Quality Within Higher Education 2018
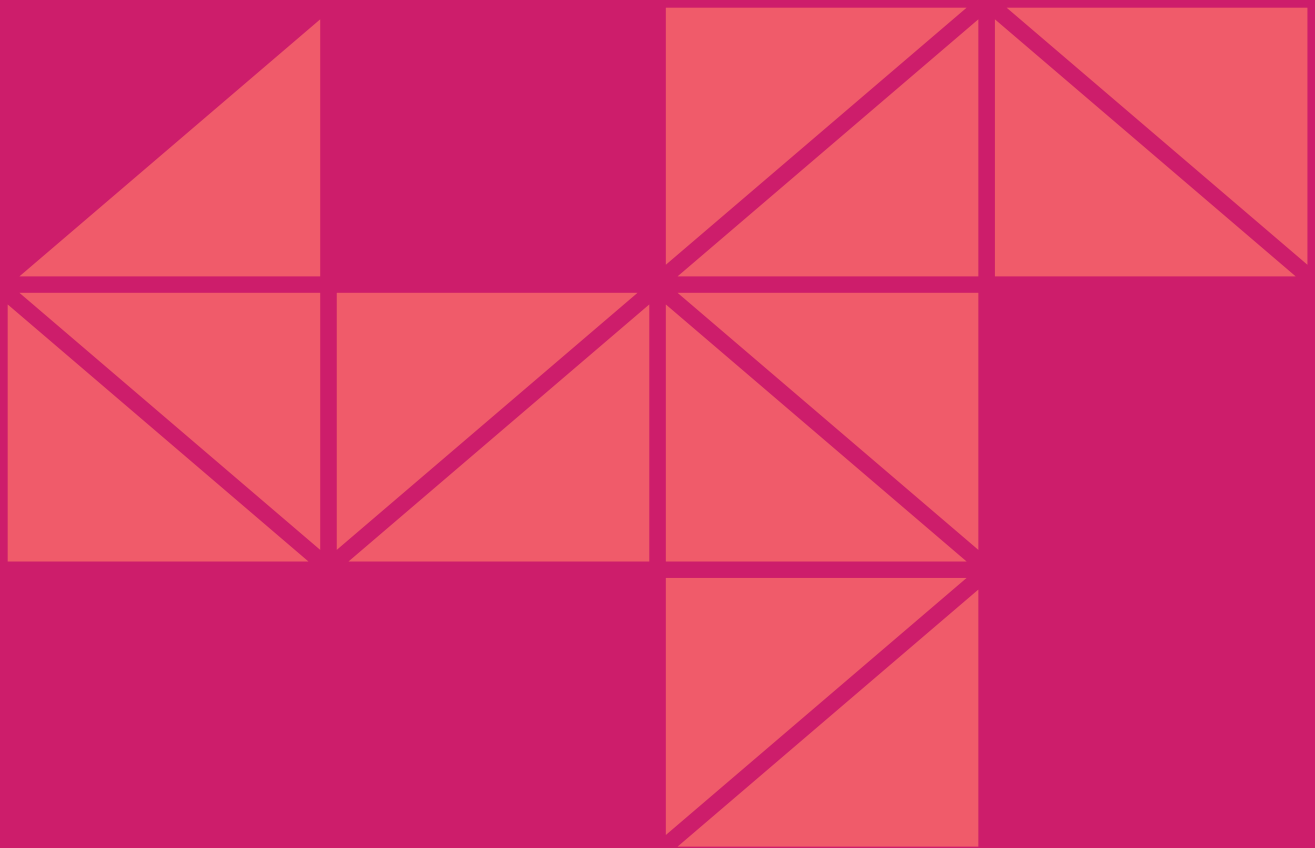
A Summary Report

QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Contents

Quality Within Higher Education 2018
Foreword

In 2018, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) published a new Statement of Strategy, "Adding value to qualifications", covering the period 2019-2021. One of the priorities of this strategy is to analyse and demonstrate the impact of measures taken to improve the quality of education and training for the benefit of learners. With this in mind, this Report is an overview of the work that is taking place in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the system. Accordingly, this summary of the Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Reports (AIQRs) demonstrates the adherence of HEIs in Ireland to national and international Quality Assurance (QA) guidelines and procedures, identifies themes occurring across the institutions, and highlights the impact of the many QA activities being undertaken in the sector. This report brings together information provided by publicly regulated HEIs for the reporting period 1 September 2016 to 31 August 2017.

This marks the second year that this report summarises developments across both the University and Institute of Technology sectors. Last year's report was universally welcomed by HEIs, who acknowledged its positive impact in publicising their own good practices and making them aware of those in other institutions. This summary of the AIQRs describes a diverse Higher Education (HE) system in which institutions are operating mature QA systems and are placing an increasing emphasis on quality enhancement.

The AIQR system is a partnership and the annual updates contained in the reports form the basis for productive dialogue meetings between QQI and institutions. During the most recent round of meetings, institutional feedback on the AIQR was extremely positive. Now that the initial time investment in the AIQR has been made and the process is embedded in the quality activities of HEIs, institutions are beginning to see the benefits of having a single repository for internal QA policies and procedures.

In 2017, QQI launched CINNTE, the name given to our current cycle of institutional quality review. CINNTE review teams have found the AIQRs to be an indispensable source of evidence to support an institution's self-evaluation report, while the series of annual reports gives them an understanding of the evolution of an institution's quality assurance system. In the wider context of Irish HE, the AIQR process and the CINNTE review reports complement other state initiatives such as the higher education System Performance Framework, Irish Survey of Student Engagement and the work of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.

Padraig Walsh
CEO
Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Quality Within Higher Education 2018
Key Findings

The Annual Institutional Quality Reports (AIQRs) continue to confirm that **Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are committed to quality assurance and enhancement** in order to improve the student and staff experience across the higher education system. There is strong evidence in these annual reports that institutions are using **feedback from students, staff and other relevant stakeholders** to enhance learning and teaching in Irish higher education. Furthermore, HEIs are using **objective external indicators** to both quality assure the education experience and to demonstrate the effectiveness of internal quality assurance policies and procedures. Of particular note is the strategic role now played by Quality Offices (or equivalent) and the efforts across both sectors to **embed quality assurance within the strategic objectives of institutions.**

Difference between Sectors

In terms of the positioning of institutional quality assurance functions, there continues to be a **divergence in the approach to quality assurance between the Designated Awarding Body and Institute of Technology sectors.** Designated Awarding Bodies (DABs) tend to have standalone Quality Offices, whereas in Institutes of Technology (IoT) quality assurance activities have been embedded into the functions of the office of the Registrar and this continues to be true in general. However, there is a **growing trend within IoTs to establish a dedicated Quality Officer position. This reflects a move away from a focus on quality assurance compliance to quality enhancement** in this sector, particularly as the quality assurance systems of IoTs become more mature.

Diversity of Reviews

The AIQRs also reveal a **differing emphasis on the unit of review in each sector**; with **DABs focusing on departments and schools**, and **IoTs conducting programmatic reviews**. Previously, within internal institutional quality assurance frameworks, the concept of programmatic review was embedded in the Delegated Authority process. However, as the IoT sector matures in terms of quality assurance, and with the advent of autonomous Technological Universities, a move towards a wider understanding of quality assurance and a more holistic approach to its implementation is needed. As internal quality assurance systems mature, institutions may take advantage of the opportunity to move away from solely following the processes for which Delegated Authority was granted. Different approaches can be taken to internal review and a number of different modalities of quality assurance review are available to institutions, such as thematic review, school review, etc. The QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines do not require that HEI internal reviews are confined to one specific modality. There was also a notable **difference in the number of reviews planned between sectors**, with more extensive review planning evident in the DAB sector. This may reflect the programmatic nature of review in IoTs or the uncertainty created by the nascent Technological University process.

---

1   The designated awarding bodies are those institutions with their own awarding powers, namely the universities, Dublin Institute of Technology and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

Commitment to Quality

While **funding cuts and the public-sector Employment Control Framework were not as pronounced a theme** in this reporting period, the impact of **reduced resources continues to be an issue**. Nonetheless, institutional commitment to quality assurance and enhancement initiatives remains strong and this is evidenced through the creation of new quality-related roles, offices and committees. Also, the AIQRs signal a commitment to the **ongoing revision of internal quality assurance policies and procedures** informed by external policy developments at a national and international level.

Focus on Access, Transition and Retention

In these reports, there was a broad range of enhancement initiatives reported in the teaching and learning space. However, **access, transition and retention** were the most prominent recurrent areas of quality enhancement activities and institutions continue to place a strong emphasis on **supporting and enhancing the first-year student experience**. The **use of data** is the most consistent area of development in terms of quality assurance activity and HEIs are clearly using information generated at local and national level to improve the student experience. Indeed, feedback from students, staff, external examiners and peer review groups is being used to confirm the effectiveness of quality assurance and to inform the development of quality enhancement initiatives.

Quality Improvement

In the past, meeting the targets set in the HEA Mission-Based Performance Compacts has been cited as a signifier of quality. This practice is less pronounced in this iteration of the AIQRs and demonstrates **a clear separation of institutional understanding of performance-based indicators and quality assurance as an improvement-based approach**. In last year's report it was noted that the reporting of unsuccessful initiatives would add to the AIQR system and that institutions could also learn from the experience unsuccessful quality initiatives. This remains an area of possible development in terms of reporting and **sharing learning that can be derived from unsuccessful innovations**.

This report, as a synopsis of the AIQRs, offers a **picture of the effectiveness and impact of quality assurance implementation across a diverse Irish public Higher Education sector**. Furthermore, the good practice highlighted here underscores the utility of the AIQR process, a value which was emphasised by feedback from the HEIs themselves in the latest round of dialogue meetings with QQI.
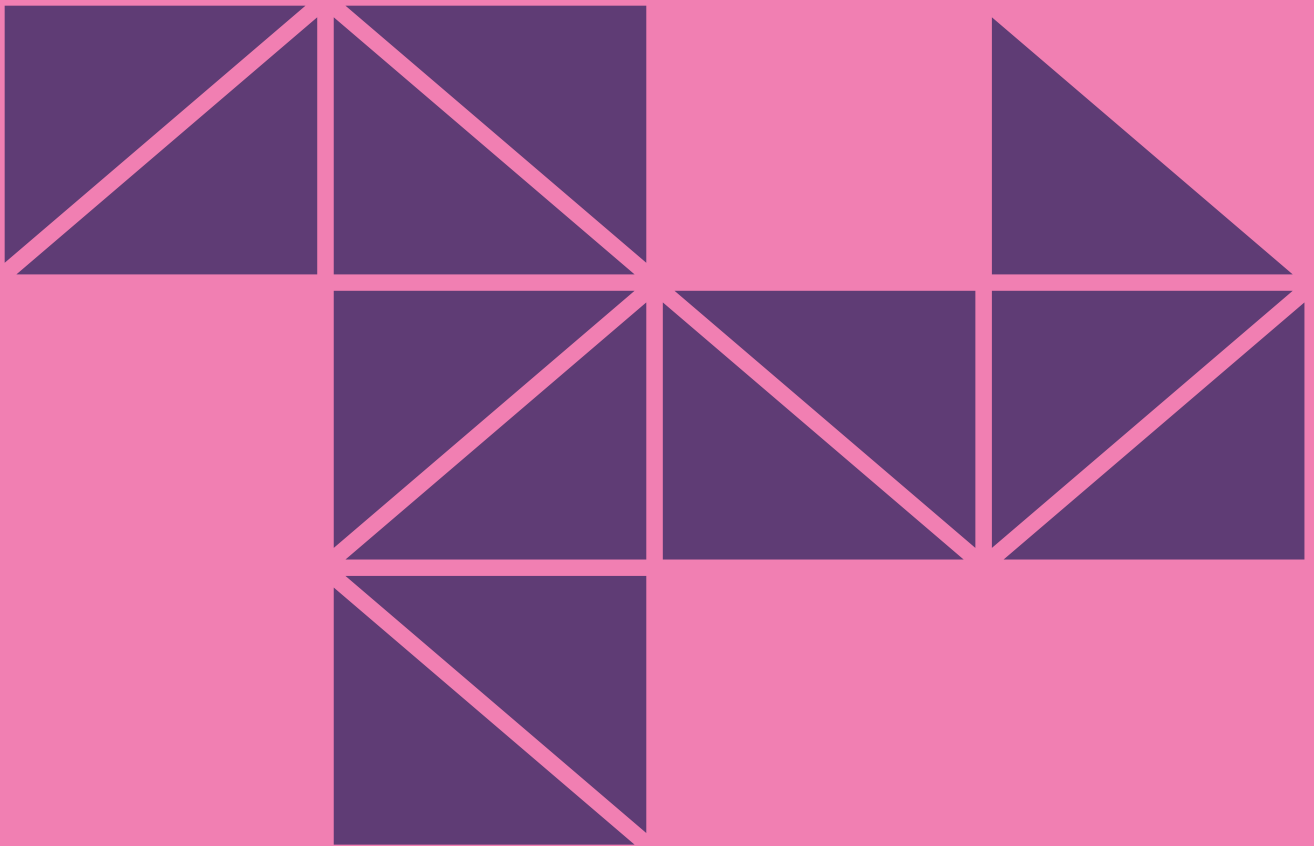
Quality Within Higher Education 2018
Synopsis

The strategic importance of quality assurance

- Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement activities are strategically important to Irish HEIs and are impacting on institutional governance structures.

