

Quality in Irish Higher
Education Institutions

QQI INSIGHTS.



Dearbhú Cáilíochta
agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and
Qualifications Ireland



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Quality in Irish Higher Education Institutions

This is the first thematic analysis of quality assurance and quality enhancement within both public and private/independent Irish higher education institutions to be published by QQI. It is based on annual quality reports submitted by sixteen public and six private/independent higher education institutions in 2023. It was produced on behalf of QQI by a project team led by Dr Deirdre Stritch and Dr Cathy Peck, supported by Ms Alexandra Anton-Aherne, Dr Annie Doona and Mr Matthew Hurley.

FOREWORD

QQI has identified the publication of authoritative analysis and insight on matters related to our functions in the tertiary education system as a core priority in our Statement of Strategy. In doing so, we seek to inform, support and stimulate our broad and diverse stakeholder base through the identification of trends, dissemination of innovative practice, and analysis of dimensions of quality and qualifications of significance for the education and training system. This work is intended to underpin the evolution of policy, support public confidence, and drive continuous enhancement in the delivery and quality of education and training.

The annual quality reporting (AQR) process for higher education institutions aims to provide documentary evidence of the establishment, implementation and monitoring of an institution's internal quality assurance system, consistent with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015) and with QQI's statutory quality assurance guidelines. It is a well-established practice in the publicly-regulated higher education (HE) sector and QQI has published syntheses of annual reporting in this sector for several years. In recent years, as higher education institutions (HEIs) in the private and independent sector have also commenced quality reporting within this framework, we have published similar syntheses of the AQRs submitted by these institutions. This report, for the first time, brings together analyses of quality reporting from both sectors, providing a comprehensive picture of quality assurance and enhancement activity across Irish higher education and enabling the identification of system-level trends and observations.

The focus of this analysis is the content of the AQRs submitted by HEIs in 2023 for the 2021/22 reporting year. A significant contextual influence in quality reporting for this period was the evolving status of institutions within different parts of the system. 2023 marked the first submission of an annual quality report from Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest, Atlantic Technological University and South East Technological University, which were established during this period following mergers of former institutes of technology. The establishment of new institutional quality assurance infrastructure thus continues to be a notable characteristic of quality reporting in the technological HE sector. Within the private and independent sector, reporting requirements focused on institutions that have ambitions to seek delegated authority to award their own qualifications. These ongoing changes in the awarding landscape reflect a maturing HE system and will alter the relationship of various institutions with QQI in the exercise of its functions as quality assurance agency, qualifications authority and awarding body.

The evidence of whole-of-institution approaches to ensuring the delivery of high-quality learning experiences and environments is particularly notable in the 2023 AQRs across the HE system, with widespread reporting of the involvement of libraries, careers, learner support and other services in quality enhancement initiatives. This is encouraging to note and is indicative of the institution-wide culture of quality envisaged in QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

Quality assurance and enhancement initiatives focused on the validity, authenticity and integrity of assessment are also of particular interest and will remain an ongoing priority for both QQI and institutions as we seek to ensure that approaches to assessment continue to provide a reliable and effective gauge of learning in contemporary contexts, reflect the needs and expectations of learners and other stakeholders, and safeguard against the potential threats posed by contract cheating and generative artificial intelligence.

Dr Pdraig Walsh
Chief Executive Officer



INTRODUCTION

I. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT: THE ANNUAL QUALITY REPORT

The annual quality report (AQR) is an important element of QQI's quality assurance monitoring and review framework. It provides assurance to QQI that requisite quality assurance (QA) procedures are being implemented and regulatory requirements are being met by higher education institutions (HEIs). For HEIs, the report is intended to serve as a record of completed and ongoing quality enhancement activities and set out planned activities for subsequent reporting periods. It also serves as a mechanism for the sharing of practice throughout the sector.

The AQR reporting model has recently been the subject of an independent evaluation commissioned by QQI, which considered the extent to which it is achieving its stated purposes. That evaluation, which was informed by key stakeholders in the sector, found that although adjustments warrant consideration, the AQR (or an equivalent reporting mechanism) has an important role to play in terms of institutional accountability and the facilitation of peer learning in the sector. The [published findings](#) of that evaluation may serve to inform QQI's more extensive upcoming review of its overall monitoring framework and providers' approach to completing future AQRs.

The AQRs are published on [QQI's website](#) to provide transparency on, and enhance public confidence in, quality assurance in Irish higher education institutions. In addition, QQI invites institutions to submit case studies¹ pertinent to specific themes in quality assurance and quality enhancement for the reporting period. The themes identified by QQI for the reporting period 01 September 2021 to 31 August 2022 were:

- Ensuring the quality assurance and enhancement of work placements: an examination of the lessons learned and challenges ahead;
- Enhancing student engagement in partnership with postgraduate and postgraduate research students: taking a closer look at student-staff partnerships;
- The QA of research and/or research assessment; barriers to effective partnership; and
- Ensuring that internal quality assurance can effectively facilitate and support access, mobility and progression of refugees and asylum seekers.

II. QQI INSIGHTS: SYSTEM LEVEL AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE ANNUAL QUALITY REPORTS

In previous years, QQI has undertaken or commissioned separate thematic analyses of both the public and private/independent provider AQRs, and has published these as distinct reports within the [QQI Insights](#) series. This is the first year in which QQI has commissioned a single report which includes a system-level analysis of sectoral trends in quality assurance and enhancement reported across the AQRs. The analysis considers the AQRs of sixteen public providers and of six providers in the private/independent sector, most of which are aspiring to awarding body status

¹ A collection of the unabridged case studies is published separately on QQI's website.

(through delegation of authority to make awards)² in the short or medium term. Case studies from nine additional private/independent HEIs offer a snapshot of practice in specific areas of quality assurance in the wider private/independent HE sector.

This report therefore analyses policy, procedural and strategic QA developments reported by current and aspirant awarding bodies within Irish higher education during the academic year 2021/22. The system-level analysis set out in Chapter 1 is supported and informed by thematic analyses of the relevant AQRs submitted by public HEIs (set out in Chapter 2, based on 16 AQRs submitted and associated case studies) and private/independent HEIs (set out in Chapter 3, based on 6 AQRs³ submitted and case studies submitted by a further 9 providers).

As stated within the [independent evaluation of the AQR reporting model](#), it is important to note that HEIs make local choices as to what to include under given headings in the AQR, rather than reporting comprehensively on all developments that may have taken place in the reporting period. Therefore, it is important to qualify when setting out findings in a thematic or system-level analysis that the AQRs do not always capture the entirety of activities within each HEI. Absence of evidence does not necessarily equate to evidence of absence of activity in a given area, but may reflect deliberate reporting choices on the part of providers to emphasise those aspects of their QA activity which are considered most meaningful in a local context.

2 Further information on delegation of authority to make awards is available here: <https://www.qqi.ie/what-we-do/the-qualifications-system/listed-awarding-bodies>

3 In light of QQI's work to develop a new monitoring framework and potential reconfiguration of the annual quality reporting process for different providers, with the exception of providers that intend to seek delegation of authority to make awards, private and independent HEIs were not obliged to submit an AQR for the 2021/22 academic year. Two further AQRs were voluntarily submitted by providers in this sector. Nine providers voluntarily submitted case studies.



CHAPTER 1.

CHAPTER 1. QUALITY IN IRISH HIGHER EDUCATION: SYSTEM-LEVEL ANALYSIS

1.1 THE LANDSCAPE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN IRELAND IN 2023

The Irish higher education system features three broad categories of provider institutions. These are:

- The seven universities listed in the Universities Act, 1997 and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI).
- The five public technological universities (TUs), established under the [Technological Universities Act, 2018](#) and two institutes of technology (IoTs). The statutory functions of technological sector institutions have a particular focus on meeting local and regional educational needs and on preparing skilled graduates for the workforce.
- Private/independent providers, which are not publicly funded, though may compete for strategic funding in specified areas. HEIs within this category vary substantially in scale, focus and learner cohorts, from established providers offering programmes across a breadth of disciplines with 5,000+ active student enrolments per year (often dominated by international learners) to niche ‘micro-providers’ offering, in some cases, less than three programmes to a small number of students per year in a particular disciplinary domain. Many (though not all) HEIs in this sector cater to the needs of proportionately large cohorts of international learners, with some almost exclusively addressing this international learner market.

Whilst all HEIs that submitted AQRs in 2023 operate within the context of QQI’s [Core Statutory QA Guidelines](#), and report on how they address the requirements of those guidelines, not all have the same responsibilities in terms of awards. All of the public HEIs are [designated awarding bodies](#) under legislation with awards made included in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The private/independent providers that submitted AQRs in 2023 offer programmes leading to awards that are currently made by QQI and, in some cases, by a range of other national and international awarding bodies. However, four of those private/independent HEIs have expressed ambitions towards the attainment of awarding functions under delegated authority from QQI in the short to medium-term.

The different categories of HEI have distinct and important roles and missions in Irish higher education. Considering this, it is perhaps surprising that differences in practice or focus as reported in the 2021/22 AQRs were quite limited. The three most significant differences apparent across the AQRs centred on:

- The reform of governance structures and the development of new policies and procedures in technological universities, as might be anticipated in new institutions established following the merger of a number of antecedent HEIs;
- The approval of AQRs submitted by academic councils and/or registrars/vice presidents for academic affairs in technological and private/independent HEIs (less frequently noted in the older universities); and

- The particular leadership demonstrated by technological universities in the areas of assessment practice and academic integrity initiatives.

The project team acknowledges that this apparent commonality may simply be the consequence of the reporting model, in which all HEIs address issues of QA implementation and enhancement under common headings. It may provide reassurance that the introduction of QQI's Core Statutory QA Guidelines has resulted in consistent QA standards and benchmarks across the sector. How the different missions and functions of Irish HEIs are progressed is more fully elicited through other reporting mechanisms, such as within the Higher Education Authority's (HEA) System Performance Framework 2023-2027, which "sets out parameters under which designated institutions of higher education can identify their contribution to the achievement of institutional and national strategy, as appropriate to each institution's mission, scale, location, and strategic plan" (2023, p.4).⁴

QA practice within institutions in each category has been observed to align closely with that of HEIs in other categories in somewhat unexpected ways. For example, with regard to quality assurance and enhancement activity in higher education (and with specific regard to the role of the AQR in monitoring this), it was previously noted that the conventional distinction made between public and private/independent sector providers may somewhat lack explanatory value⁵. For the 2021/22 reporting period, for instance, the AQRs reflect that the technological universities and some of the larger, more established private/independent providers both indicate a significant focus on rethinking assessment practices (see, for example, Sections 2.3.3 and 3.3.3 of this report), contrasting with less reporting from other institutions on this area of practice. Similarly, the AQRs submitted by a proportion of providers within each of the three broad categories reflect a specific focus on staff wellbeing (see, for example, Sections 2.3.6 and 3.3.10). However, this is not universally reported on in any category.

It is noted that although the traditionally divergent missions of the public and private/independent sector continue to be visible in specific areas, these boundaries are becoming increasingly blurred in the AQRs submitted. The HEA's Draft [System Performance Framework for 2023-2027](#) for public HEIs indicates that institutional performance data may include, among other indicators, apprenticeship enrolments; progress on the [Action Plan for Apprenticeship](#); access and participation figures reflective of targets set out within the [National Access Plan](#) (NAP); enrolments on Springboard+ funded programmes leading to qualifications where there are employment opportunities in the economy and the achievement of gender balance and [Athena SWAN Awards](#). Private/independent HEIs are not statutorily obliged to contribute to the achievement of these national objectives; however, the AQRs for this and the previous reporting period provide substantive evidence that the aspiring awarding bodies amongst the private/independent providers have increased activity within these areas. This outward looking stance has seen a number of private/independent HEIs actively engage with public funding initiatives, such as the [Human Capital Initiative and Springboard+](#). At least one private/independent sector HEI reported on the development and delivery of new apprenticeship programmes, while more than one is actively engaging with the Athena SWAN charter process (see Section 3.1.5).

In the context of a rapidly evolving sector, this system-level analysis of the strategic priorities, quality assurance and quality enhancement activities of institutions across the breadth of higher

4 HEA (2023) Higher Education Authority Governance Oversight Framework - Higher Education Institutions. Accessible at: <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/05/HEA-Governance-Oversight-Framework.pdf>

5 See discussion in Stritch et al (2023) An Independent Evaluation of the QQI Annual Quality Reporting Model, section 3.1.2.1.

education provision in Ireland functions as a valuable complement to more granular thematic analysis of activity within specific subsectors. Adopting a system-level lens enables stakeholders to gain a perspective on quality that better represents the dynamics of quality in Irish higher education as a whole.

1.2 CONTEXTUAL FACTORS IMPACTING ON QUALITY ASSURANCE

1.2.1 THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In the previous reporting period, the AQRs submitted by many of the public and private/independent HEIs reflected a focus on maintaining continuity and support for learners throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, managing the various phases of public health restrictions and reflecting on learning from the rapid pivot to fully online provision. However, across all categories of HEI, the AQRs for the 2021/22 academic year reflected a marked shift in emphasis away from the impact of the pandemic. Some HEIs reported on the integration of online learning to ongoing provision, the retention of fully online support services and phased returns to campus. However, the limited discussion of the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on practice within the reports suggests that attention had, in the main, been directed toward other objectives. These included, in many cases, progressing or developing new strategic plans (work which had been paused or delayed due to the pandemic in some cases), developing new programmes and undertaking broader QA enhancement activities.

Four of the AQR submissions from aspiring awarding bodies in the private/independent sector outlined consultative and/or phased approaches to a return to campus and in-person learning. However, this was much less discussed within the submissions from public HEIs.

The role of the Covid-19 pandemic as a catalyst for digital transformation in HEIs was noted in thematic analyses of AQRs for the previous reporting period. The AQRs submitted for 2021/22 indicated that work to upgrade information systems, enhance data management and implement data protection policies continued apace across the reporting HEIs (see Sections 2.3.7 and 3.3.11). Adding to an impression of breadth and scale in this work was a focus on specific enhancements to learner-facing activities brought about through the digitisation of processes and continued options to access in-person services online. This was showcased by HEIs in featured case studies, as well as outlined in the main body of the AQRs, with examples spanning the domains of assessment, work placements, learning support and library services.

Reporting in this area indicates that Ireland's HEIs will be on a stronger footing should the need to pivot online arise in the future. However, the project team notes that within the AQRs, work in this area is reported in a manner that identifies specific and somewhat localised initiatives. As the information reported is not presented under the umbrella of planned, institution-wide digital transformation agendas it is difficult to discern the extent to which work in this area is occurring on a strategic footing.

Overall, the lack of explicit reflection on, or reference to, learning from the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic in the AQRs may reflect that insufficient time had passed for the outcomes of considered reflection to take shape in a manner that would inform reporting via the AQR.

1.2.2 CHANGES IN DESIGNATION, STATUS AND LEVELS OF AUTONOMY ACROSS THE SECTOR

Three new technological universities were established during this reporting period, Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS), Atlantic Technological University (ATU) and South East Technological University (SETU), reflecting mergers between seven former institutes of technology. This follows the establishment of Munster Technological University (MTU) in January 2021 and Technological University Dublin (TUD) in 2019. As might be expected, the AQRs from HEIs in this sector reflect the organisational and governance restructuring inherent in such mergers, and outline the interim measures adopted, as well as the steps taken and progress made towards the development of new, integrated internal systems. The formal designation of the two remaining IoTs, Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) and Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT), as awarding bodies in 2020, and how the IoTs addressed this in internal policies, was noted in the AQRs of both HEIs.

Notably, a significant theme in the six AQRs submitted by private/independent HEIs for this period pertains to increased autonomy. The cluster of private/independent HEIs reporting for this period vary in their current status and ambitions. One report indicated that devolved responsibility for aspects of the programme validation process is an ambition. Three others, submitted by institutions that have already achieved devolved responsibility, indicate that activity is underway to support readiness for making an application to QQI for delegated authority to make awards. Future achievement of delegated authority will reflect that a degree of trust has been established in the capacity of some of the more experienced private/independent HEIs to take greater responsibility for quality assurance.

1.3 INTERNATIONAL FOCUS

Ireland's higher education institutions expressed a continued international focus in this year's AQRs. Higher education institutions described collaborative provision with European and international partners, articulation arrangements for student mobility, membership of European consortia and participation in international projects and activities (described further in Sections 2.1.3 and 3.3.13). Although the AQRs do not typically set out specific strategic ambitions in relation to internationalisation activities, most public institutions confirm their global ambitions and status (or aspiring status) as international institutions. In support of internationalisation, some HEIs saw new dedicated governance units, operational units and appointments, such as international officers, in this area. Many HEIs also identified their numbers of international staff and learners, confirming their global outlook and impact.

A number of public and one private/independent provider reported on engagement in programme delivery at campuses overseas, either as solo ventures or in partnership with local institutions. However, less detail is provided in general on activities, services and supports in place to underpin that overseas provision or how international provision and the resulting awards are quality assured.

Many private/independent HEIs, including four of those that submitted AQRs in 2023, have a long-standing focus on the recruitment of international learners from around the globe. This reporting period saw tentative steps among a small number of these providers at increasing the complexity

and ambition around internationalisation, for example, through membership of international consortia and increased student and staff mobility partnerships within Europe (see for example, Section 3.3.13).

Whilst the services and facilities in place to support international learners are described across the AQRs, there is less discussion or focus on preparations underway for the introduction of the International Education Mark (IEM) or associated Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners. Ensuring compliance with the Code of Practice/attaining the IEM are identified as strategic objectives or enhancements in only a small number of AQRs (see Section 2.4.1). Following the publication of draft policies in this area, we can likely expect to see more widespread reporting on this issue in future reports.

1.4 EMERGING STRENGTHS: EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A notable theme emerging across the AQRs was the leadership, ambition and commitment expressed in relation to the areas of equality, diversity & inclusion (EDI) and the advancement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Whilst neither EDI nor sustainability are explicitly part of the QA regulatory framework in Ireland (statutory responsibility for the advancement of the former is vested in the Higher Education Authority), HEIs demonstrated thought leadership in the range of activities and initiatives identified in these areas which exceed regulatory requirements (see Sections 2.1.4; 2.1.5; 3.1.5 and 3.1.6). This is especially the case for private/independent HEIs that are not subject to regulatory targets, objectives or particular expectations in these areas.

The AQRs from private/independent HEIs for this reporting period present a bottom-up as well as top-down approach to the development of policies, strategies and initiatives to support EDI, which are grounded in wider shifts in society and the rapidly changing expectations of staff. The range of governance units, senior leadership roles and formal institutional policies in place in this area across public HEIs speak to these institutions' commitment to advancing diverse and inclusive campuses of the future.

The embracing of the UN Sustainable Development Goals by public HEIs in Ireland is reflected in the attainment of high global rankings and awards in specific areas of the SDGs by institutions (see Section 2.1.4). Evidence was also submitted that the SDGs are increasingly being embedded in institutional strategies, policies and programme curricula. AQRs submitted by private/independent HEIs indicate that sustainability is beginning to feature in programme curricula in that sector also, as are commitments to 'greener', more sustainable campus environments.

1.5 TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

In 2021/22, work to promote inclusion in pedagogical practices, often utilising the conceptual framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), was a prominent theme in the AQRs submitted by all categories of Irish HEI. The emphasis placed on inclusive practice spanned reporting on the integration and use of accessibility features and standards within learning technologies, staff development programmes, support for learners and the development of assessment practice.

Work in this area often reflected a continuation or expansion of initiatives commenced in the previous reporting period, indicating that there is a sustained commitment to inclusion across the sector. Considered alongside the broader promotion of EDI within HEIs (see Section 1.4, above) and impactful work in public institutions to promote access and widening participation (see Section 2.3.5.1), this aspect of reporting reinforces that although a distance remains to be travelled, Irish higher education is actively ‘walking the talk’ on diversity and inclusion.

The AQRs submitted indicate, both directly and indirectly, that digital pedagogies (inclusive of online, blended and technology-enhanced learning) are well established across the sector. Case study submissions in particular indicate that the affordances of technology are being leveraged in particular contexts. However, the project team could not ascertain the degree to which the adoption of learning technologies is localised to particular programmes and faculties or integrated institution-wide. It is also not currently possible to ascertain the extent to which practice is as yet building on reflections on the experience of pivoting online during the Covid-19 pandemic. This may become clearer in subsequent reporting periods.

As a whole, the AQRs reflect a continuing trend toward industry-aligned, employability-focused programme provision and associated pedagogies. This is evident in new programme profiles that reflect a responsiveness to skills gaps in industry and government priorities for education and training. It is also indicated in the emphasis placed in case study submissions on work-integrated learning in the form of work placements. Aligned support activity is observable in an increasing focus across the AQRs on the provision of extracurricular careers support services and guidance for learners. A number of HEIs reported on activities within dedicated careers offices or submitted case studies representing developments in practice in this area.

Although not evenly distributed across all categories of HEI, work to progress alternative and authentic assessment strategies was visible, and particularly noted in the AQRs submitted by technological universities and private/independent HEIs. Notably, developments in this area are coherent with the employability-oriented pedagogies already discussed. Moreover, the importance of feedback within approaches to assessment continued to be evident in a number of the AQR submissions.

A trend that was evident, but not reported on directly, was the increasingly active role that libraries and learner support personnel are playing in augmenting and supporting teaching, learning and assessment activity. These activities are reported across a number of dimensions of QA. Similarly, the crucial role that specialised teaching support staff, such as learning technologists, play in supporting academic staff to adapt to and adopt new pedagogies was apparent, though not always directly stated. This suggests that Irish HEIs have aligned with international practice, expanding their institutional infrastructures to deliver on aspects of the contemporary mission of higher education.

1.6 ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Discussion on academic integrity initiatives in the 2021/22 AQRs further reflects the expansion and mainstreaming of academic integrity as an area of focus in Irish HEIs, which was also notable in the previous year’s AQRs. Commitment to embedding a culture of academic integrity within institutions is reflected in the widespread development of tools and guidance materials for staff

and learners (including use of Epigeum academic integrity modules across the technological HEI sector). Whilst the importance and influence of the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) was widely reported, there was limited indication that guidelines, principles and a common lexicon published by NAIN at the start of the reporting period have been adopted or implemented by institutions.

Discussion was quite limited on rates of academic misconduct, types of academic misconduct being detected or the effectiveness of measures taken to mitigate the risk of misconduct during the reporting period. As national practice and awareness regarding academic integrity was evolving rapidly at this time (as evidenced in the widespread institutional participation in the NAIN), reporting of this nature may be more evident in future years' AQRs.

This report contains analysis of AQR submissions and reporting relevant to the 2021/22 academic year, which notably preceded the release of large language model-based artificial intelligence tools, such as Chat GPT. In that sense, the steady progression of activities reported in this domain may represent, in hindsight, something of the calm before the storm for higher education institutions. It can be expected that the impacts of artificial intelligence tools on assessment design and assessment integrity will be the subject of intensive discussion in the subsequent AQRs pertaining to the 2022/23 academic year. It is anticipated that those impacts will vary substantially across disciplines and that a period of relative intensity will commence for institutions in developing associated institutional policies, as well as supporting staff and learners to navigate the use of artificial intelligence appropriately.

At this juncture, it could be tentatively posited that those pockets of the higher education sector where work is already underway to rethink assessment and embed authenticity within assessment design may be somewhat advantaged in this regard. That activity appears to have been prompted in some instances by the experience of Covid-19 and in others by a strategic ambition to embed the development of industry-aligned, 21st century competencies in the curricula. However, in either case assessment design alone is unlikely to be a panacea. Comprehensive and agile responses to the new and emerging challenges of artificial intelligence will be required, particularly if the affordances and potential of artificial intelligence to be utilised well in education and employment are to be given sufficient early attention by our higher education institutions. The wide-reaching impact of the NAIN, as evidenced across all AQRs submitted, may be harnessed to achieve this objective in a collaborative and coherent way.

1.7 INDICATORS OF THE FUTURE LEARNER EXPERIENCE IN IRISH HIGHER EDUCATION

Information pertaining to the QA improvement and enhancement plans of Ireland's HEIs is elicited within Part B, Section Three of the AQR. Priorities identified by HEIs for the subsequent academic year (2022/23) are discussed in Section 2.4 of this report (with regard to public HEIs) and Section 3.4 (with regard to private/independent HEIs). There is an observable variance in how plans are reported between institutions, with some interpreting the prompt comprehensively and reporting on a breadth of activities and others confining the scope to quality office-led activities, such as planned QA reviews. Overall, reporting in this section of the AQRs is not sufficiently comparable for trends in *stated* plans for the sector to be identified. It is noted that this may indicate that further guidance from QQI on the scope and granularity of the information to be provided in this section would be helpful.

Despite this, analysis of the AQRs in their entirety offers a range of insights on developments underway across higher education in Ireland. The reports are extensive (typically 100 - 180 pages in length), and often contain rich descriptions of particular activities and initiatives, many of which are multi-annual in duration and ambitious in scope. Analysis of the full reports thus facilitates a tentative sketch of what the learner experience may look like in the years ahead within reporting institutions:

- Learners are being increasingly exposed to proactive campaigns, initiatives, training and policy frameworks that promote the value of diversity and actively combat discrimination, inequity and forms of conscious and unconscious bias. This exposure is currently somewhat fragmented. However, with no sign that institutional commitment is wavering and strong bottom-up support, it is likely that these initiatives will cohere over time and that EDI will be increasingly embedded in the underpinning processes, norms and culture of our higher education institutions. This may, in time, mean that the graduates of the future will bring higher expectations of EDI to the workplace and society.
- Learners are studying in campus environments where visible work to promote sustainability is underway and are thus becoming accustomed to the characteristics of zero waste, low carbon footprint environments. Although not yet a reality in all programmes of study, learners will increasingly grapple directly with the concepts and considerations of sustainability within their discipline as work to embed this within the curricula of both existing and new programmes gains pace. A growing suite of specialised sustainability-focused programmes and micro-credentials is serving the upskilling needs of lifelong and mature learners. If commitments in this area are sustained and increased, it is likely that Irish graduates will be better placed to contribute to the promotion of sustainable industry in Ireland and the achievement of Ireland's [Climate Action Plan](#).
- Learners are increasingly partaking in a higher education experience in which the development of academic writing skills and ethical practice in study and assessment are fore-fronted. It may be anticipated that in the coming years, learners will be guided in their navigation of academic integrity and ethics across a number of areas, such as plagiarism, contract cheating, collusion, use of file sharing sites, and in relation to the use of artificial intelligence tools and resources. Such guidance will be provided in a context where assessment practice is increasingly informed by authentic design principles. Energies are also being invested in ensuring that staff (both academic faculty and professional support staff) are appropriately and adequately equipped to ensure the embedding of a culture of academic integrity across institutions.
- Learners are undertaking programmes that are increasingly industry and workplace focused in their orientation. It is likely that the majority of learners will experience some form of work placement during their higher education experience in the years ahead, and within their taught modules will have greater exposure to authentic learning and assessment tasks. Transversal skills are more prominent in new programmes being developed and inter/transdisciplinary experiences and elective options are also increasingly likely to feature within new programme design, meaning learners will be increasingly exposed to concepts and practices that transcend their discipline. The growing visibility of careers services is anticipated to continue, with greater support likely to be provided for graduates and alumni in their transition to the workforce post-graduation. It is highly likely that learners will find it easier to engage flexibly with higher education opportunities in the coming years, with options to undertake modules part-time, online and in the form of stackable micro-credentials increasingly facilitating access and participation.

- Learners will increasingly benefit from research-led and research-informed teachings. In many cases, learners will be exposed to research and innovation activity via institutional engagement in industry and enterprise partnerships or projects. This will more appropriately prepare learners to enter industries in which ongoing change and development is the norm and engagement with lifelong learning is a standard career requirement. This will be a feature of experience for learners in all categories of HEI, with the technological universities placing a strong emphasis on research. An emerging theme in the AQRs of the private/independent HEIs is also an increased focus on facilitating and enabling staff to engage in research and participate in communities of practice associated with research endeavours.



CHAPTER 2.

CHAPTER 2. QUALITY IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

This chapter sets out a thematic analysis of quality assurance developments and enhancements within Irish public higher education institutions (HEIs) for the period September 2021 - August 2022, as reported on by the HEIs in their AQRs. Themes were identified with the aim of highlighting key areas of focus for the institutions. Examples and case studies of initiatives are included to illustrate the nature of activities underway.

The HEIs discussed in this chapter are [designated awarding bodies](#) (DABs) meaning that they have authority to make their own awards. A [joint sectoral protocol](#), endorsed by QQI, the universities, the technological universities and the institutes of technology in 2022, enables the formal inclusion of awards made by designated awarding bodies within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) in fulfilment of Section 55B of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act (2012) as amended. The DABs are thus joint custodians of the NFQ with QQI and it is likely that the implications of this role in respect of quality assurance will come to the fore in future reporting periods.

All public HEIs are funded by the [Higher Education Authority](#) (HEA) and are subject to a variety of reporting mechanisms that enable transparency and confidence in the public higher education system. The annual quality reporting (AQR) model is an important element in that accountability framework.

The thematic analysis in this chapter is the seventh to be published by QQI pertaining to public HEIs and comes at a time of significant change within the technological higher education sector. In contrast to last year, AQRs were received from only two institutes of technology, the remainder having merged to become new technological universities. Simultaneously, this reporting period represents the first for three new technological universities, Atlantic Technological University (ATU); South East Technological University (SETU) and Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS). In total, this thematic analysis is informed by 16 AQRs submitted by the following public HEIs:

| No. | Institution |
|-----|--|
| 1. | Atlantic Technological University (ATU) |
| 2. | Dublin City University (DCU) |
| 3. | Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT) |
| 4. | Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) |
| 5. | Maynooth University (MU) |
| 6. | Munster Technological University (MTU) |
| 7. | National University of Ireland (NUI) |
| 8. | Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) |
| 9. | South East Technological University (SETU) |
| 10. | Trinity College Dublin (TCD) |
| 11. | Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) |

| | |
|-----|---|
| 12. | Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS) |
| 13. | University College Cork (UCC) |
| 14. | University College Dublin (UCD) |
| 15. | UG (UG) |
| 16. | University of Limerick (UL) |

Table 1: List of Public Higher Education Institutions that submitted Annual Quality Reports in 2023

2.1 QUALITY ASSURANCE IMPLEMENTATION AND RELATED DEVELOPMENTS

A number of elements impacted on the implementation of quality assurance in public HEIs during the reporting period. These are summarised in the sections below.

2.1.1 IMPACTS OF COVID-19

During the previous reporting period, it was observed that evolving public health restrictions resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic framed all aspects of operations within Ireland's public HEIs. There is a notable shift away from this emergency response in the AQRs documenting the academic year 2021/22. Although the impact of Covid-19 is generally acknowledged by the sector, the reports are not dominated by discussion of emergency measures adopted. Moreover, there is little convergence in the AQRs in relation to any ongoing impact or influence the pandemic will have on future practice.

Some HEIs make reference to potential longer-term impacts on teaching, learning and assessment practice within their AQRs. Examples of this include:

- DCU acknowledged that the change to online and blended learning delivery arising from the Covid-19 pandemic created new challenges as well as opportunities. The AQR highlights the importance of maintaining, ensuring and enhancing QA standards in relation to online and blended delivery and assessment.
- SETU reported that a number of programmes, from Level 6 to Level 9, and across a variety of disciplines, successfully applied to remain fully online, following the removal of distancing restrictions.
- ATU reported that programme teams have been encouraged to consider alternative assessment methods, the need for which was highlighted during the period of Covid-19-related remote delivery.
- NUI reported developing a protocol for managing the transition of programmes to permanent online delivery.
- UL reported that a checklist for course directors in planning for blended learning was developed during Covid-19. The checklist signposts the key tasks involved in planning, developing and coordinating a programmatic approach to blended learning.

- UCC reported in slightly more detail, indicating that as the pandemic ended, most of the measures adopted to facilitate the emergency response were reversed. However, some policies and operational changes arising in response to Covid-19 were maintained as a result of a review carried out by the Academic Council. Specifically, the following were permanently adopted in December 2021:
 - Guidelines for Viva Voce Examinations
 - UCC Lecture Recording Policy
 - Conduct of University Examinations Boards
 - External Examining.

Across the AQRs, a number of public HEIs provided examples of online practices and digital initiatives adopted by service and support areas that have been continued in this reporting period. For example:

- RCSI reported that new or additional library services introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic continued to be offered to students during the reporting period. These include 'Click & Collect' and 'Click & Deliver' services to enable book borrowing, 'Scan & Send' for copying book excerpts, and the virtual information desk for user enquiries, which includes LibChat.



- TUS also reported that remote access to library collections, initially implemented in response to the pandemic, continued.
- IADT reported that the Disability Support Service moved to online appointments during Covid-19, with a proposal for appointments to move to a blended format in future.
- MTU reported on the REACH Initiative, a support system for first and second year students initially developed in response to the pandemic, which continued through the 2021/22 academic year following the Reach Academic Mentoring Initiative's win of the COVID Crisis Response Award at the 2021 Irish Education Awards.

Notably, although the reporting period saw a return to campus for the sector, this is not typically discussed within the AQRs, with some exceptions:

- UCD included a summary of its Covid-19 response and preparation for students returning to campus in September 2022.
- MTU reported that recommencement of face-to-face activity, coupled with the findings of a risk assessment, led to capacity limitations in many teaching spaces. The HEI's 1974 building was most notably affected, with a pre-Covid capacity of 5,242 reduced to 3,564.
- IADT and TUS both reported holding graduation ceremonies in person from October 2021, with smaller events and some restrictions still in place.

The AQRs also include very limited commentary on the implications of hybrid and remote working patterns or intentions to enable this longer term. It could be anticipated that this will be the subject of more definitive reporting in the AQRs for future reporting periods.

- UCD reported that a new Hybrid Trial Review Working Group was established by the University Management Team as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The group met for the first time in June 2022. Three sub-groups have been established to aid the progress of the group.
- NUI reported that according to the new 'Code of Conduct for the Members of the Senate of the National University of Ireland', meetings will be carried out online with occasional meetings taking place in person. This approach was introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic but will now be carried forward. The previous requirement for in-person attendance has been removed.

Some of the AQRs link the emergency pivot to online learning to opportunities for future growth and expansion.

- TUS reported that the institution has observed continued growth in its flexible learning programmes, the number of which increased in response to the pandemic (as well as industry demand).
- SETU reported that heightened interest in micro-credentials, which the institution attributes in part to the Covid-19 pandemic, has spurred the HEI's involvement in three development projects in this area.
- RCSI noted that online delivery of the RCSI MyHealth Lecture Series resulted in "greater reach".

