



Reengagement Panel Report

Assessment of Capacity and Approval of QA Procedures

Part 1 Details of provider

1.1 Applicant Provider

Registered Business/Trading Name:	National College of Ireland Ltd / National College of Ireland
Address:	Mayor Square, IFSC, Dublin 1
Date of Application:	03 December 2018
Date of resubmission of application:	N/A
Date of evaluation:	13 March 2019
Date of site visit (if applicable):	13 March 2019
Date of recommendation to the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee:	13 June 2019

1.2 Profile of provider

The National College of Ireland (NCI) evolved from the National College of Industrial Relations. It has two schools: a School of Business and a School of Computing. It currently offers over 80 full-time and part-time programmes at levels 6-10 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The majority of the College's programmes are validated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). NCI, and the National College of Industrial Relations, has had a relationship with QQI, and its predecessor bodies, since the 1980s.

NCI also offers programmes awarded by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), and the Institute of Commercial Management (ICM). Several of its programmes are recognised by professional bodies including, *inter alia*, accountancy bodies, the Teaching Council, and the Psychological Society of Ireland. NCI's postgraduate awards in HRM are recognised by CIPD for membership. Programmes are delivered by a combination of full-time and part-time staff.



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NCI is partially funded via a core grant through the Higher Education Authority (HEA), and fees received for undergraduate full-time students under the free fees scheme. All other funding comes from labour market initiatives funded by the HEA (the College is one of the largest providers of programmes funded under the Springboard initiative), student fees from self-funded or employer-funded learners, and commercial income.

Enrolment for the academic year 2017/2018 was 5,000 learners. 4,400 of these were enrolled on programmes validated by QQI; in the previous academic year 1,700 learners received a QQI award. 48% of NCI learners are part-time, 26% are enrolled at Level 9, and a further 15% are enrolled on Higher Diploma programmes. The remaining learners (59%) are enrolled on Major undergraduate programmes and professionally focussed Special Purpose awards. This represents a notable strategic shift in learner profile for the College, which historically had 75% part-time learners. It has been achieved by introducing core business programmes at NFQ Level 9 and programmes in emerging ICT areas at NFQ Levels 8 and 9. As part of its internationalisation strategy, the College is active in India, Malaysia, China, Brazil and Africa. Over 80 nationalities are represented within its student body; the largest groups outside Ireland being from India, Poland, Brazil, China and Italy.

A core element of the mission of NCI is to widen access to education. In implementing this mission, it has maintained its links with its local community and with the further education and training sector. It has also sought to facilitate participation of all prospective learners through the provision of different modes of teaching and learning. In 2016, the College became the first institution, outside of the institutes of technology, to offer higher education apprenticeships.



Part 2 Panel Membership

Name	Role of panel member	Organisation
Professor David Croke, Director of Quality Enhancement	Chair	Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
Ms Janet Alleyne, Head of Quality Enhancement	International QA Expert	University of Ulster
Professor Brian Bowe, Head of Academic Affairs and Assistant Registrar	Teaching, Learning and Assessment Expert	Technological University Dublin
Mr Callaghan Commons, VP for Academic Affairs	Student Representative	Dublin City University Students' Union
Dr Kevin Marshall, Head of Education	Industry Representative	Microsoft Ireland
Mr Colin McLean, VP of Academic Affairs and Registrar	National QA Expert	Institute of Technology Sligo
Dr Trish O'Brien, Consultant	Independent Report Writer	O'BRIEN / Governance Design

Part 3 Findings of the Panel

3.1 Summary Findings

The Panel recommends to QQI that it approves the quality assurance procedures of the National College of Ireland (NCI). No mandatory changes have been identified. Some specific advices have been made.

The Panel was impressed with NCI's comprehensive quality assurance documentation, and the extent to which the team it met was comfortable and confident with the quality assurance system in place. The gap analysis conducted between the previous quality assurance procedures and the Core, Sector-Specific, and Topic-Specific QA Guidelines of QQI was thorough and collaborative. The Panel noted several matters of good practice that have been enabled by the QA documentation. These include the extent to which NCI takes account of stakeholders in programme development; its high-level of tailored supports for students from induction through to completion; its commitment to developing pedagogy that is responsive to student and industry demands; and its comprehensive monitoring.

3.2 Recommendation of the panel to Programmes and Awards Executive Committee of QQI



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	Tick <u>one</u> as appropriate
Approve the National College of Ireland's draft QA procedures	✓
Refuse approval of [the provider's – insert name] draft QA procedures with mandatory changes set out in Section 6.1 (If this recommendation is accepted by QQI, the provider may make a revised application within six months of the decision)	
Refuse to approve [the provider's – insert name] draft QA procedures	



Part 4 Evaluation of provider capacity

4.1 Legal and compliance requirements:

	Criteria	Yes/No/ Partially	Comments
4.1.1(a)	Criterion: <i>Is the applicant an established Legal Entity who has Education and/or Training as a Principal Function?</i>	Yes	NCI has provided a Certificate of Incorporation and Memorandum of Association confirming that it is a company limited by guarantee, with education and training as its principal function.
4.1.2(a)	Criterion: <i>Is the legal entity established in the European Union and does it have a substantial presence in Ireland?</i>	Yes	NCI was established as a legal entity in Ireland and is based in Dublin.
4.1.3(a)	Criterion: <i>Are any dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries clearly specified?</i>	Yes	All collaborations are agreed at programme validation and in accordance with the QQI Policy on Collaborative and Transnational Provision. A list of collaborative arrangements was included with the provider's application.
4.1.4(a)	Criterion: <i>Are any third-party relationships and partnerships compatible with the scope of access sought?</i>	Yes	No current agreements are operating outside of the scope sought.
4.1.5(a)	Criterion: <i>Are the applicable regulations and legislation complied with in all jurisdictions where it operates?</i>	Yes	The College's risk register requires a review of compliance with applicable legislation. In a collaborative context, regulations and legislation are captured in the templates for collaborative provision. While it follows garda vetting regulations, the Panel suggests that NCI should adopt a more universal approach to garda vetting.
4.1.6(a)	Criterion: <i>Is the applicant in good standing in the qualifications systems and education and training systems</i>	Yes	The College has confirmed that it is in good standing in the qualifications and education and training system in Ireland and abroad. The decision by QQI to