- Quality Offices or equivalent are increasingly important in terms of strategy development and implementation.

- Quality assurance reviews and initiatives are routinely analysed and disseminated at senior management meetings across institutions.

- HEIs are aligning continuing professional development of staff with strategic priorities and institutional mission.

Quality assurance developments

- Irish HEIs are committed to the continuous improvement and enhancement of quality assurance systems, evidenced by new and revised quality assurance policies and procedures, adherence to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) and QQI guidelines, changes in quality assurance governance and the appointment of new staff in quality assurance - related roles.

- There is increased evidence of wider internal dissemination of information on quality assurance policies and procedures, results of quality reviews, and analyses of quality assurance / quality enhancement activities to inform and empower staff in relation to quality assurance.

Data and the student experience

- Data is playing an ever-greater role in improving the student experience. Institutions are harnessing data collected at local and national level to inform decision making in key areas of strategic importance, while feedback from students, staff and other relevant stakeholders is directly influencing quality assurance initiatives.

Factors impacting on quality assurance

- Various factors at national and regional level have a tangible impact on quality assurance implementation across HEIs. These include: the reshaping of the Higher Education landscape; national reports and strategies; and policy developments by QQI and the Higher Education Authority.

Reviews

- Internal quality review data revealed general trends, such as: increased number of service unit quality reviews; number of reviews undertaken varies widely between institutions; reviewer profile differences between Institute of Technology (IoT) and Designated Awarding Bodies (DAB) sectors.

- There is a difference between the unit of focus for reviews for DABs and IoTs, with a much greater variety of review modalities evident in the DAB sector, while in the IoT sector there was a proportionally larger number of programme-based reviews. Review planning is a more prominent feature of DAB returns, which may be an effect of the difference in review modalities across sectors or the disruptive impact of pending Technological University mergers in the IoT sector.

Effectivenes and impact of quality assurance

- Irish HEIs use objective external indicators to demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of their QA policies and procedures, in particular, feedback from peer review groups and from external examiners.

- There is strong evidence that HEIs are responding to feedback from students, staff and other stakeholders to enhance the quality of the student experience.

Quality enhancement highlights

- Across both sectors institutions continue to establish a culture of Quality Enhancement, with initiatives in this area showed a focus on access and transition, student retention, student supports, staff development, work-based learning, gender equality and research.

Section 1
Background

Section 1
Background

As the external quality assurance body for higher education in Ireland, each year QQI requests nine Designated Awarding Bodies (DABs) – universities, Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) – and the thirteen Institutes of Technology (IoTs) to complete an Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Report (AIQR) based on the preceding academic year. AIQRs are integrated into a broader framework of engagement between QQI and institutions regarding quality assurance. This broader framework is comprised of: QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines; the Quality Assurance procedures of the institutions themselves; the National Framework of Qualifications; dialogue meetings between QQI and individual HEIs; and periodic external peer review by QQI.

This report, based on the AIQRs of Designated Awarding Bodies and Institutes of Technology for the Reporting Period 1 September 2016 – 31 August 2017, is a summary of quality assurance and enhancement within the following institutions:

- Athlone Institute of Technology
- Cork Institute of Technology
- Dublin City University
- Dublin Institute of Technology
- Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dún Laoghaire
- Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
- Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown
- Institute of Technology, Carlow
- Institute of Technology, Sligo
- Institute of Technology, Tallaght
- Institute of Technology, Tralee
- Letterkenny Institute of Technology
- Limerick Institute of Technology
- Maynooth University
- National University of Ireland, Galway
- Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
- Trinity College Dublin
- University College Cork
- University College Dublin
- University of Limerick
- Waterford Institute of Technology

The AIQRs summarised in this report were submitted to QQI in February 2018. Accordingly, this is the AIQR 2018 Summary Report based on the information submitted by the institutions in their 2018 AIQRs and pertaining to the academic year 2016/17.

The AIQR is an ongoing process, which serves as a contemporary record of quality assurance within an institution. Also, the AIQR acts as a single repository of institutional policies and procedures for quality assurance. Part 1 of the AIQR consists of an overview of institutional quality assurance governance, policies, procedures and schedules and does not change much from year to year. The AIQR is also used to capture quality assurance activities within the reporting year. Thus, Parts 2-6 provide an overview of quality assurance activities, themes, changes, enhancements and impacts for the reporting year. Institutions can and also do use the AIQR for their own internal reporting and governance functions.

While the AIQR process necessitates a significant time investment from institutions, it has a number of tangible benefits. The publication of reports helps external stakeholders to understand how quality is assured within an institution. The AIQR also provides QQI with an assurance that quality assurance procedures are being implemented on an ongoing basis within institutions and that regulatory requirements are being met. Information captured by multiple AIQRs is being used by institutions and review teams in the current CINNTE cycle of institutional reviews, which runs from 2018-2023. This assists with documentation management for institutions in reviews and reduces the burden on institutions to provide the Review Team with a significant amount of documentation in advance of their visit.

This report is a synopsis of the information communicated by institutions in Parts 2-6 of the AIQR only and is presented under the following headings:
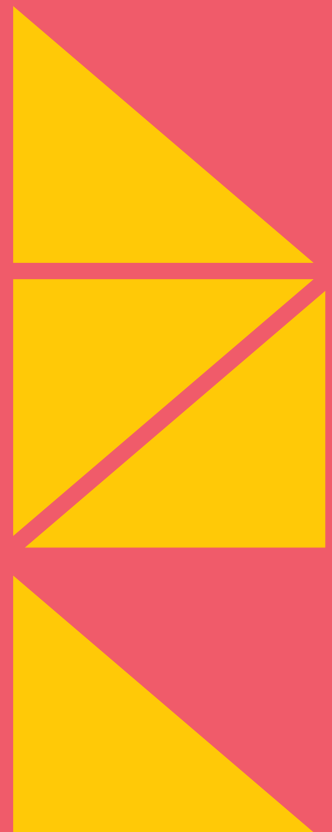
- The Strategic Importance of Quality Assurance;
- Quality Assurance Developments;
- Data and the Student Experience;
- Factors Impacting on Quality Assurance Implementation;
- Internal Reviews in the Reporting Period;
- The Effectiveness and Impact of Quality Assurance;
- Quality Enhancement Highlights; and
- Objectives for the Coming Reporting Period (2017-18).

The next series of reports (to be completed by institutions early in 2019) will cover the period September 2017 to August 2018.

The Strategic Importance of Quality Assurance

Section 2
The Strategic Importance of Quality Assurance

Quality assurance continues to be of strategic importance to Irish HEIs and this was reflected in this year's reports. Many submissions described how quality assurance and enhancement activities and reporting are impacting on institutional governance structures. A number of institutions reported the inclusion of quality activities as a standing item on the agenda of senior management meetings. There was also evidence of increased analysis and dissemination of internal quality assurance reviews and initiatives throughout various institutional fora.

Strategy Development

Quality Offices have a prominent role in the development of institutional strategies, particularly in relation to managing the internal consultation process. An example of this was seen at Dublin City University (DCU), where the development of the strategic plan involved a range of consultations with members of the DCU community and key stakeholders. As well as ten cross-institutional working groups, the consultation process involved DCU Fuse, a 25-hour crowdsourcing event to provide an opportunity for the university to engage and interact with staff, students, alumni and friends. The collation and analysis of the output reports was undertaken by the Quality Promotion Office. At the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), a thematic review was carried out during the reporting period examining implementation of the RCSI Strategic Plan 2013-2017 'Growth & Excellence' with the aims of assessing the impact of the plan and of identifying key initiatives for inclusion in the successor plan being developed to cover the period 2018-2022. The wide-ranging recommendations of the seven-member international Review Panel have proven to be of great value to RCSI in the ongoing process to develop a new Strategic Plan to cover the period 2018-2022.

Technological Universities

With the advent of Technological Universities, those institutions involved in the merger process have made it a strategic priority to focus on the alignment of quality assurance systems. For instance, the TU4Dublin Steering Group approved a Unitary Marks and Standards/General Assessment Regulations document for taught programmes appropriate for a Technological University, which will underpin quality assurance processes and procedures for the fair and consistent assessment of learners. Added to this, a full review of current quality assurance arrangements across the three merging institutions (Dublin Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown and Institute of Technology, Tallaght) is to be conducted, with a view to developing quality assurance procedures, processes and regulation for Technological University Dublin.

Staff Development

An important element of quality enhancement is the continuing professional development (CPD) of staff and institutions reported a move towards aligning CPD initiatives with strategic priorities. At the Institute of Technology, Tralee, for instance, CPD sessions are used to inform staff of internal quality assurance policies and procedures. Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology introduced an MA in Teaching & Learning programme and the Institute funds staff who wish to participate in some or all of the programme. The MA contains modules relating to areas which have been identified as strategically important to the institute such as Student-Centred Learning, Recognition of Prior Learning and Technology Enhanced Learning.

Highlighting Good Practice – University College Dublin

Creating a Quality Culture

A quality culture at University College Dublin (UCD) has been encouraged through embedding quality assurance in governance structures and aligning quality reviews with strategic objectives. Empowering local decision-making when that is the most effective approach is an objective of the UCD Strategy 2015-2020 and, during the reporting period, UCD Academic Council approved delegation of authority to Governing Boards (situated at College and School level) to approve the academic case for certain categories of new programme. All Periodic Quality Reviews are informed by key metrics aligned with the UCD Strategy 2015-2020 and are benchmarked against comparable institutional data, where it is available. Each Periodic Quality Review Report is considered by the University Management Team and is discussed with the Chair of the Review Group. This formal stage involves the Registrar and Deputy President, the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Review Group, representatives from the UCD Quality Office, the head of unit that has been reviewed and three to four members of staff from that unit. [adapted from UCD AIQR]

Other examples of the strategic importance of quality assurance include:

- Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology established 15 quality assurance workgroups to afford all staff the opportunity to engage in the upgrade and review of the institutional Quality Assurance Framework.

- The Office of the Vice President Academic Affairs and Registrar at the Institute of Technology, Tralee introduced a system that records and tracks decisions of the Academic Council and its Sub-Committees. This was complemented by a comprehensive strategy of dissemination by the Office of the Vice President Academic Affairs and Registrar of quality assurance policies and procedures.

- Reviews of Maynooth University's Information Technology Services and Human Resources are being closely aligned to the strategic planning for both units, which reflects the university's overall approach to focus on linking quality assurance and strategic planning at unit level.

- Units at the National University of Ireland, Galway assure quality by implementation of the University's Vision 2020 Strategy and the HEA's Mission-Based Performance Compact 2014-2017 – both executed through an annual system for Operational Planning that incorporate quality, performance and capacity related enhancements.

- At the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, in addition to regular reports on feedback from Peer Review Groups to the relevant Governing Boards, a formal annual report will be presented to each board by the Director of Quality Enhancement.

- Trinity College Dublin (TCD) continued to review and improve its institutional management, governance and quality systems in order to ensure alignment with evolving national and international developments, with the objectives of TCD's Strategic Plan. Also, at TCD, Annual Faculty Quality Reports were considered by the Quality Committee, and an overview of key quality assurance activities and common themes was included in a consolidated report to Council.

- The University College Cork Quality Enhancement Committee's role and authority was reviewed. The Committee was confirmed as a committee of the University Management Team Strategy, with an annual reporting line to the Governing Body, which refers relevant items to Academic Council.