Overall, across the AQRs submitted by public HEIs, there is less space allocated to discussion of longer-term shifts in practice emerging from the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic than might be expected, although such reflection may have commenced after the reporting period – by which time the pandemic had receded and the ‘new normal’ had begun. It is therefore difficult to discern how learning from the emergency pivot online may be influencing ongoing activities in this sector as a whole, for example, impacting decision-making, teaching, approaches to learning and assessment, staff management or new programme development. This may become more apparent in future reporting periods as HEIs set out new strategic plans, objectives and policies that take fuller account of the shifted boundaries of contemporary learning and work.

2.1.2 DEVELOPMENTS IN THE TECHNOLOGICAL HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

This reporting period saw the submission of the first AQR for three of Ireland’s new technological universities.

- Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS) was established on 01 October, 2021 as a result of a merger of Athlone Institute of Technology and Limerick Institute of Technology. TUS submitted an AQR for the reporting period commencing 01 October, 2021 and provided an update on (shared) planned QA objectives identified in the previous reporting period by the two former IOTs.
- Atlantic Technological University (ATU) was established on 01 April, 2022 as a result of a merger of Institute of Technology, Sligo, Galway Mayo Institute of Technology and Letterkenny Institute of Technology. ATU submitted an AQR for the reporting period 01 April – 31 December 2022, and provided updates on planned QA objectives identified in the previous reporting period by the three former IOTs.
- South East Technological University (SETU) was established on 01 May 2022 as a result of a merger of Institute of Technology, Carlow (ITC) and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). SETU submitted an AQR for the reporting period 01 May 2022 – 31 December 2022, covering the first seven months post-establishment.

This was the second reporting period for Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin), established on 01 January 2019, and Munster Technological University (MTU), established on 01 January 2021. No reports were submitted in respect of the IOTs that merged during the reporting period.

The remaining IOTs, IADT and DkIT, received designated awarding body status in 2020 (as reported in the previous reporting period). In this year’s AQR, DkIT reported that as part of its enhancement of relevant policy, an Awarding Policy was approved by Academic Council in April 2021. IADT reported that following designation as an awarding body, its Academic Council adopted the QQI generic awards standards. Meanwhile, DkIT reported plans to review a wide range of policies and procedures to ensure their appropriateness to designated awarding body status and plans to develop an educational/awareness programme on the implications of DAB status for various stakeholders, including the Governing Body, Academic Council, academic staff and students.

2.1.2.1 Designation of Technological Universities

The AQRs submitted by the three newly-established technological universities (TUs) outline the processes by which new QA and governance systems are being developed and confirm that new academic councils and associated sub-committees have been established. There is some variance across the three new TUs in approach, with interim and legacy committees in operation in some of the new HEIs and new structures being more rapidly established in others.

- TUS has established a governing body and academic council. It reported that the Academic Council has a number of sub-committees, including:
 - Quality Management: assurance, enhancement and integration;
 - Teaching and Learning (including embedding digital capital);
 - Programme Provision (including flexible learning);
 - Student Success: access, transfer and progression;
 - Apprenticeship;
 - Postgraduate Research Studies; and
 - Student Experience: management and services.
- ATU's Governing Body convened for the first time on 01 April 2022. Three sub-committees of the Governing Body were subsequently established: the Audit & Risk Committee, EDI Committee and Finance Committee. An Academic Council was established which has six sub-committees: Academic Planning & Strategy Committee; Academic Programmes Committee; Academic Standards & Policy Committee; Research & Innovation Committee; Teaching, Learning & Assessment Committee; and Student Experience and Access Committee. The reporting period has also seen the establishment of an IT Governance Committee and Software Evaluation Committee.
 - ATU further reported that an interim University Planning Team (UPT) has been appointed to assist with its transitional phase. Four sub-committees have been established from the UPT: an Academic Programme Provision Committee; a University Academic Collaborations and Partnership Committee; a Sponsorship Committee; and Resource Committee. ATU reported the institution tendered for the services of a Change Management consultancy, which also has a remit for organisational structure, to advise the President and her management team on the development of a new university-wide organisational structure, including a new faculty structure.
- SETU's Governing Body established an interim academic council to operate until SETU's Governing Body approves a permanent academic council structure. The appointed membership consisted of the President of SETU (as an ex-officio member) and 58 other members drawn equally (29 each) from the membership of the Academic Councils of WIT and ITC as they existed immediately preceding the establishment of SETU. It reported that legacy committees remain positioned between the Academic Council and its working committees, which cover the areas of Academic Quality and Regulation, Academic Development, Learning and Teaching, Research, Student Experience and the Appeals Committee.

The AQRs submitted by TU Dublin and MTU reflect various stages of ongoing activity to align and merge legacy practices and processes and to articulate future visions.

- TU Dublin indicated that this was a very busy period for its organisation design strategy and implementation project - Strategic Intent 2030, which aims to transform the student and staff experience. TU Dublin also underwent a CINNTE review in October 2021, with the panel report published in May 2022. An Institutional Action Plan was developed in response to the review which was incorporated into TUD's wider University Quality Enhancement Plan.
- MTU reported that the Governing Body agreed on a revised set of committees, including the following: an Arts, Sport & Culture Committee; an Audit & Risk Committee; an Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Committee; a Finance Committee; and a Strategic Development Committee.
 - KPMG was appointed as external advisory support for MTU's Technological University Transformation Programme, the work for which was divided into three streams: Strategy Development, Executive Structure, and Professional Services Operating Model.

2.1.3 EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS

During the previous reporting period, the AQRs submitted reflected a focus on European integration, cooperation and exchange and indicated that a number of public Irish HEIs have joined or progressed in alliances with consortia of European universities. Although much of this activity is ongoing, reporting during this period was, overall, more focused on collaborations at programme level, articulation arrangements and specific international initiatives.

Updates on European university consortia included:

- IADT reported that its membership of the [FilmEU Alliance](#), an Erasmus+ funded collaborative project comprising four HEIs, is ongoing. During the reporting period, FilmEU completed a mid-term review of work previously undertaken, the feedback and findings from which were positive, albeit with some minor recommendations.
- TUS reported that its membership of the [Regional University Network - European University \(RUN-EU Network\)](#), an initiative of seven HEIs from Ireland, Portugal, Hungary, Finland, the Netherlands, and Austria (with HEIs in Spain and Belgium to join in 2023), is ongoing.
- TCD reported that a new [CHARM-EU](#) proposal secured a grant of €12.8 million in the 2022 Erasmus+ European Universities Call. It was also reported that three new partners joined the Alliance - Åbo Akademi University, Julius-Maximilians University Würzburg and Hochschule Ruhr West.
- UG reported that Quality Departments at all [ENLIGHT](#) partner institutions formed a working group to review their respective systems in 2021/22. The remit of the working group is to establish a common approach, enabling certification of ENLIGHT courses and degrees and automatic recognition of study periods across ENLIGHT as the basis of a European University System. The first ENLIGHT pilot modules took place in semester 2 2021/22 with UG students in attendance.

A breadth of other collaborations were reported, indicating that Ireland's public HEIs are engaging actively globally, as well as at European level:

- UG provided a summary of collaborative provision, highlighting a number of national and European partners and details of an articulation agreement with Henan University, China.
- SETU reported that in September 2021, the Zhengzhou-based Carlow International College of Technology, in collaboration with Henan University of Animal Husbandry and Economy (HUAHE), enrolled its inaugural group of students into three degree programmes.
- SETU also reported on the approval by Academic Council of linked provision with the Accra Business School, Ghana, comprising three degree programmes and a proposal to offer dual degrees with Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology, China, which is to be evaluated over the next reporting period.
- DkIT reported a new articulation agreement with the University of The Mayab, Mexico, increasing DkIT's total number of articulation agreements to 31. DkIT also hosted a number of international visits by representatives of European universities during the 2021/22 reporting period.
- IADT highlighted a number of collaborative arrangements in place with education providers in Ireland and Canada.
- MU reported a joint international partnership between MU and Fuzhou University China, which offers four undergraduate programmes of study.
- RCSI reported that a successful collaboration between UCD, TCD and RCSI was extended to include the Karolinska Institute (Stockholm) and the University of New South Wales (Sydney, Australia).
- TCD reported on a TCD - Columbia University partnership that has expanded from an initial six programmes based solely in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, to twelve programmes and now includes the Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). There were 102 students on the dual degree programmes in 2021/22. TCD also reported that a partnership with Singapore Institute of Technology, which started in 2012, is now in the winding-down phase with the joint programme set to end in 2023/24.
- UCC noted that the Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on transnational education at UCC, with a number of articulation programmes coming to an end and new models of collaboration underway. The first of these is an agreement with Minzu University of China for a dual degree programme (BSc (Hons) Environmental Science and Management) with the UCC School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences.
- UL indicated that the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility at UL was nominated as an example of best practice in Europe along with the University of Valladolid, Spain to represent European Universities at the European Commission - Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture Worldwide Seminar on 23rd November 2021.
- TU Dublin reported that it is engaged with three European universities on the Programme for Students Learning with Communities initiative, which ran for a second time during the 2021/22 academic year.
- TUS reported that it was pleased to welcome the first cohort of students from Wuxi Institute of Technology in China in September 2021. Students follow two years of the TUS curriculum as well as their Chinese curriculum and have the option of transferring to the third year of the programme at TUS.

2.1.4 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

As was also the case in the previous reporting period, the AQR submissions for 2021/22 reflected that many of Ireland's HEIs are showing significant leadership in the area of sustainability and have embedded the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across strategic development activities.

A small number of public HEIs did not provide information pertaining to the SDGs in their AQRs. However, this may be due to uncertainty regarding the inclusion of this information, given that the SDGs are currently not explicitly embedded within QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines. It is not considered likely to indicate a complete absence of activity in this area. Work to implement the SDGs is necessarily cross-cutting, extending across, for example, strategy, curriculum, the built environment and research, and is reported accordingly.

A number of public HEIs report achievement on various rankings and receipt of awards for their work in this area. Examples include:

- UL reported ranking as the 21st most sustainable university in the UI GreenMetric World University Rankings 2021. The rankings were based on aspects such as setting and infrastructure, energy and climate change, waste, water, transportation, and education and research.
- UG reported ranking fifth in the world for SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production during the reporting period.
- RCSI reported being recognised for its commitment to sustainability with the 2022 Best Green Campus Award at the annual Education Awards. RCSI also won the Green Healthcare Award and the Sustainable Energy Achievement Award at the 2022 Green Awards, and became the first institution in Ireland to be awarded Beacon Status in Sustainable Healthcare by the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare (CSH).
- TCD reported ranking 57th globally by the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2021.
- UCC reported being the first university outside of North America to be awarded a Gold STARS rating from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. In 2021/22, this Gold rating was renewed, with an improvement of 13 points. UCC also ranked 8th globally in the UI GreenMetric and 62nd globally on the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings during the reporting period.

The AQRs for this reporting period reflect that the SDGs are increasingly visible in the mission statements, strategic plans and policies of public HEIs. For example:

- The UL Sustainability Framework 2030 was approved in March 2022 and officially launched in October 2022. The initiative comprises 21 missions which UL will work to complete over the next ten years. UL reported crafting a collective vision and action plan for a more sustainable university. The UL Sustainability Report, published in November 2021, showcases the many stories of how its campus community are looking to contribute to a better future.
- At TUS, work in promoting and enabling the UN SDGs is framed by one of its key Strategic

Enablers, set out in the TUS Strategic Plan 2023-2026. This enabler focuses on sustainable development and the integration of this across the university's activities.

- At MTU the Strategic Plan 2022-2027, which was finalised in June 2022, identifies a number of Strategic Enablers, the second of which is “Embracement of the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the creation of a sustainability culture across all campuses”.
- At UG, a new Climate Action and Sustainability Policy was launched in October 2021 to formalise the target of net zero carbon emissions, agreed by the University Management Team in June 2021.
- At ATU, a Centre for Sustainability was established and a manager appointed. This is noted to mark the beginning of ATU's efforts to address the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

As work toward implementing the SDGs has matured, embedding sustainability in the curriculum and within research agendas and activities has become a focal area for many HEIs. In addition to curriculum mapping and staff training initiatives, sustainability is increasingly evident within new programme design across the sector. Examples of work in this area include:

- UCC reported that, in 2021, funding from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning enabled the university to launch an SDG Toolkit designed to enable educators to integrate the SDGs further into the curriculum.
- MTU reported that sustainability is embedded in its approach to programme design and this is evidenced by the requirement that each new *ab-initio* programme is required to conduct a mapping exercise at the programme design stage to ensure that SDGs are addressed throughout the lifespan of the programme.
- UG reported that it views engaging in research and embedding sustainability in the curriculum as key to its success as an educational institution.
- TUS reported that departments across the HEI have undergone programmatic review and as part of this process taken the opportunity to integrate sustainability topics and themes across their programmes. As this process has concluded and outcomes from the programmatic review process are implemented the SDGs are being integrated across disciplines and programmes.
- TCD reported that a pilot Master's programme 'Master in Global Challenges for Sustainability' was launched in September 2021 as part of the CHARM-EU collaboration. The SDGs and support for the European Green Deal are central to its mission.
- TU Dublin reported that a community engagement initiative driving collaboration between TU Dublin staff/students and local organisations ran a 5-credit (ECTS) module for lecturers on incorporating Community Engaged Research and Learning (CERL) projects into programmes and their own teaching, giving students the opportunity to work in partnership to address particular SDGs.
- RCSI reported leading a national project on Climate Health in Medical Education, which aims to develop a shared planetary health curriculum for medical schools across the island of Ireland.
- ATU reported that sustainability is embedded in the principles underpinning programme development at the university. ATU additionally reported that the embedding of sustainable pedagogical and learning environments is a core focus of the National Technological University Transformation for Recovery and Resilience (N-TUTORR) programme.

- UCC reported that over the course of 2021/22, UCC's Research Office, in collaboration with the ERI and Green Campus, delivered workshops across all school and research centres focused on mapping UCC's research to the SDGs. It was noted that in excess of €20 million is secured annually for environmental and sustainability research. In June 2022, 27 full-time academic posts in sustainability were advertised as part of the UCC Futures initiative.

A range of other activities were reported that are indicative of the commitment to integrating the SDGs in institutional developments. They are also illustrative of the cross-cutting nature of work and achievement in this area. For example:

- RCSI reported that in 2022, RCSI Bahrain launched a Solar Farm project. When completed (estimated to be by January 2023), the solar farm will cover 12,000m² with 4,854 solar panels and produce an expected yearly energy production of 3.54MWh, equivalent to 55% of RCSI Bahrain's current energy consumption.
- UCC reported that in 2022, it hosted a second UCC climate assembly, organised by the Student Union and structured around the themes of the UCC Sustainability Office. In the Spring of 2022, the Glucksman Gallery hosted an exhibition on biodiversity in collaboration with the Environmental Research Institute.
- TUD reported on the HCI-funded GROWTHhub project, which launched in 2021 and continued into 2022. During the reporting period, GROWTHhub hosted a series of ideation challenge events, which posed questions linked to the UN SDGs, such as "How can our cities overcome crises by advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals?"
- TUS reported on the establishment of an Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Working Group, which will report directly to the VP/Deans Council within TUS. This committee has representatives across all aspects of the organisation and will map existing activities against the new National Strategy for ESD 2030 priorities while also coordinating future activities and actions.

2.1.5 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Equality, diversity & inclusion (EDI) is another area in which Ireland's public HEIs have shown significant leadership during the reporting period. Some work in this domain, for example, the production of gender equality plans, is necessary to satisfy HEA and Horizon 2020 requirements. However, the breadth and volume of EDI activity reported far exceeds what is required to maintain eligibility for particular funding streams. It is clear that public HEIs have made deep commitments in this area.

Whilst EDI is not explicitly part of the QA regulatory framework in Ireland (statutory responsibility for which rests with the Higher Education Authority), it is cross-cutting, relating to core practice in multiple domains of activity. The areas typically focused on include staff development, curriculum enhancement (inclusive of teaching, learning and assessment) and learner support. However, inclusive practice also has significant implications for policy and practice across leadership, the management of data and systems, technical infrastructure and the built environment.

In addition to the substantive work discussed above, EDI-aligned actions and initiatives are discussed in this chapter under numerous other subheadings. These include teaching, learning

and assessment, learner support, promoting access and widening participation and staff recruitment, management and development.

A number of AQRs reported on how EDI was further embedded within the leadership, governance and operational structures of HEIs during the reporting period. For example:

- At UL, in December 2021, the president formally launched the Ethnic Diversity Forum, a subgroup of the Human Rights–EDI Steering Committee. It will lead the HEI’s ongoing efforts to advance inclusion and embrace diversity on campus.
- At DCU, the remit of the Learning & Organisational Development team was expanded to include EDI for DCU employees. The team were involved in various initiatives, including the Athena SWAN framework and the DCU Women in Leadership Initiative. Other areas of activity include accessibility, anti-racism, consent and LGBTQ+ inclusion.
- MU reported that the Office of the Vice-President for Equality and Diversity is working to promote the principles of EDI and that the university continued working towards implementing its Gender Equality Action Plan, 2018-2022. A University Equality and Diversity Policy was introduced during the reporting period.
- TUS established an EDI Steering Committee in 2022, which is chaired by the TUS president, to oversee and provide guidance and direction for the achievement of EDI objectives across the university.

Ongoing consultation, review, and the subsequent development of strategy, policy and action plans in the EDI space is prominent in the AQRs submitted by public HEIs. For example:

- RCSI reported that it became the first HEI in Ireland to launch a three-year Race Equality Action Plan.
- UCD reported that following the completion of a Dignity and Respect Review and approval of the recommendations by University Management Team and Governing Authority in May 2021, an implementation plan was developed and rolled out during the 2021/22 academic year by a project group consisting of key stakeholders. UCD also reported on the publication of a Race and Ethnicity Equality Review Report by the Race and Ethnicity Equality Working Group. In Summer 2022, two new policies were published at UCD in relation to Breastfeeding and Supporting the Employment of Persons with Disabilities.
- At UCC, the EDI Unit developed and rolled out a Values & Culture/EDI consultation with UCC students and staff in 2021/22.

A number of initiatives reported in the AQRs are reported to be cross-sectoral. During the reporting period, 18 public HEIs launched SpeakOut, an anonymous tool for reporting bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, discrimination, hate crime, coercive behaviour/control, stalking, assault, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape. SpeakOut is aimed at creating safe campus communities. Additionally:

- MU reported that HEIs across the sector have been progressing toward an implementation plan for a Framework for Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Higher Education Institutions. MU has made progress during the reporting period, including designating leadership, developing policies and carrying out targeted initiatives, including training for staff and students.

- MU also reported that Minister Simon Harris launched the National Gender Equality Dashboard for Higher Education Institutions on International Women’s Day 2021. The dashboard, developed by MU, is a resource for HEIs which visualises the HEA’s Higher Education Institutional Staff Profiles by Gender data.

A significant amount of the activity reported pertains to awareness raising campaigns and events that promote equality and bring visibility to the lived experience of minority and disadvantaged groups. For example:

- At MU, the Office of the Vice-President for Equality and Diversity ran a series of events over the month of June 2022 to mark LGBTQ+ Pride. In March 2022, “Engaging Men and Women Equally – A Masterclass” was held to mark International Women’s Day.
- Also at MU, in 2021/22, the Office of the Vice-President for Equality and Diversity carried out an information campaign across several social media platforms. Content interaction with the MU EDI profile on Instagram was reported to have increased by 1,123% during the campaign.
- At RCSI, the Women’s Network hosted a public online event “Discover Research Stories”, which showcased the latest scientific discoveries of women academics and researchers at RCSI, and supported the delivery of the “MyHealth: Living Well Through Perimenopause and Menopause” series. To mark International Women’s Day, an event was held to raise awareness of bias, stereotypes and discrimination. The second edition of RCSI’s Positive Ageing Booklet was also launched and events were held to celebrate Pride week.
- At TCD, training workshops were facilitated by Lund University. The purpose of the workshops was to raise awareness and understanding of bias and its impact on career paths in academia.
- At UCC, in April 2022, the UCC LGBT+ Staff Network partnered with a number of national organisations to host the Lesbian Lives Conference at UCC. UCC also officially sponsored Cork Pride for the first time, with the president hosting a UCC Together With Pride Afternoon Tea Party.
- Also at UCC, in March 2022, Cork Traveller Women’s Network and Cork Traveller Visibility Group presented University College Cork with a Traveller Ally Award, one of the first ever awarded by these groups. In November 2021, UCC also hosted its first panel discussion to mark International Men’s Day. To mark International Women’s Day in March 2022, UCC hosted a panel on EDI x Sustainability with experts from Ireland and Malawi.

There is evidence across the AQRs that HEIs are continuing to facilitate formal EDI training and education opportunities (accredited and unaccredited) for staff as learning and professional development opportunities. For example:

- At MU, the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) developed and introduced a 5 ECTS credits module in ‘Equality Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education’ for staff as part of the Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching, Learning and Assessment in Higher Education programme. The Centre for Teaching and Learning, in collaboration with the Access Office, developed a range of accessibility-focused supports for staff and students.
- Also at MU, the Office of the Vice-President for Equality and Diversity organised two full-day sessions of Anti-Racism Training for Security Staff in recognition of their role as a frontline service for students and staff.
- At RCSI, it was reported that delivery of a suite of EDI training for students and staff covering

various equality matters was ongoing. Over 400 students and staff attended training on topics including race equality, autism awareness, trans101 and awareness & disclosure training, with support from partners including AsIAm, DRCC, Enable Ireland, Advancing EDI and TENI.

Engagement with Athena SWAN is extensive across the sector. HEIs reported ongoing progress at school and institutional level.

- ATU reported that its Gender Equality Action Plan led to the HEI receiving an Athena SWAN Bronze Award.
- IADT reported that it became the first HEI in Ireland to receive the Athena SWAN Bronze Award under the new Athena SWAN Charter Framework for Ireland.
- UCD reported that it continues to implement the Athena SWAN Gender Equality Action Plan 2020-2024 and will commence the Athena SWAN silver application in Spring 2023.

School-level achievements reported include:

- At RCSI, the School of Nursing and Midwifery and School of Physiotherapy achieved Athena SWAN Bronze accreditation for positive gender practice in higher education.
- At MU, the Faculty of Arts, Celtic Studies and Philosophy achieved an Athena SWAN Bronze award in March 2022. MU sponsored the participation of seven female employees in the Aurora leadership development programme 2021/22.
- At UCC, the Tyndall National Institute became the first research institute in UCC to receive an Athena SWAN Bronze award. Two further schools have submitted applications during the reporting period and are awaiting results.
- At UCD, seven schools across the campus received Athena SWAN Bronze awards in 2021/22. In total, 24 schools (65%) are now bronze accredited in UCD which covers 86% of employees working in UCD schools and 81% of UCD students.
- At UL, during the reporting period, there were an additional five units that received the Athena SWAN Bronze award.
- UG reported that it has progressed to holding 9 school awards in the reporting period of 2021/22.

2.1.6 FACILITIES

A number of the AQRs for this reporting period indicate work planned, progressed or completed in relation to the built environment. As per the previous reporting period, a significant volume of activity was oriented toward the development of facilities for STEM teaching and research. Examples include:

- RCSI reported that work commenced on building a new €22m Education and Research Centre at Connolly Hospital. Work also began on a €95m expansion project at 118 St. Stephen's Green, known as Project Connect. New facilities are reported in the AQR, including a new Patient Care Laboratory that was designed to provide a learning space for

up to 88 students. The existing laboratory was also renovated to accommodate increased student numbers and support science teaching in both the MPharm programme and the new BSc in Advanced Therapeutic Technologies.

- TUS reported a series of campus development projects, including construction of a new €14m campus to focus primarily on engineering (completion expected in 2024). TUS also secured investment for the construction of a new building for applied science and information technology. Development of the Applied Polymer Technology Building is expected to be completed in 2023, as is development of a €4m Campus Incubator.
- TU Dublin reported that following a pause of activity during the pandemic, a number of construction projects resumed, including the development of a Sports Science Health and Research Building in Tallaght, completion of which was expected toward the end of 2022. The development of an Academic Hub and Library in Grangegorman resumed in February 2022.
- UG reported that in March 2022, a decision was taken not to transform the existing James Hardiman Library building, but rather construct a new Learning Commons, to offer enhanced benefits for the student experience, sustainability, and community engagement.
- UCD reported that two major amenity spaces will be delivered. These include an arrival plaza (providing a pedestrian link from the front entrance to the core of the campus) and the Ardmore Quad, which will provide an outdoor amenity space and enhance the setting for Ardmore House and some high-quality mature trees on campus. Planning consents are in place. Site landscaping and infrastructure enabling works commenced in July 2021 and were concluded in 2022 for new developments underway.
- TCD reported that in 2022, the Health Service moved to new custom-built premises in Printing House Square. The facility also houses a disability centre, sporting facilities and accommodation for 249 students.
- MU reported that its facilities and buildings for teaching and learning saw significant investments. These included a major extension to the library, and the addition of 21,700m² to the university's building stock at a cost of €62.4m, including the EOLAS building and the School of Education. Construction of the new 10,500m² TSI academic building was completed in the Summer of 2022. A campus master plan is noted to guide the capital development of the university over the coming decade.

Updates on some of the specific capital investment projects announced in the AQRs submitted during the previous reporting period were absent from the submissions for this reporting period and so individual progress on these cannot be consistently represented here.

2.1.6.1 Inclusivity and Sustainability in the Built Environment

In the previous reporting period, a number of AQRs indicated adaptations to the built environment (both planned and completed) to promote accessibility, inclusivity and sustainability. The AQRs submitted for this reporting period indicate that these themes continue to be significant within projects to develop facilities and campus environments. For example:

- TUS reported that campus development projects underway align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. These include a proposal to develop a “large-scale sports infrastructure project” which aims to achieve Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology (BREAMM) excellence. There are also plans to form a Green Campus Committee in the Athlone Campus and a university-wide campaign to improve energy

efficiency, waste management and create a sustainable transport infrastructure and system.

- MTU reported that as part of the funding awarded from the HCI Capital Funding call, construction continued on MTU's multi-purpose arena through the 2021/22 reporting period. The arena has been designed to conform with Nearly Zero Energy Building (NZEB) Standards.
- DkIT reported that a Sensory Audit has been completed and that an Accessibility Audit is in progress.
- UG reported a significant decrease in energy usage for the reporting period, following years of concerted effort to invest in producing sustainable energy (most notably through Solar PV panels on campus buildings), to renovate and upgrade older buildings, to replace inefficient technologies, and to encourage positive behaviour in the conservation of energy by campus users.

2.2 STRATEGY, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

The AQRs submitted for this reporting period indicate ongoing activity pertaining to strategic development and planning. In the previous reporting period, a number of HEIs reported postponing the finalisation of new strategic plans or reviewing those that predated the pandemic. This year's AQRs indicated that new strategic plans were under development in SETU, MU, DCU, IADT and UCC. Plans were completed or launched at MTU and TUS.

The implementation and tracking of progress toward achievement of strategic objectives was made visible in some AQRs.

- UCD reported on progressing the UCD Strategy 2020-2024 titled "Rising to the Future". Various groups and units within UCD ensure monitoring of the implementation of the strategic plan. Steering groups for each of the four strategic themes were announced in November 2021 to aid progress.
- UG reported that a Strategy Implementation Progress Report was brought to Údarás na hOllscoile in December 2021 and a half-way report has now also been presented. Further information was provided indicating the establishment of the 'Balanced Scorecard', containing 21 performance indicators grouped by the HEI's core values. Target projections for 2025 were provided. The top performing categories for 2021/22 were reported as follows: Athena SWAN (9 school awards), Access, Off-campus Learning, Alumni & Friends, SDG Rankings, Sustainability in Teaching, Research Funding and Innovation.

In some instances, area-specific strategic plans were launched or initiated and new committees or governance structures were established.

- UCD reported the launch of the UCD Library Strategic Plan 2021-2025, the Library of the Future.
- ATU reported the completion of a Marketing Strategy, while an International Strategy is in progress and an External Engagement Strategy is planned.
- UG provided an update on a newly formed International Committee, a sub-committee of Academic Council, which met for the first time in May 2022.

- DkIT reported that an Academic Development and Planning sub-committee of the Academic Council was established in February 2022. The sub-committee is designed to bring a strategic focus and oversight to the development of the institute's academic portfolio.
- TCD reported that the terms of reference for the Quality Committee were amended in 2021/22 to include representation from (i) a Head of School and (ii) the Global Office to respond to the expected implementation of the International Education Mark in 2023/24. These amendments were approved by the Board in September 2022.

Notably, progress in the designation of technological universities saw a number of institutes of technology establishing new governance structures, as previously discussed in section 2.1.2.2.

2.2.1 QUALITY ASSURANCE SUPPORTING STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Ongoing development of QA was reported within AQRs, with variable levels of detail provided. In the main, activity reported pertained to digital education/online provision and the ongoing management and oversight of QA.

- DCU reported that in December 2021, it approved Principles for Quality Assurance of DCU E-learning & Blended Provision, which are closely aligned to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG 2015).
- UCC reported that a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) was developed in 2021/22. The QEP is linked to the development of a new Digital Education Strategy which is led by the Vice President for Learning & Teaching.
- TCD reported that the terms of reference for the Associated College Degrees Committee were strengthened prior to the reporting period with regard to oversight of the quality assurance of linked providers following the university's approval of its Linked Provider Quality Assurance Procedures in 2019/20. Central to this was the initiation of an Annual Dialogue Meeting with both of the university's linked providers, which occurred in April (MIE) and May (RIAM) 2022.
- TCD also reported on a project commenced in September 2021 which looked at ownership and management of policies on the College Policies website. This resulted in the College Board approving a Policy Management Framework in April 2022.
- At NUI, two new policies were developed during the reporting period: the NUI (2021) Policy, Regulations and Procedures for the Approval of Research Degrees in the Recognised Colleges and the NUI (2022) Protocol on transitioning to permanent online delivery for the 2022/23 academic year in the Recognised Colleges.

AQRs submitted by technological universities reported on ongoing work undertaken to formalise institution-wide QA that will supersede legacy processes.

- ATU reported that a Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team was established to develop university-wide policies. Several policies and procedures relating to the governance structure were approved during the reporting period, including: the Interim Code of Governance, Conflict of Interest Policy, Risk Management, Anti-Fraud Policy, Anti-Corruption Policy, Protected Disclosures Policy and Safety Statement.
- TU Dublin reported on the development of the TUD Education Model which is framed by five pillars: Include, Empower, Grow, Contribute, and Create. The AQR noted that

development of TU Dublin's Quality Framework is near to completion.

- ATU reported that the focus of the International Office during the reporting period was on integrating policies and processes around international partners, international agents, entry requirements, fees, refunds, key territories, key programmes and online recruitment systems. The reporting period saw ATU complete both its International Roadmap and Erasmus Without Papers tender, while the university's International Strategy is still in progress and the integration of its IT systems for its international activities is planned.

HEIs were invited to submit case studies and updates with a particular focus on student-staff partnerships for this reporting period.

- RCSI reported on a Student Engagement and Partnership (StEP) project to develop a definition of student success in the RCSI context and build a framework to appropriately address students' needs. The initiative, which collected staff and student feedback through anonymous and voluntary surveys, resulted in the agreement of a final definition. RCSI subsequently embedded student success within the institution's Annual Student Engagement and Partnership (StEP) Agreements, formal agreements between RCSI and the SU and PGSU teams. The process and outcomes of the initiative are set out in further detail in a case study submission accessible [here](#).
- RCSI also reported that it was presented with the AMEE ASPIRE To Excellence Award for Student Engagement during the AMEE conference in Lyon, France in August 2022. A student and RCSI staff travelled to Lyon to accept the award together, in the ongoing spirit of partnership. The process leading up to the achievement of the award is set out in further detail in a case study submission accessible [here](#).
- NUI reported that within the CINNTE process, student advisers were involved in the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) development process, and it is hoped that new initiatives in NUI's Strategic Plan 2023-27 will facilitate greater student partnership in QA matters in the next strategic cycle.
- UCD reported that, following a competitive process, seventeen project teams across the university were awarded funding to pilot different models of academic advising in partnership with students. The AQR noted that UCD works in partnership with the Students' Union to ensure that students are represented at all levels of the university and are facilitated in engaging as part of the university community.

The case study below submitted by UCC outlines how student partnership in quality assurance and enhancement activity is being facilitated at UCC. The case study has been redacted for the purposes of brevity but can be accessed in full [here](#).

Case Study

The Quality Enhancement Unit's Student Digital Space at UCC

Introduction

UCC as an institution has adopted an explicit student-centred approach with student success and partnership placed among its top strategic priorities (e.g. UCC 2022, Pillar 3). As part of this, UCC has been implementing strategic initiatives, such as the 'Students as Partners' Actions 3.3.1 to 3.3.3, including its first Student Forum, which will be launched in Autumn 2022. The Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU)'s student engagement and partnership approach (see Quality Enhancement Policy) is aligned with the institutional student-centred mission. Furthermore, the importance of digital engagement in HEIs has emerged very strongly with the sudden outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced all institutions to adapt their practices and maximise the benefits of digital engagement as a parallel and complementary means of communication and engagement with their key stakeholders.

Project Overview

This case study focuses on the development of a Student Digital Space by the Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU) on its website. The first stage of this project was completed in Spring 2022 with the publication of the Student Reviewers Section of the Student Digital Space, which is directly accessible from the QEU's landing page.

The principal target group of the Student Digital Space is students, especially those interested in collaborating with the QEU on QA and QE processes, either as Student Union Officers or representatives.

However, the site is also relevant for staff, the general public, other HEIs and national regulatory bodies interested in finding out more about our student engagement in QA and QE initiatives, including Student Reviewer recruitment, training, resources and testimonials.

Specifically, the SDS' Student Reviewer section covers quality review-related topics from a Quality Enhancement approach within the UCC context with a focus on their relevance to students and their involvement in the quality review processes of the University. The following sections are included in the SDS 'Student Reviewer' webpage:

- Welcome message from the UCC Director of QE
- The role of the Student Reviewer - Student Reviewers' Testimonials
- What is a Quality Review?
- What is Quality? A Student Perspective
- What is a Student Reviewer expected to do?

Student Resources

The development of a student-targeted digital space within the QEU website responds to the QEU's key overarching goal of broadening, diversifying and enhancing its student engagement practices, reaching out to the whole student body, through various approaches, both digital and on-campus. More specifically, it pursues the following three objectives:

Objective 1

To broaden the QEU communication with students through the establishment of a Student Digital Space (Phase I and Phase II) responding to the following functions:

- Student Reviewer-dedicated area (information and resources)
- Information for students on QE/QA processes, initiatives and developments at QEU and University level
- Awareness-raising on QE benefits for the student experience
- Digital comment box for student feedback and perspectives
- Increasing local visibility of national initiatives/resources on quality and student engagement
- Other functions identified by students
-

Objective 2

To design and implement Phase II of the Student Digital Space through an inclusive staff-student partnership approach.