	<i>in any countries where it operates (or where its parents or subsidiaries operate) or enrolls learners, or where it has arrangements with awarding bodies, quality assurance agencies, qualifications authorities, ministries of education and training, professional bodies and regulators.</i>		devolve responsibility for aspects of its validation process to NCI is an illustration of this.
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Findings

The Panel is satisfied that NCI meets all the criteria specified under *Legal and compliance* requirements.

Specific advices:

While the College follows Garda vetting regulations, the Panel advises that NCI adopts a universal approach to garda vetting rather than focusing on those staff members likely to come into contact with younger students.

4.2 Resource, governance and structural requirements:

	Criteria	Yes/No/ Partially	Comments
4.2.1(a)	Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have a sufficient resource base and is it stable and in good financial standing?</i>	Yes	The Governing Body of the College agrees an annual budget in consultation with the functional heads and Deans of School. Its financial resources arise from a combination of public funding, student fees, and commercial income. The College's finances are subject to audit and found to be in good standing.
4.2.2(a)	Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have a reasonable business case for sustainable provision?</i>	Yes	The College has developed an academic strategy and is reviewing its provision and



			teaching and learning methodologies in this context.
4.2.3(a)	Criterion: <i>Are fit-for-purpose governance, management and decision-making structures in place?</i>	Yes	The College has a comprehensive governance and quality management system in place. Some specific advices have been made below to support this area.
4.2.4(a)	Criterion: <i>Are there arrangements in place for providing required information to QQI?</i>	Yes	NCI's quality assurance procedures reflect its agreed methods of providing information to QQI.

Findings

The Panel is satisfied that NCI meets all the criteria specified under *Resource, governance and structural* requirements.

4.3 Programme development and provision requirements:

	Criteria	Yes/No/Partially	Comments
4.3.1(a)	Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have experience and a track record in providing education and training programmes?</i>	Yes	The NCI, and formerly the National College of Industrial Relations, has a significant track record as an educational provider, and has had a relationship with QQI and its predecessor bodies since the 1980s.
4.3.2(a)	Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have a fit-for-purpose and stable complement of education and training staff?</i>	Yes	The College has full-time and part-time staff. It has strengthened its full-time school staffing structures and continues to evolve the supports it provides to its part-time staff.
4.3.3(a)	Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have the capacity to comply with the standard conditions for validation specified in Section 45(3) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012) (the Act)?</i>	Yes	The standard conditions for validation specified in the 2012 Act include co-operation with and assistance to QQI in the performances of its functions; the establishment of procedures for the



			fair and consistent assessment of learners; and provisions for the protection of enrolled learners. The Panel is satisfied that the applicant has the capacity to comply with these standard conditions.
4.3.4(a)	Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have the fit-for-purpose premises, facilities and resources to meet the requirements of the provision proposed in place?</i>	Yes	The College has sufficient premises, facilities and resources to meet the requirements of the provision proposed. It is also planning to further develop and evolve its premises and facilities.
4.3.5(a)	Criterion: <i>Are there access, transfer and progression arrangements that meet QQI's criteria for approval in place?</i>	Yes	The College has detailed procedures that support its ATP activities. This is a core part of the mission of NCI.
4.3.6(a)	Criterion: <i>Are structures and resources to underpin fair and consistent assessment of learners in place?</i>	Yes	The College's quality assurance documentation, infrastructure and implementation support fair and consistent assessment.
4.3.7(a)	Criterion: <i>Are arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners to meet the statutory obligations in place (where applicable)?</i>	Yes	NCI is a member of the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) protection for enrolled learners' scheme.

Findings

The Panel is satisfied that NCI meets all the criteria specified under *Programme development and provision* requirements.



4.4 Overall findings in respect of provider capacity to provide sustainable education and training

The Panel is satisfied that NCI has the capacity to provide sustainable education and training. It has an extensive track record in education and training and long-standing practice and supporting procedures to engage with QQI and to meet its requirements. The College has developed an academic strategy that will direct the academic choices it makes over the coming period and it appears to have the resources (human, financial and otherwise) to support those decisions. As detailed in this report, it has placed significant attention on both student access and student progression. It sees admission as widening participation, not only through access, but also through different modes of teaching and learning.

Part 5 Evaluation of draft QA Procedures submitted by the National College of Ireland (NCI)

The following is the panel's findings following evaluation of the National College of Ireland's quality assurance procedures against QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (April 2016) and Topic Specific QA Guidelines - Blended Learning and Apprenticeship. Sections 1-11 of the report follows the structure and referencing of the Core QA Guidelines.

1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

Panel Findings:

The corporate governance arrangements of NCI are captured in section 2.4 of its Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH). The heritage of the College is reflected in the make-up of its Governing Body (QAH, 2.4.2). It was established by the Jesuits and its original focus on industrial relations training brought industry and union representation. Student representation has been included in the Governing Body for over 20 years. Student representatives are provided with induction by the executive in the same manner as any new members of governance committees.