- Institute of Technology, Carlow's Academic Council adopted a new Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy which supports the use of technology throughout all programmes and activities across the Institute, and includes relevant strategies and actions. The implementation phase of this strategy has commenced in this reporting period with an emphasis on blended learning.

- A Strategy Office was re-established at Waterford Institute of Technology to recognise the centrality of Strategic Planning to institutional governance, management and organisation.

Section 3
Quality Assurance Developments

Section 3
Quality Assurance Developments

A prominent feature of quality frameworks within Irish HEIs is the continuing desire for improvement and enhancement in relation to quality assurance. This is evidenced in the annual reports, as is a commitment to adherence to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) and the suite of core, sector-specific and topic-specific QQI Statutory QA Guidelines.

New policies and procedures were reported, as were changes to existing ones, including the following:

- The drafting of a 'Student Fitness to Practice Policy' was initiated at Athlone Institute of Technology. This policy document will provide an overarching set of guidelines for the Institute with respect to fitness to practice but with addendums specific to various departments across the institute.

- Also at Athlone Institute of Technology, revisions were made to the 'Institute Plagiarism Policy' and plans were put in place to establish a Plagiarism Committee with institute-wide representation.

- In response to the publication of the revised ESG 2015 and the QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, the Dublin City University Quality Promotion Office revised all documentation in relation to unit level reviews to align with the standards and guidelines outlined in both documents.

- New and revised sections of the Quality Assurance Handbook were developed by Letterkenny Institute of Technology and approved during the reporting period.

- Trinity College Dublin revised its 'Equality Policy' and 'Dignity and Respect Policy' and introduced the following new policies: 'Programme Design and Approval Policy'; 'Programme Suspension and Cessation Policy', 'Virtual Learning Environment Policy'.

- University College Dublin (UCD) approved procedures for the approval of 'UCD Linked Provider[2] QA Procedures' and developed procedures for the institutional review of its linked providers in relation to the effectiveness of their quality assurance procedures. The university's 'Subject Extern Examiner Policy' was reviewed.

- The University of Limerick introduced new quality assurance policies, including: 'Acceptable Behaviour in the Workplace Policy'; 'Procedures for the Recruitment/Appointment of Academic Staff in Exceptional Circumstances Policy'; 'Research Integrity Policy'; 'Student Fitness to Practise Policy' and 'Clinical Research Policy'.

Changes to governance, including the updating and creation of committees, were reported:

- Cork Institute of Technology Academic Council approved a revised governance structure for joint Cork Institute of Technology -University College Cork awards, which replaced the previously separate Joint Academic Standards Board and Joint Programme Management Boards with a single Joint Board.

---

2   A "Linked Provider" is a provider that has an arrangement with a Designated Awarding Body to offer a programme leading to a Designated Awarding Body award

- In order to reduce the administrative burden on programme boards, Cork Institute of Technology introduced Annual Programme Status Review reports to enable programme boards to focus on evaluating performance, identifying effective practice and devising enhancement strategies where necessary.

- The Dublin City University (DCU) Quality Promotion Committee made proposals to Executive Committee regarding a change to the structure of the committee to more appropriately reflect a post-Incorporation DCU.

- At Limerick Institute of Technology, the Academic Council Sub-Committee on Admissions, Academic Progress and Student Retention was reformed and renamed the Academic Council Sub-Committee for Student Support and Retention.

- The President of Maynooth University delegated overall responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement to the Vice-President Academic, Registrar and Deputy President. The Director of Strategic Planning and Quality, who reports directly to the Vice-President Academic, Registrar and Deputy President, coordinates the operational management of quality assurance reviews. The Maynooth University Quality Committee, with new terms of reference and membership, began its work during the period.

- The University College Cork Quality Promotion Committee changed its title to the Quality Enhancement Committee. To reflect this change, it was also agreed that the Quality Promotion Unit would change its title to the Quality Enhancement Unit and that the Director's title would change to Director of Quality Enhancement.

- University College Dublin reviewed its Academic Council Committee on Quality and made changes which included: a change of title to Academic Council Quality Enhancement Committee, to better reflect its broad remit; changes to the committee Terms of Reference to more appropriately reflect the governance, strategic and compliance/oversight functions of the Committee; and changes to the committee composition.

- At Waterford Institute of Technology, to enhance the Governing Body's role in academic governance, the AIQR is now approved by the Governing Body, prior to submission to QQI.

The ongoing commitment to quality was evident across both sectors in the form of various staffing changes. There were also broader changes in institutions which affected quality assurance governance including the appointment of two new university presidents:

- A Senior Quality Officer was appointed at the Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dún Laoghaire.

- The Dundalk Institute of Technology Careers and Employability Centre was established in August 2017 with the appointment of a new Careers and Placement Officer.

- At Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology the following appointments were made: interim Head of Mayo Campus, interim Academic Affairs Manager, Director of International Engagement and Teaching and Learning Officer.

- The Institute of Technology, Carlow appointed a Director of the Office of Institutional Planning and Research.

- Institute of Technology, Sligo appointed a new Educational Development Manager, who has commenced setting up the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT), as well as contributing to wider quality related activities.

- A new Quality Assurance Manager position was created at the Institute of Technology, Tallaght.

- The Institute of Technology Tralee appointed a Head of Research and an International Business Development Manager.

- A dedicated Curriculum Researcher was employed by Maynooth University within the Office of the Director of Strategic Planning and Quality to manage and roll-out the curriculum evaluation framework.

- The National University of Ireland, Galway appointed a new Vice President for Gender Equality and Diversity.

- A Director of Student Services and a Chief Innovation and Enterprise Officer were appointed at Trinity College Dublin.

- University College Dublin established two new key leadership posts in the Office of the Registrar and Deputy President which have a quality assurance and enhancement dimension: Dean of Undergraduate Studies and Dean of Students.

- The University of Limerick appointed a Research Integrity Officer.

- Waterford Institute of Technology appointed a Strategic Information Manager and Analyst with responsibility for developing the Institute's reporting capability and enhancing the Institute's ability to review its own performance against national and international benchmarks.

Other notable changes to quality assurance included the creation of new centres, new internal publications and updates to approaches to review. Examples are:

- The TU4Dublin alliance formally agreed to a Joint Graduate Research School (JGRS) under a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2015.

- During the reporting period, the Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown School of Business & Humanities, having achieved the critical mass in enrolled student numbers, was separated into two schools comprising; the School of Business, and the School of Humanities.

- The Institute of Technology, Carlow conducted its first two Professional Support Services Reviews, Library & Information Services and Computer Services.

- At Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT), the new Department of Quality Teaching and Learning will bring together in a more structured way LIT's commitment to the continuous improvement of the student experience and the supports available to academic staff.

- The Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies, which will co-ordinate the administration of interdisciplinary and interdepartmental electives, was established at Maynooth University. The Centre is also responsible for supporting the development of new elective modules.

- The National University of Ireland, Galway Quality Office now publishes public directories of Professional Accreditations and Collaborative Providers.

- The Trinity College Dublin (TCD) Quality Committee approved a revised approach to the schedule of internal quality reviews to reflect the timing of the Institutional Review (2021) and the impact of the Trinity Education Project. The revised schedule allows for thematic reviews across a number of areas or bespoke reviews, which are of added value to individual units.

- Also, at TCD, the Provost approved a proposal that the Academic Registry would produce an annual report on its activities from 2016/17 onwards. The report consolidates in one document data and quality metrics previously held in the Senior Lecturer's Annual Report and the Dean of Graduate Studies Annual Report regarding graduation and completion rates, grade distribution, diversity stats, plagiarism cases etc. The data outlined in the report will feed into policy and process development and enhancement in advance of the institutional review.

- University College Cork commenced a process of updating the review method to develop a clear enhancement focus commenced, with a number of policy and operational changes: Secretariat support for all Peer Review Panels; Case Studies of Good Practice (embedding and development); Preparatory support for units engaging in self-evaluation.

- A schedule for University of Limerick (UL) internal quality reviews (cycle 3 – which runs from academic year 2017/18 to 2023/24, inclusive) was approved by UL's Executive Committee.

- The UL Quality Support Unit designed a template for the completion of annual quality reports by all support units and introduced an annual operational planning policy and process document.

Section 4
Data and the Student Experience
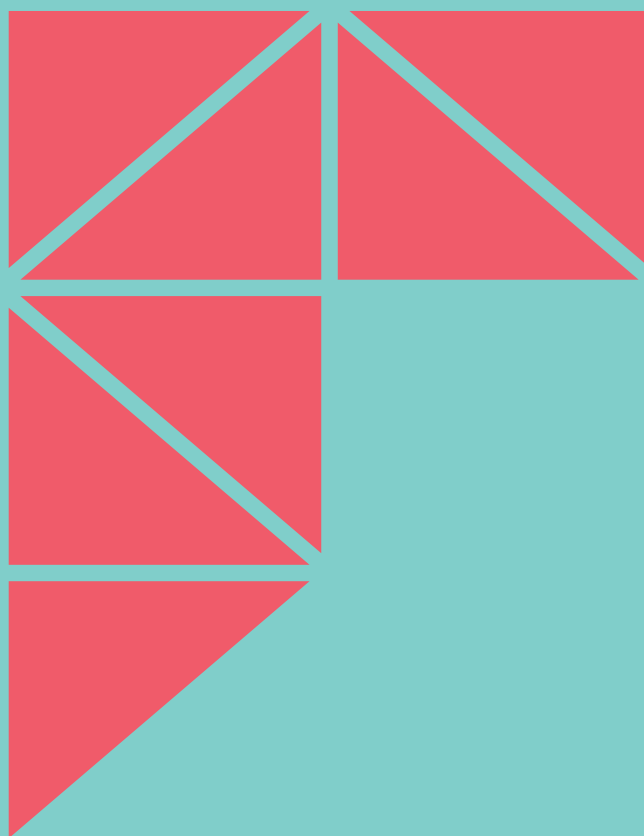
Section 4
Data and the Student Experience

The use of data as a tool to both improve the student experience and allow institutions to benchmark nationally was once again an important area across all HEIs. Data is used in a variety of ways across the system. Some examples include:

- Dublin City University (DCU) uses data to inform Annual and Periodic Programme Review and data is provided to staff using an online System. Also, at DCU, a Bibliometrics Working Group was established to support the university, faculties, schools and individuals extend their use of bibliometric analysis as part of understanding research performance within the university.

- At Dundalk Institute of Technology, student progression data for all students was computed on a School, Department, programme, stage and National Framework of Qualifications level basis and circulated to Programme Boards for consideration.

- To complement Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology's Annual Retention Reports a suite of module performance reports have been developed for use by Programme Boards.

- Under the management of the Institute of Technology, Tralee Head of Strategy and Institute Performance, a Business Systems Integration Office was established, to centralise quality data collection, analysis and dissemination.

- Maynooth University (MU provides standardised data sets to all academic departments. Also at MU, key performance metrics that are compiled as part of the Performance Framework for the Governing Authority. Of particular note are metrics on retention, progression, completion, final academic awards, and first destinations. The quality of research outputs is monitored via the trends in numbers of publications and weighted citation indices. The Maynooth performance on these indices is benchmarked against other universities in Ireland.

- At Waterford Institute of Technology, the formal implementation of a strategic planning office will further develop the institutional capacity for data analysis and data informed decision-making.

Highlighting Good Practice – Trinity College Dublin

Using Data to inform Decision-making

Notably, institutions have begun to systematically use data to inform QA decision-making. For instance, at Trinity College Dublin (TCD), teaching and learning is evaluated annually by students through mandatory undergraduate module evaluations and postgraduate taught programme evaluations. During the reporting period, the Education Officer of the Trinity Student Union and the Academic Secretary conducted a series of focus groups with 20 Schools on a 'Student Evaluation Review'. The Report was presented to Quality Committee and University Council and recommended a number of proposals, including: introduction of mid-module evaluations; establishment of student/staff liaison committees in all schools; and facilitation of a culture of students-as-partners in their learning through greater dialogue and engagement. [adapted from TCD AIQR]

Feedback from surveys and information contained in various internal and external reports were the main source of data on student performance and the student experience in general. National initiatives, like the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE), and the Data Enabled Student Success Initiative (DESSI), continue to be central to institutional use of data to improve the student experience. In particular, the data found in the ISSE is being harnessed as an institutional-level quality assurance tool. For instance:

- At Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) the data obtained from ISSE, is used at faculty meetings and programme boards and areas for improvement are highlighted and acted upon. AIT also produced an analysis of the survey results for the 2016-2017 period which was presented to the Institute's Academic Council and shared also with other committees and student bodies.