Objective 3

To provide a successful example of inclusive student partnership in QE, from the design stage to the realisation, launch and evaluation of the initiative so that it can be celebrated and disseminated across the Institution and beyond.

Conclusion

The design and publication of the Student Digital Space within the QEU website represent a significant output towards the advancement of the QEU digital communication with students on quality assurance and quality enhancement matters, in line with Section 9 of the Core Statutory QA Guidelines (QQI, 2016). It also increases the visibility of the key role played by student reviewers in contributing to the quality processes of the University and to the enhancement of the quality of student experiences at UCC. Simultaneously, it demonstrates the personal and professional development benefits for students, who are involved in the quality review process of the University.

2.2.2 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURAL CHANGES

During the reporting period, a number of new senior appointments were made across institutions.

- DCU reported that in September 2021, a newly constituted DCU Governing Authority appointed a new Chancellor of DCU.
- MU reported that the new President of the University commenced in post in October 2021. Additional senior level positions were put in place during the academic year 2021/22, including Vice-President External Affairs, Vice-President for Research (interim), Director of HR (Interim) and Director of Governance.
- ATU reported that its first President was appointed. Three members of the ATU Governing Body were also appointed for a two-year term.
- UL reported that its Provost and Deputy President was appointed for a five-year period in July 2022.
- SETU reported that its President was appointed in May 2022.
- RCSI reported that at RUMC (RCSI & UCD Malaysia Campus), a new Vice-President and Registrar was appointed.
- UCD reported significant changes in leadership within the reporting period, including the appointment of a new Acting President, Acting Registrar, Deputy President, and Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Dean of Graduate Studies, University Librarian; two new College Principals and 12 new Heads of School.
- NUI reported that two changes were made to members of the Senate during the reporting period. Four significant NUI roles also changed. These included the Manager of Academic Affairs, the Registrar, the Head of Academic Services & Registry and the Manager of Registrar's Office/Chief Risk Officer.

Given the breadth of activity in the TU sector resulting from merger activities discussed in section 2.1.2.2, a significant number of appointments were reported by ATU, TUS, TU Dublin and MTU in particular. These are too numerous to summarise here: however, several HEIs reported appointments that could be considered to reflect priority areas of activity. For example:

- RCSI reported that new heads were appointed to two professional services departments, the Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and the Head of the Quality Enhancement Office.
- UG reported that a Vice-President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion was appointed in January 2022.
- UL reported appointing a Research Integrity Officer from among its senior faculty. Additionally, a Chief Financial Performance Officer, a new Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) Director and a Director of Marketing and Communications were appointed during the reporting period.
- IADT reported appointing a Head of Department of European Projects/FilmEU, an Enterprise and Development Manager and an Institutional Research & Data Analysis Officer.
- SETU, which was established on 01 May, 2022, reported that no changes were made to the Leadership and Management team in this reporting period. However, the university has commissioned a review of its organisational structures which will finish in the next reporting period.

A number of AQRs for this reporting period indicated a focus on enabling and resourcing external engagement and global/international mobility and recruitment. Examples of activity in this area include:

- At DCU, key offices with responsibility for external engagement were restructured within a newly created Office of the Director of Engagement. These include responsibilities for national and international recruitment activities, global partnership, alumni engagement, initiatives for external engagement nationally, and the governance of DCU's external relationships and partnerships. The office is led by the Executive Director of External Engagement, who was appointed to DCU in December 2021.
- MU reported that in June 2022, a new senior-level post, Vice-President External Affairs, was created and filled to lead the development and implementation of the relevant components of the university's next strategic plan; to continue to build capacity in the function; and to provide a voice at University Executive on matters related to stakeholder engagement and communications.
- MU reported that subsequent to the creation of the new post of Vice-President External Affairs, the University Executive approved the creation of an expanded Office of External Relations directorate consisting of four teams, with a head to be appointed for each: Director of Strategic Communications and Marketing, Director of Development and Alumni Relations, University Events Manager and Director of Partnerships and Engagement.
- UG reported a new unit being established to include the International Office. The Unit has 40 staff and 12 regional representatives and encompasses Global Recruitment, Global Mobility, Global Partnerships, Finance & Global Operations, ENLIGHT, the English Language Centre (in transition) and the Office of the Vice-President International.

Some HEIs reported that new schools, colleges or departments were launched during the reporting period, while others reported that new research centres were established.

- At UL, a proposal for a Doctoral College was approved by the Executive Committee in May 2022. The proposal highlighted the anticipated organisational structure that would support the Doctoral College. This includes a new Associate Vice-President of the Doctoral College and a Doctoral College Board to provide oversight, strategic and financial planning, as well as governance and decision making to doctoral education.
- At UL, the University Research Committee approved three new centres: the Sports & Human Performance Research Centre, the Centre for the Study of Popular Music and Popular Culture and the Limerick Digital Cancer Research Centre.
- At UG, the Academic Council approved a joint submission by the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences and the College of Science and Engineering to set up two new cross-college research institutes to replace the NCBES Institute. These are the research institute for Medical Technologies and Advanced Therapeutics Discovery, with a primary affiliation in the College of Science and Engineering, and the research institute for Innovative Translational Clinical Trials, with a primary affiliation in the College of Medicine, Nursing & Health Sciences.

2.3 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM ENHANCEMENT AND IMPACTS

Public HEIs reported a wide range of enhancements and related impacts which took place during the reporting period, some of which, like updates to academic integrity policies (discussed in section 2.3.1 below) were common across the sector and others of which were specific to local contexts. These are described in more detail throughout this section.

2.3.1 ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

In the previous reporting period, it was observed that academic integrity had been brought to the fore with multiple initiatives, proactive measures and policy developments reported across the sector. AQRs for this reporting period provided evidence of continuity in activities from the previous year, for example, in the form of ongoing participation in the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) and the National Academic Integrity Week, held in October 2021. Activities and initiatives in this area were too numerous to report in their totality. Illustrative examples are highlighted throughout this section, including:

- DCU reported developing a variety of tools and activities to support academic integrity, including guidance, information and interactive activities for students and staff during National Academic Integrity Week.
- DCU reported that the DCU Teaching Enhancement Unit worked with partner universities on the INTEGRITY project with the intention of improving and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. The project centres around principles of academic integrity and avoiding plagiarism in higher education and resulted in the development of a toolkit for academics.
- RCSI reported that the Head of RCSI's Quality Enhancement Office made a presentation to the Academic Council in May 2021, recorded a QQI NAIN podcast and presented at the HECA/National Forum Seminar on Responding to the Challenge of Academic Impropriety, among other activities this reporting period.
- UCD reported that in February 2022, the UCD Library launched a Brightspace Explore Academic Integrity Course with support from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.

The development of training and support materials for staff and learners featured across a number of AQRs. UCD, MTU and IADT reported on the development of resources and services to support academic integrity by library services. All technological universities and IoTs, bar one, reported use of Epigeum academic integrity modules to increase staff and student support and training on academic integrity issues. In some HEIs, such as MTU, learners who complete the module receive a digital badge for academic integrity. TUS and SETU reported that they also provide formal research integrity training through Epigeum. Such training is mandatory for researchers on most of the publicly funded projects at UG and RCSI. Illustrative support and training activities also include:

- SETU reported holding tailored staff and student online programme briefing and Q&A sessions in September 2022. SETU also reported that bespoke group support sessions were offered to students, including those of collaborative partners. An example of this was a session on Academic Writing for Dissertations, offered to students within the Defence Forces. A similar session was offered to final-year students in Engineering over a three-week period to support them in the drafting of their theses.

- ATU reported that the Teaching and Learning Centre developed an online Academic Integrity Hub (licensed from DCU). The hub is available to all academic staff and facilitates the development of assessment that embeds academic integrity practices. The hub contains an extensive set of relevant resources and multiple self-paced learning programmes.
- MTU reported that Epigeum training for staff complements assessment design workshops for staff jointly provided by the Teaching & Learning Unit and the Department of Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL). The aim of the workshops is to support staff in reducing rates of academic misconduct through assessment design.
 - Several other MTU services offer practical advice and training for students on assessment literacy, good academic writing and referencing practice and avoiding plagiarism, such as the Academic Learning Services provided as part of the University's Student Services, the Academic Success Coaching service and the MTU Library. AnSEO, the Student Engagement Office, runs an annual "Just Ask! About Results" campaign to raise awareness of poor assessment practice.
- UG reported that it continued to promote an online lesson on contract cheating for students and a joint staff-student workshop on how to ensure good collaboration. The university also developed a campaign to promote discussion of academic integrity issues and scenarios amongst staff and students. In particular, the university noted that academic integrity and plagiarism are part of the core content in the assessment module on the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning and the Postgraduate Diploma in Academic Practice.
- TU Dublin reported that learners found to have engaged in academic misconduct or poor academic practice may be directed to revisit specific academic integrity training modules and other resources. Additionally, all Year 1 learners are enrolled on an Academic Integrity for Students course.
 - TU Dublin also reported that a Student Academic Integrity Code of Practice is in development, to be completed in 2022/23. It is intended that the Code will be available in student handbooks, on the VLE and addressed during induction.

It was evident that development of policy and guidelines in this area continued across the sector, although the influence or impact of the NAIN Academic Integrity Guidelines and National Principles and Lexicon of Common Terms, published in September 2021, was limited:

- ATU reported adopting the NAIN Academic Integrity Guidelines and National Principles and Lexicon of Common Terms at a meeting of the Academic Council in October 2021. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team, established in June 2022, is currently consolidating and updating legacy policies previously in place in ATU's constituent institutions.
 - ATU further noted that assessing the effectiveness and outcomes of academic integrity measures is difficult given the pace of change in this area. It reported that the university will focus in the 2023/24 academic year on enhancing the cohesion of policies, procedures, practices and support across the institution.
- UL reported that an Academic Integrity Team has been appointed to revise the academic integrity policy and procedures to align with the NAIN Guidelines.
- TCD reported that a Statement of Principles on Integrity for academics, professional staff, and students was developed which clarifies the meaning and importance of integrity within the university as an academic institution and how these principles relate to its core value. These were approved by Council in May 2022

- DkIT reported updating policy and procedure concerning academic integrity following a meeting of the Academic Council in December 2021, to include a role description for a Plagiarism Advisor and guidelines for staff on the conduct of oral verification interviews. As of the 2021/22 reporting period, work is ongoing at DkIT to develop an Academic Integrity Action Plan.
- UCC reported that it was developing a suite of policy and resources on academic integrity, led by the Skills Centre, which reports to the Vice-President for Learning & Teaching.
- TU Dublin reported that the Academic Integrity Working Group led the development of a new policy on academic integrity and a framework for the management of cases of suspected misconduct, which has since been approved by the Academic Council.
- UCD reported development of guidelines on academic integrity and guidance in relation to online and distance assessments which are published on the UCD Teaching and Learning website.
- IADT reported that its new Academic Integrity Policy is in development (a replacement of its former Plagiarism Policy) with a view to completion in 2023.
- DCU reported that an Academic Integrity Policy sub-committee, which is a sub-committee of the University Standards Committee, was established in 2021/22 and will be responsible for progressing the recommended policy revision.

UG submitted a case study that outlines both the importance of developing policy in the area and the challenges that may arise. The case study has been redacted for the purposes of brevity but can be accessed in full [here](#).

Case Study

Developing Academic Integrity Policy at UG

We have taken a multilayered approach including supporting academic staff in revising their assessments, creating workshops around academic integrity for staff and students, developing and launching an online lesson on contract cheating for students, encouraging discussion of academic integrity across the university, and holding an academic integrity event for academic leadership in the university to highlight the current issues. However, we know that this is not enough. As reported internationally, even “authentic assessment” is regularly outsourced both for a fee to contract cheating sites and without a fee to family and friends (Ellis et al, 2020).

As a result, in addition to the educational efforts discussed above, a significant focus of our academic integrity work has been to update our plagiarism policy to a more comprehensive academic integrity policy. We designed our new policy to deal not only with plagiarism but also contract cheating, artificial intelligence, file sharing, data falsification and a myriad of other types of academic misconduct that have increased in prevalence across higher education over the last decade and in particular since Spring 2020 as is reflected in the literature and the media (Lancaster & Cotarlan (2021), Sforza (2021), Mills (2023).

A robust academic integrity policy is essential to combat academic misconduct. Although some students will respond to educational efforts and moral pleas, this alone is not enough. There needs to be consequences for engaging in academic misconduct and we must expend effort into discovering this academic misconduct (Ellis (2021)). We researched and wrote the new academic integrity policy during the academic year 21/22 and it was passed by Academic Council in June 2022. We encountered a number of challenges while writing the policy. A significant challenge was how to determine the most recent recommendations for such work. The National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) were in the process of producing guidelines for policies nationally and we used (with agreement) drafts of their documentation to ensure that our policy was in line with these recommendations. We also consulted with international experts from both the UK and Australia and reviewed the extensive literature on the topic. This was invaluable as in some cases we were able to learn from universities who had recently revised their own policy and incorporate changes that they wish they had included, such as the use of artificial intelligence for assignments.

An additional challenge that we encountered was engaging stakeholders in the process. Early requests for contribution and discussion were sometimes missed by busy academics and then they felt that they hadn't been consulted early enough when feedback was requested later in the process. We addressed this by encouraging people to contribute their feedback at that point and incorporated each contribution into the policy where possible or responded with further information on the reasoning and approach of the new policy when it was not.

The new policy and its associated processes mark a significant change in how we will identify and deal with such issues in future. It recognises the need for a full-time, dedicated specialist to manage complex cases and to support the academic staff across the institution, with the new role of Academic Integrity Officer being established. In conclusion, we moved from forming a working group, reviewing current practices nationally and internationally, drafting a new academic integrity policy, revising that draft based on both internal and external feedback, and approving the new academic integrity policy over the course of 12 months. We have now moved our focus to the challenging aspect of implementing our new policy including hiring the relevant positions and putting training and processes in place as well as sharing our process and work nationally and internationally (Greene & Tooher (2022)) to help others embarking on their own journey.

Case Study 2: UG - Developing Academic Integrity Policy

A number of institutions reported on how Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement (SATLE) funding is being utilised to create new roles and fund activities focused on academic integrity. It can be anticipated that the AQRs for the subsequent reporting period will offer more detail on these initiatives and that new roles in particular may be important in facilitating capacity to drive activity in this area forward.

- ATU reported that with SATLE funding, a Senior Lecturer has been appointed as ATU's Academic Integrity lead.
- TUS reported on progress made during the reporting period in the production of resources using SATLE 2019 funding, including guides for academic integrity.
- DCU reported that it is involved in a university-wide Academic Integrity Awareness Campaign. The campaign is one year long (March 2021-February 2022) and is funded by SATLE. The campaign is two-phased, and it aims to raise awareness around academic integrity with all DCU stakeholder groups.
- UCC reported that SATLE funding supported the ongoing Academic Integrity Project which provides additional educational opportunities for staff and students in the area of academic integrity. The project had a number of outputs in 2021/22, including:
 - Delivery of an hour-long Academic Integrity Workshop for students which is now regularly available through the UCC Skills Centre.
 - A number of resources, including a Canvas module for students with short videos and quizzes, and a dedicated web page on the Skills Centre website.
 - An Academic Integrity Worksheet which acts as a prompt for students to consider academic integrity issues.
 - The embedding of academic integrity in the 'Integrity' strand of the new Graduate Attributes Compass for students.
 - A Digital Badge micro-credential course for staff on "Fostering Academic Integrity in Learning and Teaching" was developed.

Some HEIs indicated that further appointments are planned to increase capacity in this area.

- UL has committed to establishing an Academic Integrity Team which will progress the key strategic goal of upholding, cultivating, and embedding a culture of academic integrity. This team will scope best practice in creating a culture of academic integrity across the Irish higher education sector through engagement with National Academic Integrity Network activities. This team will comprise the following posts: Academic Integrity Lead (Senior Lecturer, 3-year post), Academic Integrity Educational Developer (3-year post) and a student Intern (1-year post).
- UG reported that a new role of Academic Integrity Officer is part of the HEI's five-year plan.

A case study submitted by MTU provides an overview of the development of an assignment toolkit that develops essential subskills that underpin a learner's capacity to uphold the principles of academic integrity. Notably, the project was undertaken by the Library Learning Community in collaboration with Le Chéile, a section of the HEI's Teaching and Learning Unit (TLU) specialising in student partnership. The case study has been redacted for the purposes of brevity but can be accessed in full [here](#).

Case Study

Library Assignment Toolkit at MTU

In October 2021, the MTU President launched MTU's new digital Library Assignment Toolkit.

The toolkit consists of eight interactive modules designed to assist students with completing assignments at different stages of their academic journey. The individual modules can be worked through independently or sequentially. Embedding of the Toolkit into specific Final Year academic modules is currently being piloted.

The Library Assignment Toolkit, which has attracted over 28,000 views to date, is the culmination of several years' work by the MTU Library Learning Community in response to a 2019 SATLE funding call entitled Developing Disciplinary Excellence in Learning, Teaching and Assessment. It was realised through a co-operative design and development process involving the Learning Community; Le Chéile, a section of the MTU Teaching & Learning Unit (TLU); a number of student collaborators; and the Department of Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL).



Figure 6: The Modules in the MTU Library Assignment Toolkit

It is important to note that the AQRs submitted for this reporting period documented an academic year that preceded the release of large language model-based artificial intelligence tools. As a result of these developments, it is likely that activities relating to this dimension of practice will be amplified in the next round of AQR submissions.

2.3.2 TEACHING AND LEARNING

The most prominent theme in relation to teaching and learning across the AQRs was ongoing work to develop inclusive pedagogical practices, most often utilising the framework of UDL. For example:

- TUS reported on a comprehensive UDL project commenced in September 2021 and completed in November 2022. The principal aim of the project was to further mainstream the integration of UDL across learning, teaching and assessment as well as in the wider service provision. The project entailed research to identify resources and supports that will be most beneficial, the development of guidelines and policy, staff awareness-raising and training and creation of dedicated UDL resources. Further detail is available in a case study submission accessible [here](#).
- ATU reported that the newly formed HEI established a UDL Centre of Excellence, which is complemented by an Instructional Design Team.
- MTU reported that development of teaching and learning took place focusing on UDL, supporting teaching and learning for students with autism, designing curriculum, and teaching for a diverse student population.

UL also reported on extensive work carried out to introduce and embed UDL practices across campus. The UL project is outlined in the case study below. The case study has been redacted for the purposes of brevity but can be accessed in full [here](#).

Case Study

Universal Design for Learning Project at UL

The UDL@UL, a HEA funded 1-year project began in November 2021. The project had two key objectives. One objective centred on the development of an inclusive practice module that could be potentially used across a range of relevant postgraduate programmes (e.g., Teaching, Learning & Scholarship, Graduate Diploma, The MA in Technical Communication and E-Learning). The second objective was focused on creating a culture of inclusivity underpinned by UDL Practices.

The module was designed and was to be put through the Academic Programme Review Committee (APRC) with the intention of rolling the module out in the Spring 2024 Semester. The content of this module entitled Inclusive Praxis and UDL was designed to transcend UDL and draw on different areas of inclusivity including anti-racist pedagogy, anti-ablism, decolonising the curriculum, trauma-informed pedagogy, inclusive language and other related topics. The module proposed to draw on expertise internally within UL and from further afield where necessary. UL already has academics researching in some of these key areas. The module was quite broad and complex and requires further work in 2023 to have it ready for Spring 2024. It was also envisaged that this would lead to a micro-credential UDL-based module under the UL@Work programme.

The second objective centred on creating a more inclusive culture across all facets of UL. This inclusivity was to draw on the principles of UDL and interconnected practices in inclusive practice and accessibility. The second objective included:

- Creating Cross-Campus awareness of UDL – 3 UL specific webinars from an international expert
- Development of a UDL Community of Practice (CoP) to encourage peer sharing on UDL and inclusive teaching strategies
- Facilitate the rollout of the UDL Badge
- Mainstreaming Assistive Technologies to support UDL practices through the Library Digital Edge set up
- Research UDL-based practice (ongoing)
- Deliver CPD related to UDL and Accessibility
- Promoted UDL and Accessibility within the university's new Virtual Learning Environment
- Create reusable digital resources around UDL and Accessibility
- Establish national links with other HEIs in UDL

Below are examples of some of the work undertaken in the project.

Creating Cross-Campus awareness of UDL: This project facilitated 3 webinars to promote UDL across all facets of the university with international UDL expert Dr Thomas Tobin, a founding member of the University of Wisconsin–Madison Centre for Teaching. These webinars targeted UDL awareness in Academia, UDL and Support Staff and UDL for Senior Management. These webinars were well attended and received positive feedback from participants. The webinars were designed to promote awareness of UDL among academic and support staff. It was also used as an opportunity to engage with Senior Management, and both UL's President and Provost were in attendance for the third session which focused on the role of senior management in driving the process.

Mainstreaming Assistive Technologies to support UDL: This part of the project looked at mainstreaming assistive technologies. Mainstreaming assistive technologies is an aim of the HEA's National Access Plan for Higher Education and supports a more UDL-based inclusive approach to education – offering supports and technologies to all students who may benefit from them, rather than just particular cohorts. A collaboration with Library staff and supported by Information Technology Division, this project forms part of the offering available through the Library Digital Edge. This collaboration will see a range of assistive technologies available to all students.

Development of Reusable UDL Digital Resources: The project also developed digital resources and images related to UDL and accessibility. These include UDL and accessible images with UL branding which can be shared both internally and externally. Example Resources include [a guide for creating accessible digital content](#) and another for [creating accessible social media](#).

Case Study 4: UL - Universal Design for Learning Project

Work-integrated, industry-aligned teaching and the integration of transversal skills development within programme design is an increasingly prominent feature of higher education in Ireland and internationally. There is some evidence of adoption of pedagogies that are complementary to this in the sector. For example:

- DCU led and contributed to a number of initiatives surrounding Challenged-Based Learning (CBL). Two challenges were delivered in 2021 (Carbon-intensive transition, and The Psychological Impact or Disruption of Innovative Technologies on Society). Additionally, DCU hosted a CBL Workshop (March 2022), a CBL Hackathon (May 2022) & an assessment workshop (May 2022). This activity was supported by the creation of a range of shared resources to support the development of CBL initiatives.
- SETU reported that it has provided Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) training and professional development to faculty and the wider staff body, through engagement with UNICollaboration. A total of 20 places were made available to colleagues across all campuses to engage in a 2-day workshop. The training supported staff not only to design COIL initiatives and projects but also provided staff with the opportunity of experiencing an interactive, collaborative online learning setting. Staff who completed the programme were issued with a digital badge and were provided with materials and resources to support the implementation of their own COIL initiatives. As a result of this series of professional development sessions, a University-wide COIL/Virtual Exchange Steering Group was established to continue this engagement and to plan for a more formalised approach to internationalisation at home. Further detail in a case study submission is accessible [here](#).

2.3.2.1 Work Placements

The feasibility and QA of work placements proved particularly challenging throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Accordingly, HEIs were invited to submit case studies reporting on the QA of work placements alongside the AQRs for this reporting period, with a focus on lessons learned and challenges ahead.

TU Dublin submitted a case study on the quality assurance and management of work placements on BSc programmes in food-related areas, and the advantages and lessons learned from using technology to design and implement a quality curriculum model for validated work placement modules.



Case Study

Technology Enhancement for Quality Assurance and Management of Tailored Industry Work Placements - a Case Study in Food Science

Theme: Quality Assurance and Management of Work Placement

Keywords: Work-placement, Learning agreement, Reflective Assessment, Blog, GoogleApps

This project uses technology in the design and implementation of a quality curriculum model for validated work-placement modules in Food related BSc Programmes. The success of the curriculum design has been largely because of the judicious use of technology; firstly, to manage the complex process of placing individual students in an appropriate role within a suitable industry, secondly, to quality assure the student learning outcomes for an industry-based learning environment, and thirdly to enhance the assessment and feedback both of core competencies and graduate attributes. The technologies utilised included several of the Google Apps from the G Suite (GoogleForms, GoogleSheets, GoogleDocs, GoogleDrive), as well as the blog tool in the Blackboard VLE.

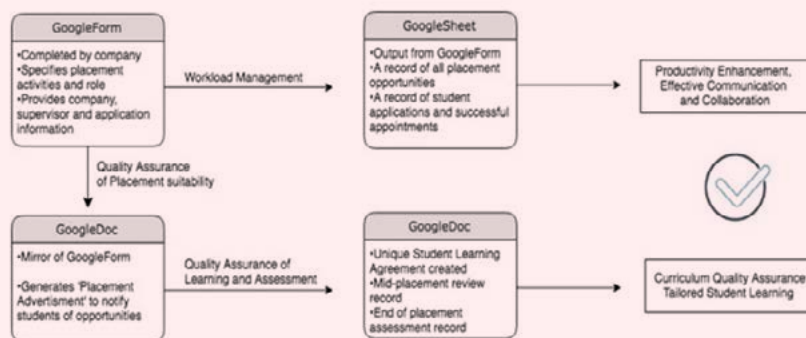


Figure 1. Overview of Google Apps in Food Industry Work-Placement curriculum

The advantages identified were:

- The technology was successfully adopted by all work placement stakeholders - tutors, students and companies.
- Companies could identify the type of learning activities that are relevant to the student on work placement giving confidence to the company that they were a suitable organisation to support a student on placement.
- Companies could select from a range of suitable activities to build a bespoke work placement that is suited both to the company and the student.

- Our range of companies and types of opportunities was rapidly expanded.
- The students are clear from the outset what the placement would involve, empowering them to select an appropriate opportunity to match career aspirations.
- The management of the placement allocation process was streamlined.
- The student has a personalised and bespoke learning agreement as a document that can empower them to have conversations with the industry supervisor if the appropriate learning activities are not being provided to them.
- The learning agreement forms the basis for structuring a mid-placement review between the industry placement supervisor and the student enhancing feedback on performance in a structured manner.
- The learning agreement can structure the conversation with academic tutors who visit the student on the work placement, assuring that the student is achieving suitable learning while on placement.
- The learning agreement forms the basis for feedback and remedial action if the student is not engaging fully in the placement experience.
- The learning agreement forms the basis for the industry supervisor to assess the student learning at the end of placement.
- The completed and signed learning agreement forms the basis for the University to decide if a student has met the learning outcomes of the industry placement. Meanwhile using the online blog assessment has helped.
- University staff remain abreast of developments in Industry through engaging in the blog assessment and reading the diverse experiences of the students.
- Students can share experiences and learn from each other.
- Students are supported while separated from the peers for the first time in their Programme of study.
- Students can actively reflect on their overall development, linking placement experiences to theory and finding evidence for the development of graduate attributes and allowing them to articulate these and enhance future employability.

The Key learning points from the project are:

1. Technology has improved the management of the work placement process, from generating ample high-quality and relevant placement opportunities, increasing productivity through better collaboration and communication.
2. Technology has guaranteed the quality of the placement, from defining suitable learning activities, through to the creation of individualised Learning Agreements.
3. The online reflective blog assessments support students' reflection on learning, as well as fostering a community of learning amongst peer groups.

Dunne, J. (2019) 'Technology enhanced food industry engagement and work placement curriculum quality assurance', Learning Connections 2019: Spaces, People, Practice, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland, 5-6 December, pp. 39-44 <https://cora.ucc.ie/handle/10468/10726>

Dunne, Julie (2021) "Technology Enhancement for Quality Assurance and Management of Tailored Industry Work Placements," Irish Journal of Academic Practice: Vol. 9: Iss. 1, Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.21427/yjrx-7p82> Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijap/vol9/iss1/4>

Case Study 5: TU Dublin – Technology Enhancement for Quality Assurance and Management of Tailored Industry Work Placements

RCSI also reported on work placement. A case study, available [here](#), outlines a mixed-methods study undertaken to explore how longitudinal placements were integrated into the curriculum and whether they promoted learning. The study found that curriculum integration was enhanced by the longitudinal nature of the placement. Qualitatively, there was evidence that engagement was promoted through role modelling and supervision. Some students had fewer opportunities to connect with people, and for some changes in supervisor compromised continuity of supervision. It was found that the placement needs to be of a sufficient length to enable repeated patient interaction. Students, supervisors and practice-educators agreed that there would be an advantage in increasing the time spent on placement.

UG submitted a case study that outlines how students registered with disability support services are being supported to access work placement opportunities. The institution noted that this is an important element of reasonable accommodation, given that approximately 78% of academic courses in the university include either an optional or compulsory work placement.

Case Study

Placement Support for Students Registered with the Access Centre's Disability Support Service at UG

Context

Once a student discloses their disability with a view to asking about reasonable accommodations, there is a legal responsibility on the HEI to put in place reasonable accommodations as necessary. This duty to provide reasonable accommodations, as a key action in avoiding disability discrimination, extends to and includes while the student is on placement. Based on this and given that work placement programmes at the UG have expanded dramatically in recent years (approximately 78% of academic courses in the University now include a compulsory or optional work placement element), a significant recent focus for the Access Centre has been the enhancement and extension of individualised placement planning processes for students with disabilities.

This objective to embed and extend placement support for students with disabilities, in particular on courses which include a practice-based placement that forms part of a professionally accredited programme, was included under *Pillar 2: Supporting Transitions* of the overall Funds for Students with Disabilities (FSD) Strategic initiative, the 'Enhancing Access and Inclusion at UG' Project. Work on this pillar began in September 2021 with the successful appointment of a Placement Planning Coordinator to research best practices nationally and internationally for supporting students with disabilities to plan for work placement and begin the process of identifying the existing and potential stakeholders in selection of placements and provision of reasonable accommodations for disabled students; with a view to enhancing and extending existing placement supports based on research and stakeholder engagement.

2021/22 AY Achievements

- All 1,416 UG Access Centre Disability Support Service (DSS) registered students have equal access to placement planning support. DSS registered students may request placement planning support at any point on their academic or placement journey.
- A confirmed Placement Link contact for each course across the university has been identified. This has been a key action in ensuring students with disabilities can be supported in the provision of reasonable accommodations while on placement.
- A DSS Disability Advisor's Placement handbook has been compiled to capture and communicate the step-by-step support process for each cohort so that a consistent and sustainable approach to placement support is in place.
- University staff and staff at placement locations, who are involved in placement coordination and the provision of reasonable accommodations, have availed of disability and reasonable accommodation training.

Challenges Encountered

- Fear of Disclosure – Students cited fear of discrimination resulting in reduced chances of employment upon graduation as a reason for choosing not to disclose to their placement site and engage with DSS placement supports. A significant focus of this work, therefore, has been to communicate to students the benefits of disclosure along with the procedures and protection that follow upon sharing such information.
- Staff Awareness/Stakeholder Engagement – Not only was there a lack of awareness on behalf of some placement coordinators and academics surrounding the existing DSS placement supports in place prior to this, but some also demonstrated limited knowledge of disability laws and reasonable accommodation entitlements. Concerns around reasonable accommodation adjustments impacting professional competencies and assessment practices on professionally accredited programmes were also expressed by those involved in professional placement coordination. The establishment of link personnel within the various courses has been crucial to driving an awareness, amongst academics and administrative staff, of the availability of DSS placement supports and our willingness to work collaboratively with them to establish a continuing culture whereby placement disclosure is facilitated, promoted, and supported across the various schools and disciplines.

Concluding Remarks

- The establishment in November 2022 of a permanent Placement Planning and Post Entry Support Coordinator position, not just for students with disabilities but all students linked with the Access Centre, demonstrates the centre's alignment not only with the UG's focus on the development of key graduate attributes necessary for gainful employment but also with the most recent National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022 – 2028 (NAP), which sets to the fore an ambition to support students at all levels and across all programmes to enter, participate and complete higher education. Much of the work of the Placement Planning and Post Entry Support Coordinator, going forward, will focus on benchmarking and implementing the recommendations made in AHEAD's recently published Reasonable Accommodation and Professional Placement report which provides *Guidance on the Provision of Reasonable Accommodations on Practice-based Placements in Professionally Accredited Programmes*. Failure to provide appropriate reasonable accommodations on placement, the report says, can have a long-term impact with the potential to jeopardise students' future employment ambitions and opportunities. The Access Centre by continuing to allocate dedicated personnel to transitional support for students linked with it, reaffirms the Centre's commitment to assist and facilitate students throughout all stages of their university life and beyond.

Case Study 6: UG - Placement Support for Students Registered with the Access Centre's Disability Support Service

A significant development for the technological universities and remaining institutes of technology is the [National Technological University Transformation for Recovery and Resilience \(N-TUTORR\) Project](#), which aims to deliver transformational change for the technological sector, facilitating innovative practice and enhancing the student experience. An award of €32m was made to the N-TUTORR consortium consisting of ATU, DkIT, IADT, MTU, SETU, TU Dublin, TUS and THEA. Under the N-TUTORR umbrella, the following are examples of the updates provided:

- TUS reported that it will work with staff and students on a number of projects that focus on enhancing digital capabilities and will provide quality and equality of access to students within TUS, and in so doing will also support access for vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- ATU reported that the leadership team for N-TUTORR in ATU is also leading Streams 1 and 2 of the project for the Irish technological university sector.
- TU Dublin reported that areas targeted for consideration to be delivered under the N-TUTORR programme are digital systems for end-to-end management of examinations including online proctoring and plagiarism detection.

It can be anticipated that more detail will be provided in subsequent reporting periods as this project becomes established across Ireland's TUs.

2.3.3 RETHINKING ASSESSMENT

A number of HEIs indicate that alternative and authentic assessment strategies are being encouraged, indicating that learning from the Covid-19 pandemic has been valuable in this area. However, variable detail is provided overall. The technological university sector, in particular, demonstrated leadership in assessment innovation in this reporting period.

- ATU reported that its programme teams have been encouraged to review modes of assessment in view of the lessons learnt from the use of alternative assessment during Covid-19. A working group was formed between the Examination Office, the Centre for Online Learning and the online Student Advisors. A number of tasks, activities and communication improvements were implemented to improve the experience of the students and the understanding of staff and students regarding the integrity of proctored examinations.
- TU Dublin acknowledged the influence of Covid-19 on the shift toward more authentic assessment activities as a means of preventing academic misconduct. To improve assessment design, TU Dublin's Learning, Teaching & Assessment department created an Authentic Learning and Assessment Practice Exchange platform. The activities on this platform concentrate on faculty development for designing and delivering curricula. Events were also arranged for staff to share their experiences in integrating inventive forms of authentic assessment into their programmes. A Community of Practice was formed with the aim of involving university teaching staff in the development of a TU Dublin Authentic Assessment Framework. The Community encourages the exchange of concepts and practices, crafting shared resources, and contributing to the establishment of institutional guidelines and best practice recommendations for authentic assessment. It currently manages a funded scholarship programme for faculty innovating authentic assessment approaches and is in the process of shaping a framework to steer assessment design.
- TUS has embedded 'Authentic Assessment of, for and as Learning' as a pillar within its 'Putting Learning First' TUS Learning and Teaching Strategy, which went through an extensive review and consultation process during the reporting period.
- MTU indicated that it had become clear in certain cases that the module assessment strategy introduced for contingency purposes was actually a better gauge of learning and should be incorporated into the approved module descriptor and retained going forward. MTU reported providing staff with guidance on minimising the risk of academic misconduct through careful assessment design.

