adoption of an external examiner is subsequently ratified by Faculty Board, the internal UoM quality assurance boards, called the Academic Programme Quality Review Unit (APQRU) and the Programme Validation Committee (PVC) [1].

The UoM defines, sets up and maintains its own internal procedures for the following:

- *Recruitment of academic staff* - Interview boards are made up predominantly of relevant academics but will also contain an external, usually government, representative;
- *Programme content* - Curricula are established internally after consultation with various stakeholders, including industrial partners;
- *Student intake* - This happens in accordance with faculty-specific entry requirements, after satisfying the more general university entry requirements and the national school-leaving requirements as set in the National Education Act. Requirements are stated in terms of national examination outcomes. Periodically, instigated by any given faculty and if approved by Senate, "numerus clausus" conditions might apply;
- *Scientific research* - This is a very important and integral part of the raison d'être of the UoM. There is no direct external influence of the direction in this area of activity;
- *Academic staff loading* - This is the prerogative and responsibility of the individual Heads of Department;
- *Delivery styles* - These vary a great deal, but, unless specifically and purposefully designed to be on-line or Massive Open On-line Courses - MOOCs, are mostly a combination of traditional lecturing, coursework, assignments and projects to which definite ECTS values is pegged. Much of the material being used and/or offered in the course of delivery is available on-line via websites or Virtual Learning Environments - VLEs);
- *Assessment styles* – There is a clear shift from traditional conceptual recall to scenario-based problem solving under various examination conditions – like closed/open-book, individual and group work, etc.).



New programme creation

New programmes are set up through university initiative. The UoM uses a two-stage procedure through the completion of standard university-wide documents. Stage one involves an initial programme proposal with general information about the nomenclature, layout of the proposed programme, timings, modes of assessment, ECTS counts, etc., and this can be put forward to APQRU/PVC by any full-time council-appointed academic. It is his/her prerogative to choose to obtain or not approval for this initial submission from his/her department, or even from his/her faculty. Stage two would require a full and detailed course programme including study-unit descriptions (study-units are individual subjects/topics taught within a particular programme). Stage two would require sign-off from minute-ed departmental meetings where the new programme was discussed and structured, and similarly from the faculty board meeting where this was presented and ratified. Ultimately, the proposed new programme would then have to be vetted by APQRU and Senate [1].

Changes to existing programmes

The processes involved in altering existing programmes would depend on the extent of alteration. If the degree programme retains its original scope and intent, then alterations would only require internal university quality assurance vetting [3]. If the programme is altered in such manner that it now addresses a different scientific area, then it will be considered as a “new programme” and treated as such (see previous section in this document).

Student influence of programme content

This would take the form of student representation on various university officially constituted boards and bodies. Student feedback, through apposite forms, physical or electronic, would also be used to ascertain material relevance and actuality [1]. External audits would then also consider handling and closure of such feedback exercises [2]. Informally, students are always encouraged to maintain an open dialogue with Faculty to help monitor course effectiveness and fairness. There is no direct formal student input into the initial creation of courses and content.

Industry influence of programme content

The UoM maintains a healthy level of social awareness through some form of interaction between all stakeholders, i.e. academic institutions (sometimes this would also include student association representation), industry, and government. This interaction varies and is manifest as internal liaison committees, formal national-level sub-committees, government-instituted bodies, private or chamber of commerce initiatives, agencies, etc. The scope of all such entities is to maintain relevance of subject matter and sanity of procedure to keep as much as possible a healthy supply of graduates to the job market.

Students with disabilities/special needs/unconventional needs

The UoM has an internal committee/organisation looking after the needs of challenged students and/or students with special or unconventional needs. The Pro-Rector for Student Affairs is also directly responsible for this category of student [1]. Representatives from internal university organisations for students with special needs would be represented on all major university decision-taking bodies [1]. Furthermore, these internal organisations would be in direct contact and would be



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members of national organisations dealing with sectors of society relating to people with special needs. These, in turn, would be subject to very specific and explicit regulation, often part of national legislation, governing equality of treatment of, and opportunities for, individuals [5].

Mobility and life-long learning processes

A widely used mechanism in most universities is that offered by the previous European Erasmus, and the more recent Erasmus+, exchange framework. There is a high interest and uptake by students through this framework. The UoM maintains a healthy amount of “private” collaboration agreements with national and international institutions which, apart from fostering exchange of staff and pooling of expertise, also serve as fertile ground for the creation of joint programmes. Student effort is also mutually recognised in such agreements.

The UoM, has what is termed a “maturity clause” which waives formal entry requirements for persons above a certain age to register for a degree programme. Background, experience and skill-set adequacy and applicability would still need to be considered by the relevant admissions board at university or faculty level. The UoM offers various evening and part-time courses that mainly target persons already in active employment. Some undergraduate programmes are offered as part-time versions, and practically all postgraduate, full-time programmes have part-time equivalents.

Information management

All programmes are made available on-line through official university websites. Information would include programme structure and content, sometimes to the level of detail of topics, their description and assessment format. In most cases, changes to programme content can be published half a year prior to course commencement, however, entry requirement restrictions would need a longer notice period (typically two years) in consideration of potential students preparing for entry into university. Requirement relaxation can have immediate effect. Student and staff data is protected by the Malta Data Protection Act [6].

References

- [1] University of Malta Regulations, www.um.edu.mt/registrar/regulations
- [2] The Malta National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE), www.ncfhe.org.mt
- [3] Wikipedia entry, www.wikipedia.com
- [4] University of Malta official website, www.um.edu.mt
- [5] Foundation for Information Technology Accessibility (FITA), Malta, www.fitamalta.eu
- [6] Malta Data Protection Act, Chapter 440, 15th July 2003, amended in 2008, and further defined through Legal Notice 426 of 2012.