The Academic Council is populated by students and appointed staff; including associate (part-time) staff. It was not entirely clear from the Governing Body and Academic Council terms of reference (QAH, 2.6.1) where authority and approval lay for certain academic matters. The College confirmed its recognition that the Academic Council is the decision-making body for academic matters and has been delegated that responsibility by the Governing Body. The Academic Council updates the Governing Body on academic matters on a continuous basis.

The Panel queried the role and level of activity of the Academic Standards and Policy Committee



(QAH, 2.6.2). The College explained that it had reviewed the utility of this governance unit and considered that it could be stood down. On reflection it chose to retain it in order to keep evaluation high on the radar of the governance system and the College. The Committee now takes a holistic overview of the outputs of all evaluations that have taken place in the previous period. It also acts as a steering group for programmatic review and other substantial review activities.

NCI benchmarks its services through its services review processes, and its programmes through its validation procedures (monitoring of this is part of the Executive Group's terms of reference, QAH, 2.5.2.1). It uses national data produced by HEA to benchmark, for instance, the College's progression rates. The College maintains a risk register (QAH, 2.4.9.4.1) and provided examples to the Panel of the types of academic risks that it keeps under review in accordance with its risk procedures.

In addition to meeting QQI governance requirements, the College is obliged to have regard to the regulations of company law, the Charities Regulator, and to any additional governance requirements of corporate donors and public funders.

Specific Advices:

- Consider a process for election of faculty onto committee structures to ensure staff experience is reflected and utilised and to ensure representativeness of committee structures;
- Consider the potential benefits of involving the Students' Union in the training of class representatives;
- Review the terms of reference of the Academic Council to ensure that its ultimate authority in academic decision-making is reflected appropriately;
- In reviewing the effectiveness of the governance system, consider opportunities for rationalisation that may emerge;
- Ensure the governance system continues to keep the sustainability of quality assurance systems under review as the College grows and diversifies.



2 DOCUMENTED APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

Panel Findings:

It was clear to the Panel in its review of the College's QA documentation that NCI had taken the opportunity of re-engagement to document practice that had evolved but not yet been formally captured; such as its policies on learner attendance and engagement (QAH, 6.11) and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements (QAH, 9.6). This review of its documentation also provided a chance to integrate the QA procedures the College has developed in having regard to the apprenticeship and blended learning quality assurance guidelines published by QQI (Chapters 12 and 13).

The College documented and spoke of an inclusive process for the development of quality assurance policies and procedures (QAH, 2.10). It considers that its updated QA Manual reflects how the College has matured in its approach to QA and has tailored its quality assurance system to fit its context and requirements; it is informed rather than being led by other national and international systems. In this context of growing ownership of QA, the Quality Assurance and Statistical Services (QASS) Office can become an internal consultant and advisor to colleagues.

In its presentation for the website, and for submission to the Panel, the QA Manual has been divided into individual chapters with a view to assisting the reader. While understanding the necessity of this in the light of the comprehensive nature of the QA Manual, the Panel raised the potential risk of document control issues where multiple versions of the document co-exist. Overall, the Panel commended the clear presentation of the QA Manual and the continuous efforts by the College to ensure clear and comprehensive communication to staff and students on changes arising.

Specific Advices:

- Consider potential matters of document control arising from the presentation of selected sections of the QA Handbook for different audiences. In particular, any update made to the main text must be reflected in the reduced versions.



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3 PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Panel Findings:

The College is very active in programme development and its experience and expertise in this area has been acknowledged by QQI in its devolution of aspects of the validation process to the College. This enables NCI, within agreed parameters, to organise independent evaluations of its applications for programme validation, and to submit the resulting reports to QQI for review and decision. The College identifies its strength in this area as contributing to a dynamic and agile environment that can be responsive to learner and industry needs. Initial programme proposals are considered from both academic (Academic Operations Committee) and resource (Executive Board) perspectives. The components of a business plan are required to support the decision to develop a programme (Appendix 3.1 Programme Proposal Form); in line with the expectations of QQI's validation policies and criteria. In this regard, the College places a great deal of emphasis on stakeholder views and contributions in its programme development decisions. This good practice follows-through to the good practice identified by the Panel in the College's procedures for designing and aligning its module and programme learning outcomes (QAH, 3.2).

Access for NCI means widening participation but also enabling that participation by being flexible in the timing, location and delivery of its programmes. Its history of high participation rates of part-time learners and non-standard applicants has led to its development of comprehensive procedures (QAH, 6.2 to 6.13) to reflect its expertise in effectively managing the admission of these cohorts. The College has procedures to support the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) (QAH, 6.3) and utilises these most in the context of admission to Special Purpose awards; its undergraduate applicants have generally not sought advanced standing. NCI provides workshops for learners to provide them with an understanding of how they can demonstrate their prior learning. Applications for RPL are reviewed by an RPL group and then approved by the Programme Director.

The College monitors application levels to its programmes. If it doesn't have the necessary cohort within a month of the planned start date it will decide not to run the programme and will seek to support applicants in finding an alternative programme within the College or elsewhere. Once a programme has commenced, the College commits to teaching out all enrolled learners. NCI is a member of the HECA Protection for Enrolled Learners (PEL) scheme.