- Data from the ISSE 2016 and 2017, along with data from internal student feedback mechanisms were considered at programme, School and College level in Dublin Institute of Technology, before each College presented their findings to Academic Council.

- To make the feedback from ISSE surveys more accessible at Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, a data model was developed to visualise student feedback.

- The Institute of Technology, Sligo has modified ISSE reports to segregate data to programme level to allow programmes to compare to Department, School, and Institute level. Training is required for programme teams on the use of this data and the Institute is also working on extending the data sets available to programme boards. For example, progression rates are published nationally for first to second year. The Institute is expanding this to all years' progression.

- At the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) feedback from undergraduate students is collected twice a year at the end of each Semester, while postgraduate students are typically surveyed either once a year or on a modular basis. A longitudinal analysis of trends in student satisfaction data was carried out and the findings presented to the RCSI Senior Management Team.

One institution reported the greater utility of internal survey mechanisms. University College Cork (UCC) reported that the UCC Student Experience Survey is well established and has to date received a higher response rate than the ISSE. However, UCC also noted that the opportunity to use optional institutional questions on ISSE may provide a means to integrate their own student experience survey and the national survey.

Sources of feedback data collected and used across institutions to improve the student experience came from different sources including:

Institutional Data

- Application/Admissions data
- Examinations data
- Progression data
- Retention data
- Completion rates
- International and non-traditional student participation
- Research metrics
- Blackboard LMS

- Quality Review data
- Student entry data (inclusive of CAO points, programme preferences, demographics and geographical origin)
- Awards data

Surveys

- Irish Survey of Student Engagement
- Student Feedback Surveys at institutional, module and programme level
- First Year Student Surveys
- Graduate Destination Survey
- Module Surveys and Programme Surveys
- HEA Equal Access Survey
- Biennial LibQUAL Surveys
- Student Exit Surveys
- Postgraduate Research Experience Surveys
- International Student Barometer Survey

Reports

- External Examiner reports
- Programme monitoring reports
- Annual research postgraduate progression reports

Other sources

- National data on progression and retention
- Peer Observation of Teaching
- Feedback from students arising from their participation on programme boards

## Highlighting Good Practice – Cork Institute of Technology

Review of Quality Data

Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) undertook a Review of Data Quality. In preparation for the implementation of an Exam Paper Management solution, a comparative review was conducted of the data held in Banner and Resource Planner for allocation of lecturers against programme instances delivered. The outcomes of this review led to the creation of data integration workflows that will push master data from Resource Planner into Banner and also Blackboard, thus ensuring that a significant amount of 'dirty data' will be cleansed from Banner and Blackboard. CIT used the data to make improvements, including: extended Campus CRM System Pilot Review; CIT Careers Service – Adaptation of Service Delivery Formats Based on Usage Data; CIT Library – Data-Based Service Usage Enhancement Projects. [adapted from CIT AIQR)

Section 5
Factors Impacting on Quality Assurance Implementation
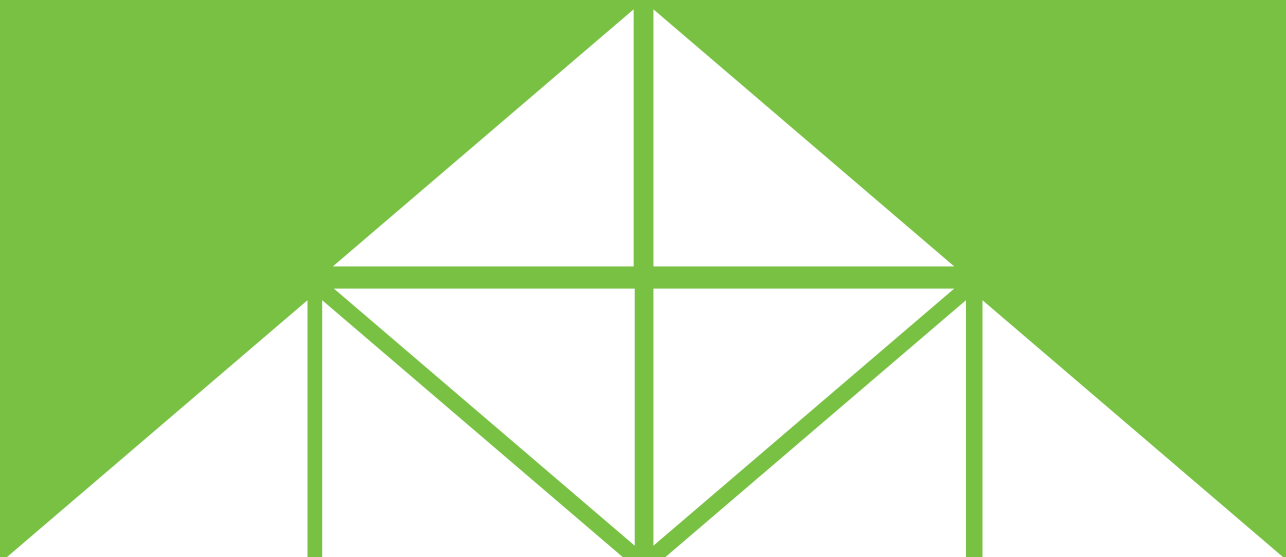
Section 5
Factors Impacting on Quality Assurance Implementation

The continuing evolution of the Irish HE landscape was the most reported influence on institutions' ability to effectively and consistently implement quality assurance initiatives. While the level of system funding was once again highlighted as impacting on quality assurance implementation and quality in higher education, it was not as prevalent a factor as in previous reporting periods. Factors reported by institutions can be broadly grouped across four areas listed below.

Reshaping of the Higher Education Landscape

The ongoing reshaping of the higher education landscape through various mergers, alliances, collaborations and incorporations (including the establishment of Technological Universities) was a recurrent factor cited by institutions. Specifically, reports referred to:

- Strategic developments in higher education (Mergers, Technological Universities, etc.)
- Technological University Dublin
- Dublin City University/Dundalk Institute of Technology Strategic Alliance
- Connacht Ulster Alliance
- West/North-West Cluster
- South Cluster of HEIs
- Regional Skills Fora in South East, Mid East and Midlands
- Regional Action Plans for Jobs
- Higher Education Authority designated West/North West Region
- The Technological Higher Education Quality Framework
- Munster Technological University
- Progression of the University College Cork/Irish Management Institute merger

National reports and strategies

As in any reporting period, various national reports and strategies were published. Institutions reported these and other existing national policies as impacting upon the implementation of QA initiatives. These included:

- The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030
- Publication of Enhancing Student Engagement in Decision Making and the establishment of the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP)
- National Access Plan 2015-2019 (specifically the national focus on the provision of inclusive and accessible third level education)

QQI and HEA developments

The work of QQI and the HEA is clearly influencing the implementation of quality assurance across the higher education system. National QQI and HEA policy developments were frequently cited as a factor impacting on quality assurance. Examples include:

- QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines

- HEA Strategic Dialogue Process

- National QQI Developments in Policy, Procedure and Best Practice

- ESG 2015

- HEA Studies of Progression in Higher Education

- Publication by QQI of Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Research Degree Programmes

National Developments

More generally, institutions referred to other miscellaneous factors at a national level, such as:

- Regional Skills Fora

- New Leaving Certificate Grading Scale

- General Data Protection regulation

- National Initiatives in research, teaching and learning

- Springboard+

- Changes in Professional, Regulatory or Statutory Body and overseas accreditation body schedules

- Involvement with projects of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning

Section 6
Internal Reviews in the Reporting Period

Section 6
Internal Reviews in the Reporting Period

A wide variety of reviews took place across all institutions in the reporting period. The AIQR captures data on the following categories of internal reviews:

- Validation/Programme Approval

- Research Accreditation/Validation

- Programme Review

- Research Review

- School/Department/Faculty Review

- Service Unit Review
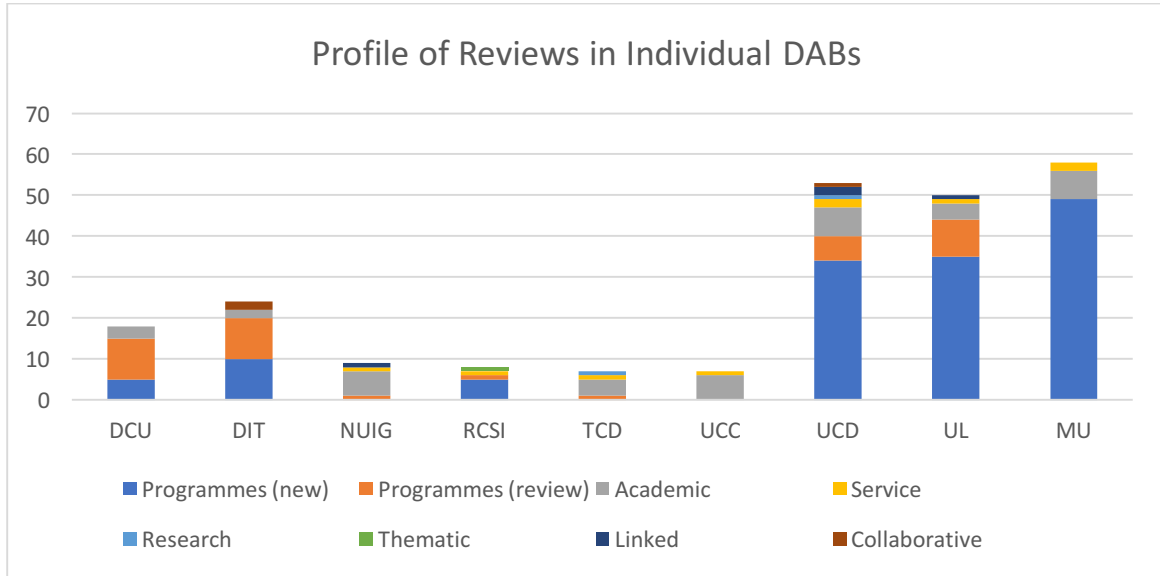
- Review of arrangements with a partner organisation

While an improvement on last year, reporting on various categories of reviews set out in the AIQR is not yet sufficiently consistent across all institutions to draw reliable conclusions. Nonetheless, certain general trends were apparent across the reports. These included:

- Once again there was a difference in approach between the Designated Awarding Body (DAB) and Institute of Technology (IoT) sectors in relation to the unit of focus for reviews. There is a much greater variety of review modalities evident in the DAB sector, while in the IoT sector there was a proportionally larger number of programme-based reviews.

- Service Unit Reviews continue to be an area of increased focus across all HEIs.

- Across both sectors ongoing cycles of School/Department/Faculty Review are continuing (further evidenced in the reporting of upcoming review plans).

- The number of reviews undertaken varies widely between institutions.

- Reviewer profile differs between the IoT and DAB sectors.