Larger-scale projects directed at enhancing assessment practice and feedback for learners were reported by some public HEIs, many of which are likely to have wider benefits and learning for the sector as a whole. Some illustrative examples include:

- MTU reported that the Teaching & Learning Unit secured funding under MTU's Technological University Transformation Fund call in September 2021 to establish a Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Student Engagement (TLASE) Research Laboratory. MTU noted that the TLASE Research Laboratory will first focus on assessment and feedback in areas such as industry work placement settings. This focus is in response to feedback from the Irish Survey of Student Engagement which identifies that 55% of Irish students are dissatisfied with their experience of assessment and feedback in higher education, a high figure by international standards.

- MTU also reported progress on 'An Institutional Approach to Developing Assessment and Feedback Literacy' project, which receives SATLE funding. The project is noted as an important element in enhancing understanding of students' experiences of assessment and feedback, which in turn informed staff assessment and feedback practices. NStEP published a case study of the approach taken, which led to the creation of a Teaching and Learning webpage on the MTU (Kerry) website with supports for both staff and students. A Learning Development community of practice was also established for staff.

An example of work to rethink assessment, and specific considerations within this, is set out in a case study provided by TU Dublin. The case study has been redacted for the purposes of brevity but can be accessed in full [here](#).

Case Study

Developing an Open-Book Online Exam for Final Year Students at TU Dublin

While the COVID-19 pandemic quickly forced assessment to take a dramatically different form, many institutions have reverted to proctored assessment due to the academic integrity concerns of open-book assessment. However, the need to provide assessment instruments that fairly and validly assess student knowledge (employing high standards of academic integrity) in an open-book format was a high priority for our faculty, as there are significant benefits to running such assessments, both from a student-centred viewpoint and from a learning outcomes viewpoint.

This case study describes the process applied to develop open-book online exams for final year (undergraduate) students studying Applied Machine Learning and Applied Artificial Intelligence and Deep Learning courses as part of a four-year BSc in Computer Science [1], however, this method and approach could easily be applied to any subject examination. We also present processes used to validate the examinations as well as academic integrity methods implemented.

Challenges

Moving to an open-book online exam presented two significant challenges. The first is how to adapt the exams themselves and the second is academic integrity.

When adopting/mapping the traditional closed-book exams to open-book exams, a review was conducted of useful resources for developing open-book online examinations (in response to the COVID situation that led to online assessments) and recommended the work of the Centre of Teaching and Learning at the University of Newcastle, Australia [2] to all academic staff. This work presented two resources for developing open-book questions: One based on Bloom's Taxonomy [3], and the other based on Socratic Questioning [4]. The challenge with moving to more open-style exam questions, is that you tend to transition upwards on the Bloom's Taxonomy, thus in many cases making the questions themselves more high order and more difficult than their proctored counterparts. Great care was taken when this mapping took place and examples of the closed book and equivalent open book exams can be found in the paper.

One of the department's primary concerns for academic integrity was plagiarism during open-book online exams. One of the initial approaches developed was centred around academic honesty principles. This consisted of students signing (virtually) the University-wide plagiarism policy, coupled with a session during each revision class about the importance of understanding the policy and what it means (both for consequences and ethically). The use of highlighting the policy was in some cases found to reduce the amount of plagiarism in computer science courses [5]. Another proactive (and perhaps also reactive) approach was the inclusion of an exam viva after the examination. This consisted of a ten-minute viva-style session with 20% of each exam cohort. The students were randomly pre-selected before the exam (but were not told until after the exam to avoid additional stress or anxiety). The preselected students took part in the viva straight after the exam. The students were not assessed on the correctness of their answers but were asked Socratic questions such as, "Where did you get that idea?" or "By what reasoning did you come to that conclusion?". Students were provided with details about the process prior to the exam. With GDPR compliance, students selected for the post-exam viva were asked for their consent for the recording of the session. 100% of the students opted for this. This was a positive response, and additional future work could unpack the underlying reasons for opting in for this. No students were identified as plagiarism concerns based on the viva responses. Finally, Urkund (<https://www.urkund.com/>) plagiarism detection software was used for the final student uploads which were in word or PDF format. No academic integrity cases have been found thus far. Full details on the criteria and processes can be found in [1].

Impact

Over the two years of open book examinations, there was no statistically significant difference in performance to that of the traditional proctored examinations. There was one exception to this. This year (January 2023) the results were statistically significant, with the results improving. This is currently under investigation, but this year was the first year we created the option of taking the open book exam virtually or in a lab in college (that was supervised, only for communication). This may have impacted the results and can be seen as another step forward in the offering to students.

Conclusion

Overall, the processes seem to be positive for both students and academics alike. While there are some bugs still to iron out, such as the timing, the approaches implemented so far seem to be positive for the students, with many citing a reduction in stress and anxiety, as well as a feeling that they understand more from this type of assessment. From an academic integrity viewpoint, the measures put in place seem to be providing a fair assessment for all. New work is underway to adapt continuous assessment using a similar technique.

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Case Study 7: TU Dublin - Developing an Open-Book Online Exam for Final Year Students

Some HEIs indicated that the use of digital technologies in assessment practice was an area of focus. For example:

- ATU reported on work to enhance practice assessment of student nurses by replacing a paper-based system with a digital portfolio. Benefits cited included freeing up all those involved in the practice assessment from the 'administrative' tasks, which are associated with processing paper documents. This time can be refocused on improving the quality of the student's clinical learning experience, not least by ensuring that there is an early intervention with students who are 'struggling' because there is no longer a need to wait until the paper document is submitted. Further detail is available in a case study submission accessible [here](#).
- TCD reported that Academic Practice launched a Spotlight Series in 2022, which provides training for staff. The focus of the first series is Digital Assessment.
- RCSI reported on how technology is being used to increase efficiency and provide learners with access to feedback on their performance in assessment tasks more rapidly. The case study is available [here](#).

2.3.4 STUDENT WELLBEING AND SUPPORT

During the previous reporting period, public HEIs reported a strong focus on the wellbeing of learners dealing with high levels of personal and academic disruption during the pandemic. Reports indicated that additional resources and support were deployed to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 on learners' experiences of higher education.

A prominent theme in the AQRs submitted for the 2021/22 reporting period was the ongoing provision of counselling and mental health support, and, in some instances, increased capacity in this area. There is some variance in reporting on the number of learners accessing these services. For example, DkIT reported that a record number of clients accessed the institute's counselling services, a high which DkIT expected following the pandemic. Similarly, TUS reported that Counselling Services saw a 24% increase in the number of students engaging with student counselling services for the same reporting period. By contrast, IADT reported a slight drop in learners accessing counselling. Nonetheless, it was clear that counselling and mental health support remained a priority. Examples of relevant activity in the reporting period include:

- MU reported that the counselling service increased its resources in January 2021, to include an additional 1.2 FTE staff complement, to provide students with 1:1 counselling services and targeted workshops. In January 2022, the counselling service further increased its resources with an additional 1 FTE counsellor, currently in place until July 2023.
- Also at MU, a student engagement 'reach out' was completed by the Student Helpdesk in semester two of the reporting period 2021/22. The purpose of this 'reach out' was to offer support to students experiencing difficulties with their programme or struggling with the overall student experience. Issues reported by learners included feeling isolated, finding it hard to meet peers, difficulties engaging with their studies, ICT deficits, financial concerns, and personal health problems.
- ATU reported on a number of student engagement activities which have been in progress since the establishment of the university on 01 April 2022. These include a review of the Counselling, Access and Disability and Medical services (which has been completed), as well as the drafting of a common Student Union constitution, structures and finances, which are in progress.
- TUS reported that a Student Counselling Service was established, which was supported by funding from DFHERIS in 2021 leading to the appointment of an Assistant Psychologist, a Mental Health & Wellbeing Project Officer, and a Frameworks Implementation Manager.

The AQRs submitted for this reporting period confirmed that comprehensive support services were in place across the sector and provision was ongoing. Although this area of operations was not as emphasised as in the previous reporting period, new initiatives, developments or projects in this area were reported by a number of HEIs. Examples that were reported include:

- At UCD, a policy gap was identified in terms of the provision of academic advice to students. An Academic Advisory Working Group has been established to address this.
- At DCU, the Quality Innovation and Development Fund, which is an open call for enhancement-focused proposals, selected the theme of Student and Staff Wellbeing as the theme for 2021/22. This was intended to reflect the importance of the wellbeing of the university community as it emerged from almost 18 months of campus closures, and as the university continued to navigate learning, research and work during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- At MU, the AQR highlighted the development of a new Student Skills and Success unit which was established in June 2022. The purpose of this new unit is to coordinate orientation, advisory and guidance supports for students, and experiential learning and employability activities including careers advisory services, work-related and community-engaged learning experiences in addition to work placements.
- At UL, data was reported that indicated high uptake of domain-specific learning centre

support. For example, a total of 30,336 visits were made to the Mathematics Learning Centre's drop-in centre in the period between summer repeats 2021 and the middle of week 15 Semester 2 2022. A total of 14,244 visits were made to the Science Learning Centre site by 3,742 unique visitors enrolled as 'participants' on the course between May 2021 and May 2022. It was noted that the Regional Writing Centre delivered 28 workshops on various aspects of writing for academic assessment during this period, with over 250 students attending.

- MTU reported that since the establishment of the university in early 2021, significant strides have been made to embed student welfare policies and community policies, including the appointment of a Student Ombudsman who assists students where grievances arise.
- At RCSI, the Centre for Positive Psychology and Health's free online course, "The Science of Health and Happiness", has now seen almost 32,000 enrolments and received overwhelmingly positive feedback. Building on this success, the Centre launched free courses, "The Science of Health and Happiness for Young People" and "The Science of Health and Happiness as We Age", during the reporting period.
- At DkIT, a preliminary evaluation was conducted in semester 1 of the 2021/22 academic year of the Student Support Hub which was launched in January 2021. The evaluation found a high level of use by students and very positive student feedback on the service. The Hub was shortlisted for the 2022 Education Awards in the 'Best Use of Educational Technology/ ICT Initiative' category.
- TUS reported on its Student Induction and Orientation programme, 'Connect & Engage', which is delivered in a blended format both onsite and online across all TUS campuses. The eight-week, themed programme includes events and activities to support students' transition to HE and a positive student experience.
- MTU reported that Student Support Services developed a wide range of staff resources aimed at enhancing inclusive teaching and learning environments.

2.3.4.1 Career Supports

An area in which there appears to be an increased focus is in the provision of careers support for learners, with some HEIs reporting dedicated careers service for students. Examples of activity in this area include:

- At TCD the Careers Service reported continuing a "Talk to us on Tuesdays" series in 2021/22, consisting of online student drop-in events on a range of career themes accompanied by a series of videos on the Careers social media channels. Additionally, the Trinity Summer Internship Programme, led by the Trinity Careers Service, was launched in Summer 2022 and will run annually thereafter.
- UCC Career Services and the Graduate Attributes Programme won the 'Best Career Impact Strategy' Award at the Irish Education Awards. UCC was also awarded the AHECS (Association of Higher Education Career Services) Building Effective Partnerships Award in recognition of the collaboration between the Graduate Attributes Programme and UCC Career Services.
- DkIT reported that its Student Support Hub on Moodle (which became fully operational in the reporting period) became the primary platform to host all career information and resources. In addition to the career toolkit, new resources were added, including recordings of employer presentations and a quick link to the Shortlist.Me video interviewing practice

platform. DkIT reported very strong usage of the Career Hub by students, with peaks in user visits in November 2021, and in February and March 2022.

- TUS reported on the annual in-person TUS Autumn Careers Fairs, which returned to both the Moylish campus on 11 October 2022 and Athlone campus on 12 October 2022, hosting the region's largest employers. These events provided employers and students with a unique space to connect at scale and in person, offering an ideal opportunity to engage with a talented pool of students.
- MTU reported on the Ready Steady Work initiative, which is a collaborative, innovative career readiness and professional development programme designed and delivered by the Careers Service and Disability Support Service (DSS), in collaboration with employer partners, Dell Technologies. It is open to all DSS students from 2nd year to postgraduate. The Ready Steady Work initiative won three awards during 2021/22: 'Operational Excellence in Education' in the Operational Excellence Awards 2022; 'Business and Third Level Institute Collaboration Award 2022' in the Education Awards in April; and the 'Higher Education Award' in the Cork Lifelong Learning Awards.

IADT's Careers Service submitted a case study focused on provision of support specific to careers in the creative sector. The case study outlines how services at IADT, DkIT and WIT collaborated to share resources, ideas and networks. The case study has been redacted for the purposes of brevity, but can be accessed in full [here](#).

Case Study

Creative Sector Careers Collective at IADT

Context

Students in the Creative arts area can often struggle when seeking to establish viable careers and ongoing employment, particularly in a traditionally project and gig economy. The employment landscape for creative industry graduates is not only challenging, but constantly changing. Also, increasingly many creative industry graduates are working in embedded roles in other industries. However, many of these students/early graduates can be slower to utilise Careers Services and therefore many are unaware that these 'embedded roles' exist or that they are as divergent and plentiful as they are. Added to all of this, the creative arts area was hit particularly badly by the COVID-19 pandemic and so students looking for work in this sector, it was felt, would need extra supports.

WIT, IADT and DkIT, three small careers services at colleges that have significant student numbers in the creative arts area, came together to create a dynamic, flexible and highly successful partnership for our creative arts students and graduates. We adopted innovative approaches to enhance the employability skills of this creative industry cohort.

Individually we had all struggled to gain traction and provide services to these cohorts, but collectively we saw our partnership share resources, ideas and networks to generate innovative interventions targeting employers, students and graduates with novel and creative engagement strategies.

This led to enhanced student-employer engagement across campuses, a set of re-usable resources and a model for future practice underpinned by the knowledge that a creative arts graduate needs to be well-equipped to respond to rapidly changing and complex work environments.

Output

This partnership allowed students and graduates to improve employability and gain a realtime understanding of the employment landscape and the skills most critical for successful progression in the Creative Arts field. We took an industry-first approach – leveraging our combined networks, both employer networks and professional body networks, working with 105 employers to co-design a series of events meeting the complex spectrum of needs of disparate student and graduate cohorts within creative courses enabling them to compete effectively in the market.

Using a graduate survey to assess employability needs a project plan was created which included a careers summit and a number of employer insights series.

Future

Moving into the future, this new way of working allows;

- Careers Centres to co-operate rather than compete. Running this project has strengthened links between the three career services and the collaboration will continue into the future expanding beyond the Creative Arts focus. TU Dublin also put their shoulder to the wheel for creating Employer Roundtables and Panels at GradIreland in 2022. There is a definite power in collaborating and working together.
- Increases student/graduate awareness and improves links with academics. These were structured programmes as opposed to students approaching the Careers Centre on an ad hoc basis leading to more impactful engagement with a greater number of students, graduates, alumni, academics and employers.

- Promotes each Careers Service & Shares Professional Practice. It raised the profile of Careers Service within the three Institutions and particularly with academic colleagues in Creative Arts thereby creating leverage and support for future initiatives. Combined the resources of the three Careers Services to produce outcomes which would not have been achievable had they worked separately.
- Improves understanding of the sector & allows evolution of initial concept to continue. This partnership has already evolved beyond its initial purpose – for the first time the creative industry was represented in the GradIreland Fair through Creative panels in 2020, ‘The Creative Corner’ in 2021 and in the GradIreland Live Event 2022, and ‘The Creative Hub’ and mainstage in Autumn 2022. We have since been involved in setting up a Community of Practice for the Creative Sector in AHECS – to bring all of our careers colleagues in this space together and harness fresh ideas and energies.
- Working in partnership brings about many benefits like widened perspectives, higher quality and more relevant content. In addition, engaging with employers in this way has the power to create a recurring cycle of events that will continue to benefit the three careers centres, future students and graduates, and the curriculum.

Case Study 8: IADT - Creative Sector Careers Collective

2.3.4.2 Supports for International Learners

A wide array of supports and services made available to ensure the wellbeing of international learners are reported across public HEI AQRs. These are typically embedded within International Offices or the result of collaboration between the International Office and other units in the HEI. Specific activities reported in AQRs include:

- DkIT reported that its International Office works with faculty and student support services to provide academic and learner supports including a Careers Information Day for international students; academic learner supports in English and IT; fortnightly Cultural Coffee Hour for international students and an all staff intercultural training workshop.
- TUS reported that its International Office conducted an assessment of existing Erasmus collaborations and discontinued institutional agreements where there had been minimal or no exchange involvement over the previous three years. The intention is to enhance opportunities from mobility amongst RUN-EU affiliates, including new partner universities from Belgium and Spain.
- DCU reported that as part of organisational restructure, and to reduce duplication in activity, the discrete functional areas of the International Office were relocated back to the relevant university departments.
- UCD reported that the UCD Global Experience Team provides information, guidance, and support on the international elements of the student experience. This could include support with complex immigration queries, cross-cultural advice, assistance during a crisis, dealing with culture shock or settling into life in Ireland. Students are encouraged to engage with other international students through the UCD Global Students Facebook group and UCD Global Lounge. Students can also submit any query they may have via the UCD Global Student Connector.
- TCD reported that the Global Room team provides guidance and support to international

students on a wide range of practical issues including immigration, accommodation, banking and health insurance while also advising on cultural transition and all aspects of life at the university. The Global Ambassador team are current Trinity students trained to help with queries that may arise during the transition from an international student's home country to Ireland and they also deliver campus tours to prospective students.

Reports on ongoing efforts to meet the needs of international learners in the latter part of the pandemic were reported by only two HEIs.

- DkIT held International Welcome Days online and collected international learners from Dublin airport.
- MTU launched a Virtual International Office which allowed learners and staff to ask questions and receive advice via Zoom.

Four HEIs, DkIT, RCSI, TUS and UL, report a mechanism to ensure compliance with [QQI's Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners](#).

2.3.5 PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

In the previous reporting period, it was observed that HEIs were facing ongoing challenges delivering programmes designed for classroom, laboratory and work-based learning in emergency online and remote modalities. Nonetheless, work progressed across the sector to develop new programmes, often in close collaboration or partnership with industry.

During this reporting period, a number of AQR submissions indicated that new programmes have been approved and established at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Within the AQRs that provide detail on new programme profiles, there is evidence that inter- and trans-disciplinarity is an emerging theme across the sector. For example:

- DCU reported that in 2021, it launched nine new undergraduate degree programmes, embracing the value of interdisciplinarity.
- UG reported on the 'Designing Futures' programme which aims to close the gap between enterprise and graduate skills needs and the current learner experience through the development of a suite of transdisciplinary modules.
- UCC noted that two workshops have been held at departmental level to familiarise staff with the range of resources available to them relating to integrating the Connected Curriculum (an element of which is inter- and trans-disciplinarity). These provide prompts to uncover immediate disciplinary connections with the framework.

A number of HEIs also reported on work to develop micro-credentials and frameworks for their recognition across the sector and internationally.

- SETU reported on engagement in three EU-funded projects to develop micro-credentials in the fields of sustainability, digital literacy and health. Within this, SETU is leading the development of a recognition framework across nine universities as a member of EU-CONEXUS, a European University Initiative, and is engaged in a number of other micro-

credential initiatives nationally and internationally, some of which fall outside of this reporting period. Further detail on these projects is available in a case study submission accessible [here](#).

- TCD reported that it is participating in a National Micro-credentials Pilot Programme being led by the Irish Universities Association. In June 2022, the University Council approved a proposal on Options for Micro-credential Award Pathways.
- TUS reported that micro-credentials are developed in accordance with the TUS Policy on Microcredentials 2022 - 2024. Micro-credentials are offered at NFQ Level 6 – 9 and carry an ECTS range of 1 – 9. Upon successful completion, a Certificate is issued. Academic recognition for completion of the micro-credential will be added to the European Diploma Supplement for TUS graduates.
- DCU reported that it is participating actively to shape policy on micro-credentials both nationally and internationally. DCU was involved in the development of a Roadmap of Implementation for industry in conjunction with Skillnet networks. During 2021, DCU supported the analysis of the European Commission’s public consultation process and the forthcoming European Council Resolution on micro-credentials along with completing a literature review.
- ATU reported that a policy framework was developed for micro-credential/MOOCs within the Higher Ed 4.0 project, indicating that progress is being made in the development of draft agile processes for micro-credential approval, the documentation of a lean content development process, and engagement with industry on recognition of prior learning and providing career advice.

The provision of flexible and part-time programmes was also a focus for some HEIs during this reporting period.

- TUS designed and delivered relevant up-skilling programmes on a flexible and part-time basis across all academic disciplines, delivering on the objectives of the SpringBoard+, HCI, and ICT initiatives. TUS reported a 400% increase in part-time, flexible learners over the period.
- ATU reported that a community of practice has been set up between Online Student Advisors, mycareerpath.ie advisors and cross-campus Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Coordinators. The purpose is to enhance knowledge and awareness of the pathways onto ATU online and flexible courses so that prospective students are channelled appropriately to the service they require to help them access ATU programmes.

A number of AQRs indicate that activity focused on RPL, which is particularly important for facilitating lifelong learners to access higher education, is ongoing.

- MU reported work on refining and highlighting the RPL process, noting that developments at a national level have been instrumental in the redevelopment of internal policy, process and supporting documentation.
- SETU reported on its engagement in projects to develop RPL extending back to 2017, indicating that in this reporting period the HEI contributed to a national HCI-funded project. A recommendation made in the AQR is that system-wide infrastructure is needed to track the number of RPL applications, inclusive of a database to establish equivalence to NFQ levels (when assessing particularly professional and industry experience). It is proposed

that this system needs to be connected to the HEA SRS annual monitoring system for HEIs to establish a baseline regarding the use of and metrics associated with RPL for lifelong learners. Further detail on SETU's work pertaining to RPL is available in a case study submission accessible [here](#).

A case study submitted by MU outlines how prospective learners are being connected with current students to enable them to ask questions about programmes and make informed choices prior to application and enrolment. The case study has been redacted for the purposes of brevity, but can be accessed in full [here](#).

Case Study

Ask-A-Student as a tool for peer-to-peer communication between prospective applicants and current Maynooth University students.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, a gap was identified in communication between prospective applicants and current Maynooth University students caused by the lack of on-campus interaction (e.g. Open Days, campus tours). Unibuddy is a digital messaging service which is designed to link current students with applicants and “Empower students to choose their future with confidence” ([link: www.unibuddy.com/the-unibuddy-platform](http://www.unibuddy.com/the-unibuddy-platform)).

Renamed “MU Ask-A-Student”, the platform was adopted by the Maynooth University Admissions Office as a method of filling the gap and assisting applicants to make informed decisions about course choice. In particular, applicants have asked about “area of study” (covering 40% of conversation data since launch). This covers topics such as structure (46%), teaching (32%) and assessment (22%). Careers (15%) and Admissions (11%) are the two other highest ranking topics of conversation. Repeated interaction between student and prospective applicants is common, with an average of 4 unique questions per conversation and feedback from students and applicants is very positive, examples follow; “Okay this sounds really great, I have already put it on my CAO and will be looking forward to it. Thank you for your time” – Applicant & “just letting you know how great it has been to work as part of the student ambassadors and I would love to still be a part of the MU Ask A Student Team next year!” – Student.

Since October 2020, over 8,000 questions have been answered by our students on the platform. The initiative has continued post-pandemic with continuous growth in site visitors (10,889 in 2021/2022 vs 12,241 in 2022/2023 – sample figures covering October to February). At launch, Maynooth University had 19 Undergraduate students active on the platform from across the varied degree programme offerings. The platform has been since expanded to other Departments, namely for International and Postgraduate student recruitment and now has over 30 Undergraduate and Postgraduate students active on the platform providing a range of experienced knowledge and expertise in their own areas of study and on their Maynooth University experience in general.

HEIs updated on their interactions with professional and regulatory bodies during the reporting period, listing the bodies they engaged with. Reports noted accreditation of programmes with professional bodies. SETU additionally reported that the university values the professional development of students and therefore has engaged in the CORU accreditation process for Social Care related programmes. Its Wexford Campus successfully completed this process during this reporting period.

2.3.5.1 Promoting Access and Widening Participation

Across the sector, a number of institutions reported a continued focus on providing access to underrepresented groups in higher education during this reporting period. For example:

- DCU was designated as an Age Friendly University, as well as being the first Autism Friendly University globally. Funding received in 2021 and 2022 (under the Dormant Accounts Irish Traveller and Roma fund) enabled work with local agencies and other HEIs to provide targeted support to Traveller communities. DCU reported that its Access Programme is the largest programme of its kind in Ireland supporting 1,168 students in the 2020/21 academic year.
- MU reported on work to increase access for learners with criminal convictions. During the reporting period, MU launched the Unlocking Potential toolkit, podcast, website and documentary and the KickStart scholarship. The goal of Unlocking Potential is to build the diversity of the learner population whilst supporting the reintegration of people with convictions, prisoners and former prisoners to society. The project created a 'Fair Admissions Toolkit' to help universities and colleges to develop their approach to applicants with convictions. MU submitted a link to a 15-minute [Unlocking Potential documentary video](#) that describes the project in more depth.
- UG provided an update on access in terms of the percentage of students from under-represented groups who can register through various routes and channels, for example mature students, HEAR and DARE, Disability, FET and other pathways. The AQR notes that numbers sustained or increased across most pathways with the exception of mature learners and those on the HEAR scheme, reflecting national trends.
- MU reported on an initiative of the Maynooth University Access Programme to promote participation for Travellers. The 'Whidden Workshops; It's Kushti to Rokker' bring together Country Needjas (settled people) and Minéir Needjas to address issues around access to education for Traveller and Roma learners. The Whidden Workshops are supported by the dedicated Traveller Outreach Officer who supports outreach and inclusion initiatives by enhancing relationships with key stakeholders. MU reported that the approach to collaboration ensures that the values of meaningful participation, inclusion and equality are at the core of the workshops.
- TUS reported on the provision of a one-year programme for mature students, designed to equip candidates with the necessary skills, knowledge and confidence to progress to higher education. The programme is offered at both TUS Midwest and TUS Midlands.
- TUS additionally reported on a HEA-funded pilot Access to Apprenticeship Programme. This programme is aimed at communities of socioeconomic disadvantage, demonstrating high levels of early school leaving and unemployment and low levels of progression. It prepares young people aged 16 to 24 years for an apprenticeship in the trades. The programme is validated by TUS as a Level 6 Continuous Professional Development Certificate. Further detail is available in a case study submission accessible [here](#).

2.3.5.2 Supporting International Protection Applicants/Asylum Seekers

For this reporting period, HEIs were invited to submit case studies and report in particular on work to ensure that internal quality assurance can effectively facilitate and support access, mobility and progression for refugees and asylum seekers. In the main, HEIs reported on designation as a University of Sanctuary and the number of scholarships awarded. Some HEIs reported additional initiatives to provide basic integration and financial support for this vulnerable cohort.

- TUS reported that both of its predecessor institutions (AIT and LIT) had offered a sanctuary scholarship programme since 2015, with proximity to two direct provision centres fostering those initial engagements. During the reporting period, an action plan was formalised for a multi-funded sanctuary scholarship programme. The TUS President and Vice President's Council approved the funding of ten undergraduate and ten Access Sanctuary scholarships. Further detail is available in a case study submission accessible [here](#).
- TCD reported that its Asylum Seeker Access Provision (ASAP) Scholarships offer four scholarships for students in direct provision who have studied in the Irish second-level school system, have taken, or intend to take, the Leaving Certificate or further education qualifications and are offered a place in the university through the CAO. All four scholarships were awarded for the reporting period.
- UCC reported 28 people being awarded sanctuary scholarships during the reporting period. In February 2022, the fifth annual UCC Refugee Week was held on campus with a new Refugee Week flag raised over the Quad. In April 2022, UCC announced the creation of a Sanctuary Fellowship Scheme, noted to be the first of its kind in Ireland. UCC additionally reported that in response to the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Ukraine, the UCC Centre for Adult and Continuing Education created a six-week course, 'Introduction to Student Life in Ireland' which was open to any student from refugee or asylum-seeking backgrounds.
- UL reported its aims to ensure that, in addition to the tuition fee waivers, asylum seekers in direct provision also receive a stipend of €100/week to cover travel to/from campus, meals on campuses and data and photocopying.
- DCU reported that for the 2021/22 academic year, it funded 15 continuing and five new postgraduate scholarships as a University of Sanctuary. Further initiatives took place, including DCU Refugee Week, the Migrant English Language Literacy and Intercultural Education project, University of Sanctuary Lecture, as well as DCU research outputs such as peer-reviewed articles, conference notes and workshops.
- MU undertook significant and wide-ranging work to support refugees and asylum seekers, and launched a [Community Needs Analysis for Refugees](#) as part of the College Connect project. The published report sets out findings from 40 in-depth interviews and 104 survey responses from people in the protection process focusing on their experience of accessing or trying to access higher education in Ireland. MU launched the [We are Here, HEAR](#) Photovoice touring exhibition from Autumn 2021 to Summer 2022 to highlight the College Connect Refugee Community Needs Analysis. MU's AQR also links to a [short artistic and research video](#) about refugees' experience in the protection process and in particular in the direct provision system, outlining the challenge for refugees to access higher education in Ireland.
- DkIT reported that the first sanctuary scholarship was awarded in academic year 2021/22 and following promotion of the scheme there was an increase in the number of applications to the scheme over the summer of 2022.

The case study below submitted by MU outlines not only the HEI's own response to supporting students and researchers fleeing from war in the Ukraine, but how partnerships across the sector and with other agencies and organisations have contributed to the response. The case study has been redacted for the purposes of brevity, but can be accessed in full [here](#).

Case Study

Response to the war in Ukraine and the provision of support to those who arrived in Ireland at Maynooth University

Maynooth University is proud to have played our part in the Irish Higher Education response to the situation in Ukraine. From March 2020, Ireland became the home of many people from Ukraine, HEIs across Ireland responded by offering accommodation, basic supports and facilitating access to education for those arriving.

During the summer of 2022, MU hosted 1,200 people displaced from Ukraine in our student accommodation. This involved the setting up of a Maynooth Ukrainian Action Group with weekly strategic coordination meetings of c.20 support agencies/organisations where each pledged support and offered to lead on particular areas where they had expertise. This was in place from June – September 2022 and was chaired by the Maynooth University Vice-President for Equality and Diversity. The Maynooth Ukrainian Action Group was unique in Ireland as the only place that organisations like the Health Service Executive and Department of Social Protection regularly met with host organisations and local support agencies to ensure a holistic joined-up response to supporting the complex needs of guests.

In particular, learnings from this included the need to have a 'poverty gap fund' to cover the costs of essential items/medical needs for refugees who had just arrived in Ireland and who had no money until their state benefits started several days later. Also, the need to have established links with all the necessary providers of services and contact details of relevant organisations and community groups/volunteers to reach out to for supports. The MU Scholars at Risk Admin Mentor acted at the central contact point in this regard and provided admin support for the Maynooth Ukrainian Action Group and the Maynooth Ukrainian Information Centre which employed four Ukrainian speakers and was hosted on campus until September.

Additionally, as part of the national response, a need was identified for a single point for contact for students and researchers wishing to access third level in Ireland. The National Student and Researcher (NSR) Helpdesk was established by DFHERIS in March 2022, as an emergency response, to guide and support Ukrainian students and researchers displaced by the invasion of Ukraine who were covered by the EU's Temporary Protection Directive to explore suitable study options in the Irish education and training system. Maynooth University was asked by DFHERIS and the Irish Universities Association (IUA) to host the National Student and Researcher (NSR) Helpdesk on behalf of the higher education sector. This was announced by Minister Simon Harris on 3rd May 2022 to assist Ukrainian students and researchers seeking to continue their higher education studies and work in Ireland. It was supported by a National Steering Group chaired by DFHERIS and staffed by six Admissions and Researchers Advisors seconded from HEIs around Ireland, and two Ukrainian speakers. The Helpdesk was developed as a single holistic and student focused national point of contact and information for potential students seeking to access higher education in Ireland. The Helpdesk partnered with Irish Translation Services (based in DCU) to provide translation services for documentation, partnered with Duolingo to provide a central resource for the assessment of English Language for academic purposes free of charge to students, and partnered with PAC who developed a national application system to consistently process applications on behalf of the sector. It was in place until December 2022. MU was asked to provide this service on the basis of our expertise in Excellence in Exile, including the SAR MU Fellowship and the MU College Connect work on refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers ([Community Needs Analysis with Refugees](#)).

The key strength of our response in supporting Ukrainians was the importance put on partnerships. Whether that was other universities and private companies as part of the National Student and Researcher Helpdesk or community and voluntary organisations through the Maynooth Ukrainian Action Group. Recognising the value of the Maynooth Ukrainian Action Group and the ongoing need for coordination of supports, County Kildare Leader Partnership (CKLP) appointed a Ukrainian Emergency Response Coordinator, Helen Mulhall, whose role is to coordinate and communicate between agency and voluntary responses, to address gaps in the response and to advocate for Ukrainian voices and needs in emergency response

Case Study 10: MU - Response to the War in Ukraine and the Provision of Support to Those who Arrived in Ireland.

2.3.6 STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

The AQRs submitted for this reporting period indicated that the provision of continuing professional development opportunities to teaching staff is ongoing across the sector. For example:

- UCC reported that in November 2021, it ran a university-wide, week-long showcase of learning and teaching highlights across UCC under the inaugural national 'Valuing Ireland's Teaching & Learning (VIT&L) Week'.

- UCD reported that UCD Teaching and Learning will offer a new module: Leading in University Teaching & Learning. This module is available as part of the Professional Programmes in University Teaching and Learning.
- MTU reported that the Teaching & Learning Unit organised a series of 16 seminars and workshops as part of its Conversations on Teaching & Learning Winter and Summer Seminar Series during the reporting period.
- TUS reported that a [Compendium of Active Learning and Assessment for Student Engagement](#) was published during the reporting period and represents a significant resource for staff development in teaching and learning. The compendium includes the twin themes of Active Learning and Innovative Assessment for Student Engagement. This publication is the first official, collaborative TUS publication in Learning, Teaching and Assessment and contains 44 submissions from academic practitioners across TUS.

Teaching staff development activities are also reported under academic integrity and in relation to assessment practice.

