



This review was conducted in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

# International Quality Review

Mid-Cycle Review

University of Gibraltar

**Review Report**  
September 2024

## Contents

<b>About this mid-cycle review .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Outcome of the mid-cycle review .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Summary of IQR outcomes .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Overview of the institution.....	1
Good practice identified by the 2022 International Quality Review .....	2
Recommendations of the 2022 International Quality Review .....	2
<b>Changes since the last IQR review visit .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Findings from the mid-cycle review analysis.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Development of quality assurance and enhancement procedures.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Findings from the observations of facilities and learning resources .....</b>	<b>8</b>

## About this mid-cycle review

This is a report of a mid-cycle review conducted by The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at University of Gibraltar. The mid-cycle review consisted of a desk-based analysis of documentary evidence and a site visit to review learning resources and facilities and to meet with staff and students. The review was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Jeremy Bradshaw
- Dr Yue Song.

The full International Quality Review (IQR) in January 2022, resulted in a [published report](#). The QAA review team concluded that University of Gibraltar met all 10 standards set out in Part 1 of the [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#). The team identified four features of good practice and made five recommendations.

This mid-cycle review evaluates progress against the key actions since the IQR and considers any significant changes that may impact on the ability of University of Gibraltar to continue to meet the ESG standards.

The mid-cycle review usually takes the form of a desk-based review. In the instance of the January 2022 IQR, the review visit had to take place virtually due to the Covid pandemic restrictions. This mid-cycle review has therefore included an onsite visit and review of learning resource provision.

## Outcome of the mid-cycle review

From the evidence provided, the review team concludes that University of Gibraltar is making **satisfactory progress** since the January 2022 International Quality Review and that the period of validity of the IQR should be extended to January 2027.

## Summary of IQR outcomes

### Overview of the institution

University of Gibraltar (The University) was founded in 2015 by Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar through the University of Gibraltar Act 2015. The University's aim is to deliver high-quality teaching, learning and research in order to contribute to the sustainable development of Gibraltar and to the Mediterranean region.

There are currently 298 students enrolled at the University, of whom 50% are undergraduate, 41% postgraduate and 9% PhD. The majority of students are from Gibraltar with 44% of the student body comprising EU/international students. There are currently 61 academic and non-academic staff employed at the University, and a further 12 contracted sessional lecturers.

As per the University of Gibraltar Act 2015, the management, administration and control of the property, revenue and business of the University fall under the auspices of its Board of Governors. The Academic Board, formally established through the University of Gibraltar (Academic Board) Regulations 2018, is the University's highest academic body with overall responsibility for academic decisions and academic governance. The Academic Board is the only body within the University that has the authority to award academic credit and qualifications. The Vice-Chancellor is the chair of the Academic Board. The Vice-Chancellor

is also CEO of the University and is responsible for the overall management of the University, supported by the Executive Committee and senior operational staff and directors.

The University's overarching mission is to respond to societal needs as well as shape personal and professional futures through the pursuit of education, training and research. The University of Gibraltar's strategic plan for 2023-2026, centres on "Consolidating Excellence" and outlines six key priorities:

- Curriculum Portfolio: Incrementally grow mission-aligned quality educational provision.
- Research and Research Education: Produce research that builds local capacity, can attract funding and is recognised internationally for its significance and impact.
- Learning and Teaching: Provide an excellent learning and teaching experience that supports students to optimise their academic success.
- Facilities and Resources: Provide effective learning and teaching facilities and resources.
- Student and Staff Experience: Provide an excellent student experience and be a preferred place for staff to work.
- Corporate Governance: Operate under good governance and management frameworks to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of the University.

### **Good practice identified by the 2022 International Quality Review**

- The quality handbook provides a robust level of architecture for the management of quality and standards at university level, and which includes extensive externality (ESG Standard 1.1).
- Clear procedures of how the outcomes and actions from Module Evaluation and Enhancement Reports (MEERs) and Programme Review and Enhancement Plans (PREPs) are carried forward to the next time a module or programme is delivered (ESG Standard 1.3).
- The close-working partnerships between the University and other Gibraltar-based organisations, given the particular challenges with operating in such a densely populated and geographically restricted space, such as the Gibraltar peninsula (ESG Standard 1.6).
- The effective use of externality throughout its committee structure and embedded within its quality assurance processes (ESG Standard 1.9).