- Review planning is a more prominent feature of DAB returns, which may be an effect of the difference in review modalities across sectors or the disruptive impact of pending Technological University mergers in the IoT sector.
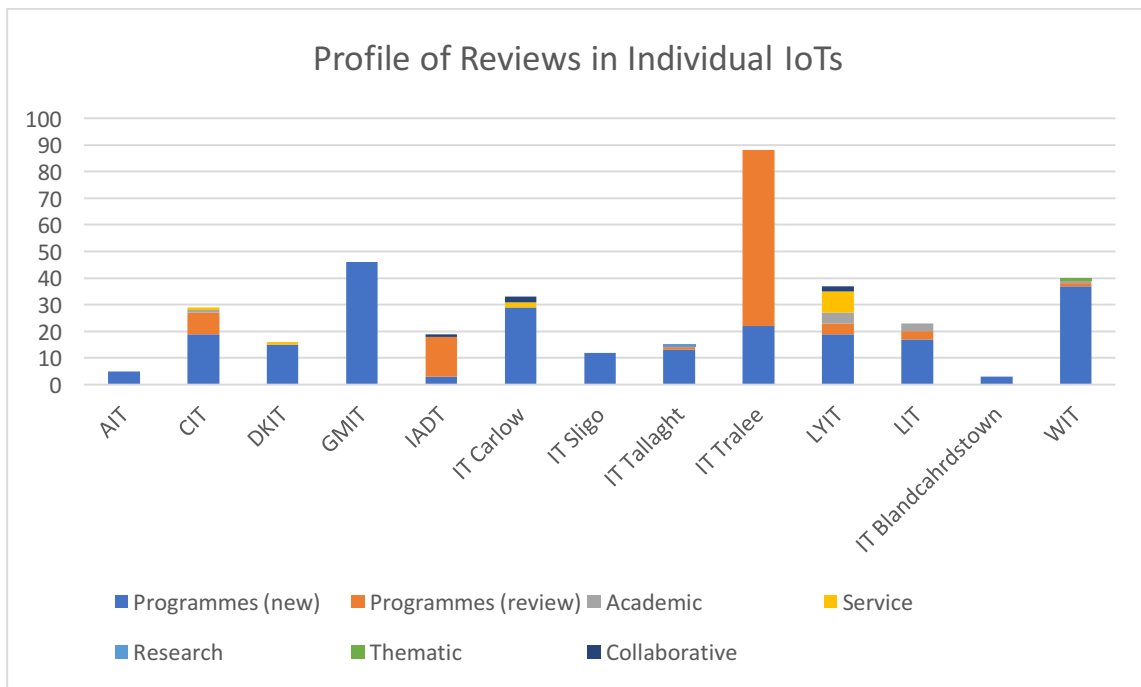
The tables which follow summarise the data received in relation to internal reviews[3].

---

3   The figures in the second table are an underestimate given that some IoTs only report on overall programmatic reviews rather than programmatic and programme review

Profile of Reviews

Profile of Reviews in Individual DABs

Reviewers

Profile of Reviews in Individual IoTs

Review Planning

DAB Internal Review Planning 2016-2022

Legend: Programme, Academic, Service, Research, Thematic, Collaborative, Linked

IoT Internal Review Planning 2016-2022

Legend: Programme, Academic, Service, Research, Thematic, Collaborative

Types of Reviews for All HEIs

Legend: Programme, Academic, Service, Research, Thematic, Collaborative, Linked
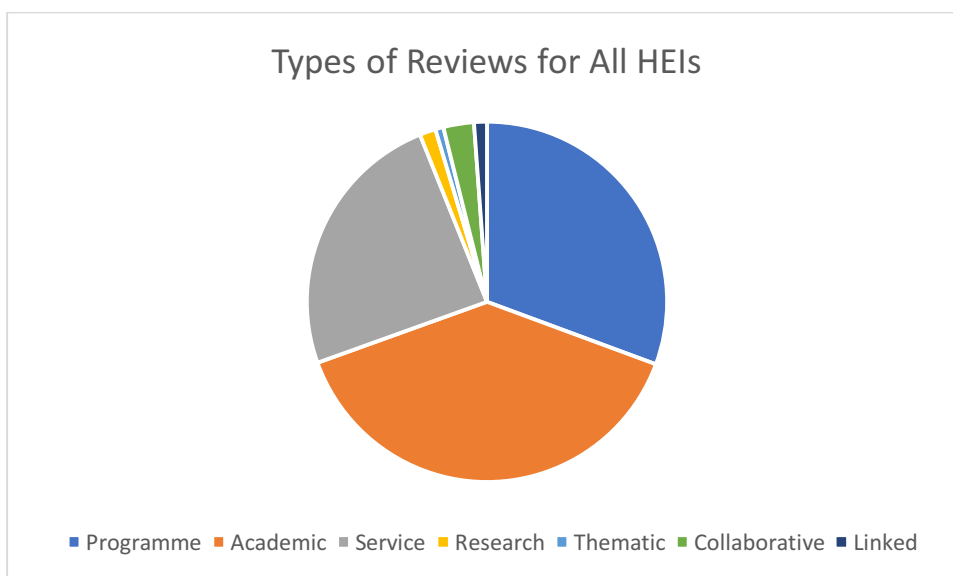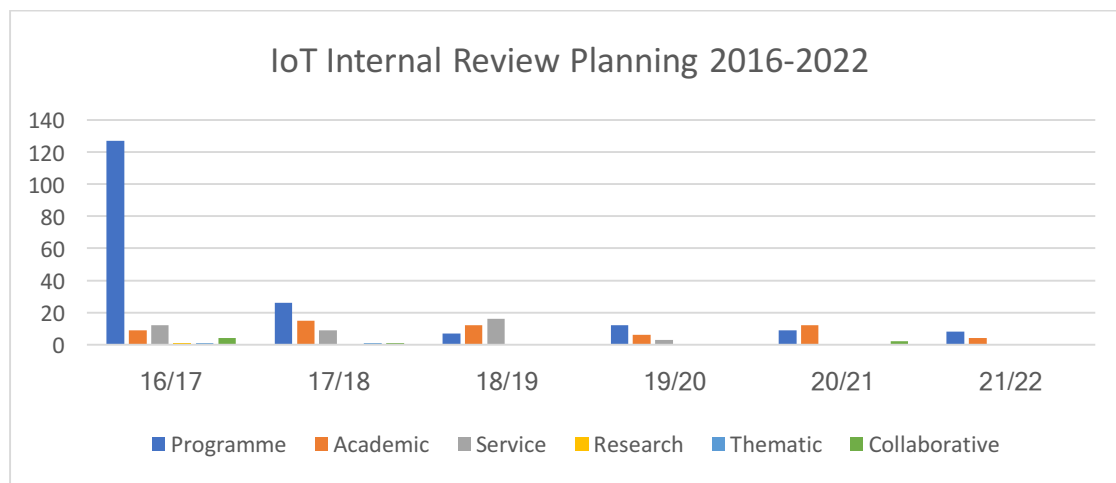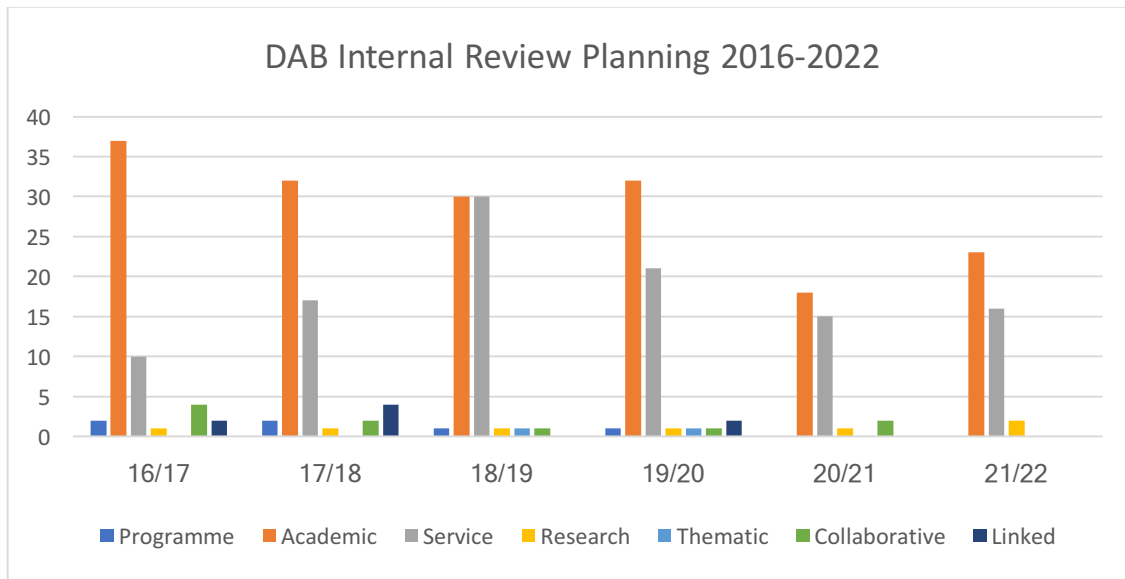
Section 7
The Effectiveness and Impact of Quality Assurance
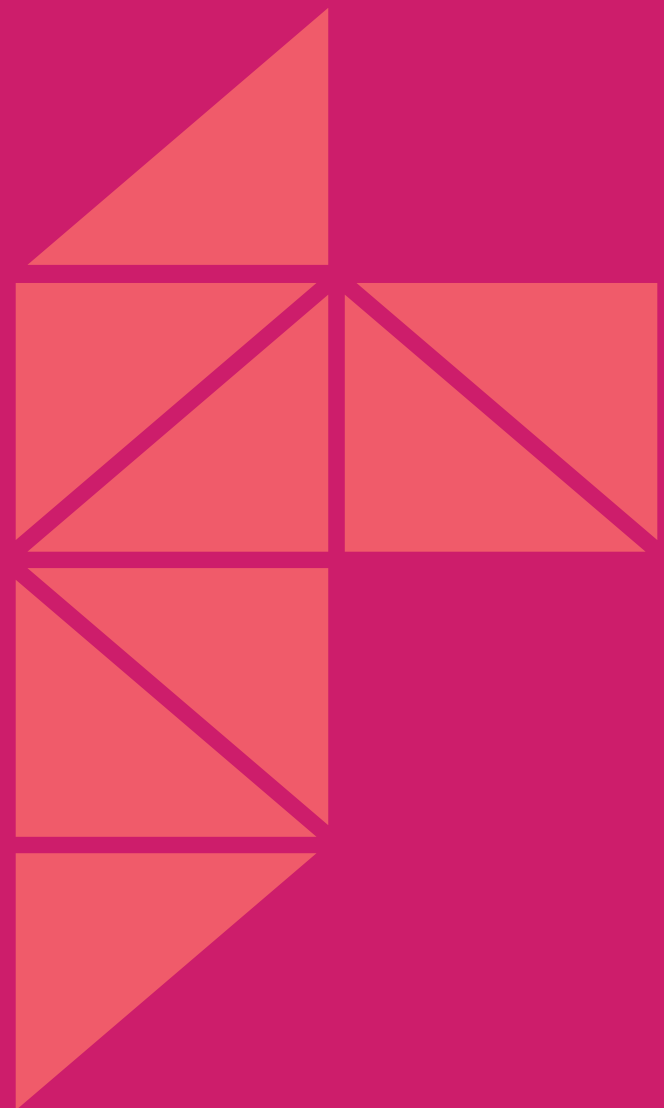
Section 7
The Effectiveness and Impact of Quality Assurance

The approach to quality assurance in institutions continues to shift from the implementation of quality assurance policies and procedures to a focus on embedding a quality culture at both an institutional and unit level. There were a number of recurrent themes that arose within the implementation of quality assurance policies and procedures across all institutions, which included:

• Student Retention and Progression

• Student Success

• Access and Transition to Third Level

• Student Engagement

• Student Feedback

• Links with Professional Bodies

• Industry and Community Engagement

• Graduate Attributes

• Graduate Performance/Employability

• Assessment

• Internationalisation

• Staff Development

The AIQRs demonstrate that, across both sectors, quality assurance policies and procedures are being effectively implemented and are having a tangible impact. Once again, the main indicators of the effectiveness of internal quality assurance were external. They included: commendations and positive feedback from peer review groups taking part in quality reviews; feedback from external examiners (at programme/module level); the institutional Mission-Based Performance Compacts with the HEA. In relation to the impact of quality assurance policies and procedures, the most cited factors were institutional responses to feedback from internal and external surveys, and the implementation of the recommendations of external reviewers. In many institutions survey data and quality review outcomes have led to the development and implementation of quality enhancements for a wide cross-section of stakeholders.

The effectiveness and impact of quality assurance can be broadly grouped under the following headings:

• External Feedback

• Responding to Feedback

• Data Analysis

• Process Review

External Feedback

HEIs reported external feedback as a key factor in the quality enhancement process. In the first instance, a number of institutions highlighted the positive feedback received from external factors as an objective indicator of the effectiveness of internal quality assurance. Some examples include:

- At Dundalk Institute of Technology feedback from external examiners was generally positive and in many cases, examiners commended specific examples of good practice.

- Feedback from review groups indicated that overall, University College Dublin units prepared well for Periodic Quality Review, with the majority of Self-Assessment Reports providing a useful analysis of the units' core activities.

- To assess the effectiveness of the quality review process at the University of Limerick as a quality assurance tool, the Quality Support Unit conducted post-review feedback surveys with external quality reviewers. The response rate was over 90% for both surveys and all respondents considered the review process to be either a 'very effective' or 'effective' quality assurance tool.