The AQRs for the previous reporting period indicated a recognition across the sector that the provision of learning and development opportunities is essential to enable staff to manage change and work effectively in rapidly transforming and increasingly digital environments. The AQRs for this reporting period indicate that this activity is ongoing. Specific examples from 2021/22 included:

- UCD reported on the launch of the UCD LinkedIn Learning Platform for employees in October 2021. During the first year of LinkedIn Learning in UCD, 1,700 colleagues (46%) activated their LinkedIn Learning license, over 50,500 LinkedIn Learning videos were viewed and 1,235 courses were completed across UCD, totalling 2,087 hours of engaged learning via this platform.
- UG also reported on the successful use of the LinkedIn Learning Platform, indicating that membership has been renewed until 2023. Learning paths on LinkedIn Learning support specific areas, including bereavement and grief workshops, employee wellness, onboarding, anti-bullying and sustainability. The university's LearnUpon platform hosts unconscious bias and EDI training modules.
- IADT reported on a range of professional development opportunities, including training in GDPR Compliance, Equality and Diversity, Unconscious Bias, Cyber Security, Protecting Yourself when Home Working in Ireland, Protecting Data when Home Working in Ireland, an Anxiety module, Child Protection and Introductory eLearning in Equality and Human Rights in the Public Service.
 - In addition to legal and compliance-based training, IADT reported that membership with a training provider enables staff to avail of relevant courses, mainly related to generic employment competencies as well as a variety of wellbeing sessions. Participation in these courses was strong with 78 staff availing of 41 courses between September 2021 and August 2022.
- DCU reported that the HR and Learning & Organisational Development Team consults across the university to identify ongoing learning needs and strategic focal points. This process is steered by the Academic Development and Promotion Framework, alongside the newly introduced DCU Professional Development Framework. Targeted actions are implemented to address these skill, capacity, and competency demands. Staff can

discuss their learning and development aims using the University's Probation Assessment procedure and the recently established Performance Review & Development (PRD) Scheme.

- Also at DCU, the Explore Leadership programmes is a comprehensive initiative that spans the academic year and focuses on essential leadership skills.

As per the previous reporting period, wellbeing continued to be a focus. Examples include:

- MU reported that employee wellbeing was a topic of emphasis over the reporting period and notes that MU employees can avail of support via various channels. During the academic year 2021/22, there was a collective attendance of 1,121 participants across all courses/seminars organised by Learning & Development.
- RCSI reported that the INSPIRE staff wellbeing programme continued to run employee wellness activities throughout the reporting period, including mindfulness sessions, mental health awareness training, and social coffee mornings. RCSI also reported that during



2021/22 the HEI was included in the Business & Finance/Ibec top 100 companies in Ireland who are leading the way in workplace wellbeing.

- UCD reported that the Mental Health and Wellbeing Steering Group, managed by Culture and Engagement and EDI, rolled out initiatives to support employees experiencing mental health and wellbeing difficulties. UCD also reported that employees who have experience of fertility treatment were invited to attend a focus group session in June 2022 to share experiences and contribute to the development of workplace support for employees undergoing fertility treatment.
- TUS reported that a range of policies to support staff were developed. These included policies on adoptive leave, bereavement leave, career break leave, marriage and civil partnership leave, maternity leave, parental leave, carers leave and a workshare policy.

In addition to staff development, it is noted that [QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines](#) encompass the fair and transparent recruitment of staff, staff communication and the provision of a supportive environment that allows them to carry out their work effectively. For this reporting period, fewer updates are provided in relation to these aspects of practice within public HEIs across the AQRs than are set out pertaining to staff development. This may indicate that no changes have taken place and that established procedures are continuing, or it may reflect that priority in reporting has been given to staff development activities. However, noting the considerable work ongoing in relation to EDI across the sector and the transformation of working practices throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, it is likely that efforts to ensure practices in these areas remain fit-for-purpose will become more visible in subsequent reporting periods. Some updates were provided that relate to these areas, for example:

- UCD reported that an Interview Skills Training Course, which was already in place at UCD, has been enhanced with the addition of a second module focusing on the more practical aspects of recruitment. It also reported on the launch of the new Faculty Promotions Development Framework. UCD indicates that it seeks to ensure that faculty and staff are enabled to achieve their full potential and are appropriately rewarded for their contribution. Additionally, a new RISE (Respect, Inspire, Support Employee experience) programme launched in May 2022, supports the ongoing development of all people managers and leaders across the University.
- UCD Human Resources also published updates to the Parental Leave and Adoptive and Surrogacy Leave policies in May 2022.
- MTU reported that in order to 'gender-proof' recruitment, selection and promotion procedures and practices, MTU (Cork) has provided unconscious bias training to all staff who are routinely called upon to sit on interview boards, including Heads of Department and Heads of School.
- TCD reported that information and training sessions were provided to support line managers over 2022, indicating that a toolkit for recruitment of staff containing relevant resources is available.
- TCD also reported on progress on its Career Framework for Professional Staff, which was introduced in 2017. The update indicates that a Role Grading Project, which had the overall objective of developing a Role Grading framework to ensure all posts in the university are correctly graded, was completed in 2021. TCD reports that Role Grading commenced on a one-year pilot basis in March 2022.

Work underway in HEIs to support teaching staff to facilitate effective online teaching, learning and assessment and to safeguard academic integrity has been discussed in sections 2.3.1, 2.3.2 and 2.3.3. During 2021/22, the AQRs submitted by HEIs confirmed that cyclical staff development and support is ongoing.

During this reporting period, ATU submitted a case study outlining the development of an online induction programme for academic staff that focuses on ensuring they are oriented to systems, processes and procedures that they need to become familiar with, rather than focusing on teaching methodologies. The case study has been redacted for the purposes of brevity, but can be accessed in full [here](#).

Case Study

Academic Staff Induction with Digital Badge at ATU

A bespoke Online Induction programme for academics, new to ATU Sligo, was developed in 2021. This Induction does not relate to teaching methodologies or pedagogies (CPD is available to support staff in this regard), but rather provides an in-depth understanding of the various systems, processes, and procedures that academics need to be familiar with in their role as academic/lecturer. New academics may have substantive teaching experience but will still require support with gaining knowledge and understanding with ATU systems and procedures. This Induction Programme draws together all the administrative and operational tasks and systems that support academics in fulfilling their role.

In September 2022, following consultation with Teaching & Learning Heads across ATU, the programme was further developed to roll out across ATU Sligo and ATU Galway-Mayo. The programme is hosted on Teams, and facilitated by Colin Birney (Lecturer, ATU Sligo) in conjunction with Sean Daffy, Instructional Designer ATU Galway (who acts as mentor for Galway-Mayo campus staff). The online programme comprises one hour per week (1pm – 2pm) for a six-week duration and is delivered each semester.

Once registered onto the programme, participants have the option of attending the live online lunchtime session, watching the recording of each session at a time that suits, or completing a combination of both – attend and/or watch the recording. On successful completion of all six sessions (regardless of format) participants are asked to complete a Quiz and Feedback Form – once successfully completed participants are awarded a Digital Badge in Academic Induction. This digital badge can be linked to their CORE HR for professional development (CPD) purposes.

On completion of the six-week programme participants are invited to a half-day face-to-face workshop to gain further understanding of the CPD opportunities available to them. The workshop comprises:

- Meet and Greet.
- Overview of the online six-week Academic Induction Programme (which participants may or may not have attended) and next steps.
- Academic Staff CPD opportunities at ATU including PG Cert, Diploma & MA in Teaching & Learning.
- National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning - Open Courses, DigitalEd, LinkedIn Learning and resources to support academics in their teaching role.
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a Teaching & Learning Framework.
- Open Discussion – Experiences and Challenges so far and supports available for staff and students.

In Semester 2 2022 (September-October), the first joint roll out of the Online Academic Induction Programme had over 90 staff participate. A detailed handbook (hardcopy and online versions) to accompany and expand upon the Induction programme is being created. The programme will continue to be delivered each semester, with the intention to include all ATU campuses when systems and processes are more closely aligned.

Case Study 11: ATU - Academic Staff Induction with Digital Badge

2.3.7 INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

Notably, in the previous reporting period, the AQRs captured abundant evidence that Covid-19 had acted as a catalyst for an acceleration of digital transformation across the sector. During 2021/22, a number of HEIs indicated that work to upgrade existing systems or adopt/transition to new platforms was ongoing. As the acquisition, piloting and integration of new systems typically requires multi-annual projects, reporting spans work completed, work ongoing and work in the planning stages.

- A number of HEIs, including IADT, MTU and SETU, reported on upgrading to the latest version of the Student Information System (Banner). The system is used to manage critical student information.
- TUS reported initiating work to enable effective integration of information and data management systems for collation, maintenance and utilisation of data consistently across

the TU and to inform its decision making and operations at all levels. Projects to merge systems such as CoreHR, DXC (Banner), and the overall IT infrastructure were initiated.

- ATU reported that three options were considered for migrating CRM solutions to an ATU-wide tenancy. An option was chosen and an outline plan produced to have a CRM platform for the whole of ATU. The first change was completed with users signing in with an ATU identity. ATU additionally reported that the HEI was in the process of developing a portal to review RPL applications.
- DCU reported on the adoption of an enterprise reporting platform to provide business intelligence requirements. The AQR indicated that a multi-year project to upgrade/replace the student information system was ongoing and is due to conclude at the end of 2023.
- UL reported that in Autumn 2021, the Executive Committee approved the development and roll-out of a secure internal communications platform. UL Connect is now UL's internal communications and information sharing platform.
- UL reported preparation for a virtual learning environment (VLE) transition. The new VLE will be piloted in September 2022 and January 2023 with the end goal being migration of all modules during the academic year 2023/24.
- TCD reported that an IT project to improve functionality in the Research Proposal and Awards Management System was completed in 2021/22. The system tracks proposals and awards. The improvements will provide for better data quality, the provision of a suite of reports, improved performance and data, and the ability to interface with other systems. In 2021/22, a new Research Ethics Application Management System (REAMS) to receive, triage, and store ethics applications, was also launched at TCD.
- IADT reported on the procurement of a Current Research Information System (CRIS), intended to secure significant improvement in the visibility and accessibility of IADT's research profile.
- UCC reported being in the midst of an ambitious multi-year investment in its core student and curriculum management systems.
- RCSI reported that Kaizen, the new RCSI Student Dashboard and Assessment solution, will be introduced for the subsequent academic year.

Across the sector, a range of updates were provided on policies approved, implemented or in development that indicate data protection continues to be a priority area.

- ATU reported the approval of a Data Protection Policy in 2021/22.
- MTU reported that during this period, policies were implemented relating to information and data management, including an Information Governance Policy, a Data Protection Policy, a Data Retention Policy, a Data Handling and Clean Desk Policy, a Data Protection-Breach Response Policy, a Data Access Management and Privileged User Policy, an Information Security Policy, a Third Party IT Engagement Policy and a Freedom of Information process.
- TUS reported that with regard to its data management and protection practices, TUS has a number of important and required policies in development. Interim policies are in place until these are completed.
- UCC reported that the Office of Corporate and Legal Affairs (OCLA) website was updated in 2021 to include additional internal guidance and training materials on records management.

UG reported in some detail on an attempted cyberattack in September 2021. Since then, various security measures have been put in place. UG indicated the following:

- An immediate investment of expertise, time and resources was required to respond to the 2021 attempted cyberattack.
- The university continues to leverage cloud technologies and invest in upgrades to servers and data storage systems to ensure this critical infrastructure is fit-for-purpose.
- A 24/7 Security Operations Centre has been deployed.
- The university has strengthened on-premises and cloud environments.
- Recruitment of additional key information security personnel is planned.

Based on the experience and expertise developed, UG is engaged in information-sharing at a national level to determine ICT priorities across the university sector.

UL updated on developments that pertain to information management activity that will enhance capacity to use data to inform decision-making. It reported that the Quality Support Unit developed a data portal to support the 27 annual programme review processes. This portal gives course directors and academic managers access to key data which will allow them to make data-informed decisions on programme enhancement.

In the previous reporting period, a pronounced theme was the increased effort to collect and use student feedback data to inform practice at HEIs. During 2021/22, there was evidence that HEIs are engaging with studentsurvey.ie and that the outcomes are evaluated at senior governance levels, including by academic councils, but also at faculty and school level. During this reporting period, Ireland's three new technological universities confirmed the embedding of studentsurvey.ie within their processes, alongside other mechanisms for eliciting feedback from learners and amplifying the learner voice.

- TUS reported that the HEI is committed to the survey and traditionally has high student participation rates. The data from the survey is analysed at institutional, faculty and programme level in TUS. During the reporting period, TUS conducted its first annual student survey as a newly established technological university and results were analysed and utilised for the first time at a technological university and campus level to inform quality enhancements. Annual results are notified to TUS Academic Council and issued to relevant subcommittees of Academic Council and Faculties/Departments to address the results reported, where appropriate, in their policies, initiatives, and activities.
- ATU reported that student engagement and satisfaction is measured, annually, through studentsurvey.ie. During the reporting period, ATU coordinated the promotion and administration of the survey across all campuses of the new university. The output from the survey will be analysed and shared with Faculties/Schools, Departments and Programme Boards to inform enhancements based on student feedback.
- SETU reported that student satisfaction surveys are a growing part of the information strategy. While student input is currently sought through student representation on Governing Body, Academic Council, programme evaluation panels, programme boards and local, course-specific feedback, the University closely monitors and evaluates feedback from the national studentsurvey.ie. The evaluations of the studentsurvey.ie data are debated at the Academic Council, publicly offered through the Office of the Head of

Quality Promotion and available to each school for school-wide use.

MTU additionally reported that the outcomes of the student survey are analysed by the university and discussed by the Academic Council and other relevant units.

A number of AQRs indicated that additional module and area-specific surveys were utilised, alongside other mechanisms to elicit feedback such as student representation on programme boards and committees. However, updates specific to the reporting period were generally not indicated. Updates relevant to this reporting period included:

- RCSI indicated that following a review in 2021-22, the frequency of its surveys has been decreased to two Pulse surveys in each semester, complemented by a longer end-of-semester survey.
- TU Dublin reported that in 2021/22 a pilot of an online module survey was run. The learnings from this informed a new tender competition for the university's new Student Feedback System.
- TUS reported participation in the annual Graduate Outcomes Survey. The AQR indicates that information provided by the survey serves as a key performance indicator of the Careers and Employability Service.

Although not a pronounced theme across the sector, the AQRs indicate work in some HEIs to develop capacity to utilise data analytics.

- TCD reported that a new Data Analytics and Strategic Initiatives Unit, based in the Office of the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, was established in 2021/22.
- UL reported that a workshop on using student feedback and learning analytics in professional development was held in December 2021.
- TUS reported that the Transitions and Student Success function collaborated with the TUS Midland's management information system unit to establish a Student Performance section on the report manager platform. The project successfully migrated statistical sets during the academic year 2021/22. Those sets pertain to the first-year withdrawals before 31 March, and the participation and success rates of the student cohort in the autumn repeat exams. These statistical sets have informed the university's plan for transitions and student success.

The case study below outlines how indicators of learner engagement are being used to inform specific proactive interventions at UCD.

Case Study

Live Engagement and Attendance Project (LEAP) at UCD

LEAP Project Activity:

In order to enable proactive interventions by institutional support resources (namely Student Advisers), a VLE engagement data monitoring system was developed by the Project Team and implemented in the 2020/21 period to address emerging needs for oversight within the hybrid learning sphere. Student data analytics from custom VLE data thresholds (underpinned by existing UCD guidelines, best practice, and sectoral literature) were generated and utilised to offer early support interventions by a Student Adviser. The resultant report was designed to provide weekly programme-level information on VLE engagement. Given that there may be discrepancies in the quantity and quality of learning materials and resources students are provided with at module level, an analytics monitoring infrastructure tailored at programme level aims to offer more representative oversight capacity. Specifically, students were flagged for the following benchmarks:

- Log-in Flag: The student has not logged into the majority (relative to their programme) of VLE modules in seven days.
- Content Flag: The student's module topic access is <30% of their class peer average.

This reporting enabled Student Advisers to proactively reach out to students who may be struggling in real-time, increasing the chances of timely support being delivered and facilitating student success as a result. The scalability of VLE interventions led to rollout and expansion across the university, from an initial cohort of 280 students in 2020/21 up to thousands of students across multiple UCD Colleges (Agriculture & Food Science, Arts & Humanities, Science, Social Science & Law) in the 2022/23 academic year. With UCD's VLE (D2L Brightspace) already embedded in the institution, data is sourced and generated centrally, enhancing replicability and mainstreaming capabilities of this resource across the UCD student body.

By ensuring student support resources are deployed when potential disengagement is flagged in participating schools and programs, and by facilitating discretionary student-staff dialogue on potential non-engagement reasons, this system can help foster equity in the availability and access to student support services. Importantly, there is ongoing scope to enhance the data's capacity to provide proportionate and actionable insights centred on initiating meaningful student support dialogue.

Institutional Mainstreaming:

There are two key aspects of LEAP's sustainability and scaling plan:

- **Digital Embeddedness:** UCD's VLE plays a critical role in the delivery of academic and administrative services and in implementing broader service transformation initiatives. A digital oversight programme continues to be available for pastoral support staff informed by programme-level VLE engagement reporting.
- **Service Coordination:** Based on the adaptability and accessibility of engagement analytics, UCD's support infrastructure can utilise student data to coordinate a range of cross-campus service transformation and enhancement initiatives.

As a result of this project, VLE engagement monitoring tools for Student Advisers are now available within different Schools in UCD, assessing the utility and feasibility of this activity. The project team continues to investigate the extent to which VLE engagement paints a representative picture of student participation and to strengthen intervention pathways. The ongoing roll-out across campus will help identify how in-person and remote resources can work together in delivering student support, and operate as part of a broader suite of resources, highlighting the role digital resources can play in enhancing and delivering student success. Further information is available at: <https://supportingstudentsuccess.ucd.ie/>

Case Study 12: UCD - Live Engagement and Attendance Project (LEAP)

2.3.8 PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

In the previous reporting period, in addition to efforts to facilitate good communication and access to information for students and staff, a number of HEIs outlined successful external communications initiatives within their AQRs. For 2021/22, very few updates were provided in relation to this area of practice. The AQRs submitted typically outlined the policies in place and platforms used to communicate information, but did not indicate updates to these that were specific to the reporting period. Exceptions were:

- MU reported that a new Office of External Relations website was established, reflecting the new structure and providing new resources and signposting to both internal staff and external audiences.
- TCD reported that a project to build a new web presence, based on a Content Management System, was initiated in 2021/22 (envisioned for completion in 2023).
- UL reported that as part of the Technology Transfer Office's strategy to improve service delivery and expand marketing reach, the office has joined the IN-PART global IP marketing platform. IN-PART offers UL access to a network of more than 6,000 companies in the Life sciences, Engineering and IT sectors. UL is noted to currently be marketing 13 technologies on the platform, which has resulted in a number of new connections with companies and investors.
- TUS reported that as a newly established technological university designated on 1 October 2021, the [TUS logo and brand](#) was launched shortly after.

Given the focus on external and global engagement reflected in new appointments during this reporting period (see section 2.2.2), as well as ongoing development in the arena of social and digital media, it is anticipated that activity in this area may become more visible in subsequent reporting periods.

Some focus on internal communications was evident in this year's submissions, with a focus on accessibility and EDI considerations. Examples of this included:

- TUS developed a guide designed to align to national and international effective practice that supports equity in communication particularly in its written documentation. This is consistent with the EU directive requiring public bodies to ensure their content is accessible to everyone. It is also in line with the Technological Higher Education Quality Framework principle “consistency with policy and international effective practice”, which has been adopted by TUS.
- ATU submitted a [case study](#) on an Inclusive Communications Strategy. The case study sets out a project with the objective of fostering a culture of EDI and the conditions for culture change, through a multi-channel inclusive communications strategy that would mainline EDI communications from the time of the merger (01 April, 2022). The platforms and media used are indicated and stated key learnings from the project have included that timely communication is key and that multiple types of communications are effective in engaging support and buy-in.

2.3.9 SOCIETAL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Reporting across the sector with regard to societal and community engagement activities was markedly variable. This was included within some AQR reports as a specific subheading and omitted from others. However, where no direct reporting was provided by HEIs, a focus on social and community-oriented activities was often discernible within the activities indicated under other headings, for example, social- and community-focused research endeavours. Therefore, although the examples in this section highlight reported activities, they should not be interpreted as the entirety of activities across public HEIs.

- TUS provided links within its AQR to accounts of activity that demonstrate the HEI's societal and community engagement. These included hosting an International Refugee Week, Graduate Art Shows, International Women's Day events, engagement with the Limerick Men's Shed and fundraising activities for the Irish Red Cross, among other initiatives.
- ATU reported that the Sustainable Tourism Observatory at ATU (STORY@ATU) research group has been active throughout 2022 as it aims to help tackle the social, cultural, economic, and environmental challenges facing the tourism industry across the island of Ireland. STORY@ATU is a collaboration between the three ATU campuses. It aims to build on new and existing partnerships with key stakeholders in local authorities, state agencies, tourism, industry, enterprises, and communities across the island and internationally to address local challenges and collaborate with national and international researchers on global solutions. In December 2022, a webinar was organised by ATU Tourism colleagues entitled “Upskilling Irish Tourism for a decarbonised world”. This was funded by the HEA and brought national and international experts, policy makers and practitioners together with students and staff to explore how the rapidly changing HE sector can positively contribute to the decarbonisation agenda.
- MTU reported on the pop-up restaurant event, The Open Door, held in Cork Prison in May

2022, which was the culmination of an intensive eight-week MTU Culinary Skills programme taken by six prisoners. Over 50 invited guests attended the event, held in the Education Unit of the prison. The meal was prepared by the students as the capstone assessment of their Special Purpose Award programme and served by MTU Hospitality Management students. This pilot-programme is co-managed by the Irish Prison Service, MTU (Cork)'s Department of Tourism & Hospitality and the MTU Access Service. The event showcased the unique partnership between the Irish Prison Service, MTU and the Cork Education & Training Board (CETB), which runs the Educational Unit in Cork Prison. All partners are determined to enhance pathways to further training, education and employment for people in custody while at the same time offering a solution to employers in the hospitality and tourism industry by providing new, motivated employees to fill the current shortage in the sector.

- NUI reported regular collaboration with the Dublin City Council Archaeological Conservation and Heritage Unit. NUI co-organised and hosted the annual Viking lecture as part of the Dublin Festival of History in October 2021.
- UL reported on a breadth of community engagement activities that the university supported during the 2021/22 reporting period. These are too numerous to list in their entirety but included, for example:
 - The Community Wellness, Empowerment, Leadership and Lifeskills (CWELL) diploma programme, which is a Level 7 diploma programme directed at adult learners from socio-economic disadvantaged communities across Limerick city. CWELL continues to recruit and is now fully embedded in local communities.
 - The One Million Stars to End Violence project brings communities together to engage in a creative project that demonstrates the university's support and solidarity with those who experience violence, particularly domestic violence.

UL submitted a case study which outlines the presentation of these and multiple other community-focused projects on the UL Engage website. The full case study and links to further information are available [here](#).

Notably, a number of HEIs also reported on engagement and collaboration with enterprise partners. Examples of this include:

- TUS reported that around 150 entrepreneurs and innovators were supported on programmes and initiatives in the TUS Enterprise and Incubation centres. Companies supported ranged from early and initial stage ventures, right through to Series-A companies with, in addition to Enterprise Ireland, national and international VC partners. TUS enterprise centres have supported hundreds of companies that have raised well over €100m in investment.
- DkIT reported on the Regional Development Centre (RDC), which provides incubation facilities for start-up businesses and provides support to entrepreneurs. The RDC successfully secured €146,170 in funding from Enterprise Ireland for Covid-19 recovery efforts in the previous reporting period (2020/21) and work continued on the back of this funding into the current 2021/22 reporting period. This work included delivery of a Business Resilience Programme, installation of a New Access Control System, and marketing for the RDC.

2.3.10 SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

The AQRs submitted for 2021/22 indicated that monitoring and review activities were underway across the sector. Activities reported spanned reviews of senior governance, faculties, programmes and professional service areas. Examples of this include:

- At UG, following its establishment in February 2021, Údarás na hOllscoile (2021-2025) was in a bedding down phase. Its first annual internal effectiveness review was conducted in March 2022 and the outcome was discussed at its meeting in April 2022. Overall there was a generally high level of satisfaction and key steps were agreed to address issues raised
- ATU reported that reviews were conducted during the reporting period of ATU's Faculty of Engineering & Technology, Faculty of Business, and Faculty of Science & Health, alongside programmatic reviews within their academic departments. Full programmatic reviews for each department were completed in 2022.
- DkIT reported that a periodic review of Research and Graduate Studies was conducted in collaboration with DCU (with both institutes collaborating in support of the DCU-DkIT Graduate School).
- MTU's Department of Construction underwent a programmatic review during the reporting period.
- TUS reported that eight periodic reviews took place across the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment, the Faculty of Applied Science and Information Technology, the Faculty of Business and Humanities Technology, the Faculty of Business and Hospitality, and Limerick School of Art and Design.
- ATU reported that immediately prior to designation as a TU and within the reporting period, a number of professional services and functional areas undertook reviews. The outcomes of those reviews and implications for readiness for transitioning to ATU are outlined.

One of the elements that HEIs report on in the AQRs is the composition of expert panels involved in quality assurance and programme approval processes. This identifies the gender, nationality and internal versus external institutional status of expert reviewers. In the previous reporting period it was noted that a relatively small number of non-Irish review panel members was reported, and that most of those were from the UK. Inclusion of EU or non-EU reviewers in review panels was rare. This was interesting to reflect on in the light of the emphasis on EU integration and international collaboration across the sector discussed in section 2.1.3. It is noteworthy that, again in this reporting period, review panels were consistently and overwhelmingly composed of Irish reviewers.

2.3.10.1 CINNTE

Not all public HEIs had yet completed the [CINNTE](#) review process during this reporting period. Of those that had, some AQRs made brief reference to addressing the recommendations made within the Institutional Review Report and incorporating these into quality enhancement plans. At UCD, the recommendations were clearly integrated to reporting on QA and QE supporting the achievement of strategic objectives. IT Sligo (now ATU) mapped QA improvement and enhancement plans for the upcoming reporting period to CINNTE recommendations where relevant.

A number of public HEIs provided updates on preparations for, or other activity related to, QQI's external quality assurance review process, CINNTE.

- TUD underwent its CINNTE review in the 2021/22 reporting period (October 2021), which involved completion of an Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER), Institutional Profile and a number of case studies.
- ATU established a plan to form a CINNTE Steering Group in anticipation of its CINNTE review.
- IADT formally commenced the CINNTE review process during the reporting period, with the review scheduled for May 2023. The institute submitted its Institutional Profile in May 2022.
- MTU planned the submission of its ISER for its next CINNTE review for Q4 2023, with the site visit to take place following this in Q1 2024.
- TUS reported plans for a programme of self-evaluation and critical review to be conducted to enable submission of an ISER to QQI in Q1 2024. A core steering group with staff from the Registry/Quality Office was established to plan for the self-evaluation.
- TUS reported that a process of self-evaluation is underway as part of the preparatory process for drafting the ISER. A Project Management Plan for this work was agreed during the reporting period, and faculty and student focus groups were conducted.

2.3.11 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMES

During this reporting period, Ireland's new technological universities worked to establish appropriate oversight committees for research programmes and activities. The sector additionally undertook a number of enhancement activities, particularly in relation to the governance and management of research activity.

- TUS reported that since its establishment as a TU, the TUS Academic Council has formed a Postgraduate Studies & Research sub-committee which has, in turn, established a Working Group. This Working Group is developing TUS Research Degree Regulations which are to be considered by the TUS Academic Council in 2023. TUS research activities have grown substantially during the reporting year and continue to have a strong applied focus, delivering specific innovative outputs in partnership with industry, community and other external stakeholders.
- ATU reported that development of policies and procedures for research is underway, being led by the interim Vice-President for Research and Innovation. While these are in development, the legacy policies and procedures of the legacy institutions are in effect.
- ATU additionally reported that the quality assurance and enhancement team are progressing development of a policy encompassing postgraduate research. This entails consultation with internal and external stakeholders in postgraduate research and involves both ATU as well as non-ATU e-supervisors. This broad consultation recognises that ATU's postgraduate research students are routinely co-supervised by academic staff of other HEIs and by mentors in public and private enterprise, NGOs, government departments and agencies. These co-supervisors bring important external perspectives and experience to the PGR student journey, its quality assurance, and the practice in other HEIs and jurisdictions.

- SETU reported that a Research Committee of the Academic Council has been established, as well as a Research Ethics Committee.
- MTU reported the approval of an interim MTU Research and Innovation Statement which in turn has informed the development of a university-wide framework for research and postgraduate research provision. Since its establishment, MTU has approved a number of policies and documents relevant to its research activities. These include a Code of Good Practice in Research, Authorship Policy, Human Research Ethics Policy, Human Research Ethics Screening Checklist, Open Access Policy, Research Data Management Policy, Signing Authority for MTU IP and Innovation Agreements.
- TU Dublin reported that the 1st edition of the TU Dublin Graduate Research Regulations was approved by Academic Council in June 2022 and is strategically aligned to QQI's [Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Research Degree Programmes](#), the [National Framework for Doctoral Education](#) and [Ireland's Framework for Good Practice in Research Degrees](#). TU Dublin reported that work has continued on the restructuring of the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation (VPRI). The University's 'Open Research Support Unit' is being established to promote TU Dublin's transition to an 'Open Research Environment'. The VPRI office is centralising its Common Services into a single professional service hub for the Office aiming to achieve consistency, efficiency and effectiveness in its own processes and those it shares with others.

The two remaining institutes of technology indicated that research is a priority area within their overall activities and for the upcoming reporting period.

- DkIT reported that 33 of the 64 items identified as part of its QA Improvement and Enhancement Plans for the Upcoming Reporting Period (2022/23) relate to Research and Graduate Studies, indicating a concerted effort to strengthen this area.
- IADT reported that work commenced on a review and revision of policies and procedures related to research activities and programmes, including the Research Degrees – Procedures and Guidelines, Research Strategy, Ethics Policy, and Staff Research Policy. In further acknowledgement of the role of research, the Vice-President for Research, Development and Innovation began chairing the Research + Development Committee, a move approved by Academic Council in October 2021. IADT also reported submitting a number of national and European research proposals, while a new staff research development programme was initiated by the Research Office in consultation with Heads of Department. Thirteen staff were selected to take part in the programme, which is scheduled for delivery in the 2022/23 academic year.

A number of public HEIs reported or submitted case studies pertaining to training and support services made available for student and faculty researchers. For example:

- UCD reported on a significant expansion of online support for research and innovation, including a new integrated system for end-to-end management of research projects. The research impact toolkit, recently launched Promote Your Research website and other existing support is available through UCD's research portal and the research website.
- TUS reported that the TUS library delivers a range of research support services and training sessions. The AQR confirms that a comprehensive programme of training and support is available for postgraduate researchers, research supervisors and staff.
- MTU reported that the library liaised with the Graduate Studies Office to create a dedicated

space within the Graduate Studies – Student Information module on MTU’s VLE, Canvas, for a Publishing section. This section offers an index on all aspects of publishing as a useful facility to prepare graduate students for publishing their own research. Topics covered include Scholarly Publishing, Journal Selection, Open Access, Predatory Publishing, Copyright and Licensing, Promoting Your Research and Research Integrity in Academic Publishing.

- TCD submitted a case study outlining how the introduction of agreements between supervisors and research students is helping to ensure transparency and accountability throughout the learners’ research journey. Further detail is available in the full case study submission accessible [here](#).
- UG submitted a case study pertaining to research support, outlining the introduction of a postgraduate mentoring initiative intended to address common issues such as loneliness, anxiety and trouble finding information. The case study can be accessed [here](#).

ATU submitted the case study below on an interdisciplinary postgraduate research training programme in modelling and computation for health and society.

Case Study

Postgraduate Research Training Programme (PRTP) in Modelling and Computation for Health and Society (MOCHAS)

The MOCHAS PRTP is an interdisciplinary, cohort-based research training programme which commenced in September 2022 with a cohort of 15 PhD students across all three ATU colleges. The MOCHAS PRTP aims to produce high-level, multidisciplinary research graduates who can develop, communicate, and exploit modelling and computational tools for the solution of real-world problems relevant to societal needs.

The individual research projects have been developed in tandem with stakeholders including hospitals, local government and industry, and address problems encompassing environmental sustainability, zero-carbon transport planning, medical devices, and health technologies. The cohort of PhD scholars share a common core training programme which entails development of the technical skills but also the soft skills in communication, visualisation, cost analysis and innovation processes which are key to successful exploitation and impact of modelling and computational tools. Students are also highly encouraged and supported to do an internship or external placement over the course of their PhD studies. The programme involves 32 Principal Investigators from across the ATU as well as 34 external partners – including 9 public enterprises, 11 private enterprises, and 14 national and international research partners. Of these 11 are regional stakeholders, emphasising the importance of regional development in the research projects. The students themselves come from 7 different countries from across the world, and the research teams have discipline backgrounds including Engineering, Mathematics, Computer Science, Chemistry, Life Science, Physics and Economics. The programme has so far been a catalyst for inter-campus and inter-discipline research collaboration and training. Activities so far in the academic year 2022/2023 have included:

- Programme launch at the ATU Galway City campus by SFI Director-General, Prof Philip Nolan.
- Development of a specialist module in Mathematical and Computational Modelling designed for researchers to support in the selection, development, use and evaluation of different modelling, analytics and simulation tools appropriate to their research topic. This involved weekly on-line classes and a face-to-face 'Autumn School'.
- Autumn School at the ATU Sligo Campus 1st-4th November – including Training Needs Assessment and Personal Development Planning, Technical Workshops on modelling, inference, simulation, data analytics and machine learning, as well as social events and student group work and presentations. This Autumn school was opened to other PhD students outside MOCHAS studying in cognate fields (sponsored by the ATU MISHE Research Centre).
- Winter Symposium in 'Modelling and Computation for Health and Society' at the ATU Galway campus 16th-17th January. The symposium included a keynote talk from Prof James Gleeson, Director of the SFI CRT in Foundations of Data Science hosted by the University of Limerick, and ATU researcher Dr Cormac Flynn, an expert on modelling of human skin. The symposium was an opportunity for the MOCHAS students to present their research topics and also entailed interactive poster sessions which were open to all ATU researchers. A total of 38 ATU research projects in the theme of 'Modelling and Computation for Health and Society' were presented over the two day event. The event also included a conference dinner for all participants and a prize-giving for the best posters and presentations.
- A four-day Summer School will be held on 6th-9th June 2023 on the ATU Letterkenny campus. Again, this will be opened to other PhD students who are interested to attend and will focus workshops on engaged research, group projects as well as technical and personal development workshops and social events.