NCI places a significant emphasis on retention. Its focus on the first-year experience is further discussed under section 7 below: Supports for Learners. In addition to providing support to avoid drop out, the College scrutinises the circumstances of learners who have failed to progress, with a view to improving the success rate at first sittings of assessments. Mitigation and trends within the



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programme, for instance high failure rates in a module, are all considered. The outcomes of this process are benchmarked with HEA data on points of entry and non-progression and considered by the Examinations Board. Much of this analysis is undertaken as part of the annual review of NCI's programmes where all relevant data is gathered and analysed; including, module evaluations, student and graduate data, assessment outcomes, complaints, student feedback on preferences etc. Staff completing the Annual Monitoring Report Template (QAH, Appendix 3.7) source much of this data through the QASS. Where changes to a programme are proposed as a result of this exercise, they must be seen by the programme committee, the school committee and then approved by the Academic Council. If the assessment schedule requires amendment this goes to QQI. Other actions are captured via a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

The thorough annual review process put in place by the College contributes to the programmatic review process (QAH, 3.8) that it will undertake over the coming period for 38 of its programmes. These reviews will look at all aspects of the programmes, including the continued suitability of their learning outcomes. In this respect, the College will also seek to assure itself that the social conscience it wishes to engender in students remains visible in the programmes. Software has been used as a further enabler in this regard to prompt the representation of values in programmes and to help ensure that values move from rhetoric to implementation. The College anticipates that the programmatic review process will lead to a consolidation of its programmes and to the retirement of some of its smaller programmes.

The College has developed QA policies and procedures for the running of apprenticeships, which have been approved by QQI as part of the validation process. The College also wishes to expand its research activity and is increasing the number of research active staff and the number of PhD holders amongst its staff. The College has completed an outline Memorandum of Agreement with a university to award PhDs to students who will be enrolled with, and jointly supervised by, NCI and the university. It gave examples of how its ethics procedures have been implemented and the types of research areas that the Ethics Committee (QAH, 11.1.6.3) is most likely to want to interrogate. A supervisor is not allocated to a student until ethical approval has been confirmed. The Panel commended the College's efforts to support PhD activities and to enhance its profile through research awards.

Specific Advices:

- In the best interests of applicants, consider revising the point at which the College makes the decision to withdraw a programme (currently one month), and whether adequate market research is conducted in advance to minimise the need for such withdrawals;



- Consider automating the pre-population of the Annual Monitoring Report template to support programme teams in conducting the annual review and to create process efficiencies;
- Whilst the QA procedures for Programme Development, Validation and Evaluation are comprehensive, there may be future opportunities to further capture in this documentation the richness and added-value that was articulated to the Panel by NCI staff of some of these processes; including programme review.

4 STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Panel Findings:

Chapter 8 of NCI's QA Handbook details its policies and procedures on Staff Recruitment and Development. The Panel noted the clarity in the College's recruitment statement and the connection made with the values and strategy of the organisation (QAH, 8.1).

The College has a reliance on part-time staff, many of whom it has retained for several years. As influencing factors, it noted the general buoyancy of the current employment market and the high involvement of the College in the delivery of programmes funded by Springboard, which is leading to part-time staff contracts. Acquiring necessary work permits for full-time employment has also proved difficult for some staff. NCI is, however, also increasing its full-time staff base; particularly for its post-graduate programmes. Full-time positions are filled by applicants holding a PhD. It has also strengthened its full-time staff structure at school level. Each school now has a Dean and two vice-Deans.

The combination of full and part-time staff presents challenges in ensuring that communication is timely and effective, and in securing consistent engagement in developing QA and teaching and learning practices. The College has committed to providing comprehensive initial and continuous professional development supports in different formats and within the context of a staff competency framework (the application of this framework to assessment is discussed further in section 6). Tailored induction is provided by the College (QAH, 8.2). It uses videos to provide an early introduction to key information for new recruits and to provide 'just-in-time' supports for all staff that can be accessed via Moodle, as and when required. Take-up on professional development initiatives supporting the staff competency framework is tracked on Moodle. This is all part of the aim of the College to make professional development part of its culture and a pursuit that is valued by staff and understood as being integral and not additional to fulfilling their responsibilities. Part



of this value proposition is to encourage and promote innovation through CPD and by investing in teaching, learning and assessment interventions (QAH, 5.4).

Staff turnover is less than 10% of all NCI staff per annum. The College reported feedback from academic staff that the level of supports in place encourages them to remain. The College explained that it places emphasis on maintaining collegial relationships with former staff as part of wider higher education cooperation.

5 TEACHING AND LEARNING

Panel Findings:

NCI has developed its academic strategy and is reviewing its teaching and learning in that context. The College explained to the Panel how teaching and learning methodologies are designed to support a given programme or type of programme (QAH, 5.1). In this regard the clear commitment of the College to developing pedagogy that is related and responsive to its learner body was commended by the Panel. The introduction by the College of a higher education apprenticeship programme is one such example. The College built on its extensive work placement experience to inform its learning agreement between the apprentice, employer and the College (QAH, Ch.12, 2.9). Its usage of a portfolio to collect and demonstrate evidence of learning (discussed in Section 6 below) has been a significant feature of this tailored approach; the College is also looking at potential opportunities for developing a blended learning approach to make the programme more accessible nationally. Four out of five of its business undergraduate degrees include a work placement. This has contributed to, and supported, the College's maintenance of strong connections with industry, which is in turn informing its approach to teaching and learning. It also invites guest lecturers to keep students and the College abreast of sectoral trends.

NCI has augmented its quality assurance policies and procedures to align with QQI's guidelines on blended learning (QAH, Chapter 13) and intends developing further its blended and online teaching and learning methodologies. It is looking carefully also at the physical environment of the campus and on how it can enhance the teaching and learning experience of students by supporting contemporary requirements of collaborative learning. In these ways, it is preparing for the future of teaching, learning and assessment, which it perceives will include increased personalised learning and the further intersection of teaching and learning with technology.