### **Recommendations of the 2022 International Quality Review**

- Summarise the outcomes of due diligence of partnership arrangements in a documentary report which follows the sequence listed in paragraph 60 of the Academic Partnerships and Collaborative Provision [238 QH-H1]. This would then enable the University to present a consolidated report for consideration and approval by the Contracts & Agreement Committee and ultimately the Board of Governors (ESG Standard 1.1).
- Set up personal tutoring procedures in a more formal and structured manner (ESG Standard 1.3).
- Build a time allocation into its workforce model for personal tutoring and provide training for staff on conducting their tutor roles (ESG Standard 1.5).
- Develop an overarching strategy to underpin its approach to students' employability and professional skills development (ESG Standard 1.6).
- Formalise the process currently in place to ensure the ongoing currency and accuracy of its public information (ESG Standard 1.8).

## Changes since the last IQR review visit

1 The University has not acquired any new buildings since the 2022 IQR review visit. However, refurbishment of the existing building has continued since December 2020 to convert it from its former function as a primary school. This refurbishment has included the demolition and reconstruction of some sections of the building. The University reported that the refurbishment is progressing in time and in line with the University's requirements for increased space. It is expected that most of the building will be in active use by the start of the 2024/25 academic year, increasing classroom availability by an additional six teaching spaces, taking the total from 11 teaching spaces originally (including one Nursing Simulation Suite and one Laboratory) to an estimated 17 teaching spaces. Further developments are planned, including an extension to the present fire simulator and in due course the addition of a maritime bridge simulation unit.

2 The review team conducted a site visit during the mid-cycle review, including the observation of new teaching spaces and refurbishments. Students and staff at the meeting confirmed that the facilities and resources are sufficient and appropriate for their learning and teaching.

3 Changes to the Executive and Senior Management Team have included personnel changes; the Director for Professional Development and the Director of Information and Communication Technology have left the University. Their replacements have the job title as 'Head of Department' and are members of the Senior Management Team, but are not part of the Executive Team, which now comprises the Vice-Chancellor, the Registrar, the Chief Finance and Operations Officer and the Director for Academic Programmes and Research. Senior staff reported at the meeting that the changes in job title was to clarify and reflect actual roles and responsibilities.

4 Four former managers have now become senior managers. These are the Facilities Manager, the ICT Manager, the Recruitment and Student Experience Manager and the Academic Quality and Learning Manager. A new Head of School of Maritime Science was appointed in August 2024. A Human Resources manager has been appointed.

5 Ten new programmes of study have been introduced, bringing the total to 18. All the new programmes are delivered by existing schools and align with existing fields of study and the University strategic plan. These programmes are:

- BSc (Hons) Computing and Entrepreneurship (launched September 2022)
- BSc (Hons) Mental Health Nursing (launching in September 2024)
- Level 4 Teaching Certificate (launched in January 2024)
- MBA in Gaming (launched in September 2023)
- Master of Education (launched in September 2022).
- MSc Environmental Science and Climate Change (launched in September 2023)
- MSc Contemporary Healthcare (launched in September 2023).
- MSc Advanced Healthcare Practice (launching in September 2024)
- MSc in Sustainable Maritime Operations (launching in January 2025)
- Postgraduate Open Degree (approved in August 2024).

6 A total of six programmes have been withdrawn, including the BA and Integrated Master in Sport Management, and the online programmes (the Executive MBA, the MSc in Sport and Exercise Nutrition, and the MSc in Applied Clinical Psychology) which were delivered online through a partnership with Learna which attracted too few students to be viable and did not align with the University's focus on face-to-face delivery.

7 The number of students at the University has increased substantially since the IQR visit, growing from 188 to 298. This is in agreement with the Strategic Plan where the strongest growth of intake has been for undergraduate programmes.