Case Study 13: ATU - Postgraduate Research Training Programme

Expanded research capacity or fields of interest were also reported by some HEIs. Some examples of such activities include:

- UG reported that in April 2022 Academic Council approved a joint submission by the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences and the College of Science and Engineering to set up two new cross-college research institutes to replace the NCBES Institute. The two research institutes are the research institute for Medical Technologies and Advanced Therapeutics Discovery, with a primary affiliation in the College of Science and Engineering, and the research institute for Innovative Translational Clinical Trials, with a primary affiliation in the College of Medicine, Nursing & Health Sciences.
- UL reported that the University Research Committee approved three new centres this academic year. These were the Sports & Human Performance Research Centre, the Centre for the Study of Popular Music and Popular Culture and the Limerick Digital Cancer Research Centre.
- UCC reported that in December 2021, the UCC Futures initiative was launched as a major output of UCC 2022: Delivering a Connected University. The overarching goal of this programme is to connect research across disciplinary boundaries and provide an

environment of creativity, curiosity and critical thinking that generates knowledge and translates research into sustainable benefits and value for society.

- UCD reported on further investment in internal research funding schemes, including the launch of the next phase of the EQUIP (core research equipment funding) programme.

2.4 QUALITY ASSURANCE IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT PLANS

In the previous reporting period, it was noted that there was significant variation in the level of detail presented in the AQRs pertaining to QA improvement and enhancement plans for the upcoming reporting period. This is also the case in 2021/22, with some HEIs setting out planned actions and indicators in detail. In other instances, limited information is provided.

In the university sector, the focus of this area of reporting in the AQRs also varies substantially, with some HEIs indicating objectives associated with strategic development and others primarily concerned with quality reviews and quality office-led activities. The summary provided below is indicative:

- UCC primarily indicated objectives associated with reviews, inclusive of CINNTE, thematic reviews, quality reviews, programme reviews and a research quality review. Additionally, the enhancement of student feedback was indicated as a priority.
- RCSI also indicated objectives pertaining to preparation for CINNTE and the development of a central repository for quality enhancement actions.
- TCD indicated that objectives include the development of an implementation plan for institutional review and the institutional review of linked providers. TCD additionally indicated that it will progress its postgraduate renewal programme and data management strategy, and engage with QQI on the IEM and revised blended and online QA guidelines.
- UCD indicated that the university is making progress on the implementation of its strategic plan.
- MU stated that in anticipation of the completion of the new University Strategic Plan 2023-2028, no new major activities were planned for the upcoming reporting period.
- DCU indicated that objectives include the finalisation and launch of the DCU Strategic Plan and further changes to the DCU Operating Framework. The implementation of ECIU goals in relation to challenge-based learning opportunities and micro-credential development is indicated.
- UG indicated that objectives included the implementation of the Academic Strategy, the finalisation and approval of proposals for the Learning Commons, progression on the Student Digital Pathways programme (established in 2018) and preparation for the Institutional Review of Research Performance 2024.
- UL indicated that objectives for the upcoming reporting period encompassed the development of a University Research Strategy and Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy that align to the recalibrated UL Strategic Plan. An international focus is evident in objectives to establish a global launch to promote internationalism and help with the integration of international students, the implementation of MoveOn for UL Global, and software to improve administration of mobility in Erasmus and study abroad. Additionally, human resources are a priority with the conduct of a university culture audit and

development of a healthy campus charter identified. Introduction of a new information system to improve documentation security for the Governing Authority and a thematic review of professional support for research are also indicated.

Of the remaining two IoTs:

- IADT indicated that CINNTE Review, the deployment of the Current Research Information System, completion of a new strategic plan and the HEA compact were objectives.
- DkIT indicated 64 objectives for the upcoming reporting period. Thematically, these encompass DAB status, policies and procedures, teaching and learning, research and graduate studies, professional support areas, EDI and RPL.

Where detail provided is minimal, it is difficult to gain meaningful insight into intended activities for the subsequent reporting period. Greater visibility of QA improvement and enhancement planning would enable more meaningful reporting by HEIs on progress against objectives in this area in the subsequent reporting period. Similarly, the variable focus of reporting on QA enhancement plans means the information within this section of the AQRs is not sufficiently comparable for trends in the sector to be identified regarding the upcoming reporting period. This may indicate that further guidance from QQI on the nature of the information sought in this section would be welcomed by the sector.

Despite this, notable themes emerging in the context of QA improvement and enhancement are described below. Note that the QQI cycle of external quality review of public HEIs is coming to a close for the previously established universities; consequently, this theme is less pronounced in the improvement and enhancement plans of public HEIs in this reporting period. Relevant updates are captured under Section 2.3.1.1.

2.4.1 TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY INTEGRATION

Unsurprisingly, ongoing integration and organisational design features heavily in the QA and QE objectives set out by HEIs in the technological university sector for the upcoming reporting period.

- TUS highlighted objectives focused on the progression of strategy and integrated quality assurance and enhancement. Additionally, TUS indicated that it will establish a new Centre for Pedagogical Innovative Development, further develop goals in relation to EDI and the SDGs, implement the N-TUTORR project and deepen collaboration with the further education and training sector to enhance progression opportunities.
- ATU indicated objectives focused on the development and publication of the ATU strategic plan, the development and approval of ATU-wide policies, progressing the new organisational structure and integration across all functions and faculties and progressing integration of key systems. Additionally, ATU indicated that it will focus on the integration of St Angela's College, Sligo and establish a steering group to oversee preparation for the CINNTE review cycle.
- SETU indicated objectives focused on the alignment of policies, procedures and processes from antecedent bodies, as well as the development of a quality framework, university regulations and a strategic plan. The formation of a steering group for institutional review and preparation of an ISER in advance of the 2024 CINNTE process are also indicated. Additionally, a proposal to expand the existing international offering of SETU programmes is

being prepared and will be evaluated in the next reporting period.

- MTU indicated objectives focused on the implementation of the MTU executive structure as well as the professional services and academic operating models. Additionally, the HEA-funded Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Student Engagement project and an Elevate Leadership Development programme funded through Technological Universities Transformation Funding are priorities.
- TU Dublin indicated objectives focused on the development of the University Education Model, development of an Academic Quality Framework, progression of the Student Records Management System and development of a unitary programme and module catalogue. Additionally, the configuration of a centrally-administered student evaluation system that will facilitate module surveys and implementation of the institutional action plan following the CINNTE review are priorities.

2.4.2 INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION MARK

AQRS submitted by public HEIs contained some references to preparations and ambitions for the introduction of the IEM. These included:

- TCD reported that it continued to engage with QQI and the IUA on the HE Code of Practice and Policy for Authorisation to use the IEM.
- RCSI reported that in preparation for both the CINNTE review, and the introduction of the International Education Mark, an IEM Group was established. This will be reconvened to undertake a self-evaluation against the draft Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners and to support preparations for application for the IEM.
- DkIT indicated that attainment of the International Education Mark is a strategic objective.
- ATU indicated that its International Office is preparing for the forthcoming introduction of the IEM, although this is not explicitly highlighted as an objective in the improvement and enhancement plan section of the AQR.

The AQRs submitted outline current structures and supports in place for international learners. Initiatives and developments in this area are discussed in section 2.3.4.

2.5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter offered a thematic analysis of the AQRs submitted by public HEIs in 2023, which reported on activities across the sector during the 2021/22 academic year.

The AQRs for this reporting period indicated the continued use, enhancement and integration of digital strategies for teaching, learning and assessment to programme delivery. The AQRs indicate that the affordances of technology utilised throughout the pandemic are being retained and built upon. Accessibility and inclusive practice remain at the forefront of reporting on teaching and learning, with work ongoing to provide staff development in UDL and implement UDL principles across the curriculum.

Reporting also indicated that within the technological university sector in particular, consideration is being given to rethinking assessment. Projects in this area suggest that in the years ahead learners in Irish TUs will be able to increasingly engage in more authentic tasks to demonstrate their achievement of intended learning outcomes. Academic integrity continues to be a focus across all public HEIs.

Two prominent themes within the AQRs are work underway to achieve the SDGs and efforts to develop EDI across all aspects of operations and culture in higher education. These are areas in which the sector has shown significant leadership. It can be anticipated that graduates of public HEIs will be increasingly well versed in sustainable practices in general as well as those specific to their discipline as efforts to embed sustainability considerations into the curriculum gain pace. Moreover, Ireland can anticipate that future cohorts of graduates from public sector institutions will be 'EDI literate' and transfer that knowledge to their future workplaces.

As noted throughout the report, institutions reported less on some dimensions of QA than might have been expected. For example, in general, public HEIs did not report in detail on the management of the return to campus or whether the trend toward hybrid and remote working was a feature of ongoing operations. Relatively little information was provided on learning from, or reflections on, the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic and any ongoing implications for higher education provision and quality: however, as the sector was still emerging from the pandemic, reflections of this nature may feature in future reporting periods.

Variable approaches and levels of detail in reporting on QA enhancement plans for the upcoming period also preclude a clear view of this across the sector.

The AQRs for this reporting period continued to reflect that Ireland's public HEIs have international reach and ambition. This is evident not only in HEIs' participation in European university consortia, but in a breadth of programme-level collaborations and arrangements as well as specific collaborative projects. Although this represents significant ongoing development, very little is indicated in relation to international engagement in the QA improvement and enhancement plans for the upcoming period. However, omissions may be an outcome of divergent approaches to reporting in this area, as noted in section 2.3.11.



CHAPTER

3.

CHAPTER 3. QUALITY IN PRIVATE & INDEPENDENT HEIs

This chapter sets out a thematic analysis of quality assurance developments and enhancements within Irish private and independent higher education institutions (HEIs) for the period September 2021 - August 2022, as reported on by the HEIs in their AQRs. Themes were identified with the aim of highlighting and disseminating good practice and identifying key areas of focus for the private and independent higher education sector.

All of the HEIs discussed in this chapter had their quality assurance procedures approved by QQI through either the reengagement or initial access to validation processes, and offer programmes that are validated by QQI. Many of these providers also offer programmes leading to awards of other awarding and professional bodies.

In light of QQI's work to develop a new monitoring framework and potential reconfiguration of the annual quality reporting process for different providers, private/independent HEIs were not obliged to submit an AQR for this reporting period, with the exception of providers that intended to seek delegation of authority to make awards when the regulatory framework for this process is finalised. This thematic analysis was, therefore, undertaken based on the AQRs submitted by four HEIs understood to have such intentions, namely Griffith College, Dublin Business School (DBS), Hibernia College and National College of Ireland (NCI) and two further AQRs that were voluntarily submitted by the College of Computing and Technology (CCT) and Open Training College (OTC).

Accordingly, most of the AQRs submitted for this period indicate progress toward achievement of increased autonomy in programme approval processes. CCT indicates that [devolved responsibility](#) for arranging independent evaluation reports for programme validation is an ambition. Three reports, submitted by institutions that have already achieved devolved responsibility indicate that activity is underway or is planned to support readiness for making an application to QQI for delegated authority to make awards. This significant development in the private/independent provider sector is discussed in Section 3.1.2. The four HEIs for whom reporting was required vary in their stated ambitions in the AQRs submitted regarding autonomy in the programme approval process. However, for the private/independent sector as a whole, progress in this area reflects that a degree of trust has been established in the capacity of some of the more experienced HEIs to take greater responsibility for quality.

Despite the waived obligation to submit an AQR for the wider private/independent sector HEIs, two HEIs elected to prepare a full AQR and nine prepared a standalone case study representing a particular development in practice during the reporting period. This voluntary activity may reflect a finding of the recent [evaluation of the AQR process](#), that for a number of HEIs in this private/independent sector, the AQR is a well-embedded and integral element of the provider's internal QA system, the preparation of which encourages ownership or 'buy-in' to quality assurance processes on an annual basis amongst staff.

Although the thematic analysis of quality in the private/independent sector for this reporting period draws upon a reduced number of submissions, it provides a comprehensive insight into developments and enhancements undertaken by the larger providers in this group. Through the inclusion of additional case studies submitted, it also provides a glimpse of ongoing enhancement work among a diverse group of smaller providers, some of which operate in highly particular contexts and disciplinary domains.

The thematic analysis presented in this chapter is based on the annual quality reports submitted by the following private/independent HEIs:

| No. | Institution |
|-----|---|
| 1 | College of Computing and Technology (CCT) |
| 2 | Dublin Business School (DBS) |
| 3 | Griffith College |
| 4 | Hibernia College |
| 5 | National College of Ireland (NCI) |
| 6 | Open Training College (OTC) |

Table 2: List of Private Higher Education Institutions that submitted Annual Quality Reports in 2023

The thematic analysis is augmented by case studies submitted by the following private/independent HEIs.

| No. | Institution |
|-----|--|
| 1 | Bridge Mills Galway Language Centre |
| 2 | Children's Therapy Centre (CTC) |
| 3 | Innopharma Labs Ltd. |
| 4 | Institute of Business and Technology (IBAT) |
| 5 | Institute of Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy (ICHAS) |
| 6 | International School of Business (ISB) |
| 7 | Irish Payroll Association (IPASS) |
| 8 | Open Training College (OTC) |
| 9 | SQT Training |

Table 3: List of Private Higher Education Institutions that submitted Case Studies in 2023

3.1 QUALITY ASSURANCE IMPLEMENTATION AND RELATED DEVELOPMENTS

Providers reported on a number of factors, both external and internal to HEI operations and strategies, which impacted on QA implementation in the reporting period.

3.1.1 IMPACTS OF COVID-19

Although the six private/independent HEIs that submitted AQRs implemented a return to campus during the academic year 2021/22, several emphasised the consultative and phased nature of that transition.

- NCI reported that senior management consulted over a period of months with the Students' Union, class representatives and staff to determine the optimum balance of delivery modes to ensure ongoing quality in the student experience. The College reached a decision in early summer 2022 for a full return to campus in September 2022 for all full-time programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, with some online teaching as needed.
- Hibernia College reported that analysis of feedback from students, staff and adjunct faculty (from end-of-module surveys, adjunct faculty feedback forms, Assessment Working Group feedback, symposia feedback and student support surveys) revealed that students felt the need for additional opportunities to engage with each other outside of formalised webinars and online learning; that anxiety and that feelings of isolation were more prominently reported during the Covid-19 period. The College implemented a phased return using the Covid-19 Safety Guidelines and Requirements Process, which was regularly reviewed and updated and was shared with students and faculty before each in-person engagement.
- CCT reported that 2021/22 was a transitional year for it in relation to continued implementation of contingency arrangements for Covid-19. The College decided on a cautious transition and return to on-campus provision so as to manage both the concerns and wellbeing of students and staff.
- Griffith College reported an ongoing review of lecture room capacity and room set-ups. For the start of the new academic year, a maximum capacity of 80% of pre Covid-19 numbers was permitted in lecture rooms. All rooms were fitted with a carbon dioxide (CO₂) monitor and stocked with hand sanitising gel and disinfectant wipes. As restrictions were lifted during the year, these set-ups were reviewed and adjusted for semester 2 of 2021/22; however, the college continued to maintain 80% to 85% capacity in teaching rooms where it was possible to do so.

Some of the six providers reporting from this sector explicitly indicated that reflection on, and learning from, the pandemic is ongoing.

- NCI reported that the lifting of most government restrictions in February 2022 enabled the college to begin assessing the impact of the two-year Covid-19 "era" at the college and determine how best to maintain quality in both academic life and the student experience in a post Covid-19 environment. The outcomes of this assessment were not available in the report.
- DBS reported that it is now looking at what it can learn from the Covid-19 experience regarding online learning delivery and support.

The AQRs provide evidence that four of the six private/independent HEIs are opting to retain some of the practices and processes adopted during the pandemic where this is deemed appropriate to specific cohorts.

- OTC reported that the period was one of 'transition', with many programmes returning to blended delivery, including live rather than online workshops; while others continued to be delivered fully online under the special contingency arrangements.
- At NCI, it was decided that part-time programme delivery would continue in blended mode.
- Griffith College reported that following heavy investment in a bespoke online examinations management platform as part of its Covid-19 response, online provision and exams continued in the first part of the reporting period.
- DBS reported that in response to student requests, and in alignment with QQI guidance, hybrid attendance was facilitated via the broadcasting of scheduled classes live at the same time as they were delivered on campus. This was to facilitate, in particular, vulnerable, international and first year students. Exams at DBS continued online in the 2021/22 academic year.

The longer-term adoption of practices that were initially introduced to facilitate learners during the pandemic was illustrated in a case study submitted by IPASS, which focuses on how technology-enhanced learning employed during Covid-19 has been found to have longer-term value. The case study submission is accessible [here](#).

3.1.2 DEVOLVED RESPONSIBILITY

As noted in the thematic analysis of the AQRs submitted by private/independent HEIs for the previous reporting period, a small number of experienced providers in this sector have already achieved devolved responsibility from QQI for some aspects of the programme validation process. This places responsibility for arranging an independent evaluation report of the proposed programmes on the HEI. Notably, obtaining devolved responsibility for this aspect of the process denotes a level of trust and confidence in the provider's ability to oversee an objective process. HEIs with devolved responsibility do not have a role in making a decision about the approval of their proposed programme.

- Griffith College reported that, following the successful conclusion of QQI's pilot validation processes during 2020/21, the college actively progressed its processes for the validation of micro-credential (5-30 ECTS) awards. During the reporting period, the college completed QQI validation of a further four stand-alone micro-credential programmes and achieved QQI validation of embedded minor and micro programmes within the (re)validation of major programmes.
- CCT indicated plans to initiate discussions with QQI in respect of gaining devolution of responsibility for validation sub-processes in 2023.

3.1.3 DELEGATED AUTHORITY

During this reporting period, three private/independent HEIs that previously attained devolved responsibility for aspects of the programme validation process indicated plans to progress applications for delegated authority (DA) to make awards from QQI. Providers with delegated authority may make their own awards within the scope of the authority delegated by QQI,

enabling greater autonomy in programme development. Providers with delegated authority are not required to apply to QQI for validation of programmes within the approved scope of DA. The Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act (2012) (as amended) enables the extension of the range of providers that are eligible to request delegated authority.

- DBS reported that a key strategic focus is to attain delegated authority from QQI, and that it is in dialogue with QQI regarding an application. Activities to progress toward delegated authority, which are reported in detail, include the work of a project team to undertake internal mapping and auditing against the QQI criteria, the commissioning of an independent review of the professional services areas and a mock panel review conducted by a panel of external experts.
- Griffith College reported that it is preparing for an application for delegated authority once the process is open to private/independent providers and when new standards and guidelines are in place. Griffith College is actively engaging with QQI in relation to this.
- NCI reported that its new strategy confirms its strategic objectives to obtain delegated authority and secure a position as a designated Higher Education Authority (HEA) institution.

3.1.4 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Reporting on activity that progresses achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is not currently required within the AQR for private/independent providers. However, an increase in voluntary reporting on activity in this area is visible for this reporting period. This is perhaps reflective of the SDGs becoming an increasingly mainstream feature of strategy, innovation and reporting across both the business and education sectors within Ireland and internationally.

Two providers that deliver programmes in business domains indicated work - either completed or planned - to embed sustainability into the curriculum:

- NCI reported on the embedding of sustainability-focused learning outcomes into both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes revalidated during the reporting period.
- DBS indicated a plan to prepare an academic programme strategy to, inter alia, incorporate environment/sustainability considerations into programme curricula and incorporate the values of good citizenship.

A focus on sustainability in the built environment was also apparent for two providers.

- Griffith College reported on a number of new activities including:
 - A meeting between the Griffith College 'sustainability team' and architects to provide inputs into the Dublin Campus Masterplan for submission to Dublin City Council.
 - Participation in a 'Clean Air Together' air quality survey to gather NO₂ (Nitrogen Dioxide) pollution samples in the area of the South Circular Road campus. 'Clean Air Together' is a joint project between the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Environmental Education Unit of An Taisce, which aims to create a better understanding of NO₂ air pollution in Dublin, to help the EPA develop air pollutant mapping and forecasting models for the whole of Ireland.
 - The development of a Sustainability Strategy for the college by the Management Board.

- CCT reported that extensive campus enhancements were undertaken. Within this, elements of the refurbishments were noted to reduce noise and increase heat retention.

3.1.5 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

An increase in reporting on activity that has an explicit focus on equality, diversity & inclusion (EDI) was discernible in the AQRs for this reporting period when compared with the previous year. This is particularly noteworthy as the HEIs in this sector are not compelled, for example, to participate in the [Athena SWAN Charter](#) process as a condition of funding or engage directly with the [Race Equality in the Higher Education Sector Implementation Action Plan](#). Furthermore, although private/independent HEIs are required to offer appropriate support to learners and uphold the Equal Status Acts 2000-2018 (providing reasonable accommodations and refraining from discrimination), they are not the subject of the [National Access Plan 2022-2028](#) and, as such, are not responsible for facilitating equity of access to higher education for underrepresented groups. The greater prominence of such activities in this sector therefore suggests providers are cognisant of learner and staff expectations in relation to the promotion of EDI, which is becoming an increasingly mainstream aspect of higher education.

Voluntary initiatives reported in this area are directed at promoting diversity and inclusion either among the HEI's staff or among its learners. Others are intended to concurrently enhance both the working environment for staff and the experience of learners within the provider. Examples of EDI relevant activity undertaken in the private/independent sector include:

- At DBS, managers completed an inclusion and diversity course.
- NCI reported actively monitoring its commitments under the Athena SWAN Bronze Award and the launch of its Consent Framework in March 2022. Strategic commitments to EDI were included in the approved Strategic Plan for 2022-27.
- CCT reported the implementation of an extensive programme of enhancement to establish the CCT campus as neurodiverse friendly. The addition of a new sensory space was planned during the review period, informed by expert guidance from 'thesensorypod.ie' and will be used to support CCT's application to AsIAM to be recognised as an Autism Friendly HEI.
- Also at CCT, in partnership with the [National Student Engagement Programme](#) (NStEP), multiple class representatives completed diversity training. This aids class representatives to more effectively represent and empower students from all backgrounds. Additionally, the CCT Learning Space guides were further developed, and new ones added, throughout 2021/22, with a range of text, audio and video sources provided to promote inclusion through increasing accessibility of assessment, incorporating student agency in assessment design, and promoting UDL in practice.
- Griffith College marked International Women's Day in March 2022 with its 'Break the Bias' theme, with an event to inspire students and staff. Through an exhibition of photographs, the college celebrated the diversity and achievements of Griffith College female-identifying staff, students and graduates who have pushed boundaries.
- Griffith College also reported that as part of the college's development of equality, diversity and inclusion-related policies, the following documents were developed during the period under review (and planned for completion and implementation in the subsequent reporting period):

- Gender Identity and Expression Policy
- Learner Dignity and Respect Policy
- Hibernia College reported that during its reengagement process, a recommendation was made that the application of a UDL approach be more clearly reflected in the QA documentation. The AQR outlines that the College now brings UDL to the fore by including it in the four pillars of its conceptual framework, which were revised during the reporting period and guide its provision.

3.1.6 OTHER SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS

In addition to the wider sectoral topics outlined in the previous subsections, two providers offered the following significant updates:

- DBS reported at length on the context and outcomes of the withdrawal of programmes in social care and the refund of fees paid to almost all learners in the relevant cohort. At the time of submission, DBS had commissioned an external review by an independent consultant into the issues that resulted in the programme withdrawal and indicated that the matter continues as a significant challenge that the organisation is actively managing.
- CCT reported on the continuation of a significant programme of development for both its physical and virtual campuses. This included (but is not limited to) the refurbishment of the basement level bank vault in the campus building to build and install a professional music recording and podcasting studio with gaming capacity. It also included the refurbishment of a study room (the Kavanagh room), canteen area, entrance hall and atrium and staff office spaces.

The providers that submitted AQRs completed QQI's [reengagement process](#) at least two years prior to this reporting period. Updates on the implementation of recommendations made within that process were, therefore, less prominent than in the AQRs submitted in previous years. Reporting on engagements with QQI pertaining to QA approval was visible in NCI's AQR in relation to scope of provision for a pilot online programme validation exercise and the management of devolved responsibility for elements of the validation process (see section 3.1.3).

3.2 STRATEGY, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

During this period, providers reported on progress toward the attainment of strategic objectives and plans. Ongoing development of strategy in targeted areas was also evident in the AQRs submitted by NCI, DBS and Hibernia College.

The AQRs also indicated that the governance structures and processes of several providers in this sector were subject to ongoing development during the reporting period. In many instances, these developments were in response to emerging challenges and priorities across the sector.

- CCT reported on the role, purpose and membership of its Academic Integrity Working Group, which was approved as a sub-committee of the Academic Council. The new sub-committee was due to commence work in September 2022.
- CCT also reported that the academic year 2021/22 saw the formal commencement of the Audit, Review and Strategy Committee. The proposed membership and terms of reference of this advisory committee were approved by the College Board in January 2021 with the

committee acting as an advisory body within the governance structure from September 2021. CCT further reported that following approval by the College Board, the Academic Council Constitution was revised to reflect potential co-opting of members and to include greater clarity in respect of the member election process.

- Hibernia College reported that a formal due diligence process preceding changes at Board level (which commenced in October 2020) was progressed, resulting in the appointment of a new Chair of the Board.
- Hibernia College also reported that the Terms of Reference for the Student Engagement Committee, which promotes and identifies areas to enhance student partnership between the institution and the student body, were approved.
- NCI reported that three dedicated sub-committees of the Academic Council's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee, were set up in this period: Teaching and Learning sub-committee; Assessment sub-committee; Digital learning sub-committee. These committees were charged with bringing forward proposals for innovation and quality enhancement across their areas of remit, and proposals to refresh policies, procedures and guidelines needed to underpin NCI's strategic commitment to excellence in education. Also, during this period, the recently established Programme Lifecycle Management Executive Sub-Group became embedded in the management of programme-level quality at NCI.



3.2.1 LEADERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND STRUCTURAL CHANGES

A number of the six HEIs that submitted AQRs indicated organisational restructuring in specific areas. As per the previous reporting period, a number of providers also reported increasing capacity in their quality assurance offices, with an emphasis on roles supporting programme validation and the programme lifecycle.

- At Griffith College, a new appointment was made to the college's Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) department, in the role of Quality Assurance and Enhancement – Project Manager. This role works closely with the QAE team and the college's faculties and departments to support and enhance the operation of its quality assurance systems.
- At NCI, the Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (QIE) Office was restructured and enhanced with the addition of new staff, reflecting commitments made in the 2019 QIE Plan to scale quality assurance and enhancement support as the college expands its provision and further develops strategically. Organisational restructuring also resulted in the recruitment of a Programme Lifecycle Manager position, with a strong emphasis on data analysis and reporting skills to support annual and cyclical, in-depth programme review, as well as administrative management. The team was also complemented by the appointment of a full-time Administrative Coordinator position. The Director of QIE also participates as a member of the Executive Group.
- At DBS, the post of Assistant Registrar - Validations was created. This replaced the post of Validation and Accreditation Manager that had operated previously. The Assistant Registrar post reports to the Registrar to assist with all aspects of the validation process for new and reviewed programmes, as well as assist with preparation of an application for delegated authority from QQI.
- At Hibernia College, a full-time Research & Development Lead was appointed to examine future technologies and consider how they may be applied and implemented across academic programmes and supporting structures.

3.2.2 QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The reported focus of updates and enhancements to provider QA frameworks varied substantially across the sector, ranging across dimensions of QA including learner support, teaching and learning, information management and documented approach to QA.

- At NCI, material changes were made to NCI's Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES) policies and procedures. A review and refresh of the QAES was initiated during the 2021-22 reporting period, and two areas were given priority: the Student Complaints Policy was completely refreshed and an update was made to the policy and guidelines on technology-mediated learning in line with QQI's pilot validation process for fully online programmes, in spring and summer 2022. Further approved changes to policies and procedures will be provided in the AQR submitted in February 2024.
 - NCI also reported that the QAES was under review to ensure that core policy provisions for information and data management reflect the interim updates on data protection. A Data Protection Policy and associated guidelines were published and refreshed via NCI's internal Support Hub document repository and reference portal for staff.

- At DBS, new policies reported included an Acceptable Usage policy, and policy pertaining to Feedback, Marking and Moderation. A number of policies were updated. Additionally, a professional services review of non-academic functions was commissioned which identified a lack of standard operating procedures across a number of areas, which were subsequently developed in the reporting period (this is outlined in more detail in a case study, which can be accessed [here](#)).
- At Hibernia College, the Advance Conferral of Awards Internal Process was approved. This process was proposed to the Academic Board to cater for students who require their parchment early for employment or visa purposes.
- Also at Hibernia College, a Fitness to Practice Policy and Procedure was approved to safeguard the wellbeing of members of the public, service users and other students. The college's Reasonable Accommodation Form was also updated for ease of engagement.
- At OTC, following a review of all college policies in the last reporting period, two additional policies (the Attendance Policy and Academic Integrity Policy) were updated through a process of identification, consultation with internal and external stakeholders, final review and Academic Council approval.
- At CCT, an Intellectual Property Created by Students Policy was approved in April 2022. The policy assigns intellectual property rights to CCT for student work which has been informed by, or benefitted from, CCT knowledge, supplies, equipment or assets. This recognises that the work would not be possible without the contribution from, or on behalf of, CCT. In all cases, the student retains the identity as creator or author. With the growth in file-sharing websites, CCT indicated that this public declaration of IP ownership is another tool in the armoury when educating students about sharing materials and also in having CCT materials removed from file-sharing websites. The effectiveness of this is yet to be tested.

3.3 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM ENHANCEMENT AND IMPACTS

3.3.1 ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity continued to be a key theme across the six AQRs submitted in this reporting period. It was noted that in the previous year's AQRs, discussion of, and reference to, academic integrity was no longer confined to a discrete section on that topic; rather it was embedded throughout descriptions of quality assurance activity. This trend continued in the 2023 AQRs. As a result, in this year's thematic analysis, updates that are relevant to academic integrity but distinct to particular domains (for example, governance, policy updates, or assessment) are considered within those subsections of the report.

- Hibernia College prioritised the promotion and embedding of an understanding of academic integrity within the college amongst both staff and students. The college continued to build awareness, record and report academic misconduct: however, a review and consultation with programme directors, and within the Office of the Registrar, highlighted that a more structured and targeted approach to academic integrity would be beneficial. Academic integrity has been identified as a key priority and a detailed work plan is currently in development.
- NCI's library accelerated its education and training on Turnitin, the College's plagiarism-detection software accessed via the VLE platform, Moodle. Detailed information is provided in case study 14.

- CCT commenced research into strategies to deter and detect academic misconduct in ICT subjects. As part of this, an academic integrity expert was invited to attend a meeting of the CCT Academic Integrity Committee, where he encouraged a multi-faceted approach comprising assessment design, use of viva voce examinations, and use of detection software. The college continues to prioritise the promotion of academic integrity and the review and revision of assessment practice to minimise potential for misconduct.
- OTC reported on the development of a module to enhance awareness of academic integrity and the provider's supports in this area.
- DBS developed resources for students to support and guide them, including a podcast on essay mills. However, the AQR identified that there was limited engagement by learners and faculty with some of the above events. The Registrar's and Exams offices are reviewing this to establish strategies to improve future engagement.

A number of HEIs, including CCT, DBS and NCI reported on their active participation in the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) and involvement in National Academic Integrity Week. To support local adoption and embedding of NAIN resources, the librarian at CCT actively disseminated sectoral updates, guidelines and resources from NAIN to all NCI staff and organised training and information seminars throughout the year. Core developments are discussed in detail with plans for implementation proposed by the Academic Integrity Committee. These proposals are subsequently referred to the Academic Council and, in some cases, the Executive Leadership Team.

Academic integrity continued to be a focus within policy review and development activity across a number of HEIs in this sector. Griffith College, OTC and CCT reported the review and development of new academic integrity policies informed by NAIN guidance materials. CCT also reported monitoring file-sharing websites and actions to be taken upon identifying CCT students engaging with, or CCT materials on, such sites.

Case studies were submitted for this reporting period that reflect ongoing work to refine processes and systems surrounding the use of similarity checking software. Work highlighted in a case study submitted by ICHAS reflects the importance of staff training and the need for clear guidance to ensure that such software is used appropriately. The case study submission is accessible [here](#).

The case study below, submitted by NCI, outlines work undertaken by the NCI Library to provide education, training and resources for staff and learners. The case study has been redacted for the purpose of brevity; the full version is accessible [here](#).

Case Study

Library Turnitin Developments at NCI

Introduction and Context:

For the academic year 2021-22 the Library's main aim, in terms of Turnitin, was to continue to educate students and staff on how best to understand and utilise Turnitin. This work first began when the library was part of an inter-departmental working group, originally set up in February 2018, to examine the use of Turnitin within the college. One takeaway from this working group was the need to provide additional training to staff, primarily lecturers, on how to make the most of Turnitin in terms of grading papers and providing feedback to students, as well as identifying possible cases of plagiarism and how to deal with them. The other main concern was how to change students' attitudes to Turnitin, in terms of viewing it as a possible aid to better academic writing instead of something to be feared. Below are some of the initiatives the library undertook, in the past academic year, in order to contribute to the above aims of changing staff and students' relationship and attitude towards Turnitin.

Summary of Initiatives Undertaken in 2021-22:

Turnitin Guide and FAQs

The library's Turnitin LibGuide includes links to Turnitin's instructional videos as well as similarity report tips and Turnitin misconceptions. The guide has become more popular over time and was viewed 4,295 times in 2021/22. It is particularly well used during the busy assignment submission periods, such as November each year when it averages around 1,000 views for the month.

The guide also includes a Turnitin FAQs section where students and staff can search for questions or submit one if they do not find an answer. These Turnitin FAQs have high public views particularly those in relation to similarity scores or reports such as, "What does the colour on my Similarity Report mean?", which had 3772 views in 2021/22. This highlights one of the main concerns that we wanted to address with our guide and FAQs, the fixation students seemed to have with the similarity score or percentage and their misunderstanding of what it meant. To address this, we try to include several FAQs and information boxes emphasizing the fact that having similarities does not equate to plagiarizing and that Turnitin simply finds similarities and does not determine whether a student has quoted or cited correctly.

The Turnitin guide also includes a staff tab which provides links for staff to complete Turnitin training as well as instructions for setting up assignments and detecting plagiarism and there are also staff specific FAQs available. The decision was made to have both the staff and student resources available to all, in one place, it was felt that this would further help to demystify the whole process behind Turnitin for students as they could see how and for what their lecturers used it.

Draft Coach

Since 2018 students have been allowed to make multiple draft submissions to their Moodle submission point, and although this was a welcome and necessary step it still caused a certain amount of doubt and apprehension for students. Students were hesitant about submitting drafts to their module submission points on Moodle and there are also certain restrictions in place for this system in terms of how many drafts one can submit within a certain timeframe. For these reasons Turnitin's Draft Coach feature is a very welcome development and one the college will be adopting for the coming academic year, 2022-23. This new feature will allow students to run similarity, citation, and grammar checks on their work prior to submitting it to Moodle. It can be done through Word Online or Google Docs and the library has an additional guide and FAQs prepared relating to the use of Draft Coach. The average number of draft submissions being made per student per assignment through Turnitin (Moodle plugin) for the 2021/22 academic year was less than 1 draft so it is hoped that by introducing Draft Coach it will increase students' use of editing and redrafting to improve their academic writing.