6 ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS

Panel Findings:

Chapter 4 of the QA Handbook is dedicated to all aspects of the planning, quality assurance, regulation and security of assessment. The College explained aspects of its assessment regulations for the Panel, including the circumstances in which pass by compensation is possible (QAH, 4.11.4). Standardisation meetings take place to review and analyse assessment marks (QAH, 4.23.6) and all programmes in the College employ a first and sample second marking process (QAH, 4.10). To date, it has not employed psychometrics as a means of further ensuring standards across repeated assessments.

NCI is aware of the danger of over-assessment within a semesterised structure and is keeping this under review. One of its strategies in this regard, is to be more creative in how it enables learners to demonstrate their achievement of programme learning outcomes. Assessment competence is also one of the areas that the College has included in its competence framework for staff (discussed in section 4 above). In doing so, it was reported that assessment as a technical competence has been more widely recognised. As part of this increased focus, the importance of fully aligning assessment with learning outcomes and the implications of identifying too many learning outcomes in the module design, are also being highlighted.

Overall the College is seeking to enable innovation and increased student involvement in assessment, within the parameters of its agreed QA procedures, and subject to rigorous monitoring and review.

Specific Advices:

- Consider the value of psychometrics to enhance evidence of the reliability of assessment, particularly in the context of increased online assessment.

7 SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS

Panel Findings:

As noted previously, the College is seeking to motivate learners from the beginning of their programme to increase the likelihood of successful participation. It harnesses its student support services to contribute to that objective. It provides targeted supports to improve students'



mathematical ability, problem solving and computing skills (QAH, 7.8) and has extended these efforts by becoming a partner in a European Council project aimed at improving STEM education and pedagogies in programming and mathematics. The College also provides extensive careers supports for students (QAH, 7.11) and, again as part of their early motivation, encourages students to consider employment options early on in their programmes.

In addition to providing feedback, the College's class representative system (QAH, 7.16) is used to assist in communicating services available to all students. The breadth of services provided is tailored to cater for the diversity of students and the different means through which they engage with their learning and with the College.

As part of making the physical environment more conducive to contemporary learning, the College is augmenting its library facilities - which are operating at maximum capacity - with rooms set aside for study coming up to examinations. Quiet spaces are also becoming available within the building as are team working environments and developments in the available IT infrastructure (e.g., power units, push wireless, and whiteboard points). A further evolution in student services is the increasing emphasis placed by the College on the availability of services online, which are described throughout Chapter 7 of the QA Handbook.

The College acknowledged that whilst it had good foundations for the recruitment of additional international learners – language and other supports have been in place for some time – it has had to scale up those supports (QAH, 7.12). It noted that its process for anticipating international student numbers has helped it to plan for meeting those support needs.

The College is required to maintain attendance records in some student circumstances; in others, it reviews attendance as an early warning indicator (QAH, 6.11). Based on attendance information it seeks to engage with students to establish if interventions are required to support them in their studies. It also provides academic assistance, including reasonable accommodations and alternative assessment arrangements, through the Learning and Disability Support Service. The Panel noted and commended the detailed procedures included in the QA Handbook to support these provisions (QAH, 7.2).

8 INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

Panel Findings:

The College provided examples to the Panel of how it is increasingly using information technology



to support quality assurance and the provision of quality services; including for more effective examination scheduling and for curriculum updates. The Panel considered that the College's various data management systems (QAH, table 9-1) could be better designed to collectively harness information at an institutional level, and better support its QA systems.

In terms of data security, the College has introduced policies and procedures to align its practice with GDPR (QAH, 9.6) and has developed document retention and management schedules. It has provided training and is moving to a single platform for document storage. The College described the change to GDPR as representing a huge education issue for all staff and as being an area in which mistakes serve to highlight how easily data breaches can occur without proper security and awareness. It was noted that more connected IT systems would also support the management and security of data.

Specific Advices:

- Continue to evolve institutional management data to fully support QA and seek opportunities to leverage in-house ICT expertise in doing so. The establishment of a Data Strategy Committee might assist in gaining support within the College for this approach;
- Continue to develop and progress policies and practices that will meet the College's GDPR obligations.

9 PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION**Panel Findings:**

As noted previously, the College is increasingly using its online systems to make information available to its learners and its student support policies are advanced in that regard.

NCI's quality assurance policies and procedures and reports arising from quality processes are all published on its website as required by QQI policy and with its own quality assurance expectations (QAH, 10.5). The College also provides comprehensive programme information on its website. This covers *inter alia* the award to which a programme leads and its level on the NFQ, comprehensive module descriptors, and professional recognition details.

**10 OTHER PARTIES INVOLVED IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING (incl. Apprenticeships)*****Panel Findings:***

As noted in section 3 above (Programmes of Education and Training), the College has developed learning agreements with industry and learners to support the operation of apprenticeships and to describe how collaboration between employers and the College is expected to take place in the interests of learners. The supporting procedures are described in some detail in its apprenticeship QA procedures (Chapter 12).

Any off-site provision for which NCI is responsible for quality assurance has been agreed in advance with QQI. The procedures for engaging in collaborative arrangements are fully documented (QAH,3.6); they include an emphasis on strategic and risk assessment (QAH, 3.6.1-3.6.2) as part of advance due diligence.

The College is in the process of agreeing a joint working relationship with a university for Level 10 research qualifications. In this case the university would make the award and NCI would be obliged to have regard to its quality assurance procedures. The College is in the process of considering how these requirements would be accommodated in its QA Handbook.

In the light of the number of relationships NCI has with partners and collaborators, which are reliant on a consistent understanding of quality assurance, the Panel considered that some further compartmentalisation of relevant procedures for these partners may be beneficial.

Specific Advices:

- Extract the QA policies and procedures on collaborative programme development into its own section of the QA Handbook;
- Consider developing a guide to the QA Handbook for collaborators.

11 SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW***Panel Findings:***

The College utilises the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE). However, while the student population taking Major awards in the College is increasing, it is still too small to be able to generalise the feedback gathered to the diverse mix of students and programmes in NCI. Module, programme, and class representative feedback are therefore also required to provide a more



complete picture. Themes and trends arising from student survey data are extracted and provided to the programme team for review and action. The College has also established a Student Engagement Working Group to help to close the loop of communication back to students.

The College's class representative system was reported as being one of the most effective routes through which issues are identified. Class reps are appointed quickly and trained at the outset of their programme. Two class representatives attend and provide feedback at the Programme Committee.

As noted previously, the College is about to embark on a very significant project to review 38 of its programmes. This process will be informed by the comprehensive annual reviews of programmes that have been undertaken. Service reviews are also planned, including of the international office. In addition, the College has recently commissioned a review of the administration of its schools. As the maturity of the College's quality assurance systems grows, it hopes to enter a new stage of evaluation and review, which provides more time to engage in quality as institutional research, and to further examine measures of quality effectiveness.

Specific Advices:

- The effectiveness of the College's evaluation activities could be enhanced by live quality action plans, which are addressed to the appropriate level at which actions can be taken (i.e., the Programme Committee), and which feed into a strategic Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) at College level.

Evaluation of draft QA Procedures - Overall panel findings

The Panel recommends to QQI that it approves the quality assurance procedures of the National College of Ireland (NCI). No mandatory changes have been identified. Some specific advices have been made.

The Panel was impressed with NCI's comprehensive quality assurance documentation, and the extent to which the team it met was comfortable and confident with the quality assurance system in place. The gap analysis conducted between the previous quality assurance procedures and the Core, Sector-Specific, and Topic-Specific QA Guidelines of QQI was thorough and collaborative. The Panel noted several matters of good practice that have been enabled by the QA documentation. These include the extent to which NCI takes account of stakeholders in programme development; its high-level of tailored supports for students from induction through to completion; its commitment to developing pedagogy that is responsive to student and industry demands; and its comprehensive monitoring.



Part 6 Mandatory Changes to QA Procedures and Specific Advice

6.1 Mandatory Changes

- | |
|---------|
| 1. None |
|---------|

6.2 Specific Advices

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. While the College follows Garda vetting regulations, the Panel advises that NCI adopts a universal approach to garda vetting rather than focusing on those staff members likely to come into contact with younger students.2. Consider a process for election of faculty onto committee structures to ensure staff experience is reflected and utilised and to ensure representativeness of committee structures;3. Consider the potential benefits of involving the Students' Union in the training of class representatives;4. Review the terms of reference of the Academic Council to ensure that its ultimate authority in academic decision-making is reflected appropriately;5. In reviewing the effectiveness of the governance system, consider opportunities for rationalisation that may emerge;6. Ensure the governance system continues to keep the sustainability of quality assurance systems under review as the College grows and diversifies;7. Consider potential matters of document control arising from the presentation of the College's QA Handbook in different formats;8. In the best interests of applicants, consider revising the point at which the College makes the decision to withdraw a programme (currently one month), and whether adequate market research is conducted in advance to minimise the need for such withdrawals;9. Consider automating the pre-population of the Annual Monitoring Report template to support programme teams in conducting the annual review and to create process efficiencies;10. Whilst the QA procedures for Programme Development, Validation and Evaluation are comprehensive, there may be future opportunities to further capture in this documentation the richness and added-value that was articulated to the Panel by NCI staff of some of these processes, including programme review;11. Consider the value of psychometrics to enhance evidence of the reliability of assessment, particularly in the context of increased online assessment;12. Continue to evolve institutional management data to fully support QA and seek opportunities to leverage in-house ICT expertise in doing so. The establishment of a Data Strategy Committee might assist in gaining support within the College for this approach; |
|--|



13. Continue to develop and progress policies and practices that will meet the College’s GDPR obligations;
14. Extract the QA policies and procedures on collaborative programme development into its own section of the QA Handbook;
15. Consider developing a guide to the QA Handbook for collaborators;
16. The effectiveness of the College’s evaluation activities could be enhanced by live quality action plans, which are addressed to the appropriate level at which actions can be taken (i.e., the Programme Committee), and feed into a strategic Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) at College level.

Part 7 Proposed Approved Scope of Provision for this provider

NFQ Level(s) – min and max	Award Class(es)	Discipline areas
NFQ Levels 6 to 10*	Major, Minor and Special-Purpose	Business, Computing, Psychology (not clinical), Education (not initial teacher education)

*There are 2 learners enrolled on a QQI validated PhD programme for which there is no longer an intake.



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Part 8 Approval by Chair of the Panel

This report of the panel is approved and submitted to QQI for its decision on the approval of the draft Quality Assurance Procedures of the National College of Ireland (NCI):

Name: David T. Croke

Date: 08 April 2019



Annexe 1: Documentation provided to the Panel in the course of the Evaluation

- Re-engagement Application, including:
 - The completed application form
 - Company information
 - Collaborative Agreement Templates
 - Financial Viability information
- The NCI QA Handbook
- QQI relevant documentation and agreements with NCI
- Additional information was also provided to the Panel by NCI, including on:
 - Governance roles and responsibilities
 - Staff roles and responsibilities
 - Enrolment and progression data
 - QAES Action Plan updates

Annexe 2: Provider staff met in the course of the Evaluation

*Dr. Deirdre Stritch (Approval and Monitoring Manager) and Michelle Gallagher (QQI Awards) from QQI attended the site visit as observers.