Responding to Feedback

A sign of a healthy quality assurance framework is not only the existence of positive feedback that demonstrates effectiveness but also the ability of an institution to respond to the concerns of internal stakeholders, as well as to commendations made by external Review Teams. As noted above, Irish HEIs collate feedback from internal stakeholders (both students and staff) through various surveys and feedback mechanisms. The AIQRs reveal the effectiveness of these initiatives. For instance:

- The inaugural Trinity Postgraduate Research Survey highlighted the need for a greater focus on communication with postgraduate research students regarding the requirements of postgraduate study and structured PhD programmes, especially in relation to the availability of teaching skills courses and modules for structured PhD programmes. Subsequently, the Trinity College Dublin Graduate Studies Committee approved the introduction of two new generic modules to the structured PhD programme.

- Based on the biennial LibQUAL survey and regular meetings with the Students' Union, the University College Cork Library has implemented the three most requested services, namely: increased opening hours including a 24/7 pilot at examinations time; increased numbers of electrical and USB charging points and enhanced Wi-Fi coverage.

- The University College Dublin (UCD) Registry introduced an online resource for Heads of School, based on feedback following consultation with a number of Heads of School. The aim of the pack is to provide information about how UCD Registry can help Heads of School in this role.

Highlighting Good Practice – National University of Ireland, Dublin

Impact of QA Peer Review Processes

Response to external feedback was also central to demonstrating the impact of quality assurance peer review processes such as quality review and the use of external examiners. A good example of the real impact that the external examination procedures makes to the ongoing improvement of assessment processes within Irish HEIs was evident in the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG) AIQR. This institution reported multiple changes that were implemented in response to feedback from external reviewers, the aim of which was to further quality assure the student experience. These included: more instructive and consistent feedback; reducing the number of continuous assessments; using the full marking scale, especially in the higher ranges of the first class band; developing marking criteria for the extremes of the marking bands 'A' and 'Fail' to help to expand the range of marks awarded; ensuring a balance between individual and group assessments to ensure students receive appropriate grades for their individual effort; encouraging higher numbers of students to complete the module evaluations; annotating exam scripts when marking; removing negative marking in multiple choice papers; extending the marking turn-around time prior to the exam board; Institutional procedure for responding to External Examiners reports; supporting students with their writing skills. [adapted from NUIG AIQR]

Examples of the impact of quality assurance processes in other HEIs include:

- As a result of conditions and recommendations a number of institutional and/or programme specific initiatives were implemented by Limerick Institute of Technology. These included: issuing department staff with hard copies of the Writing and Usage of Learning Outcomes: A Guide for Academics 2014-2017 to assist them in writing appropriate learning outcomes; establishment of a working group to review the Admissions Office policies and procedures; recruitment of a Work Placement Co-ordinator.

- Key impacts emerging from quality review at the National University of Ireland, Galway include the following: Schools developing more comprehensive research strategies; strengthened focus on research subject areas that reflects competencies; a clearer relationship with research institutes; research mentoring expanded; developing more effective societal impact cases; focus on improving PhD completion rates; Schools and Colleges addressing gender and seniority profiles; School's developing broader international links.

- A number of changes were made to internal quality assurance procedures at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland due to feedback received from Peer Review Groups. Examples include: the introduction of benchmarking as a component of the Self-Evaluation Phase of internal quality assurance review to allow units undergoing review to compare their policies and procedures against a comparator unit elsewhere; a mid-cycle review of implementation of Quality Improvement Plans arising from quality assurance reviews was introduced; in addition to regular reports to the relevant governing boards, a formal annual report will be presented to each board by the Director of Quality Enhancement.

- At Waterford Institute of Technology, based on the advice of Peer Review Groups, post-School Review Implementation Plans established School Boards. These new boards have led to an increased consideration of non-major awards. This improves the opportunity for external engagement, including meeting industry's continuous professional development needs.

Highlighting Good Practice - University of Limerick

Monitoring QA Systems

HEIs are continuously monitoring and developing their external quality assurance systems. A good example of this is seen at the University of Limerick (UL), where the revised internal quality review guidelines place more emphasis on the post-review quality improvement plan implementation phase to maximise the impact of the review. A comparative analysis of the percentage of improvement plan actions fully implemented by units at the time of their implementation review meeting (approximately one year after the review) was undertaken. Units reviewed under the pre-2016 guidelines achieved, on average, full closure of 48% of action items by this stage of the process. For units reviewed under the new (post-2016) guidelines, this metric increased to 76%. [adapted from UL AIQR]

Data Analysis

During this reporting period, HEIs reported actions resulting from internal data analysis as one of the major impacts of quality assurance. This analysis was carried out in relation to a variety of sources, including programme data, student data and quality review reports.

- A longitudinal analysis of Peer Review Group reports, their commendations and recommendation in the period 2011 – 2016 was carried out at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. This analysis highlighted similar needs across the institution in the areas of Organisation and Management and Staff and Facilities – this reflects a shared need to build and/or optimise internal management structures to support the unit Heads in their leadership roles and to redistribute staff workloads to provide opportunities for greater involvement in research and administrative roles.

- At University College Cork (UCC), the on-going analysis of the outcomes of periodic review processes point towards a need to reinvigorate the periodic review processes to enable engagement and alignment with internal planning cycles and external cycles of accreditation; as a result of this analysis, this development and alignment will be the primary focus of developing UCC's quality approach in the next Strategic Planning phase 2017-2022.

- The use of programme common entry options has been explored in detail by the Cork Institute of Technology Faculty of Engineering and Science, based on an analysis of annual programme and student performance data.

- An ongoing analysis of Annual Programme Board Reports for the reporting period by the Dundalk Institute of Technology Registrar's Office suggests that the programme board structure is working well and in accordance with the 'Institute Monitoring of Programmes Policy'.

- At Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, a review of retention statistics on engineering programmes suggested the need for a review of the entry requirements; following a review of points and subsequent student attainment, it was decided to introduce a minimum threshold for maths commencing in 2017/18.

Process Review

The AIQRs demonstrate an institutional desire to enhance and improve quality assurance policies and procedures and this is reflected in the frequent reviews of internal quality processes. Indeed, the outcomes of such reviews are cited by the institutions themselves as evidence of effectiveness and impact. Examples of such reviews and the resulting impacts are:

- The effectiveness of quality assurance policies and procedures at the Institute of Technology, Sligo was reviewed during the reporting period and a new procedure for online invigilation of examinations was developed as a result of recommendations made.

- The Institute of Technology, Tallaght carried out a review of examination appeals process, which led to enhancements including greater clarity provided to applicants regarding the process; extending the period of review available to students; strengthening of the formal review stage to include a departmental academic panel approach as opposed to review by the lecturer.

- A review of the Institute of Tralee's 'Staff and Students Complaints Procedures' resulted in the development of a 'Student Complaints Policy and Procedure', and a 'Dignity and Respect Policy and Procedure'.

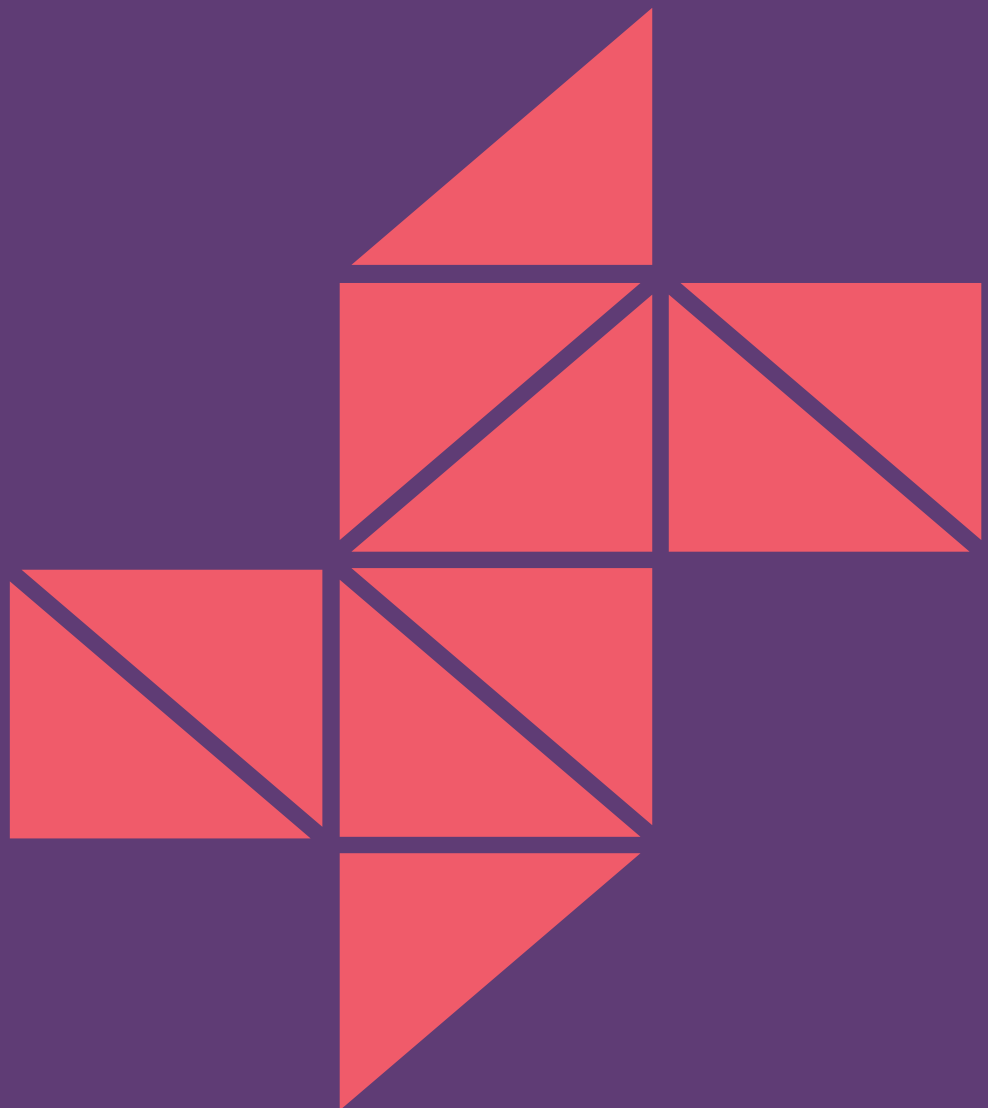## Highlighting Good Practice – Dublin City University

The Effectiveness and Impact of Quality Assurance in Action

The effectiveness and impact of quality assurance policies and procedures in Irish HE is best seen through examples of quality assurance processes in action. A good example of this was reported by Dublin City University (DCU), in relation to the reporting of issues raised within the Annual Programme Review (APR). The process of APR is managed within the faculties at DCU, and the outputs of individual programme reviews are discussed at Faculty Teaching & Learning Committees and, in turn, a summary of the issues raised are considered by Faculty Management Boards. Issues that can be resolved at Faculty level are actioned at that level; issues that cannot be (fully) resolved at Faculty level are brought to the DCU Education Committee, where the key issues are discussed and where appropriate issues raised are actioned for response. Examples of actions responded to issues raised by Annual Periodic Review conducted within the reporting period include:

- An increase in teaching space to address concerns raised in relation to room capacity leading to multiple delivery of larger modules;

- The development of an analysis tool to analyse potential correlations between prior attainment in mathematics and progression in Engineering subjects will be developed to deepen the understanding of required maths competence and progression;

- The establishment of an academic calendar review group to address issues in relation to stakeholder input into the development of the academic calendar;

- The development of a handbook for external examiners, including standard operating processes for engagement, to address support for a consistent approach to the provision of statistical information to external examiners. [adapted from DCU AIQR]

Quality Enhancement Highlights

Section 8
Quality Enhancement Highlights

Student Recruitment, Retention and Support

During the reporting period, many quality improvements and enhancements occurred in the areas of student recruitment, retention and support.

The reports showed a focus on access and transition to third level education, for example:

- At Cork Institute of Technology (CIT), the Access Service participated in a broad range of activities promoting STEM education, including a collaborative 'Science Buddies' programme for primary and post-primary students and their parents and a Robotics Competition for primary and post-primary schools, which was held in CIT's Nexus Student Centre.