Library Help Centre

Library, during the 2021/22 academic year, has been part of a wider effort to improve student and staff understanding of Turnitin and to dispel many of the misconceptions around it. There is an effort to bring it out into the open as opposed to it being a software working in the background and something to be feared. We have attempted to highlight as much as possible that similarity does not equal plagiarism and that students should see Turnitin as a tool to help improve referencing, paraphrasing, and academic writing in general. The Library must continue to update its guides and FAQs in order to ensure students are getting accurate information. The FAQs, in particular, is an area where more might be done, we currently have 42 Turnitin specific questions but there is scope there to increase this number. Promotion and awareness are also vital elements. In 2021 the library added a link to the Turnitin guide to all other guides and this led to an increase in public views. The library also participated in Academic Integrity Week 2021 and 2022 and this is a good annual opportunity to promote some of the library resources in this area. Draft Coach will be rolled out in the coming academic year and this will need to be continually promoted and supported. Another recent development is in the area of AI generated text and we will need to monitor how Turnitin plans to deal with this issue and how quickly they can implement new technologies into their finished product using Turnitin's Artificial Intelligence detection interface, which is due to be launched later in 2023.

Case Study 14: NCI - Norma Smurfit Library Turnitin (Anti-plagiarism/Student Learning Support) Developments

3.3.2 TEACHING AND LEARNING

During this reporting period, some private/independent HEIs indicated ongoing development or review of teaching and learning strategies.

- Hibernia College reported that a College Framework was reviewed during this period to ensure that the Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA) Strategy and Conceptual Framework function in tandem to provide an appropriate academic and learning framework. A full review of the TLA Strategy will be conducted in the next reporting period.

- OTC reported that the blended learning and online learning strategy was reviewed against its objectives. This will be further reviewed against expected QA guidelines for online learning to be published by QQI, which will in turn prompt a new version of the strategy to be developed, to take these statutory guidelines into account.
- DBS reported that a review of its three-year Strategy for Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Enhancement (2020-2022) was completed in 2021/22. During 2022 a new LTA strategy was developed for rollout in 2023.

During the reporting period, HEIs in this sector continued their focus on the enhancement of physical and virtual teaching environments, as well as the provision of specialist support for teaching staff to enable them to adopt digital pedagogies in a principled manner. This builds on enhancements reported in the previous year's AQRs and is indicative of holistic investments to progress quality in this area.

- CCT reported on the installation of new audio technology in all rooms to enhance the live-streaming experience so online participants can hear all interactions within a live onsite class setting.
- NCI reported on investment in a new Digital Design Learning Team in the Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning (CELL). The team will play a pivotal role in enabling the college's Digital Learning Strategy, providing direct support and training for academic staff to effectively use digital technologies in programme and module design.
- DBS reported on the formalisation of its former EdTech team into a Learning Unit in 2022, comprised of an Educational Developer, Senior Educational Developer, and Learning Technologist. The team develops and supports continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities for staff.

Overall, the AQRs submitted indicate that digital pedagogies, inclusive of online, blended and technology-enhanced learning, are now firmly embedded across the six private/independent sector HEIs that submitted AQRs. Exemplars and case studies indicate a dual focus on learner engagement and accessible, inclusive practice in teaching and learning. Examples include:

- Griffith College reported that enhancements piloted throughout the period of contingency arrangements were further embedded to support student success in the hybrid environment. Student feedback firmly endorsed the use of the flipped classroom approach, recording and live streaming of classes, and the use of technology to promote interactivity to maximise learner engagement in the class.
- NCI reported that the NCI President's Excellence in Education award went to the Online Academic Programme Supervisor and Online Learning Support person. This award recognised that the Online Directed Learning (ODL) model of pedagogy and curriculum design - planned "directed" asynchronous learning outside of the classroom, with a more discursive and less didactic teaching style in the classroom - was positively impacting on students' learning experiences. NCI's AQR notes that ODL requires painstaking planning, development, and review for each module.
- At CCT, the Moodle accessibility block allows users to customise the appearance of Moodle including the font size and colour and the overall colour scheme. This can be applied on a once off basis or can be set to apply to all pages accessed by the user. The assistive technology bar is also embedded in Moodle.

The case study below, which has been redacted for the purposes of brevity, outlines how a UDL-informed approach to developing digital content for learners was implemented at Hibernia College. The full version is accessible [here](#).

Case Study

UDL in New Online Digital Content at Hibernia College

Introduction

In Hibernia College, the Digital Learning Department (DLD) are responsible for developing the digital content in the asynchronous online sessions that students engage with in their programmes. To enable access to the online content for all learners, as well as the growing number of our students with varying levels of physical and cognitive abilities, we need to be aware of UDL and accessibility principles and always keep these in mind when developing online content.

In 2021 and 2022, 12 members of the Digital Learning Department received a digital badge for completing the CPD course Universal Design in Teaching & Learning, run by AHEAD and UCD Access & Lifelong Learning and hosted by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning. Undertaking this course increased our awareness of the importance of embedding UDL practices in our content development process.

How we embed UDL principles in our online content

The launch of two new programmes in the past two years — the BSc (Hons) in Nursing in General Nursing and the Postgraduate Diploma in Science in Business Data Analytics — has provided us with an exciting opportunity to examine how we develop content and look at new ways of developing creative and innovative content. Over the past four years, we have researched and expanded the range of digital tools and technology we use to develop our online content, such as Articulate Rise, Articulate Storyline, Vyond and H5P. While these digital tools allow us to develop more engaging, interactive and creative content, they can also support inclusive practices and provide flexibility in the way information is presented and how learners engage with the content — thus, ensuring that our content is accessible to all learners.

When developing content for asynchronous online sessions, our focus is mainly on the multiple means of representation principle of UDL; in other words, the WHAT of learning. We present information and content in a variety of ways to give learners different ways of acquiring information, knowledge and skills and to support understanding by students with different learning styles and/or abilities. We do this by:

- Chunking information into smaller, more manageable, bite-sized elements
- Making connections between different elements
- Making content interactive by including a variety of learning activities
- Removing unnecessary distractions
- Offering alternatives for auditory and visual information, such as transcripts and closed captions



(CAST, 2018)

Using alt text for images

Alt (alternative) text is used to describe the appearance and function of all images in content. Our learners with visual impairments who use screen-reading tools rely on alt text to provide context for the images presented in our content.

Providing transcripts and closed captions

We provide transcripts for videos, presentations and audio that we develop and include in our content — this allows all learners alternative ways of engaging with visual and auditory information. There are now multiple ways of engaging with a piece of content. We now also provide closed captions in videos and presentations developed by our digital design team. Closed captioning is beneficial for all learners as it:

- Makes videos more accessible
- Allows deaf and hard of hearing people watch videos
- Helps learners to focus on and remember information more easily
- Allows learners to watch videos in sound-sensitive environments

Clarifying vocabulary

To clarify unfamiliar vocabulary for all learners, we provide glossaries at the programme, module and session level in MyHELMS (Hibernia College's learning management system).

Activating prior knowledge

We regularly activate relevant prior knowledge in our content by both linking to content previously covered and providing preparatory activities to allow learners to bring previously learned knowledge to their current studies. We do this by using visual imagery such as icons and headings, so learners are aware of the purpose of the learning activity.

Guiding information processing and comprehension

When developing online content, we ensure that:

- Content is presented to learners in a logical and meaningful manner
- Patterns and ideas are highlighted
- Key points are emphasised
- Content is 'chunked' into smaller sections
- Headings, lists and instructional text are included to guide learners through the content

Asynchronous online content is released on MYHELMS, is available 24/7 and can be revisited at any stage throughout the programme. Learners can go through it at their own pace. They can pause/rewind audio, videos and presentations. Certain videos can also be speeded up/slowed down. There are no time limits on quizzing activities. When completing activities in digital tools such as Padlet or Mahara, students can record responses via audio or video. It doesn't always have to be written.

Our main goal when developing online content is to strive to provide equal access to all our learners, which will result in fairer and transparent learning. Applying UDL principles, where possible, in our content development process, will help us to achieve this goal.

Case Study 15: Hibernia College - UDL in New Online Digital Content

During this period, the increasingly active role that libraries and learner support personnel play in specialised areas of teaching and learning was brought to the fore in a number of case studies submitted. These outline how staff in these areas are facilitating workshops and delivering teaching that is intended to develop learners' academic, study and career skills. Activities of this nature complement and support student learning within scheduled modules and programmes. An illustrative case study is included below.

Case Study

The development of a workshop series for learners at Innopharma Education

In October 2020, Innopharma Education achieved success in Stage 1 of QQI's Initial Access to Programme Validation process, gaining approval of its institutional capacity and quality assurance procedures. With the aim of enriching the learner support services in mind, the Learner Support team worked on developing and implementing a workshop series for learners.

While embarking on this project, there were certain elements that were important to keep in mind in order for this support to be effective and efficient for our combined learners. The workshop series would have to cater to the three branches of learners at Innopharma Education: learners on Innopharma-TU Dublin collaborative programmes, learners on Innopharma-Griffith College collaborative programmes and learners on Innopharma own developed programmes. Programmes delivered at Innopharma range from NFQ level 6 to level 9. It was therefore important to offer a variety of workshops that would cater to the needs of all our learners.

Feedback was sought from learners and staff at Innopharma Education in terms of relevant workshop topics. The Learner Support team brainstormed the logistics of offering this support to our learners i.e., different start dates, VLEs, etc. The first workshop series for learners took place in the Autumn 2021 semester and was composed of eight workshops: four on study skill development and four on academic skill development. A workshop schedule was created and made available to learners. Keeping the demographic of Innopharma learners in mind and the blended nature of our programmes, workshops took place on Wednesdays at 6pm. They were composed of a 20-minute-long active presentation that was recorded and an additional 10 minutes allocated to Q&A. Post workshop, learners were directed to a short survey which gathered feedback and suggestions for future workshops.

Within this first workshop series for learners, we had 403 registrants; 188 participants; 442 recording page views by the end of the semester and an average workshop rating of 9.3. The workshop series was well received by learners across our various branches with comments of feedback such as: "Nice approachable info. Handy resources to have so thank you. Wish I'd had these in Uni years ago!"; "Great help, thank you"; "Really helpful, thanks!".

To date we have had over 2,000 registrants and 1,000 workshop recording views. Innopharma is currently embarking on the fourth Workshop Series for Learners. Since the first series in Autumn 2021, we have made many changes to make this support more efficient and beneficial to our learners. As Innopharma places great focus on career development, we now incorporate career focused workshops within each workshop series. Various staff and lecturers have also become involved in the delivery of workshops which is a good way to engage with learners outside of their usual areas. As the Innopharma offering is blended programmes, it's only natural that we cater to our learners accordingly by offering workshops in the evenings. We have also recently started offering lunchtime sessions. Feedback is sought from staff and learners ahead of each series and enhancements are continuously made.

The Workshop Series for Learners has been and continues to be an excellent support for learners at Innopharma Education. There is a demand for academic & study skill development workshops as well as career focused workshops. The fact that workshops are recorded means that we have built a good bank of workshop recordings. These are available to learners to review as needed. There really is something to cater for everyone.

Case Study 16: Innopharma Education - The Development of a Workshop Series for Learners

3.3.3 RETHINKING ASSESSMENT

Rethinking assessment design and practice was a focus within several of the six AQRs submitted. This can be attributed in part to the increasing challenges to the integrity of assessment posed by contract cheating and other forms of academic impropriety. However, it is also evident that an increased focus on inclusive practices and UDL has made an impact in the sector (see also, case study 15 in section 3.3.2 on teaching and learning). Consultation with learners, policy development and ongoing review of assessment practices were features of the AQRs submitted by several providers. For example:

- Griffith College reported that as learners returned to campus at the start of the period under review, it undertook a large survey consultation with over 1,100 learners responding. The survey asked about exam format preferences with over 90% of respondents indicating a preference for open book exams in the future. This was presented to Heads of Faculties and Programme Directors in October 2021.
- At CCT, Academic Council approved the Assessment Workload Guidelines in March 2022, as part of a multi-pronged approach to tackle over-assessment. Within the guidelines, limiting summative assessments, and maximising opportunities for formative assessments is strongly encouraged.
- Also at CCT, it was reported that faculty are encouraged to promote inclusion and maximise the opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge, skill and competence through a diverse range of assessment tools, including allowing students the freedom to choose their preferred assessment format e.g., written, video, audio etc. where this can be applied within a module.
- At DBS, work to review assessment on academic programmes was on-going. Principles of Assessment and an updated policy on Marking Feedback and Moderation were developed

through a Working Group in 2021. However, further work on assessment best practice is noted by the provider to be required and will be part of actions for the 2022/23 academic year.

A case study submitted by CCT provides a useful exemplar of how traditional assessment strategies are being reconsidered and new strategies are being developed to replace traditional methods. The case study has been redacted for the purposes of brevity. The full case study is accessible [here](#).

Case Study

E-Portfolio Using Google Sites at CCT College Dublin

As part of an on-going focus on digital innovation in teaching, learning and assessment, CCT College Dublin decided to conduct a pilot in relation to e-portfolio for assessment using Google Sites during the academic year 2021/22. In the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning's INDEX Survey, CCT scored highly in relation to digital teaching, learning and assessment approaches except for e-portfolio use which was lower than the sectoral average. CCT subsequently consulted with the Head of Lifelong Learning at the Technological University Dublin in relation to a suitable e-portfolio platform. Google Sites was recommended for its flexibility and ease of use.

This project involved the Centre for Teaching and Learning and members of the business faculty. The aim of the project was to:

- Encourage innovation in assessment approaches reducing reliance on traditional assessment approaches such as examinations.
- To promote assessment approaches that enhance digital literacy and encourage reflection
- To promote inclusive assessment approaches as part of an institution wide focus on universal design

The intended learning outcomes or objectives of the project were:

- To replace a written essay for the Social Media Marketing Module on the BA Honours in Business at CCT College Dublin with an e-portfolio assessment using Google Sites
- To gather feedback as part of the e-portfolio pilot process to inform the wider adoption of e-portfolio institution wide.
- To create support resources for faculty and students to inform more widespread engagement with e-portfolio at the College.

During the academic year 2021/2022, the written essay for the Social Media Marketing module on the BA Honours in Business was replaced by an e-portfolio assessment as part of an institutional pilot project. Google Sites is particularly advantageous as all CCT students and staff have a GMAIL account.

The advantages of using Google Sites to create an e-portfolio include:

- Free to use
- User-friendly software
- Easy to customise (Google Sites also contains a template gallery)
- Content can be embedded from other sources
- Ownership of the e-portfolio is retained by the owner
- Secure (the owner controls user permissions)
- Google Sites facilitates interactivity. You can collaborate with other editors for example.

A guide for staff and students was placed on CCT's Learning Space to support staff and learners.

A survey tool was created informed by the questionnaire in E-Portfolio's hub's article entitled 'Awareness and Usage of ePortfolios by Students in Higher Education in Ireland: Findings from a Student Survey.'

The survey tool was administered late in the semester. Consequently, the response rate was relatively small with ten respondents. Going forward, the survey will be administered earlier in the semester to maximise the response rate. Despite this, student feedback is overwhelmingly positive.

- 80% of respondents agreed and 20% strongly agreed that 'e-portfolio allowed me to record, evaluate and reflect on my learning experience'
- 60% of respondents agreed and 20% of respondents strongly agreed that 'e-portfolio is a more beneficial assessment than exams or a traditional essay'
- 70% agreed and 20% strongly agreed that 'e-portfolio helped me to produce a more effective assignment'
- 50% agreed and 30% strongly agreed that 'e-portfolio effectively showcased my learning to employers'
- 50% agreed and 50% strongly agreed that 'Google Sites is an effective e-portfolio platform'
- 100% agreed that 'there are benefits to e-portfolio'
- 70% agreed and 20% strongly agreed that 'e-portfolio enhances the learning experience'
- 70% agreed and 10% strongly agreed that they were given clear guidelines in relation to what should be put into the e-portfolio
- 70% agreed and 10% strongly agreed that they received help with their e-portfolio

Although innovation in assessment was apparent, several providers indicated that within programmes that continue to feature exams as part of the overall assessment strategy, online exams were maintained. As a result, refinements to online proctoring processes and platforms selected for use were evident, as well as enhanced communication with learners.

- At DBS, exams remained online for the academic year 2021/22 due to continuing concerns about Covid-19 restrictions. The College wanted to be able to provide assurance to learners at the commencement of the academic year that there would be no disruptions in the exams cycle. In recognition of the need to protect the integrity of online exams, DBS continued with the online proctoring pilot that had commenced previously, proctoring selected high stakes exams.
- At Griffith College, training was provided to guide learners to multiple exam resources, including how to access the online exam process (Better Examinations). For the April/ May 2022 exam period, Griffith College adopted proctoring software as an examination invigilation tool. Similarity checking software was also linked to the proctoring software to increase the integrity of the examinations.

The following case study from ICHAS illustrates QA considerations that apply to online exams. The case study has been redacted for the purposes of brevity. The full case study is accessible [here](#).

Case Study

Moving from Unseen Examinations to Open Book Examinations at ICHAS

Case Description

This case study relates to the period of December 2021 to April 2022 and in particular the end of semester terminal assessment. It is however important to note that the College's overall assessment practice encompasses a small number of sit-down examinations across semesters on the undergraduate programme with between 1 – 2 terminal (in person) examinations per year for the four-year Undergraduate programmes, with one sit down examination in each of the MA programmes.

As semester 1 of the academic year progressed it became apparent relatively early that terminal assessment in the form of sit-down examinations were going to prove problematic given the public health advice. The College was also cognisant of the need to make a decision early to provide certainty for students in terms of assessment. At the first Academic Council meeting of the year (October 2021) the Council made the decision to move unseen sit down examinations to open book examinations, which would be proctored using Zoom.

Some modifications to the original guidelines for proctored examinations were made, approved by Academic Council, and advised to QQI. Key exemplars of these modified guidelines provided to students are outlined below.

- In order to commence examinations in a prompt and timely manner, students are required to be at their PC (in a quiet area) and logged into the Zoom exam room fifteen minutes before an examination begins.
- Students must turn off all mobile phones and ensure that their microphones are muted once the examination commences.
- Students must work in silence with microphones muted and cameras on during the examination and are not permitted to talk to one another or members of their household, use mobile phones, pass notes, or communicate in any way with anyone other than the invigilator until the examination has ended.
- Students are permitted to bring notes and or reading material into the examination, however students are not permitted to access the internet.
- At the commencement of the examination, questions will be released through the Learning Management system.
- Once students have completed their examination, they will be required to immediately upload their answers to the LMS in Microsoft Word.
- All answers uploaded to the LMS will be subject to VeriCite similarity checks and requirements. Please note the activity history of MS Word documents will be surveyed – any activity outside the examination timeframe or any pasting from external sources to the document will nullify the submission and be deemed a breach of examination rules.

The move to “open book” proctored online examinations from an “unseen” proctored online examination was originally intended to mitigate challenges in relation to monitoring the environment in which students were based while taking such examinations from home or outside a more traditionally controlled environment. This process highlighted the need for specific QA Policies and procedures specific to fully online proctoring. It was felt that without comprehensive adjustments of the existing QA the college couldn’t best assure the quality of Assessment in this environment.

Case Outcome

Following the assessment cycle and a review of the processes, the sub-group identified a range of issues for consideration in relation to the Quality Assurance of online proctored examinations and developed a range of procedures associated with online proctored examinations and presented them to the Quality and standard committee which have been approved by Academic council and form part of the submission to the QQI pilot programme to develop QA Guidelines for Online Programmes. The proposed Procedures associated with Remotely Proctored Examinations comprise the following elements:

- System Requirements
- Pre-Examination Process
- Online Examination Procedure
- Procedures associated with Technical Issues
- Grievance and Review
- Breaches of Examination Regulations
- Procedure for dealing with Breaches of Examination Regulations

Case Study 18: ICHAS - Moving from Unseen Examinations to Open Book Examinations

Consideration of the importance of feedback within approaches to assessment was also evident in some of the AQR submissions.

- CCT adopted the Moodle Audio Feedback Tool, which enables lecturers to provide a voice recording with feedback on any student work in the place of written text. CCT considers this to be a valuable tool in the context of universal design and inclusive practice, particularly when supporting, for example, international learners or learners with visual impairments or dyslexia.
- DBS undertook work to separate out feedback, marking and moderation components from the Overarching Assessments sections of its QA Manual to be clearer and more explicit about these principles and definitions.

3.3.4 LEARNER WELLBEING AND SUPPORTS

During the previous reporting period, a particular focus on learner wellbeing was evident in the AQRs submitted. This was unsurprising, given the widely reported negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on learners. However, the six submissions covering this reporting period have shifted focus away from Covid-19, with the learner support activities documented being broader-ranging, encompassing the learner experience of HEI processes throughout the student lifecycle, inclusive of process improvements, responsive measures, peer mentoring initiatives and career focused supports.

- NCI reported that in spring 2022, a Streamlining Student Success initiative was launched under the leadership of the Director of Academic Registry Services, following consultations

with staff and students in 2021. Over 70 staff and 40 student volunteers actively engaged in the initiative which aimed to review and refresh NCI policies and procedures across the entire NCI student journey through a human-centered design approach. Six Task and Finish Groups were established to focus on the six key aspects of the student journey: (i) Applications, Acceptances & Enrolments; (ii) Orientation & Student Welfare; (iii) Learner's Experience, Engagement & Retention; (iv) Student Voice & Programme Quality; (v) Assessments and Examinations; and (vi) Graduates & Alumni.

- Griffith College reported that in July 2022, the college's Management Board approved the provision of free English language training for learners who are non-native speakers and wish to further improve their language proficiency (while meeting the programme's English language entry requirements).
- Griffith College also reported that, in response to higher levels of exam anxiety as a result of a return to on-campus exams, it invited learners to participate in exam stress management and effective study technique sessions. Dedicated Moodle pages and added sessions from the library were made available to ensure learner confidence for online examinations.
 - The College further reported on the development of an accredited "Certificate in Career Skills" minor award-type programme, to be rolled out as a pilot programme in 2022/23. The college also established a Career Industry Liaison Office in Cork, providing a resource where learners can access services such as one-to-one appointments, CV reviews, a mentoring programme and access to the Griffith College Alumni Network. The Liaison Officer also created a Careers Service Moodle page where learners can access career resources, career blogs, articles and job vacancies.
- DBS reported that in the academic year 2021/22, it had over 100 peer mentors divided across three areas – programmes, regions (by nation), and year. The mentors are reported to help make coming to DBS a more welcoming, less daunting experience. As well as arranging informal meetings and social events with their mentees, the team assists with any queries or concerns that new students may have. Each student mentor is given continuous training throughout the academic year to ensure they are fully engaged in the college experience and best prepared to support their mentees.

A discernible pattern within the breadth of activities reported by the six providers was the investment of time and energy in engaging with learners and providing essential support and information utilising digital technologies. For example:

- OTC reported that as fully online delivery continued for some programmes, new Learner Guides were developed. These guides act as a quick reference resource guiding areas such as assessment submission, learner effort involved and the different modes of delivery (webinar, seminar and tutorial). They also explain the different types of learning involved such as directed, self-directed (independent), work-based, synchronous or asynchronous.

The case study below submitted by Hibernia College is illustrative of digital first approaches being taken by HEIs in this sector to improve the availability and quality of learner supports to promote greater interactivity. The case study has been redacted for the purposes of brevity. The full case study is accessible [here](#).

Case Study

Cohort Connections: A Student Wellbeing Initiative at Hibernia College

Introduction

Hibernia College developed a Virtual Communities of Inquiry (VCoI) (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2000) initiative to strengthen and establish cognitive and emotional connections between physically separated learners. The Community of Inquiry framework adopted by the College highlights three core elements needed for a meaningful educational experience that are interdependent (depicted in Figure 1).

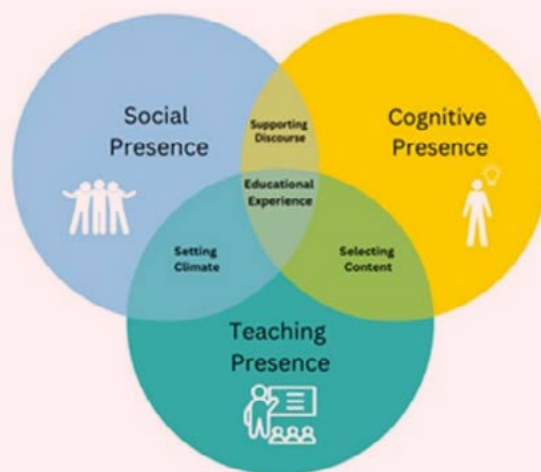


Figure 1: Community of Inquiry Framework, Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000)

The Cohort Connections (CC) initiative aimed to provide a supportive VCoI through dialogic methods using informal drop-in sessions. Each session was facilitated by a Professional Master of Education (PME) faculty or adjunct faculty member. Each faculty member was assigned a specific cohort(s) of students.

The overarching purpose was to support students' wellbeing, sense of belonging and connection with the programme faculty and peers. The aims were developed and achieved by enabling students to get to know each other and themselves as initial educators by establishing a collaborative professional community while learning online. Students also engaged in inquiry, explored ways of thinking and problem solving at challenging moments during the programme, held reflective peer discussions, constructed meaning, and developed critical skills in analysing, synthesising and making sense of teaching experiences.

The CC pilot began in April 2022 with the PMEP Spring 22 cohort of approximately 165 students. Initially, nine points of contact over the two-year PME course were planned, with one introduction session, six themed sessions and two discretionary theme sessions. Each session was to be approximately one hour long, and each cohort tutor would notify their perspective cohorts of each point of contact throughout the academic year.

The CC were delivered via Zoom. This structure changed to a more student-led initiative for the PMEP Autumn 22 cohort, with approximately 430 students. The new structure comprised three formal scheduled sessions, one introduction and two themed sessions. This change was due to the associated workload of facilitating meetings by each full-time faculty and adjunct faculty member with their associated CC groups and students' engagement in prescheduled CC meetings, which decreased from the first meeting.

The CC initiative was piloted with the Spring 2022 and Autumn 2022 cohorts on the Professional Master of Education primary programme. For this case study, the students from both cohorts were invited to complete a short online survey to gather information on their experiences of engaging with the CC initiative. The survey comprised two sections, 1) students' sense of belonging and connection with the College and 2) students' sense of wellbeing. The survey was piloted with 3 students before dissemination to the two cohorts. Of the 660 students surveyed, 78 responded, giving a survey response of 12%. The survey took an average time of 2 minutes and 29 seconds to complete.

In response to whether the CC initiative supported students' sense of belonging and wellbeing, 67% of students definitely or mostly agreed that CC provided opportunities to contact academic faculty when needed. 64% definitely or mostly agreed that CC provided opportunities to receive sufficient advice and guidance in relation to the course. 71% definitely or mostly agreed that CC provided opportunities to engage with peers, while 61% definitely or mostly agreed that CC supported their sense of belonging to the College. Some suggestions made by students to improve how the CC initiative can support students' sense of belonging and connection to the College were:

- To include lead tutor email addresses so they can be contacted directly
- For CC facilitators to post daily or weekly updates or check-ins to make the communications more regular

Some students indicated that cohort groups use alternative communication platforms to share and communicate with one another rather than the College's dedicated Cohort app. Students said they are more familiar with other communication platforms, such as WhatsApp, and feel they can be more open and honest because no faculty member is present.

How Cohort Connections supports the development and evolution of the internal quality system

While students face many challenges while on the PME primary programme, literature also indicates that academic misconduct is less likely to occur when they feel their teachers and tutors care about them (McCabe, 1992; 1993). The CC initiative was piloted to support students' connection and sense of belonging to the College and to support their wellbeing. This initiative has been positively received by the Spring and Autumn 2022 cohorts with the majority of students indicating that CC supported their sense of belonging to the College. `

The next phase in the CC pilot is to carry out CC facilitator focus groups on their experiences to date and to explore options of how to leverage the initiative to further support student wellbeing. Suggestions from the student survey would be to engage more closely with the cohorts closer to assignment submission dates as students feel under pressure and stress at these times.

Conclusion

While the CC initiative has had a positive impact on students' sense of belonging to the College, the initiative has had less of an impact on supporting students' sense of wellbeing. Survey results indicate that factors outside of the CC initiative such as academic scheduling of assignment submissions, face-to-face days, online forum responses, and contact with staff and faculty members are problematic. The learning outcomes for this study indicate that for future sustainability and success of the CC initiative, a more focused approach to supporting students' wellbeing is required.

Case Study 19: Hibernia College - Cohort Connections

3.3.5 INTERNATIONAL LEARNERS

The six private/independent HEIs that submitted AQRs for this reporting period have diverse learner populations, with some addressing larger international learner cohorts than others. Therefore, the degree of focus placed on international learners can be expected to vary across the AQRs. Nonetheless, the submissions for this period were noted to have a substantially lesser focus on international cohorts than those for the previous year.

Last year's AQRs highlighted the particular difficulties faced by international learners as a result of the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. It may be surmised that the gradual removal of public health restrictions both within Ireland and internationally during this reporting period is a factor in the shift away from this focus in reports.

The AQRs generally confirmed that policies, procedures and supports relevant to international learners are in place to facilitate this cohort. Griffith College reported that with the escalation of the political situation in Ukraine, the college supported both Ukrainian and Russian enrolled learners at the college in practical ways.

Griffith Global - the Griffith College Global Engagement Office (formerly Griffith College International Office) - submitted a case study outlining how it had developed a series of short and practical videos about all aspects of student life in Ireland, to be hosted on the Griffith Global YouTube Channel. Digital content is being created by existing learners who have become Global Ambassadors for the HEI.

Case Study

Expanding Learners' Induction Online at Griffith College

The Griffith Global YouTube Channel is one of a number of official communication channels of "Griffith Global" - the Griffith College Global Engagement Office (formerly Griffith College International Office). This channel provides information that is key to the onboarding process for new incoming international learners. It provides useful information for international learners who are already studying at any of our Griffith College Campuses: Dublin, Cork or Limerick.

The YouTube Channel contains short and practical videos about all aspects of student life in Ireland. As well as having some Griffith alumni talk about their experiences, Griffith Global has produced videos about opening bank accounts in Ireland, how to get a PPS number after arriving, what to expect from campus life (where certain buildings are on campus, where classrooms are) and more.

The Griffith College Global Ambassador Programme was launched in 2021. This Programme was developed to identify suitable students who would create digital content for the College, to be used for various purposes. The programme continued into the Academic Year 2022/2023 and a number of existing learners were selected to become Global Ambassadors. They created videos about a range of topics, including their favourite places in Ireland and things to do in Ireland, offering peer insights for prospective and soon-to-arrive students.

One positive measure of impact is a decreased footfall of international learners at the Global Engagement Office on-site because their immediate needs are being met when they are accessing the information via the videos. Informal feedback suggests that applicants and learners benefit from the visual instructions, from being able to view and re-watch the videos at their convenience, to control the speed of the presentation, and to use closed captions, should they wish. This allows the staff more time to focus on other aspects of the learner experience. Examples of the new incoming international learners video resources provided are linked below.

- Griffith Global YouTube Channel <https://www.youtube.com/@GriffithGlobal/videos>
- Getting around Dublin Campus playlist https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzsyX8pkIlo&list=PLHamADFIHmSQaUAQleUPCdDVVytZHG_BaZ
- Welcome Back – Alumni Sharing Experiences playlist https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LvQ6-4-8jk&list=PLHamADFIHmSRpOga8gys_r-IOdBwXCBI

Case Study 20: Griffith College - Griffith College Global Ambassadors: Expanding Learners' Induction Online

3.3.6 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

A number of HEIs reported in depth on the progress that has been made in amplifying the learner voice within governance and quality assurance processes, for example by encouraging participation in student unions/councils and fostering partnerships.

- CCT reported that it continued to encourage student partnership and is working in collaboration with NStEP to maximise opportunities for this. In addition to having student members of CCT academic governance committees, during 2021/22 students engaged as partners in the review of programmes and modules, the provision of professional development, and in the development of student support sessions and resources. At CCT, all new class representatives are offered multiple opportunities to complete the NStEP introductory training. Returning class reps participated in the Advanced Class Rep Training for the first time, learning further skills that contribute to effective leadership, communication, and partnership in their role. Lastly, in completing these trainings, CCT had several class reps earn the NStEP Digital Badge “Student Engagement Recognition Award” which is achieved by completing two trainings and writing a reflective report (submitted to NStEP).
- CCT also reported that student partnership opportunities were enhanced with the expansion of its Peer Mentoring programme in 2022, the active participation of student representatives on programme boards and through the student representatives’ forum. Peer mentors are also now members of the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) Forum to encourage a partnership approach in all CTL initiatives. Students became co-creators in initiatives such as the Peer Mentoring academy and through engagement with the CTL Forum, NStEP, NAIN and National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning. Both formal communications channels such as module surveys and informal channels such as Zoom Chats, WhatsApp chat and the ‘Point of View’ Moodle Plugin have further developed student engagement.
- Griffith College reported that the Students’ Union (GCSU) became an independent student representative body in August 2021. The GCSU objectives for the period under review (and its status at the conclusion of the timeframe) were to develop measures of autonomy and self-sufficiency, to engage with Griffith College staff with experience of students’ unions and learner engagement to support the GCSU in this transition, to secure increased funding to support additional paid GCSU representative positions, and to establish a student activities department. In November 2021, the Management Board committed the funds to see the appointment of GCSU Vice President positions in Limerick and Cork, with student elections held the following February to identify post-holders. In February 2022, students voted to approve a referendum for the implementation of a new constitution, which came into effect immediately. By the end of the reporting period, the SU was in the process of developing a new bespoke website, had developed a “Guide to Dublin” booklet in partnership with the International Office, had contributed to a college Induction Booklet for class representatives, and was actively involved in planning induction and events for the coming academic year 2022/23.
- NCI reported that it signed an agreement with NCI Students Union (NCISU) based on the principles of the NStEP programme. NCI and the NCISU co-developed a new complaints policy and the college is collaborating with NCISU on areas including gender identity and consent.

ISB submitted a case study that provides a comprehensive outline of how the student council process has been enhanced to more effectively champion the student voice within the HEI. The case study is available [here](#).

3.3.7 THE IMPACT OF STUDENT SURVEYS

Of the six providers that submitted AQRs in the private/independent sector, only NCI and DBS report involvement in [studentsurvey.ie](#). However, it is clear that the use of surveys to elicit feedback from learners is a well-established practice in the sector and the outcomes of surveys are informing quality enhancements.

- OTC reported on the collection of student feedback via in-house end-of-year surveys. The results are summarised within the AQR and include action areas for focus/improvement alongside areas positively reinforced. Variations in tutor responses and the need for feedback to be timely are highlighted as action areas, while the singling out of tutors who were going 'above and beyond' in survey feedback was an area of positive reinforcement.
- At Griffith College, a survey conducted near the end of the academic year, asked learners to identify how they used services and facilities in the college and identify any areas that could be improved. Feedback included software suggestions for classrooms, opinions on the cafeteria and other useful information. Responses were developed across functional areas in relation to the issues identified in the report. A process was also identified to facilitate communicating action/close-out to the learners who provided feedback.
- At ISB, an aspect of the Student Council enhancement programme outlined in the case study linked in section 3.3.6 has been the introduction of an anonymous student survey, issued to all students across all programmes. The impact of this introduction may be visible in future reporting periods.

NCI reported a 26% response rate to the 2022 [studentsurvey.ie](#), which was the college's highest to date. 73% of respondents rated their NCI experience as good or excellent. Results were presented and discussed at Academic Council. Major contributions were reported from student survey results at programme level, plus focus group feedback, to cyclical programme reviews and QQI revalidations of more than ten major awards in the School of Business. NCI's utilisation of [studentsurvey.ie](#) is outlined in the redacted case study below. The full case study is available [here](#).

Case Study

The Impact of Student Surveys at NCI Academic year 2021-22

Introduction and Context:

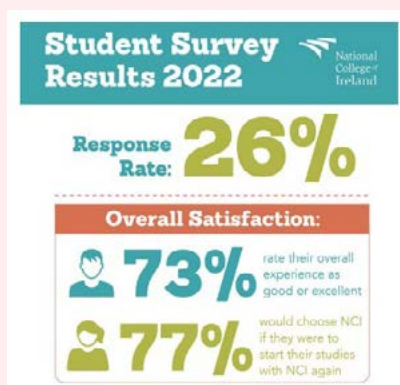
In this short case-study, we highlight the institutional impact of the **student survey.ie** results in 2022 (from fieldwork carried out among the eligible student body in February 2022).

NCI has always placed a premium on student feedback as a key component of robust Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) processes for programmes of education and training and the student experience more widely. As a relatively small College, albeit one that has grown significantly in recent years, NCI staff and students have always enjoyed close relationships, built on high levels of one-to-one contact and underpinned by our core values of Inclusivity, Learner-centredness and community. Values-based commitment and good staff-student relationships facilitate the **Learner Voice** to come to the fore in decision-making. This was further strengthened at College level in 2021-22 with the signing of the NCI – NCI Student’s Union Partnership Agreement

Findings at institutional level: 2022 Student survey.ie

NCI achieved a 26% response rate in the 2022 national student survey. This was the highest response rate in NCI since the beginning of participation in 2013/14. NCI’s Executive Group (EG) and Academic Council (AC) discussed the 2022 student survey.ie results extensively, as an important insight into students’ views during the 2021 – 22 academic year, which was the second academic year of Covid-19 restrictions at the College.

The following key findings were the focus of attention at the institutional level and will continue to be monitored closely year on year:



NCI was pleased to note that respondents selecting “good or excellent” to describe their overall experience in NCI has steadily increased (from 68% in 2017-2018 to 73% in 2022). In addition, 77% of learners responded that if they were asked to start their studies again, they would start again with NCI. This result was up 6% since 2017-18. It is essential that we continue to build on these positive scores.

NCI’s results also showed a year-on-year improvement since 2019 across nine of the ten studentsurvey.ie engagement indicators – however we noted that although the 2022 result was 3.36 (out of 60) up on 2021, satisfaction with levels of Student-Faculty interaction was the lowest scoring indicator in 2022 (a sectoral finding). The Academic Council agreed to emphasise this finding at School and Programme levels with all faculty, particularly in relation to formative assessments which provide opportunities for students to engage with academic staff on their performance in modules.

NCI closed the feedback loop with students by communicating the high-level results to all students via the website and NCI social media and engaging with the Student’s Union leaders on the key findings. In addition, where survey results were available at programme-level, Programme Directors fed these through to scheduled programme reviews and QQI revalidations during the reporting period.

Case Study 21: NCI - The Impact of Student Surveys

3.3.8 PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

During the period under review, several of the six HEIs in this sector that submitted AQRs reported a significant volume of activity in bringing new programmes forward for validation, while concurrently updating and revalidating existing programmes. Many of the new programme profiles reflect responsiveness to skills gaps in industry and government priorities for education and training. Notably, the validation of embedded minor awards, as well as standalone micro-credentials, is highlighted within the AQRs.

- CCT reported that the academic year 2021/22 was noteworthy for the extent of programme development, review, validation and revalidation that took place. These developments were informed by learnings from programme delivery, assessment and student engagement throughout the period of contingency arrangements, and the college’s successful expansion into masters and blended learning provision.
- Hibernia College reported on an additional (non-QQI) validation of a Master of Education (MEd) which is a two-year, part-time, fully online programme. It is designed to meet the growing demand for flexible postgraduate training in education, with accreditation by Coventry University. It is envisaged that the programme will commence in September 2023.
- Griffith College reported that in February 2022, the college built on its existing portfolio of government-funded, industry-based apprenticeship programmes, with approval from QQI and SOLAS of the Bar Manager Apprenticeship, which was developed in conjunction with a Consortium Steering Group, including members of the Vintners Federation of Ireland. Griffith College also reported that during the period under review, the college was successful in validating micro-credential programmes to meet very specific requirements for knowledge and skills development.

OTC, Griffith College and NCI also reported on their engagement with QQI's pilot project for the validation of fully online programmes.

Across the AQRs, it was evident that programme development in this sector is being undertaken in alignment with institutional strategic objectives and quality assurance processes.

- Hibernia College reported that the development and growth of the college's programmes is indicative of the diversification and pursuance of new partnership opportunities, which form part of the strategic objectives of the college.
- NCI reported that the Programme Lifecycle Management (PLM) structure, introduced in February 2021, began to make an impact on the quality of programme-level decision-making at the college. The new PLM Executive Sub-Group began the approval of new programme proposals and managed an intense schedule of programmatic review and QQI revalidation, including the data-driven review of six postgraduate programmes and four undergraduate programmes in the Business School.
- CCT reported that its strategic plan includes the objectives of developing new programmes within the areas of Computing and Business from NFQ levels 6 to 9 which include interactive, real-world, industry informed, work-based and collaborative learning and prioritising blended learning and micro-credential modes, together with credit accumulation towards full awards.
- DBS reported preparation of an academic programme strategy and plan to include i) an outline skills matrix to guide the programmes it will develop, ii) incorporation of work-based learning into programmes as standard, iii) incorporation of environment/sustainability into programmes and iv) incorporation of the values of good citizenship. DBS intends to have a programme strategy approved by the end of Q2 2023. DBS also reported that it has increasingly put a focus on industry and employer engagement feeding into development of programmes.

3.3.9 ENGAGEMENT WITH PROFESSIONAL BODIES AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

Five of the six private/independent providers that submitted AQRs engage with professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs) for accreditation or recognition in addition to validating programmes with QQI. These include NCI, DBS, OTC, Hibernia College and Griffith College. The profiles, requirements and processes of these bodies vary substantially. The AQRs submitted for this reporting period reflect that some of these providers are actively seeking to secure or maintain PSRB approval of programmes.

The AQR submitted by DBS also highlights potential challenges in the process of engaging with PSRBs and deals extensively with issues encountered in securing approval by CORU for an existing programme.

Work placements form an important part of many higher education programmes and are often a statutory requirement for graduate recognition by, or registration with, a PSRB. Work to enhance the quality and outcomes of work placements was outlined in three distinct case studies submitted by CTC, NCI and OTC.

- CTC reported on measures taken towards the end of the reporting period to better communicate clinical practice placement requirements through the development of flowcharts. The case study is accessible [here](#).
- NCI provided an overview of its approach to, and the impact of, its work placement model. The case study is accessible [here](#).
- OTC reported feedback sought in spring 2022 on a new placement model introduced in 2019 for the Level 7 BA in Social Care in preparation for approval by CORU. Under the model, students must work in an agency to evidence their proficiency. The model is intentionally flexible to facilitate learners who may be unable to undertake a traditional 'block' placement. Feedback on the placement model from learners and other stakeholders is outlined in the case study below.

Case Study

Lessons learned through feedback from stakeholders involved in a professional Social Care placement model at Open Training College

In applying for CORU approval for the B.A. in Social Care (Level 7), the Open Training College (OTC) moved from a work-based supervision model to a practice placement-based model. The newly validated programme and hence placement model commenced in 2019.

The main differences in implementation of the model included the student now having to work in an agency to evidence defined standards of proficiency (SoPs). Academically, the College provides access and supports through the innovative, supported open learning model. The flexibility of the placement model – 16 hours per week across 25 weeks – allows for a profile of students who may be excluded or restricted from completing a more traditional block placement arrangement to be able to engage with a professional Social Care degree. The OTC has over 30 years of experience working with a profile of students who tend to be mature learners and who often already have many years of life and professional experience. Our placement model allows this profile of students the flexibility to engage with the SOPs on placement over 25 weeks.

If a specific organisation feels that the 16 hours per week over 25 weeks does not meet the demands of their service, they can request that the 400 hours be completed in a more block placement arrangement. The College can, and has facilitated, this arrangement once a student is in a position to achieve this.

Due to COVID, opportunities to gain feedback on this new process were limited. In the spring and summer of 2022, the college gathered in-person feedback from the students, agencies (via the practice educators who supported and supervised the student during the placement in the agency) and the people who used the agencies' services.

These were themes that emerged in the feedback:

Effectiveness of communication

The Practice Educators (PEs) were asked how effective they felt the communication between the College and their organisation was (for example, email correspondence from the placement coordinator/ placement tutor, phone calls and meetings). Most said the communication was appropriate and timely. However, the large amount of paperwork involved in the assessment was identified as an issue by both students and practice educators.

The Placement model

The model had a mixed response from the agencies. Some agencies said that the 25-week model did not suit their organisational flow and that a block placement on hindsight would have been better. However, while still stating that balancing work, life, study and now placement was challenging, the students still felt that the 25-week model allowed them to study more effectively, where a block model would not.

Assessment

The PEs were asked how they found the assessment of the placements – they were asked specifically about the tripartite meetings, the portfolio and the Assessment Record Book. The portfolio generally allowed for well-structured discussions on the standards of proficiency and key learning. The online induction provided by the College gave a clear sense of the processes and structures involved in supporting the assessment. The practice educators and the students again mentioned the amount of documentation.

Level of preparation of students and practice educators before placement

Overall, the PEs felt that the students were prepared before placement, but one PE recommended introducing more pre-placement preparation on communication. The practice educators appreciated the support emails the practice placement team sent periodically.

Role and contribution of the students to the placement agency

The responses stated that the students had become part of the agency teams while bringing their experiences and an outside eye to the practice. The service users felt that it was positive having a new person to interact with. The theme of having someone who spends quality time with them and supporting them in many ways, including outreach in the community and with families, distinctly emerged.

Summary of outcomes

The overall response to the placement model was positive from all stakeholders. However, a few areas need to be adjusted, especially the amount of paperwork involved in the assessment for all stakeholders. The key positive is that the service users benefit from this process by having another person in their service, which allows for more quality time. Also, the practice placement team needed to ensure that the placement model used while working for the student must also work for the agency.

This annual process allows all stakeholders to give feedback to the practice placement team. The feedback is then reviewed at the social care team and programme board level to ensure that any identified issues are actioned and implemented. The process also provides the practice placement and broader social care team to engage with people in practice to ensure that the programme continues to fulfil the sector's needs.

Case Study 22: OTC – Ensuring the Quality Assurance and Enhancement of Work Placements

3.3.10 STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Alongside the management of a return to campus for learners outlined in section 3.1.1, HEIs in the private/independent sector worked to respond to changes in the needs and expectations of staff in the post-Covid-19 era. Focus centred on the facilitation or formalisation of hybrid working models.

- NCI reported that significant progress was made towards the development of a Hybrid Working Policy for NCI staff, building on the experience gained during the Covid-19 restrictions. Steered by the College's Executive Group, and chaired by the President, a Hybrid Working Group began a detailed consultation process with staff over the summer and this continued into autumn 2022. Further updates will be provided in the next reporting period.
- Hibernia College reported that as a blended learning provider, it was able to adapt efficiently to a hybrid working environment for all staff. Management development training sessions were provided by the College for managers and team leads to support them in adapting to the hybrid working model. The College's company policies were updated to include the Hybrid Working Policy for all staff. A new staff induction process was developed to provide a structured, transparent and replicable process.
- Griffith College reported that a Right to Request Remote Working (RRRW) policy was introduced on foot of collaboration involving the HR team, the HR committee, the heads of department/faculty and management board. The policy was initially introduced on a pilot basis, pending the publication of legislation in this area. A RRRW approval committee was established to support this policy and information and training sessions were provided to all staff on the processes involved.

In addition to EDI-focused initiatives intended to promote inclusive working environments (outlined in section 3.1.6), a general emphasis on positive working cultures, staff retention and wellbeing was evident in the AQRs submitted by Hibernia College and Griffith College.

As may be expected, a prominent theme within continuing professional development activity in the sector centred on developing staff capabilities to teach, assess and support student learning.

- At OTC, the provision of CPD opportunities for tutors was enhanced with online sessions in academic integrity, online facilitation, assessment and the use of Google Drive. CPD was reported as a central theme for the year, with lessons learned from annual CPD surveys taken into account, particularly in relation to programme delivery. Further development of the College's CPD policy was flagged for the next academic year.
- At DBS, the Learning Unit developed an eight-phase on-demand module pathway, which takes faculty from the initial steps of taking on a new module through to reflecting on their teaching performance having taught the module. This module pathway can be engaged with on an individual basis, with the support of the learning unit or with peers from a programme team. The module pathway will be mandatory for all new faculty during their probation period from the start of 2023. It is accompanied by workshops and informal 'lunch n' learns' staged by the Learning Unit. DBS also made reference to provision of access to AdvanceHE fellowships for its teaching staff through institutional access membership.
- At Griffith College, staff enrolled in formal Education, Learning and Development CPD studies on the Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma, and Master of Arts in Education, Learning and Development (MAELD). Additional modules of the MAELD were also delivered as accredited CPD, including Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), Psychology of Learning, Supervision of Research (provided for 3 times across the semester), Workplace Learning, Emergent Learning Technologies, and Learning Analytics.
- Griffith College reported that in January 2022, the college hosted a Teaching Champions Showcase. The role of Teaching Champions at Griffith College is outlined in more detail in the case study below.

Case Study

Griffith College's Teaching Champions

Following the publication of the college's teaching and learning strategy in July 2021: 'A Roadmap for Sustainability and Innovation in Teaching and Learning at Griffith College', a proposal was developed by the college's Education, Learning and Development Group (ELDG) for the appointment of teaching, learning and assessment champions - 'Teaching Champions'. This initiative was approved by the college's Management Board, and a college-wide team of expert, committed, teaching, learning and assessment professionals from the existing faculties, programmes and collaborative partners was recruited, for implementation in the period under review. Using Teaching Champions (TCs) to pioneer and support real changes in teaching, learning and assessment is in line with best international practice allowing the faculties to peer-learn from, and benchmark against each other. The potential TCs were identified as those individuals who:

- have a passion for teaching, learning, and assessment practice (TLA) in their discipline and are keen to develop and enhance their own practices

- are knowledgeable about best practice and emerging developments, in TLA (through engagement, college-wide and beyond)
- engage with new and existing lecturers and learners to assist them in the exploration and implementation of best practice TLA
- support other teaching staff in developing authentic teaching and assessment practices
- monitor and review learner performance, meeting directly with individual learners and groups of learners to obtain valuable feedback on their experience of the faculty's / programme's TLA
- monitor overall learner performance analytics identifying appropriate TLA enhancements
- contribute to their faculty's / programme's TLA strategy

Initially eleven Teaching Champions (TCs) were appointed for a one-year period, to represent and support faculties, partners, and regional campus lecturers. Appointees included a diverse mix of full-time and part time staff, early-career and long-time academics, and Griffith College and collaborative partners. TLA Champions were expected to commit an average of one-half day per week of protected time to their role, with a reduction in their teaching and related commitments facilitated for full-time staff members.

Led by members of the core ELD group, the TCs began their workplan for the 2021/22 academic year, which was prescribed as follows:

In Semester 1 of the academic year (October 2021), they reached out within their designated areas, building a network of new and experienced lecturers with a view to enhancing the Teaching, Learning and Assessment foundations of the college. The TCs ensured that academic staff in their area had access to all relevant module descriptors, approved programme documentation, programme assessment strategies, programme SharePoint files, and the current faculty, lecturer and learner handbooks for 2021.

Teaching staff were also encouraged by their relevant TCs to attend drop-in support sessions and Teaching and Learning showcase events. Throughout the year, the TC's research was shared within the group on a monthly basis.

In Semester 2, the TCs took on a research project as part of their remit. This was an extensive exercise in fact-finding and reflecting on the feedback processes, assessment strategies and shared pedagogies, used in their discipline, faculty or campus groups.

There was a January 2022 Teaching Champions Showcase. The event included presentations from various TCs across the faculties and collaborative partner institutions (including, for example, Innopharma Labs, Leinster School of Music & Drama, and Pulse College).

The presentations covered topics such as how to engage students in the classroom, and innovative assessment. All the presentations and resources remain available to all staff on a dedicated page in the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Group page on the college's Moodle.

At the end of the academic year (and the period under review) the college initiated a review of the process, to inform and guide the college's TCs plans for 2022/23. The review confirmed the benefit of the TC initiative and resulted in ongoing funding for the initiative into the next reporting period. The college collated the findings into a reflective Teaching Champions booklet, with relevant statistical, anecdotal and pedagogical evidence reproduced as a working document, to be read, considered, and enjoyed by both contributors and interested parties across the college. This document was published in the next reporting period.

Case Study 23: Griffith College - Teaching Champions

3.3.11 INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

During the previous reporting period, the rapid progress toward digital transformation necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic was very evident. For this reporting period, the AQRs reflected ongoing investment and development of information and data management systems.

- CCT reported acquisition of a CRM which is hosted by a third party. Compliance with GDPR was evaluated as part of the acquisition process and the College assured itself of the requirements of the regulation being satisfied. A template data processing agreement was established with legal support.
- Griffith College reported continued investment in the development of a student information system, reflecting investment of over €1m on external developers, in addition to extensive time commitment and support from key college staff to support the system design and the testing process of key modules for managing the student lifecycle. The legacy system was retained and will run in parallel until the new system is fully commissioned.
- Griffith College also reported piloting an assessment results system (for the new learner information and management system) with a small number of learners in January 2022. Results indicated that a full pilot-study could be implemented for the June 2022 results. The output of this full pilot process was used to inform software development and the processes to support learner engagement with the platform to obtain assessment results for future reporting periods.

3.3.11.1 Information Security

The AQRs from this reporting period indicated that cybersecurity and data protection continue to be a priority. Ongoing work to update systems and processes, as well as ensure that these are effectively communicated to staff, was apparent.

- Griffith College reported that in March 2022, in response to escalating cybersecurity threats, the college implemented multi-factor identification security settings for learner accounts (this security measure was already in place for staff systems).
- NCI refreshed and published its Data Protection Policy and associated DPIA and other guidelines via NCI's internal Support Hub document repository and reference portal for staff. Chapter 9 of the QAES was under review to ensure that core policy provisions for information and data management reflect the interim updates on Data Protection.
- CCT reported a new relationship with a new network management consultancy firm to enhance the College's approach to managing staff and student networks. Plans are ongoing to enhance the College's Wi-Fi network and IT services including enhanced cybersecurity provisions.

There is some evidence in the AQRs submitted during this reporting period that providers in this sector are progressing their capacity to utilise learning analytics.

- Hibernia College reported that the Quality Assurance Office was involved in the development of a learning analytics strategy. The collection and use of data about students and their learning provided new opportunities for Hibernia College to support learners and enhance educational processes.
- Griffith College offered a module on learning analytics to teaching staff.

A case study submitted by SQT Training is indicative of the shift toward digitisation of processes across the sector, some of which was inspired by the movement to online feedback mechanisms introduced in response to Covid-19. The case study notes the enhanced efficiency and accuracy of online feedback software now used by the provider and its usefulness in closing the feedback loop to learners. The full case study is accessible [here](#).

3.3.12 EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT, PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

The extent to which external engagements were reported by HEIs in the sector, and the nature of those engagements, varied markedly across the AQR submissions. Several HEIs highlighted their involvement with the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA).

- Griffith College reported that it engages in national initiatives and data-collecting initiatives that inform national policy and understanding. The college has two representatives on HECA's Academic Quality and Enhancement Forum (HAQEF) and led on organising sectoral events, along with sharing best practice. A member of Griffith College staff conducted research to support HECA's "[Connected Conversations: The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Practices Experienced in Higher Education Colleges Association \(HECA\) Colleges during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)".

- Hibernia College also reported contribution to HECA and participation in QQI conference events. Through HAQEF engagement, it contributed to a project aimed at producing useful insights and resources for the ongoing application of quality assurance of blended and online learning over the pandemic. The project was funded by the National Forum Network and Discipline Fund and the subsequent report ([Quality Assurance in HECA Colleges During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Mixed Methods Analysis Through the Lens of QQI's Core Criteria](#)) was launched in June 2022.

Although most of the AQRs include a reference to industry advisory boards or bodies being established within governance and programme development processes, there was little emphasis on updates to this within the reporting period in this year's AQRs. Reporting in relation to public information and communication was also relatively limited.

3.3.13 NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS

Within the six AQRs submitted, there was substantial variance in the profile of collaborations reported. For example, two providers reported engagements at European level that pertained to activity extending beyond the collaborative provision of programmes. Other providers reported on collaboration that was limited in scope to collaborative provision and articulation agreements. CCT and OTC indicated that no collaborative provision was undertaken.

- Griffith College reported that it engaged in discussion with a view to forming a consortium with (up to) 11 European university partners to facilitate a variety of potential collaborative programmes and projects. One such opportunity resulted in the submission of a joint application for possible capacity building in the area of enterprise and entrepreneurship. The following projects were developed and submitted by the end of the reporting period (August 2022):
 - EU project (SMART4FUTURE) with Algebra University College, Croatia, approved by the European Institute for Innovation and Technology – Climate Knowledge and Innovation Community.
 - EU ESCALATE project submitted under ERASMUS+ with a consortium of EU partners – topic development of train the trainer modules for lecturers teaching innovation.
- NCI reported that in November 2021, the European Commission awarded it the ERASMUS+ Charter, enabling NCI to apply for funding to support student and staff mobility (exchange) and other activities with universities, colleges and other organisations in the European Economic Area (EEA).

3.3.14 SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

During this period, the six AQRs submitted provided evidence that internal monitoring and review activities were underway within institutions. A substantial amount of activity was reported in relation to the development, validation and monitoring of programmes of education and training and associated provider processes. This is discussed in more detail in section 3.3.8.

- NCI reported that it will relaunch an Annual Programme Monitoring and Evaluation process in semester 2 of academic year 2022/23. The relevant policy and procedures (Chapter 3 of the QA Handbook) were being refreshed for Academic Council approval in spring 2023

and will be included in the next AQR.

- At CCT, it was reported that the Programme Review and Revalidation policy was implemented for the first time in 2021/22 and provided a structure and framework for a successful review and revalidation process. The Programme Management and Annual Monitoring policy was revisited as part of the review process as it was apparent from annual monitoring reports that there was a lack of clarity or understanding in respect of the changes that can be made to a validated programme and the process to be applied when wishing to propose a change. Upon review, it was established that the policy in its current format provided clear information in respect of this, but that these could be better signposted. As a result the policy was renamed to Programme Management, Annual Monitoring and Changes to Validated Programmes Policy. The name change now alerts readers more easily to the programme modification and differential validation policy and procedures.
- At Griffith College, the QAE Department initiated a review of the college's programme development, review and (re)validation process in August 2022. The review was facilitated using anonymous questionnaires sent to stakeholders of recent validation and revalidation processes at the college (including collaborative programmes). Consultations with stakeholders - including QAE staff, heads of faculty, programme directors and teams, panel chairs and secretaries, and learner support staff - who participated in recent reviews and validations, were scheduled for the next reporting period.
- DBS reported that some of the articulation arrangements highlighted in the AQR with providers in a range of countries including Brazil, China, and Germany were reviewed in the reporting period.

Comprehensive reviews were indicated by CCT and Griffith College in distinct areas:

- CCT reported that it completed its annual review of quality assurance policies and procedures. While the college commits to reviewing QA policies within a 5-year period, practice reflects the implementation of an annual review process which considers the application of the policies and procedures in the year to date, any issues concerns or challenges experienced in implementing them, feedback from stakeholders regarding the suitability of the policies and procedures and any recommendations for improvement that may arise from that, and any sectoral developments nationally and internationally which may impact on the policies and procedures as documented.

3.1.15 DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH CAPACITY

During the last reporting period, development of research capacity was the focus of reported activities and also a stated focus within several HEIs' QA improvement and enhancement plans. In this reporting period, it is clear that a number of the six private/independent providers that submitted AQRs have taken further steps to action this, with several roles and appointments noted.

- Griffith College reported that the year under review saw progress being made, including the appointment of nominees to HECA's Research Committee.
- At Hibernia College, a full-time Research & Development Lead was appointed to examine future technologies and consider how they may be applied and implemented across academic programmes and supporting structures.

- DBS reported that the new role of Research Practice Coordinator was established in February 2021 in order to:
 - Improve the reliability of the data behind the research profile;
 - Illustrate a measurable increase in research outputs;
 - Work with Academic Directors to define a research strategy for their disciplines;
 - Conclude and publish an updated research section of the Intranet;
 - Continue to publish the newsletter bi-monthly but as a gateway into the Intranet;
 - Stage an online Practice and Applied Research Conference;
 - Define a research strategy for DBS with the Research Committee. Work on this is ongoing, with goals set out for 2023.

Additional actions taken by some of the six private/independent providers that submitted AQRs for the reporting period that are relevant to research capacity include work to establish research repositories and focused staff development. For example:

- At CCT, the [Academic Research Collection \(ARC\)](#) was updated with collections created by staff and students. The CCT Research Lunch and Learn series commenced.
- Hibernia College reported the official launch of an Institutional Archive of Scholarly Content (IASC) in July 2022. IASC is the college's open access research repository. Using IASC, employees can share academic papers, articles, book chapters and other research artefacts that they have authored or co-authored. IASC is integrated with Google Scholar, which makes items discoverable via Google search and considerably increases their potential reach and visibility. Google Analytics have also been integrated with IASC, which enables the college to view a range of data on user engagement with the repository.

3.4 QUALITY ASSURANCE IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT PLANS

Private/independent HEIs reported a breadth of planned activities to improve and further develop their quality assurance in the upcoming reporting period. These span ongoing development of governance arrangements and committee structures, as well as learner and staff support, the review and enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment strategies and continued work to enhance the delivery of online and blended programmes.

Within this, a number of providers specifically indicated planned engagements with QQI and related processes:

- CCT indicated that discussions will be initiated with QQI in respect of gaining devolution of responsibility for validation sub-processes. CCT will additionally evaluate satisfaction of requirements for International Education Mark approval.
- DBS indicated that work will be completed to ensure readiness for external institutional review and application for delegated authority to make awards.
- Griffith College also indicated that it will seek or advance readiness for delegated authority and the International Education Mark.
- NCI reported that a priority for the HEI is successful external review by QQI in 2024. A further objective is a 100% success rate for all programmes submitted to QQI for validation and revalidation to enhance the likelihood of attaining delegated authority and HEA designation.

Two HEIs explicitly indicated that promotion of EDI and inclusive working and learning environment will remain a priority.

- CCT reported that it will continue to enhance practice and develop and implement policies which further promote equality, diversity and inclusion, strengthening a culture of access, engagement and success for all. Further, CCT indicated that it will expand upon student supports to support widening participation and student success.
- Griffith College reported that it will continue to support, enhance and resource the development of EDI, including policy development and related activities.

Griffith College was the only provider in the sector that included sustainability as an explicit priority for the upcoming reporting period. Given the increased attention being paid to climate change, extreme weather events and environmental sustainability post this reporting period, it is anticipated that, although efforts in this area are entirely voluntary, HEIs are likely to highlight their contributions in this area more explicitly in future submissions.

A number of HEIs indicated that the ongoing development and expansion of programme portfolios will be a priority, suggesting continued growth in the sector. Within this, a focus on industry/sector aligned programmes was evident.

Although a number of providers indicated that ongoing review of assessment practice and a focus on academic integrity would be focal in the next reporting period, this was not a dominant theme in plans indicated in the AQRs. It can be anticipated that due to the release of artificial intelligence tools subsequent to this reporting period, HEIs may be reporting a necessary pivot toward

meeting challenges in this area in future submissions.

- CCT reported that it will increase support to academic faculty to facilitate changes in assessment practice which promote academic integrity and reduce the potential for engagement of contract cheating services or use of artificial intelligence.
- DBS reported that it will review assessment practices, undertaking benchmarking and a review of standards.
- Hibernia College reported that academic integrity has been identified as a key priority and a detailed work plan is currently in development.

Finally, noteworthy ambitions to further develop research capacity and expand international relationships were indicated in some AQRs.

- DBS reported an aim to pursue articulation agreements, international collaborations and transnational validation relationships to increase international business in-country as well as in Ireland. DBS also indicated that it will update and publish a research strategy and complete a review of the ethical approval process for student research.
- Griffith College reported that it will create a European centre of excellence for research commercialisation and deep tech innovation. It also indicated that it will advance the college's research activities and related QAE processes.



3.5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter offered a thematic analysis of the AQRs submitted by six private/independent HEIs in 2023, which reported on activities across the sector during the 2021/22 academic year.

Unsurprisingly, the AQRs for this reporting period indicated the continued use, enhancement and integration of digital strategies for teaching, learning and assessment to programme delivery. Although providers reported on a cautious return to campus, the AQRs indicate that the affordances of technology utilised throughout the pandemic are being retained where this is considered appropriate to serve learner and staff needs. Reporting on support for learners illustrated how digital platforms are being used to provide easy access to information and resources as well as to facilitate collaboration and interaction. A specific focus on mental health, counselling and support for international learners dealing with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was not as prominent this year as in previous reporting periods. However, it is noted that support services and appropriate referrals are a part of general and ongoing operations for providers in this sector.

Several HEIs in this sector also highlighted activities directed toward the wellbeing of staff. The provision of inclusive working environments was highlighted by some providers that have focused on EDI and it is clear that resources are being devoted to the development of teaching staff with the provision of both accredited and unaccredited CPD. The focus on staff in this year's submissions includes attention paid to the implications of hybrid and remote working patterns.

As there was no obligation to submit an AQR during this reporting period for the majority of this sector, the analysis presented in this chapter is necessarily based on six reports. As a result, any conclusions drawn must be viewed cautiously. However, it is noted that for this reporting period, those providers that elected to submit either a full AQR or a standalone case study had more experience of completing AQRs and engaging with monitoring processes than in previous years. A number of relevant and useful case studies augmented the reporting within the AQRs to illuminate practice across the sector.

A significant theme in the AQRs submitted for this period pertains to increased autonomy in the private/independent sector. Griffith College and NCI previously attained devolved responsibility for aspects of the programme validation process. DBS attained devolved responsibility during the reporting period and CCT indicated this was an ambition.

Three of the AQRs submitted by institutions that have achieved devolved responsibility indicated that activity is underway to support readiness for making an application to QQI for delegated authority to make awards. Notably, there is substantial variance in the level of detail provided across the AQRs pertaining to this, with one HEI omitting any mention of delegated authority from the AQR. This is likely to be addressed in greater detail in the subsequent reporting period.

Although the HEIs reporting for this period vary in their current status, ambitions and level of reporting, as previously stated, for the private/independent sector as a whole, the achievement of devolved responsibility by some HEIs and engagement with QQI on delegated authority by four providers reflects that a degree of trust has been established in the capacity of some of the more experienced HEIs to take greater responsibility for quality.

The AQRs submitted by larger and more experienced providers also reflected significant ambitions for the future. The focused development of research capacity, engagement with government priorities and increasingly outward looking, international nature of collaborations reported is noteworthy. Coupled with a shift toward greater autonomy, these developments reflect a high degree of confidence and maturity. An important consideration for QQI's planned review of its monitoring framework will be the distinct forms of monitoring that will be required to accommodate on the one hand, engagement with large, mature providers in this sector, and on the other, engagement with the small or new providers operating in niche domains.



APPENDIX A.

APPENDIX A:

MAPPING OF REPORT SECTIONS TO ESG 2015 AND QQI CORE STATUTORY QA GUIDELINES (QAG)

| AQR Part A Section | QQI QAG Core Sub-section No. | QAG Core Subsection Title | ESG Standard No. | ESG Standard Title |
|--|------------------------------|---|------------------|---|
| 1.0 – Internal QA Framework | 2.1 | Governance and Management of Quality | 1.1 | Policy for Quality Assurance |
| | 2.2 | Documented Approach to Quality Assurance | | |
| 2.0 – Programme Development and Delivery | 2.3 | Programmes of Education and Training | 1.2 | Design and Approval of Programmes |
| 4.0 – QA of Research Activities and Programmes | | | 1.9 | On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes |
| 8.0 – Monitoring and Periodic Review | | | | |
| 5.0 – Staff Recruitment, Development and Support | 2.4 | Staff Recruitment, Management and Development | 1.5 | Teaching Staff |
| 2.3 – Teaching, Learning and Assessment | 2.5 | Teaching and Learning | 1.3 | Student-centred Teaching, Learning and Assessment |
| | 2.6 | Assessment of Learners | | |
| 3.0 – Learner Resources and Supports | 2.7 | Supports for learners | 1.6 | Learning Resources and Student Support |
| 6.0 – Information and Data Management | 2.8 | Information and Data Management | 1.7 | Information Management |
| 7.0 – Public Information and Communication | 2.9 | Public Information and Communication | 1.8 | Public Information |

| | | | | |
|--|---|--|------|---|
| 2.0 – Programme Development and Delivery | 2.10 | Other Parties Involved in Education and Training | 1.9 | On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes |
| 8.0 – Monitoring and Periodic Review | | | | |
| 9.0 – Details of Arrangements with Third Parties | | | 1.2 | Design and Approval of Programmes |
| 2.0 – Programme Development and Delivery | 2.11 | Self-evaluation, Monitoring and Review | 1.9 | On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes |
| 8.0 – Monitoring and Periodic Review | | | 1.10 | Cyclical External Quality Assurance |
| | | | | |
| 4.0 – QA of Research Activities and Programmes | QAG for Providers of Research Degree Programmes | | | |