Name	Role/Position
Ms Gina Quin	President
Ms Sinéad O’Sullivan	Director of QA & Statistical Services
Prof Jimmy Hill	Vice President Academic Affairs & Research
Mr John McGarrigle	Registrar
Dr David McCarthy	Quality Officer

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Mr Donnchadh Ó Madagáin	Director of Finance
Ms Ann Noonan	Director of HR
Dr Colette Darcy	Dean of School of Business
Dr Pramod Pathak	Dean of School of Computing
Mr Richard Barry	Director of International Development
Dr Danielle McCartan-Quinn	Vice Dean Undergraduate & Programme Director, School of Business
Dr Vivienne Byers	Vice Dean Postgraduate & Programme Director, School of Business
Dr Paul Stynes	Vice Dean Undergraduate, School of Computing
Prof Christos Grecos	Vice Dean Postgraduate, School of Computing
Dr Leo Casey	Director of Teaching & Learning
Mr Jonathan Brittain	Programme Director & Apprenticeship Manager
Dr Yvonne Emmett	Programme Director & Lecturer
Mr Alex Courtney	Programme Co-Ordinator, School of Computing
Ms Lillian Dorst	Programme Co-Ordinator, School of Business
Ms Siobhan Mockler	Work placement Co-Ordinator
Mr Michael Bradford	Programme Director & Lecturer
Dr Horacio Gonzalez-Velez	Programme Director, Head Cloud Competency Centre
Dr Louise Maguire	Programme Director & Lecturer
Mr Sam Cogan	Computer Support Tutor
Ms Jane Liu	Academic Partnerships Manager
Mr Robert Ward	Director of Marketing



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Ms Mary Buckley	Librarian
Ms Niamh McAuley	Director of Student Services
Ms Geraldine Minogue	IT Manager
Ms Sarah Duignan	Admissions Officer
Ms Sinéad Kavanagh	Examinations Officer
Ms Sheila Mahon	International Supports
Ms Catherine Elliot	Learning Support
Ms Karen Mooney	Disability & Inclusion Office
Mr Jonathan Lambert	Maths Support
Mr Deryck Tormey	Student Experience Officer
Mr Sean McMahon	Outgoing President NCISU

Appendix: Provider response to the Reengagement Panel Report

NCI Response to the Re-Engagement Panel Report

NCI welcomes the report of the Panel and is particularly pleased that the Panel has acknowledged the College's strengths in the provision of a high-level of tailored supports for students from induction through to completion; our commitment to developing pedagogy that is responsive to student and industry demands; and the degree to which our staff demonstrated their confidence with the quality assurance system in place during the site visit. The College also appreciates the Panel's acknowledgement of our intention to further support PhD research activities and to enhance our profile through research awards.

Given the breadth of NCI's provision and scope, we are also pleased that the panel has commended the clear presentation of the Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) and in accordance with the recommendation of the panel, the College will continue to refine its contents and presentation as well as ensure that it is version controlled in all of its iterations. This positive external evaluation of NCI's Quality Assurance & Enhancement System (QAES) at this juncture in the College's development provides a firm platform for the QAES to be used as a live resource for its stakeholders and to be further refined and enhanced as the College implements its new academic strategy.

We sincerely thank the members of the Panel for their recommendations which are welcomed without reservation. The constructive and collegial nature of the engagement of the Panel with us during the meeting provided additional value to the process. NCI's responses to the specific recommendations provided by the Panel are outlined below.

1. *While the College follows Garda vetting regulations, the Panel advises that NCI adopts a universal approach to Garda vetting rather than focusing on those staff members likely to come into contact with younger students.*

We note the Panel's advice and will explore the available options. The safety and wellbeing of our learners and staff are central to the values of NCI. The College's policy is that those who are teaching on full-time programmes and involved with minors and vulnerable adults are Garda vetted, i.e. all full-time staff of the College. This policy was developed according to the advice of An Garda Síochána, who only vet those who will definitely come into contact with minors and vulnerable adults as part of their job rather than those who potentially might do so. NCI will review this policy in light of the Panel's recommendation and liaise with An Garda Síochána to ensure it is in adherence with statutory regulations and sectoral standards of best practice.

2. *Consider a process for election of faculty onto committee structures to ensure staff experience is reflected and utilised and to ensure representativeness of committee structures.*

We recognise that the size of the College has previously impacted on the design of the committee structures and their ability to accommodate wider representation. The composition of Committees will be revisited over the next academic year to ensure improved representativeness and broaden the number of ex-officio members with elected and appointed members.

3. *Consider the potential benefits of involving the Students' Union in the training of class representatives.*

The Students' Union is currently involved in the recruitment and training of class representatives. NCI has been involved in the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) since its inception in 2016 and the NStEP project intended to develop national guidelines on the role, recruitment and retention of class representatives. These guidelines were published at the NStEP Conference in March 2019 and will be implemented by NCI in the 2019/20 academic year. A Student Engagement Working Group has also been established in NCI, which is chaired by the Quality Officer and consists of representatives from the Students' Union, Learning Support, Student Experience and the College's constituent academic departments. This working group's objectives are to use the feedback from the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) to inform NCI's quality enhancement activities, to improve the College's class representative system and embed it within the QAES, and to develop a Student Success Strategy, due for implementation in September 2020.