8 The increase in student numbers has been mirrored by an increase in staff to a total of 61 academic and non-academic staff employed at the University, and a further 12 contracted sessional lecturers. The University has a structured approach in reviewing staffing resources. More staff are currently being recruited to meet the increasing number of students/programmes' needs.

9 A Learning and Teaching Committee has been established around the time of the 2022 IQR visit. The University claims it has embedded well within the University governance structure. The minutes provided show effective flow of information, scrutiny of papers, and decision making.

## Findings from the mid-cycle review analysis

10 The QAA review team identified four features of good practice at the University of Gibraltar, which are further developed by the University as follows:

11 **Good Practice 1:** *The quality handbook provides a robust level of architecture for the management of quality and standards at university level, and which includes extensive externality (ESG Standard 1.1).*

12 As required under the University policy of reviewing key documents every three years, the Quality Office began a review of all 25 Codes of the Quality Handbook in 2023 (<https://www.uniqib.edu.gi/quality-handbook/>). Key and secondary stakeholders were identified for each Quality Code and asked to review the regulations and their application. Meetings were held with each stakeholder group to discuss the requested changes and revised Codes were drafted. There were no major changes to the handbook, but a large number of adjustments were required due to changes in job title, roles and responsibilities, and growing experience within the young institution. The new Codes were then approved through the Quality Enhancement Committee and the Academic Quality and Standards Committee.

13 **Good Practice 2:** *Clear procedures of how the outcomes and actions from Module Evaluation and Enhancement Reports (MEERs) and Programme Review and Enhancement Plans (PREPs) are carried forward to the next time a module or programme is delivered (ESG Standard 1.3).*

Periodic review of all modules and programmes continues through MEER, PREP, Programme Mid-Cycle Review and Programme Periodic Review. Around the time of the IQR visit, the first two programmes were undergoing Programme Mid-Cycle Review, these being the Bachelor of Business Administration and the MSc in Marine Science and Climate Change. The first Programme Periodic Reviews are currently underway for the same two programmes. These processes include a high level of externality.

14 **Good Practice 3:** *The close-working partnerships between the University and other Gibraltar-based organisations, given the particular challenges with operating in such a densely populated and geographically restricted space, such as the Gibraltar peninsula (ESG Standard 1.6).*

15 The reviewers heard of many examples of continuing close cooperation between the University and Government departments, industry and other bodies in Gibraltar. It is clear that these partnerships bring benefits to the University and its students.

16 **Good Practice 4:** *The effective use of externality throughout its committee structure and embedded within its quality assurance processes (ESG Standard 1.9).*

17 The effective use of externality continues. Quality panels for programme periodic reviews include a high proportion of members external to the programme. The University's proactive engagement with external bodies has resulted in the creation of new programmes of study and has ensured that existing programmes remain up-to-date with current industry practice.

18 The QAA review team made five recommendations to the University. Each of them has been addressed effectively, as follows:

19 **Recommendation 1:** *Summarise the outcomes of due diligence of partnership arrangements in a documentary report which follows the sequence listed in paragraph 60 of the Academic Partnerships and Collaborative Provision. This would then enable the University to present a consolidated report for consideration and approval by the Contracts & Agreement Committee and ultimately the Board of Governors (ESG Standard 1.1).*

20 A formal review of paragraph 60 of the Academic Partnerships and Collaborative Provision Code was undertaken in May 2022. It concluded that no changes were necessary. However, a Due Diligence Report template was developed and approved by Academic Board by Contracts and Agreements Committee in May 2022. There have been no new academic partnerships since this date, so it has not yet been used.

21 **Recommendation 2:** *Set up personal tutoring procedures in a more formal and structured manner (ESG Standard 1.3).*

22 The IQR Action Plan records that, by November 2022, a policy was being developed. This is confirmed by the minutes of the meeting of Learning and Teaching Committee, held in November 2022, which report that a personal tutoring framework had been prepared in consultation with Heads of School and the Director of Academic Programmes and Research. The minutes note that particular attention had been given to mapping the framework to the ways pastoral support could be delivered across all programmes. The framework was subsequently reformatted as the Student Pastoral Support Policy and formally approved by the Executive Team.

23 The policy clarifies that it is not deemed necessary to assign students to a specific pastoral tutor due to the small size of current cohorts. The Head of School for each programme is expected to communicate clearly to students how they are able to contact any of the teaching team for pastoral support purposes. They are responsible for keeping a log of pastoral meetings, and for signposting students to the Student Experience Officer when additional support may be required.

24 Students confirmed there are no pastoral tutors, but they are able to go to any of their teachers for support and that they are also able to contact the Student Experience Officer directly. Academic staff operate an open-door policy.

25 **Recommendation 3:** *Build a time allocation into its workforce model for personal tutoring and provide training for staff on conducting their tutor roles (ESG Standard 1.5).*

26 In order to address this recommendation, the IQR Action Plan identified two actions. Firstly, by September 2022, the workforce policy would be amended to include a time allocation for lecturers specifically to include one-to-one student support. Secondly, by March 2023, training or specific development opportunities for staff in one-to-one mentoring or tutoring of students would be developed and delivered.

The IQR Action Plan reports that no changes to the Workforce Policy were deemed necessary as it already included an allowance for academic staff time spent on personal tutoring. The Learning and Teaching Committee, at its meeting in March 2023, agreed that a staff training session would be arranged before the start of the next academic year. The training session was held as scheduled. It was aimed at academic staff, who were all expected to attend. Attendance registers show that the majority of staff attended. The training was offered again in 2024 and has now been established as an annual continuing professional education event that covers different topics and share good practices across the schools.

27 **Recommendation 4:** *Develop an overarching strategy to underpin its approach to student employability and professional skills development (ESG Standard 1.6).*

28 The IQR Action Plan identified that such a strategy would be developed by March 2023. In September 2022, Learning and Teaching Committee received a draft of a Student Employability Policy designed to underpin the development of employability skills. The policy was approved by the University Executive Team in February 2023. It is aimed at undergraduate students; the majority of master's students at the university study part-time and are already in employment. Graduate data show that employability has risen from 92 percent in 2023 to 94 percent in 2024.

29 **Recommendation 5:** *Formalise the process currently in place to ensure the ongoing currency and accuracy of its public information (ESG Standard 1.8).*

30 The IQR Action Plan records that a public information currency policy that formalises the current procedures for keeping public information up to date would be developed by March 2023. A copy of the Policy, as approved by University Executive in February 2023, was provided. Staff confirmed that the processes for ensuring currency and accuracy of public information had been formalised and strengthened. There is now a checklist for the approval of publication any information, published information is regularly reviewed and redundant webpages are removed.

31 Students confirmed that the information available to them before enrolment was comprehensive and accessible, and that it had subsequently proved to be accurate. Students also reported that they had access to all the information they required through the Canvas VLE and a phone app.

32 In addition to the five formal recommendations, the IQR Report included some advisable recommendations and in-text suggestions. Action taken to address each of these is provided in the IQR Action Plan.

33 **Recommendation 6 (advisable):** *The review team would advise the University to consider segregating the chairing responsibilities for both the Academic Board and Academic Quality and Standards Committee.*

34 Following a review of the chairing responsibility for the two committees and recognising that the advice was probably prompted by the risk of conflicts of interest, nevertheless, Academic Quality and Standards Committee strongly favoured continuation of the existing arrangement whereby the Vice Chancellor chairs both committees. The decision took note that the arrangement was working well, and that the majority of Academic Quality and Standards Committee members are externals and, as such, mitigated against possible conflicts of interest. It was agreed to review the situation in 2-3 years, when it may be timely to separate the chairs.