- The Dublin Institute of Technology Widening Participation entry routes and student supports continued to be delivered in line with the revised targets in the National Access Plan. Also, DIT expanded the range of opportunities for local DEIS primary and secondary schools in the Grangegorman area to visit the new campus, in the form of Junior Cycle workshops for secondary students and on-campus activities for primary school children.

- The Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dún Laoghaire (IADT) continued to run the First Year Matters Programme, a comprehensive, all-Institute interdisciplinary induction programme designed to welcome students, foster engagement, and create a genuine sense of belonging at IADT.

- Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Galway Community College, a DEIS second level and Further Education provider located in the locality. The MoU is aimed at promoting and improving equity of access to higher education for second level students and for providing progression routes for PLC students.

- The Institute of Technology, Sligo led a project involving seven Irish HEIs to develop a dual-pathway Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), "Get Ready Education – A Learning Journey", designed to help second level students prepare for the transition into higher education. The project was funded in 2015 by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning under the 'National Roadmap for Building Digital Capacity in Irish HE'.

- Short, open, online courses, "Academic Success - Preparation for 3rd Level", were developed by the Institute of Technology, Sligo and Dublin City University in collaboration with a number of other universities and colleges in the UK, Australia and New Zealand.

- To support transition to third level, the Institute of Technology, Tralee has developed an enhanced Orientation and First Year Induction Programme.

- A new Transition to Trinity programme was launched to take students from pre-arrival through their first semester in Trinity College Dublin. The programme is in three phases: (i) Administration & Logistics that takes place pre-arrival; (ii) Socialisation & Academic that occurs during orientation week and the first week of teaching; and (iii) Transition that takes place throughout the first semester.

- Trinity College Dublin (TCD) introduced the International Foundation Programme (IFP) in partnership with Marino Institute of Education. The IFP aims to make TCD's undergraduate programmes accessible to school leavers whose high school examination qualifications are not recognised by TCD for the purposes of admission. The programme is delivered by Marino Institute of Education and validated by Trinity, and students can register for two pathways – an Arts and Social Science pathway and a Science and Health Science pathway.

Highlighting Good Practice – Maynooth University

First-Year Feedback

Maynooth University (MU) led the "Y1Feedback" teaching and learning enhancement initiative in collaboration with its Regional Cluster partners, Dublin City University, Athlone Institute of Technology, Dundalk Institute of Technology and the Technological University Dublin partners. The aim was to enhance feedback practice in first year undergraduate programmes by leveraging the potential of digital technologies, in order to better support student transition to first year. Key outputs included:

- a landscape study of feedback practice and experience across partner institutes;
- a review of international scholarship in relation to technology-enabled feedback;
- design and development of 24 case studies involving over 30 academic partner teams across 16 disciplines, which explored a range of best practice and innovative approaches to feedback in first year;
- hosting of a National Symposium on Enhancing Feedback in First Year in January 2017.

In the next reporting period, further work will examine student engagement with feedback and programmatic approaches. Y1Feedback was funded by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. [adapted from MU AIQR]

Also related to access were initiatives focused on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), including:

- At Cork Institute of Technology, a new 10 credit module in "RPL: Policy, Practice and Pedagogy" was developed and approved for inclusion within the MA in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education as well as being available for single subject certification.
- The Connacht Ulster Alliance (Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, the Institute of Technology Sligo and Letterkenny Institute of Technology) initiated a project to inform, support and facilitate Irish or international applicants in applying for RPL to gain entry onto a programme or seek exemptions from parts of a programme.
- Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology launched an open online course on Recognised Prior Learning Assessment and Mentoring Skills available to all staff in higher education working in an RPL role.

Other initiatives focused specifically on retention:

- Athlone Institute of Technology intend to appoint a part-time Retention Officer for the Faculty of Business and Hospitality, whose role will be to ensure a planned and coordinated approach to retaining students on first year programmes within the faculty.
- During the reporting period, Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) mainstreamed a pilot retention project, the CIT Strategic Student Engagement and Retention Initiative, and designated it as a permanent Institute office, "AnSEO – The Student Engagement Office".
- At the Institute of Technology, Tralee, the Business Systems Integration Office carried out a detailed analysis of entry routes and prior educational attainment with comparison to year 1 retention/progression to assist in identifying students at risk with a view to providing targeted supports (including benchmarking against HEA Non-Progression Report).
- Waterford Institute of Technology have strengthened their retention activities through: better student engagement online; enhanced access and school support programmes; the generation of detailed retention reports and the continued roll out of peer mentoring programmes.

Initiatives that addressed issues relating to student support systems included:

- At Dundalk Institute of Technology, a review of the Student Learning and Development Centre was carried out to assess the impact of the service with a view to supporting its future development and guiding the allocation of limited resources to where they will have the most impact.

- Trinity College Dublin University Council approved a Student Partnership Policy, the aim of which was to reinforce a joint commitment by the University and the Students' Union and the Graduate Students' Union to develop and support effective student partnership, engagement and representation.

- Following a University of Limerick internal review, the Personal Advisor Support System (PASS) was rolled out institutionally during the reporting period. The aim of the PASS is to develop a network of concerned lecturers with adequate resources.

Staff Development/Support

During the reporting period, many quality improvements and enhancements occurred in the area of staff development/support:

- DCU initiated a two-year National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning funded project "DSTEP" (Developing Staff To Enhance Programmes) targeted at Psychology educators in the School of Nursing & Human Science, the DCU Business School, and the Institute of Education.

- DkIT continued to offer staff accredited CPD in Teaching and Learning (MA in Learning and Teaching) and unaccredited CPD (NFETL workshops).

- In the reporting period, a collaborative project aimed at developing a Competence-based Professional Development framework for engineering staff who teach in higher education was initiated with the TU4Dublin Alliance partners. When completed, the framework will be used to recognise and support the alignment of formal and informal professional learning activities at different career stages of engineering educators.

- The Institute of Technology, Sligo offered new academic staff an online induction module, First Steps in Teaching and Learning, which aims to provide an introduction to teaching, learning and assessment in Higher Education.

- The Institute of Technology, Tallaght launched an app to provide dynamic information to new registrants and support their transition to third level.

- At The Institute of Technology, Tralee, an institute-wide Health and Wellbeing Working Group was established (in collaboration with the Students' Union), extending the institute's Health Promotion and Retention Project and associated activities to students across the institution.

- The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland made available to both students and staff an on-line Cultural Competence training resource, which focuses on developing shared attitudes and behaviours in cross cultural situations, to enable both staff and students to have an understanding and acceptance of people from different cultures.

- During the reporting period, the University of Limerick's UL Engage delivered a schedule of training workshops for staff, students and community partners on community-engaged research and learning.

Quality Assurance

During the reporting period, many quality improvements and enhancements occurred in relation to quality assurance processes:

- The Dublin City University (DCU) Quality Promotion Committee developed an Annual Quality Enhancement Topic, which, in the reporting period, was "The Student Voice". A number of

activities and initiatives took place during the academic year, aligned to the theme. Also at DCU, the Quality Promotion Office co-ordinated an internal competition for small funding grants for initiatives and projects which focus on quality improvement and development projects aligned to the quality enhancement theme.

- The Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology Registrar held a quality assurance dialogue meeting with each School, and identified issues for change or improvement which then fed into the Institute's Quality Improvement Plan.

- A synthesis was developed of the findings from departmental reviews carried out in the Maynooth University Faculty of Social Sciences; this synthesis identifies common issues and challenges, highlights good practice and provides opportunities for collaborative quality enhancement activities.

- At Trinity College Dublin, the Global Relations Partnership Team in association with Trinity Teaching and Learning published an online International Partnership Toolkit to facilitate Trinity staff in the development of new international academic partnerships.

- The University College Cork Students Union, in collaboration with Quality Enhancement Unit, identified a panel of potential student reviewers that underwent training to familiarise them with the purposes of review and their role as a reviewer. This training has been impactful, with Panel members increasingly positive regarding the valuable input of student reviewers to the process.

- Case studies of good practice continue to be developed and endorsed through the University College Cork Quality Review process, and the potential to use these internally as local resources for good practice is being developed in conjunction with the Office of the Vice-President for Teaching and Learning.

- University College Dublin created Rowan – Global Partnership Database as part of a broader Global Engagement initiative, with the objective of integrating information from across the university to provide a directory of strategic partners and an integrated profile for each.

- University College Dublin continued the annual publication of 'Examples of Positive Practice identified in UCD Quality Review Reports'.

Highlighting Good Practice – Institute of Technology, Carlow

QA of Collaborative Arrangements

In the reporting period, special attention was given to the procedures around the Collaborative Review process which were updated in the Policies and Procedures for Collaborative and Transnational Provision and Joint Awards. Engaging with partners who are not in the field of education requires Institute of Technology, Carlow to provide guidance and support when undergoing reviews. The three-year Collaborative Review can be very daunting. The Annual Collaborative Review is an opportunity for both partners to discuss the progress of the partnership and have a dialogue around the quality assurance of the programmes delivered. In order to give structure and support to the process, a set of procedures has been developed and adopted, making the Collaborative Review process easier to engage with, for our partners. As a learner focused organisation, Institute of Technology, Carlow has a rigorous quality assurance protocol to ensure that learners are supported on their education programme. As part of the impact of the Research Strategy 2016-2020, infrastructure and support mechanisms were put in place to augment the learner experience. This was accomplished through two initiatives. With three taught NFQ Level 9 collaborative programmes, two of which were run for the first time, an Academic Coordinator was appointed in order to support the learners and the Defence Forces supervision staff. This was identified as an area which required attention as some of the supervisors were new to Level 9 supervision. Two research supervisor workshops were designed and delivered in order to ensure a comprehensive support scaffold is provided for learners. This support was welcomed by the collaborative partner. [adapted from Institute of Technology, Carlow AIQR]

Teaching and Learning

During the reporting period, many quality improvements and enhancements occurred in the area of teaching and learning:

- Dublin City University launched a branded Moodle App, 'DCU Loop'; the university learning portfolio, 'Reflect', also made available on the platform.

- The Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown School of Business integrated Microsoft Office Specialist Certification (MOS) to the Information Systems modules across all Year 1 and Year 2 of programmes, giving learners the opportunity to complete the industry certification of proficiency in the Microsoft Office suite of products as a supplement to their final awards.

- At University College Cork an internal analysis of the published curricula was undertaken by the Centre for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning to evaluate the extent to which research/teaching linkages are articulated explicitly.

- All Schools at Waterford Institute of Technology have been invited to propose their own embedded awards, which is an award that is generic to the overall School, based on the numbers of credits and learning achieved as the learner progresses regardless of whether or not the learner exits.

- Waterford Institute of Technology introduced a new category of Repeat Learner, to replace the old categories of 'exam only' and 'repeat attend', as these categories no longer reflected the realities of the Institute. The Institute introduced the Repeat Learner category to facilitate the provision of adequate, quality, engaged support to a learner for any module that they must repeat.

Work-based learning:

- The Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown School of Informatics and Engineering undertook the development of two Learn + Work Programmes, which are intended to enhance graduate employability skills by concurrently offering students opportunities for learning in the work-place.

- The Institute of Technology Carlow Policy on Work Placement was ratified during the reporting period and this allows for a high level of supervision at the Department and Faculty level to ensure that a comprehensive support structure is in place for learners on work placements.

- Maynooth Unioversity launched the Experiential Learning Office, which aims to support the enhancement of student opportunities for short-term work placement, service learning, community engagement, and undergraduate research. The office will advance experiential learning in the following areas: Community Based Service Learning; Enquiry/Project Based Learning; Undergraduate Research; Community Engagement and Volunteering, in conjunction with the Student Engagement Officer. These experiential opportunities will provide several benefits to both students and staff, enhancing academic learning, integrating theory and practice, and promoting professional development and active citizenship.

- The National University of Ireland, Galway has engaged in extensive curricular reform, in Arts, Business, Law and Engineering programmes, expanding the number of programmes offering work-based learning experiences, prioritising the development of skills modules with a greater focus on employability, and broadening the opportunities for study abroad. For example, in response to feedback from a survey of prospective undergraduates in the University's catchment area, the College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies are now implementing reforms to the existing curriculum, programme structures and the programme portfolio, including the introduction of Core Skills modules to the standard Joint Honours Arts Degree.