4. *Review the terms of reference of the Academic Council to ensure that its ultimate authority in academic decision-making is reflected appropriately; and*
5. *In reviewing the effectiveness of the governance system, consider opportunities for rationalisation that may emerge.*

These recommendations will be considered in conjunction with Recommendation 2. NCI recognises the ultimate authority of Academic Council for all academic decisions. The sections of the QAH relating to Academic Council will be reviewed and revised accordingly to remove any ambiguities, with particular attention paid to work-flow charts and terms of reference that describe Academic Council and outline its primary role in academic decision-making. The College will also seek to utilise opportunities for rationalisation that arise during reviews of the effectiveness of governance structures as recommended by the Panel.

6. *Ensure the governance system continues to keep the sustainability of quality assurance systems under review as the College grows and diversifies.*

The incoming Director of Quality Assurance & Statistical Services (DQASS) will be asked to monitor this recommendation and to advise the College Executive and Academic Council on the resourcing required to maintain and sustain the QAES as presented to QQI during the re-engagement process.

7. *Consider potential matters of document control arising from the presentation of the College's QA Handbook in different formats.*

The document control policy will be reviewed and revised accordingly to clearly state the primacy of the QAH over any extracted documentation. The QAH is currently version controlled by the Quality Assurance and Statistical Services (QASS). The College has recently migrated to Microsoft Sharepoint for document management and all staff are in the process of receiving training in its effective application. This document management system will ensure that the QASS Office has ultimate authority over version control of the QAH while also ensuring that staff only have access to the authorised versions of the College's Quality Assurance policies and procedures.

8. *In the best interests of applicants, consider revising the point at which the College makes the decision to withdraw a programme (currently one month), and whether adequate market research is conducted in advance to minimise the need for such withdrawals*

As NCI has expanded its Higher Education and Training provisions, the quality of the market research and viability studies conducted as part of our programme development process has improved significantly. Nevertheless, analysis of applicant and registration data has revealed that one of the primary reasons for successful applications not reverting to registrations is primarily due to the precarious nature of state funding for part-time programmes, which comprise a significant proportion of the College's programmes. While there is often a market for a programme, applicants' ability to independently finance their studies is often limited without state support. Late withdrawals of applications en-masse due to a lack of state funding means that a programme is no longer viable for a particular intake. NCI appreciates this recommendation of the Panel and will continue to strive to ensure that the decision to withdraw a programme prior to commencement will be made in an appropriately timely manner and that applicants are informed so that the decision does not negatively affect their ability to apply to other programmes in NCI or in another HET provider.

9. *Consider automating the pre-population of the Annual Monitoring Report template to support programme teams in conducting the annual review and to create process efficiencies; and*
10. *Continue to evolve institutional management data to fully support QA and seek opportunities to leverage in-house ICT expertise in doing so. The establishment of a Data Strategy Committee might assist in gaining support within the College for this approach.*

The College recognises the importance of ongoing programme monitoring and the value that effective learning analytics plays in creating process efficiencies and supporting quality assurance and enhancement activities. These recommendations will be considered as part of the implementation of the College's Academic Strategy and Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy, with the aim of embedding learning analytics in programme reviews and academic decision-making processes. This will include consideration of an additional dedicated role to manage the College's data requirements. Within our current resource base, we will continue to endeavour to automate as much of the annual monitoring process as possible. We also await sectoral agreement of key performance indicators concerning retention, progression and completion, which will contribute to the College's quality assurance monitoring and quality enhancement activities.

11. *Whilst the QA procedures for Programme Development, Validation and Evaluation are comprehensive, there may be future opportunities to further capture in this documentation the richness and added-value that was articulated to the Panel by NCI staff of some of these processes, including programme review.*

NCI is due to begin a period of programmatic review from Q3 2019 – Q4 2020, during which the School of Computing's undergraduate programmes, the School of Business' postgraduate programmes and the College's teaching and learning programmes will be reviewed for viability and updated according to stakeholder engagement and QQI's revised statutory guidelines. The programme review process will be used as a case study to ensure that this added-value of the College's robust Programme Development, Validation and Evaluation procedures are captured in the related documentation submitted to QQI. This review process

will also be used to establish institutional guidelines for future programme validation and revalidation events.

12. *Consider the value of psychometrics to enhance evidence of the reliability of assessment, particularly in the context of increased online assessment.*

This recommendation will be considered as part of the implementation of the College's Learning, Teaching & Assessment strategy and in upcoming programme reviews as mentioned above.

13. *Continue to develop and progress policies and practices that will meet the College's GDPR obligations.*

The College has already made significant improvements within its existing resource base to ensure its compliance with GDPR regulations. These will be further enhanced by the recruitment of a dedicated Information Governance & Compliance Officer. This position is expected to be filled in Q3 2019.

14. *Extract the QA policies and procedures on collaborative programme development into its own section of the QA Handbook; and*
15. *Consider developing a guide to the QA Handbook for collaborators.*

These recommendations are noted and will be implemented in Q3 2019. As NCI continues to expand its collaborative and apprenticeship provisions, the QASS Office recognises the need to make the QAH readily accessible to all relevant stakeholders and to ensure adherence to the College's Quality Assurance policies and procedures. The development of user-guides in particular areas will be considered by the QASS Office.

16. *The effectiveness of the College's evaluation activities could be enhanced by live quality action plans, which are addressed to the appropriate level at which actions can be taken (i.e., the Programme Committee), and feed into a strategic Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) at College level.*

The incoming DQASS will be asked to progress this recommendation with the support of the Deans and Vices Deans of School. Progress on this will be supported by the finalisation of the administrative support structures within the Schools, which is expected to be completed during Q3 2019.