35 **Recommendation 7 (advisable):** *Discuss at QEC how the University can continue to encourage student participation in quality assurance.*



At its meeting in April 2022, Quality Enhancement Committee discussed how best to encourage student participation in quality assurance. The proposals included involving students in recruitment following the successful model used by Nursing and PGCE, involving students in the Board of Studies, seeking student opinion through small focus groups to discuss specific topics, explaining marking and engaging students in marking exercises, an annual “you said, we did” session as used with PhD students, and a Quality Assurance Office session during induction on how survey responses feed back into improvements. Senior staff confirmed that these proposals had been actioned. Focus groups have been introduced to replace some of the student surveys and the Senior Manager (Academic Quality and Learning) attends staff-student liaison committees and presents a session about quality assurance and the importance of surveys during student induction. The response rate for student surveys is currently better than 80 percent. There are student members of Academic Board and the Board of Governors. A Student Quality Pool has been formed, comprising students who have been recruited and trained to serve on quality assurance panels. Students told the reviewers that their voice was heard within the University and were able to provide examples of changes to modules brought about in response to student feedback.

**36 Recommendation 8 (advisable):** *The review team encourages the University to pay particular attention to ensuring students understand how their feedback is used to improve the student experience.*

37 Following discussion at the Learning and Teaching Committee and Quality Enhancement Committee in 2022, it was agreed that the Quality Assurance Office would run a session during student induction on how survey responses feed back into improvements. Such a session is now established as a regular part of the induction process.

38 The text of the IQR Report included the observations that “*Students met by the review team were however a little unclear of who their programme external was and where external examiner reports were located. As the external examiner reports are clearly located in Canvas we would suggest that the University review the communication methods on this topic with students.*” In response to this comment, the University reviewed ways to communicate external examiner details and reports to students at Quality Enhancement Committee. It was proposed that students should be made aware of the role of external examiner at induction, and that they should be notified via Canvas when external examiner reports are available for consultation. Students who met the reviewers were aware of the role of their external examiners and knew where to find their reports. Some of them had met their external examiners, confirming the University practice of arranging meetings with small groups of students during visits of each examiner to the University.

## **Development of quality assurance and enhancement procedures**

39 Since the IQR visit, there have been extensive developments in the policies and practice of quality assurance. Some of these have come in response to the rapid increase in student numbers. As described here and in the sections above, the enhancements include the development of new structures (such as the Learning and Teaching Committee), new policies, adapting existing practices to support growth and development and revision of the Quality Handbook.

40 New policies introduced since the IQR visit include an Attendance and Engagement Policy, together with three policies noted above, namely the Student Pastoral Support Policy, Student Employability Policy and Public Information Currency Policy. The University has also developed a University Guidance on the Use of Generative AI additional guidance for The Use of Generative AI in Assessments. The Declaration of Originality, which students need to

submit with their assessments, has also been updated to include a section on how they have used Generative AI.

The reviewers heard that dissemination of new and revised documents depends upon their nature. Staff will be informed by email, while high impact documents, such as those relating to generative AI, are accompanied by training sessions for all appropriate staff. The University is a small institution, with a corresponding small number of staff. This means that the majority of staff members affected by a new or revised document would typically be involved or consulted in the drafting process.

41 As evidence that the University's approach to quality assurance and enhancement, the Mid-Cycle Report points to its strong student performance and retention. In the 2022-2023 academic year, the average retention rate was 86 percent, the average progression rate was 84 percent, and the average completion rate was 86 percent. Many programmes had a completion rate of 100 percent. The University continues to observe high student satisfaction scores of over 90 percent.

## **Findings from the observations of facilities and learning resources**

42 The review visit provided an opportunity to view the physical facilities available at the University, including the classrooms, laboratories and other learning spaces, the library, cafeteria and social spaces. The campus tour also provided further opportunities to speak to staff and students about their experience at the University.

43 There are teaching rooms of varying size and layout. These include lecture theatres, seminar rooms and examination spaces. The reviewers saw a laboratory in the School of Marine and Environmental Science that is used by students and staff, and a clinical skills facility in the School of Health Sciences equipped with state-of-the-art simulators. Work is underway to extend the clinical training space by redeveloping a former school to construct a mock hospital with two wards and meeting rooms. A fire safety training facility allows for the staging of fire scenarios for practical training of cadets within a range of environments found onboard ships. In all cases, the facilities were purpose built, well maintained, and extensively stocked with high-quality equipment and instrumentation. The buildings were equipped with appropriate health and safety equipment and access to all levels was available via ramps or elevators.

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