Highlighting Good Practice – University of Limerick

Experiential Learning

The University of Limerick (UL) offer a UL Practicum, which provides a means for academic staff to deliver their curriculum differently – in collaboration with community partners working on real-life projects. The UL Practicum enables students to achieve module learning outcomes via practical and applied experiential learning instead of, or in addition to, more traditional classroom-based pedagogies. Examples of UL Practicum projects include:

- City Engage Limerick, a collaborative project between Limerick City and County Council and the School of Architecture, University of Limerick (SAUL). The project entails a series of community engagement events to collect thoughts, hopes and opinions about living in Limerick and creating an accessible vision for the future of the city.

- Limerick Be Heard, a collaborative project between Limerick Youth Service (LYS), Limerick Comhairle na nÓg and UL's Department of Politics and Public Administration. The project focuses on providing facilitated workshops and 'GE2016 Flashdebates' to explain the Irish electoral system and the stances of all political parties. The project was subsequently developed into a more general educational intervention designed to develop local citizenship and human rights awareness. In spring 2017, the young people from LYS and students from UL co-delivered the Limerick Be Heard 'Youth Engage Schools Roadshow' to five local schools. The project is now being expanded nationally and internationally. (adapted from UL AIQR)

Internal Collaboration:

- A collaborative workshop between the Academic Writing Centre and the Library took place at Athlone Institute of Technology, while the library referencing expert worked with Peer Assisted Student Support (PASS) leaders to act as a mentor for academic referencing skills.

- Dublin City University (DCU) launched an initiative entitled, 'The Sipping Point', the aim of which is to provide an opportunity for staff with a shared interest in teaching to interact with each other in a non-formal setting, in order to foster a climate where staff across all disciplines can potentially learn from colleagues about aspects of teaching practice. Also at DCU, around 80 staff participated in a Teaching and Learning Day, which comprised a student led discussion panel, short presentations from staff throughout the university sharing their practice, a workshop on the university's online learning platform and a poster display.

- At Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, staff were invited to participate in the annual teaching and learning showcase, to highlight and demonstrate innovative practice to colleagues during Staff Development Week. It showcased excellence in retention initiatives, learning technologies, assessment tools, community engagement, student-centred learning, online learning approaches and teaching methodologies.

- The University of Limerick's first annual Teaching Expo took place during the reporting period. The event showcased some of the innovative teaching and learning practices across UL and provided a platform for formative discussions and professional development for all staff involved in pedagogic practice and support.

Gender Equality

Gender equality is an area which has seen increased quality assurance activity across all institutions. Examples of quality improvements and enhancements reported as having occurred during the reporting period are:

- The Dublin Institute of Technology President and Senior Leadership Team completed unconscious bias training to create awareness of bias in policy and decision making, while Athena SWAN and Gender Equality is a standing item on the Institute's Human Resources Committee chaired by the President. Specific gender equality initiatives included: a focus on gender equality in the School Review of the School of Computing in the College of Sciences and Health focused on gender equality, with a particular emphasis on growing the pipeline and supporting female students in computer science; and the establishment of a College Gender Equality group to manage its gender equality initiatives and development of a Mentorship Programme to attract and retain female students in engineering.

- Trinity College Dublin launched the new Trinity Centre for Gender Equality and Leadership, established to deliver the University's strategic objectives to advance gender equality. Recognising the work done by WiSER (Centre for Women in Science and Engineering Research) to recruit, retain, return and advance women in academic science, engineering and technology, the new Centre expands this remit to all disciplines and support areas across the university.

Research

The quality assurance of research continues to be of importance to institutions and examples of quality improvements and enhancements in this area include:

- As part of a 4-year Research Action Plan, Dublin Institute of Technology developed a Schools-based research support programme, "Empowering Our Schools", the objective of which was to support research development planning to leverage the totality of a School's research profile and support the attainment of medium and long-term strategic objectives. Academic Leaders were appointed to the thematic areas of Environment, Energy and Health, and Information, Communication and Media Technologies. In addition, two Strategic Proposal Coordinators were appointed to support development of major project proposals while the position of Coordinator, Researcher Development (Postdoctoral and Early Career Researcher Support) has been approved to support researcher career development.

- The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland launched a new Post-PhD Researcher Career and Development Framework which is aligned to the European Commission European Charter for Researchers, Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers and is closely modelled on the EU framework.

Section 9
Objectives for the Coming Reporting Period (2017–18)

Section 9
Objectives for the
Coming Reporting Period (2017-18)

As noted in Section 6, institutions have internal reviews planned for the period 2017-18 in a variety of categories. In addition to this, a wide variety of planned quality assurance/quality enhancement activities were reported. These initiatives, which can be loosely grouped under the headings that follow, demonstrate the commitment of all institutions to the continuous improvement and enhancement of quality and quality assurance in Irish higher education.

Quality Assurance Policies

Institutions reported plans relating to the ongoing review and development of their internal quality assurance systems. These included:

- Ongoing review of all relevant policies and procedures to ensure alignment with regard for the QQI guidelines and policies and ESG 2015.

- Further alignment of institutional policies and procedures in line with QQI Statutory quality assurance Guidelines, in particular, topic-specific guidelines for Research Degrees and Apprenticeships.

- Updating institutional quality assurance manuals in line with relevant local, national and international quality assurance policy developments.

- Development of internal quality assurance policies relating to relationships with Collaborative and Linked Providers.

- Revision of the institutional Student Handbook.

- Development of a roadmap for design, implementation and evaluation of pilot Blended Learning programmes.

- Developing a Handbook for Quality Assurance and Enhancement of Graduate Research Education.

Quality Review

QA-focused plans centred around the following:

- Review of Collaboration/Articulation Agreements

- Planned Programmatic Reviews (across IoT sector)

- Self-evaluation in preparation for Institutional Review

- Reviews of Marks and Standards, and Assessment policies

- Quality Reviews of Professional Support Services/Service Units

- Review of the process for new programme validation

Strategy

Institutions reported plans in relation to strategy for the coming reporting period:

- Development of new strategic plan
- Launch of new strategic plan
- Further implementation of student engagement strategies and initiatives
- Reporting on the implementation of strategic plan
- Preparation for TU process

Other Objectives

Other objectives mentioned by institutions included:

- Preparing for GDPR legislation
- Preparing applications for Athena SWAN awards
- Implementation of online exam and external examiner management systems
- Providing accredited professional development programmes to staff
- Establishment of a Centre for Academic Learning Support
- Establishment of a Centre for Educational Development
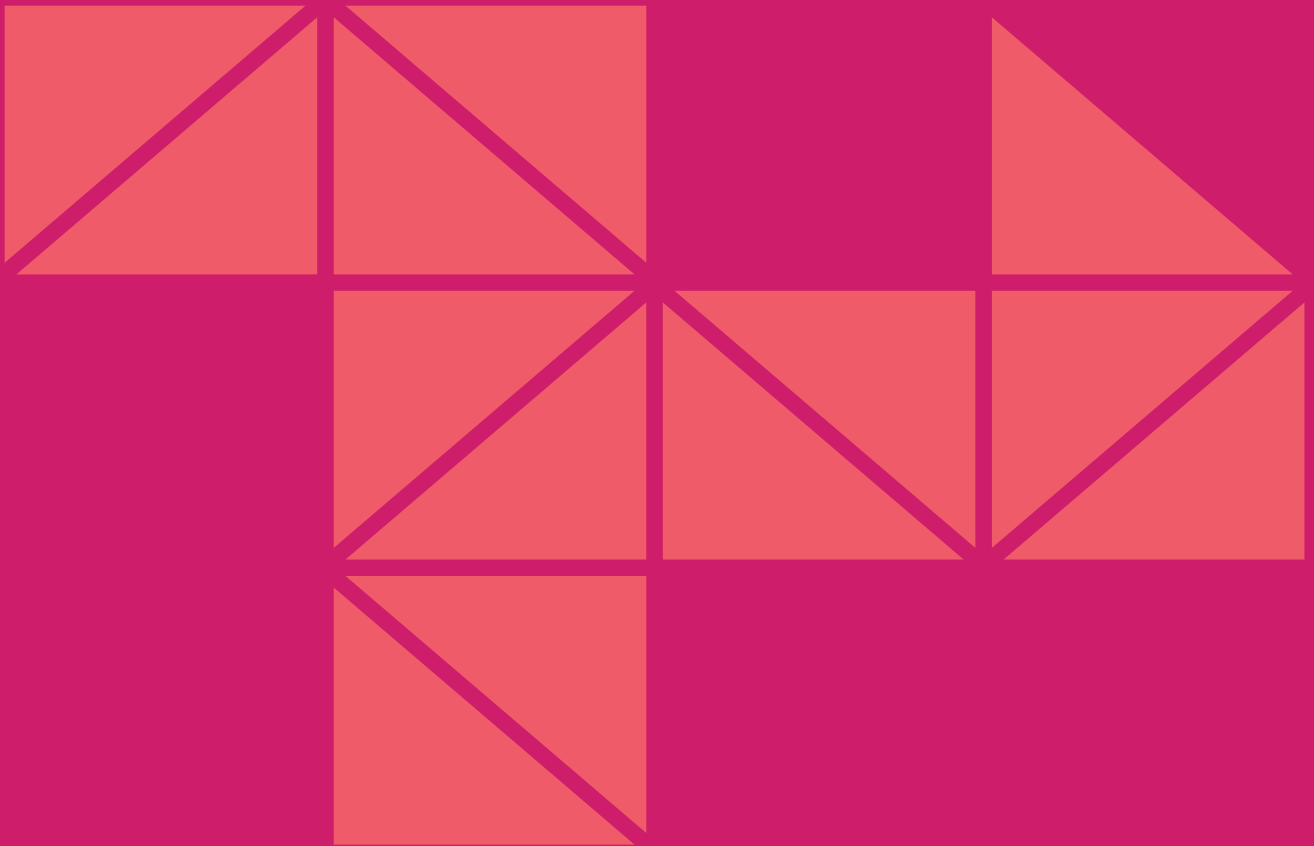- Appointment of a new Academic Council

Quality Within Higher Education 2018
Glossary

AIQR	Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Report
CAO	The Central Applications Office, which processes applications for undergraduate courses in Irish Higher Education Institutions.
DA	Delegated Authority
DAB	Designated Awarding Body; a previously established university, the National University of Ireland, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.
DESSI	Data-Enabled Student Success Initiative
ESG 2015	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, May 2015
HEA	The Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IoT	Institute of Technology
Internal Review	This is a quality review of a department, school, faculty, service area or theme, undertaken within HEIs on a routine, rolling or demand basis. It usually follows a procedure of:

- an initial self-assessment report (SAR),
- followed by a 2 or 3-day visit of a peer review team,
- resulting in a published report with a series of recommendations,
- followed by the development of a quality improvement plan by the unit being reviewed.

ISSE	The Irish Survey of Student Engagement, which is open to first-year, final-year undergraduate, and taught postgraduate students in participating Higher Education Institutions each February to March.
Linked Provider	A provider that has an arrangement with a DAB to offer a programme leading to a DAB award.

Mission-Based Performance Compacts	This Compact is an agreement between the Higher Education Authority and a HEI and is the outcome of a process of strategic dialogue between the two bodies. The purpose of strategic dialogue is to align the missions, strategies and profiles of individual Higher Education Institutions with national priorities, and to agree strategic objective indicators of success against which institutional performance will be measured and funding allocated.
NStEP	National Student Engagement Programme
Policy	A documented statement of a provider's principles and approach to a particular activity.
Programme	A process by which a learner acquires knowledge, skill or competence and includes a course of study, a course of instruction or an apprenticeship.
Provider	A person or organisation that provides, organises or procures a programme of education and training.
PSRB	Professional, Regulatory or Statutory Body
Quality Assurance	Quality assurance is a term generally used to describe the processes that seek to ensure that the learning environment (including teaching and research) reaches an acceptable threshold of quality.
Quality Assurance guideline	Statutory guidance published by QQI to which providers will have due regard when developing, revising or updating their own internal QA system, policies and procedures.
Quality Assurance procedures	Translated into practice, a policy must be broken down into clear and coherent procedures. Procedures are the means and methodologies that a provider uses to carry out the intention of a policy.
Quality Assurance system	A provider's quality (assurance) system refers to all of the provider's internal QA policies and procedures working in concert to form an integrated whole.
Quality Enhancement	Quality enhancement is the improvement and enhancement of the student experience through quality initiatives.
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Reporting period	The reporting period represents an academic year from September 1 to August 31.
USI	Union of Students in Ireland.

QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann