March 2024

Institutional Review Report 2024

RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences

CINNTE

Dearbhú Cáilíochta
agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and
Qualifications Ireland

Contents

Foreword

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is responsible for the external quality assurance of further and higher education and training in Ireland. One of QQI's most important functions is to ensure that the quality assurance (QA) procedures that institutions have in place are effective. To this end, QQI carries out external reviews of higher education institutions on a cyclical basis. This current QQI cycle of reviews is called the CINNTE cycle. CINNTE reviews are an element of the broader quality framework for institutions composed of Quality Assurance Guidelines; each institution's Quality Assurance Procedures; Annual Quality Reports (AQR); and Dialogue Meetings. The CINNTE review cycle runs from 2017-2024. During this period, QQI will organise and oversee independent reviews of each of the universities and the Institutes of Technology.

Each CINNTE review evaluates the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of each institution. The review measures each institution's compliance with European standards for quality assurance, regarding the expectations set out in the QQI quality assurance guidelines or their equivalent and adherence to other relevant QQI policies and procedures. CINNTE reviews also explore how institutions have enhanced their teaching, learning and research and their quality assurance systems and how well institutions have aligned their approach to their own mission, quality indicators and benchmarks.

The CINNTE review process is in keeping with Parts 2 and 3 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) and based on the internationally accepted and recognised approach to reviews, including:

- the publication of terms of reference;
- a process of self-evaluation and Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER);
- an external assessment and site visit by a team of reviewers;
- the publication of a review report including findings and recommendations; and
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken.

This QQI CINNTE review of the RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences (hereafter RCSI) was conducted by an independent review team in line with the terms of reference in Appendix A. This is the report of the findings and conclusions of the review team. It also includes the response of RCSI to the report.

The Review Team

Each CINNTE review is carried out by an international team of independent experts and peers. The institutional review of the RCSI was conducted by a team of six reviewers selected by QQI. The review team was trained by QQI on 05 September 2023. The Chair and Coordinating Reviewer undertook a planning visit to RCSI on 13 September 2023. The main review visit was conducted by the full team between 9 October and 13 October 2023.

CHAIR

Professor Ann Griffin is Deputy Director of University College London (UCL) Medical School, Director of the Research Department of Medical Education, lead for Postgraduate Programmes and Scholarship and Honorary Consultant NHS London. She is a Doctor of Medicine and a Doctor of Education. She is head of the Research Department for Medical Education (RDME). In 2021 her department was recognised with the inaugural award for institutional commitment to scholarship from the Association for the Study of Medical Education. RDME submitted to REF 2021 with the Institute of Education, coming first in research power in the UK.

Ann has extensive experience in strategic leadership in healthcare education as well as research with expertise in undergraduate and postgraduate education at UCL including an international profile in Faculty Development. Her strategic leadership is acknowledged by the award of Principal Fellowship of Advance Higher Education, particularly for her work in governance and quality assurance in medical education. She leads UCL's Centre for Health Professionals Education which provides master's programmes and continuous professional development for an interprofessional audience.

Ann is an adjunct professor in medical education and family practice at the Chulabhorn Royal Academy in Thailand where she is leading an academic collaboration to establish a new medical school. She is also an associate member of the General Medical Council and Non-Executive Director West Hertfordshire Teaching Hospitals Trust

COORDINATING REVIEWER / INTERNATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE REPRESENTATIVE

Maureen McLaughlin joined Northumbria University as Academic Registrar in September 2021 where she leads an array of professional services supporting the student journey and works with 500+ staff members covering: Quality and Teaching Excellence, Registry Records and Returns, Academic Support, Student Engagement, Student Life and Wellbeing, Northumbria Language Centre, University Library, Graduate Futures.

Working closely with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education), they support the development and implementation of the Education Strategy. This includes policies and services to support student voice, student progression and student outcomes, the day-to-day management of quality and standards and compliance with external regulatory requirements, as well as preparations for Teaching Excellence Framework.

She has worked in the Higher Education sector since 1989 and has held senior administrative positions, both central and faculty based, in seven UK universities (MMU, Liverpool, UWE, South Wales, Gloucestershire, Warwick and Northumbria) as well as the post of Manager of the Committee Secretariat/Clerk to Council at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji.

She has a long history of working in quality assurance and enhancement nationally, joining QAA in 2009 as an Assistant Director leading on the training and deployment of reviewers, the introduction of student reviewers in England

and NI reviews. She led review teams in UK and overseas reviews of UK higher education provision in Singapore and China. She returned to QAA in autumn 2015 as Head of Universities and Standards, working with cross Agency teams to develop and deliver stakeholder engagement, institutional liaison programme, the redevelopment of the UK Quality Code, and the development and delivery of services, events, and activities for QAA's key stakeholders.

INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE
Dr Dujeepa Samarasekera is the Senior Director of Centre for Medical Education at the National University Singapore's School of Medicine. He also holds the portfolios as Senior Advisor, Centre for Development of Teaching and Learning at NUS and is a Senior Consultant with the Ministry of Health Singapore.

He is a globally recognised leader in Medical and Health Professions Education with demonstrated experience in leading high impact and transformational initiatives. Dujeepa leads the School of Medicine Quality Improvement team for education and at national level a member of the Medical Schools Review Committee (MSRC) in Singapore. Dujeepa is also a member of the Expert Advisory Group of European Union support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (SHARE).

He was the inaugural president of the College of Clinician Educators at the Academy of Medicine Singapore and was an Executive Board member of the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) from 2018-2021, presently chairs the WFME Risk Committee.

Dujeepa has won many accolades such as the NUS Medicine Special Recognition Award as a Role Model in 2015, Residents Choice Award by NUHS Residency from 2015-2021, Value in Action Award, awarded for excellence in innovation by NUHS in 2018, MILES award for outstanding contribution for global medical education in 2014, Excellence in Administration 2020, COVID Challenge Award for innovation at NUS Medicine and NUS Virtues Award 2021. Dujeepa is the Editor-in-Chief of The Asia Pacific Scholar journal and serves on a number

of editorial advisory boards. He has published widely and authored books. He is an Honorary Professor of several other universities and holds the Fellowships of Academies of Medicine Singapore, Malaysia, Medical Educators UK and Europe and is a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians Edinburgh.

LEARNER REPRESENTATIVE
Beatriz Atienza Carbonell is a PhD student in Medicine at the Universitat de València (UV) in Spain. She holds a bachelor's and master's degree in medicine from the UV and a master's degree in criminology from the Valencian International University, where she currently works as quality assurance manager.

She has extensive experience in higher education quality assurance and has participated as a reviewer in ENQA and 9 different ENQA member agencies reviewing programmes and institutions from Spain, Belgium, Germany, Kosovo, and Lebanon.

During her studies, she had the opportunity to take part in an Erasmus exchange at the Sorbonne University (France), where she completed the fifth year of her medical studies. She participated as well in a research internship at the Alexandrovska Hospital of Sophia (Bulgaria) and a clinical internship at the First Pavlov State Medical University Hospital of Saint Petersburg (Russia).

She has a vast national and international experience in promoting student engagement in higher education. She is a former Vice President for External Affairs of the National Council of Medical Students in Spain (CEEM) and Medical Education Director of the European Medical Students Association (EMSA). She is a former trainer of the Advocacy in Medical Education Training of the International Federation for Medical Students Associations (IFMSA) delivered in Taiwan and Greece.

INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVE
David Willey is a recently retired executive with more than twenty-five years at main board level in

higher education and central government in the UK. In his time at Bournemouth University, Regent's University London, and Ordnance Survey (GB), he has held executive roles in strategic leadership, major project delivery, change management and board governance. He has undertaken a number of interim appointments including as Interim Director General at Ordnance Survey and Interim Vice-Chancellor at Bournemouth University.

During his 40-year career in the public and private sectors, he has held responsibility for major IT, estates, and organisational change projects with resource responsibilities up to £120m p.a. His early career as a land surveyor took him to major mapping projects in East Africa and South America. He has substantial experience as a regional, national, and international representative building relationships and working in collaboration with academic partners across higher and further education, local and central government, and commercial business.

Following his retirement from executive roles, he was appointed as a lay trustee at SOAS University of London where he sits on the Board of Trustees, the Resources and Planning Committee, and the Governance and Nominations Committee.

### NATIONAL HE SECTORAL REPRESENTATIVE

Professor Pól Ó Dochartaigh is Deputy President and Registrar of the University of Galway since 2014, having previously been Professor of German and Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Ulster University. A native of Belfast, he holds BAs from Cardiff and Ulster universities, and a PhD and DLitt from Nottingham University. In the 1980s and 1990s he spent six years in Germany working, teaching English, and researching. He is fluent in English, German and Irish.

He has published eleven monographs and edited collections and some fifty peer-reviewed research papers. He works across German, Jewish, and Irish literature and history in the 20th century. He is a Member of the Royal Irish Academy, a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, and a former President of the Association for German Studies in Great Britain and Ireland.

In his leadership roles he has sought to promote excellence in teaching and research, access to HE for people from non-traditional backgrounds, sustainability in the curriculum, as well as equality, diversity and inclusion, and the Irish language. He chairs, inter alia, the University's Teaching and Learning, and Quality and Academic Promotions Committees.

He recently led the development of the University's first Academic Strategy, which charts a path forward for staff and students post-Covid in the teaching, learning and student experience space. From 2018-22 he chaired the CAO, Ireland's central system for university applications.
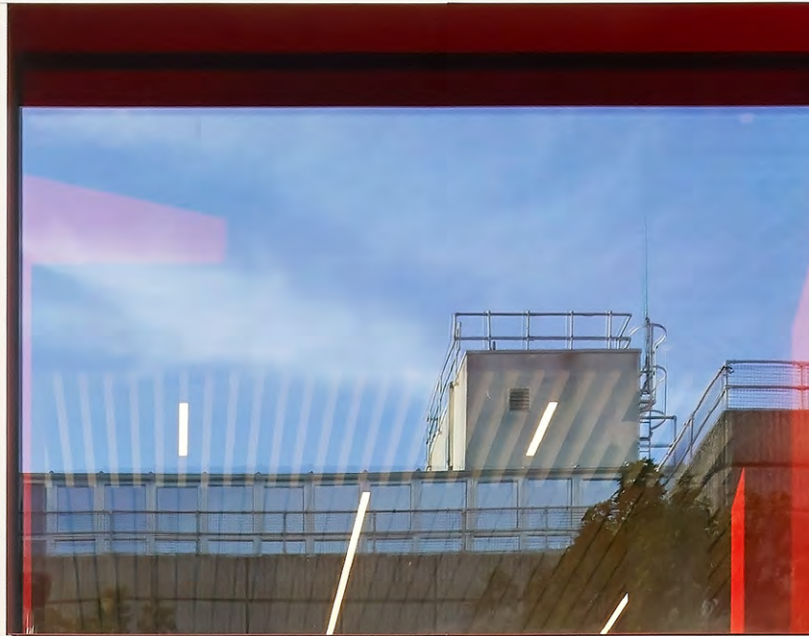
Section 1

Introduction and Context

Introduction and Context

Founded by Royal Charter in 1784 to establish and support professional standards for surgical training and practice in Ireland, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland – University of Medicine and Health Sciences (RCSI) functions today as both as a Professional Training Body and a University of Medicine and Health Sciences. It is a Recognised College of the National University of Ireland (NUI). RCSI gained degree awarding powers in 2010 and is a not-for-profit, independent institution with an exclusive focus on medicine and health science delivering a range of accredited degrees up to and including level 10 of the NFQ and accredited national training programmes including all surgical specialties, emergency medicine and radiology. In 2019, RCSI was granted University title, having been authorised to do so overseas since 2015.

RCSI is a leading international health sciences institution with undergraduate and postgraduate schools and faculties offering provision across a range of health sciences. As well as supporting several healthcare institutes and research centres, RCSI has campuses in Dublin, Bahrain, and Malaysia. Within RCSI there is an active and competitive research environment where its success is underlined by metrics placing it at the top of the Irish university sector and joint second in Ireland in the 2023 Times Higher University rankings.

RCSI has an increasingly diverse and multicultural student body, with a larger proportion of non-EU students than other higher education institutions in Ireland. 50% of RCSI students are Irish domiciled and 47% are domiciled outside the EU. In 2021/22, RCSI had a total student population of 4647 and an annual graduation of 1849, up from 1435 in the previous year. Numbers have increased steadily over the last five years as RCSI has expanded its course offerings and places across all levels of study. In line with national trends, the majority of RCSI students are female, most visibly in the postgraduate taught student population.

The review team notes RCSI's core values focus on: Respect, Collaboration, Scholarship, and Innovation and how it has built on these values by pursuing innovation in education, research, and healthcare delivery in Ireland and internationally. The review team also noted RCSI's mission to make a positive impact on local, national, and international level communities.

Section 2

Institutional Self-Evaluation
Report (ISER)

Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER)

METHODOLOGY

The RCSI Institutional Review drafting group, established in June 2022, supported the Quality Enhancement Office (QEO) in the production of the ISER. The institution ensured ownership of the ISER by staff and students through a communication and engagement plan at institutional level, through its governance committees (Awards and Qualifications Committee; Equality and Diversity and Inclusion Committee; Quality Committee; Academic Council; Medicine and Health Sciences Board; Audit and Risk Committee; Council and the Surgery and Postgraduate Facilities Board) and through its seven schools (Medicine; Nursing and Midwifery; Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences; Postgraduate Studies; Physiotherapy; Population Health; and The Graduate School of Healthcare Management). This approach ensured that all the divisions within RCSI, including those who are not traditionally student facing, were aware of and could contribute to the report.

The preparation of the ISER involved consultation with staff at RCSI Dublin and key international partners in Bahrain, Perdana University-RCSI and RUMC (RCSI and UCD Malaysia campus). Student engagement with the institutional review process involved both undergraduate (via the Students' Union) and postgraduate students (via the Postgraduate Students' Union).

The institution made use of feedback from routinely collected sources of information (internal and external student survey data, internal quality reviews) as well as collecting supplementary qualitative and quantitative data from students, staff, and external stakeholders.

The draft ISER was reviewed by Academic Council, Quality Committee, the Medicine and Health Sciences Board and the senior management team and feedback was brought together for the oversight of the ISER drafting group and the senior management team (SMT).

It is clear from the self-evaluation report and the main review visit that quality assurance and enhancement are of enormous importance to RCSI. The main review panel observed the enthusiasm and engagement of all staff and students it met during the institutional review process, and they all reported that the ISER was an accurate reflection of their institution.

ENGAGEMENT OF EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

RCSI includes external stakeholders within its own governance structure, and these members contribute actively to quality assurance and enhancement across the organisation. External stakeholders are present on governing boards and advisory committees including Council, Medicine and Health Sciences Board, the Surgery and Postgraduate Faculties Board, College Advisory Board and Quality Committee. External members are also present within RCSI's own quality assurance processes such as peer review groups, programme review panels, external examiners and external members of accreditation panels who represent the Professional Statutory Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). External stakeholders were also involved in supporting the development of the ISER, including the National University of Ireland (NUI).

Other parties involved in programme delivery include Munster Technological University, Dublin City Council and Dublin Fire Brigade and the Irish Hospice foundation. The RCSI is an academic partner of the RCSI hospital group which includes Beaumont Hospital, Connolly Hospital, Cavan and

Monaghan Hospital, Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, Louth County Hospital, the Rotunda Hospital, Children's Health Ireland (Temple Street and Crumlin), as well as a range of affiliated general practice providers and private hospitals.

There are examples within the ISER of working collaboratively with external stakeholders on national initiatives and priorities, as exemplified by participation in the work of the QQI National Academic Integrity Network to ensure robust approaches to academic standards.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ISER

The review team concurred that the RCSI's ISER was clear, comprehensive, and highly professional. The chapters covered the essential elements required by the core statutory quality assurance guidelines embedded in the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) process and included two additional chapters describing the approach to quality assurance of research and international education. Each of the chapters concluded with the institution's reflections and enhancement opportunities. Chapter 14 included 15 case studies supplying contextual and detailed exemplars illustrating in depth the main themes included in the main body of the report. The review team noted that there was a strong coherence between the annual quality reports (AQR) and the subsequent ISER. The ISER documented a deliberate and comprehensive approach to quality assurance and enhancement which was significantly enhanced during wide-ranging interviews held during the main review visit.

In addition to the ISER, there was a significant amount of supporting information shared with the review team prior to and during the review visit; this was extensive and allowed the review team to further explore potential key lines of enquiry.

The ISER provided a strong narrative and detailed descriptions which enabled an in-depth understanding of the institution. The review team agreed that greater use of metrics (internal and external) as an integral part of that narrative would have provided more measurable evidence of quality and provided more confidence in the

robustness of RCSI's approach to quality assurance and enhancement. During the visit, the review team learned of RCSI's ambitious plans to generate and synthesise datasets in order to provide comprehensive evidence to illustrate their progress and demonstrate effectiveness.

Section 3

Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Quality Assurance/ Accountability

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

The RCSI's vision, mission statement and core values ("We are leading the world to better health. A deep professional responsibility to enhance human health through endeavour, innovation and collaboration in education, research and service informs all that we do. Our mission, to educate, nurture and discover for the benefit of human health. RCSI's core values focus on: Respect, Collaboration, Scholarship, and Innovation.") collectively provide a strong guiding framework for an organisation, setting the direction and purpose for its activities. This vision statement communicates RCSI's ambition to be at the forefront of efforts to improve global health. It signifies leadership, innovation, and a commitment to making a positive difference to local and global health outcomes.

RCSI exhibits a strong institutional commitment and a culture for continuous quality improvement, demonstrating a proactive approach to enhancing educational standards. The institution actively engages with stakeholders, utilising systematic surveys to collect feedback. Regular feedback loops ensure that the institution stays attuned to the needs and opinions of its various stakeholders, enabling rapid responses to emerging challenges and perceived gaps in quality. The review team heard that the collected feedback from these surveys is analysed and disseminated both at leadership and operational/student levels and coordinated through the Quality Enhancement Office. However, the review team would have appreciated more insight into this data and details of its dissemination in order to be more confident that data is used to enable rapid adaptation and changes within the system.

The review team noted the inclusive leadership within RCSI, recognising its pivotal role in nurturing a positive and supportive organisational culture, while concurrently instilling a commitment to continuous quality improvement. The team's observation highlighted the leadership's significant impact on cultivating an atmosphere where staff members not only felt valued, well informed, and empowered but also experienced heightened morale. This inclusive approach actively fostered collaboration, serving as a conduit for establishing a solid foundation for sustained quality and growth within RCSI. **The review team commends the way in which RCSI leverages the benefits of its small size and flat structure to facilitate effective communications between stakeholders.**

RCSI's 2014 institutional review identified the importance of quality assuring placement learning which forms a significant and crucial element of health professionals' education. During the main review visit, the review team heard about robust practices in Pharmacy. The Affiliation for Pharmacy Practice Experiential Learning (APPEL) produces standards for placement providers and undertakes associated quality assurance. Students also have choice in placement, which was favourably commented on by students met during the review visit. The Irish Medical Council (IMC) has a process in place for approving placement providers for medicine and RCSI also monitors the quality of placements via evaluation questionnaires issued to students via the QEO. **The review team recommends that RCSI makes more effective use of the data gathered about medical placements to advance clinical education through increased transparency in reporting.**

Gathering input from stakeholders on the learning environment is important. The review team noted that student satisfaction with teaching and learning processes, the National Student Survey

for 2021 and 2022 revealed positive feedback at RCSI, with students giving higher ratings in many areas compared to the national average. To further enhance the quality assurance process, the team suggested that it would be beneficial to complement this feedback by triangulating data from student exam performance and graduate achievements. This approach would enable more informed value judgments about programme strengths and effectively identify areas that may require improvement. The review team discussed with the institution the perceived gap in tracking graduates. By greater employment of both qualitative and quantitative data, valuable insights into the effectiveness of RCSI's education in real-world scenarios could be provided, helping to refine educational approaches. **The review team recommends that RCSI should make more effective and visible use of data to underpin decision making.**

As part of QQI's quality framework of engagement with HEIs, RCSI submits an Annual Quality Report (AQR) to QQI. The AQR is published in full on QQI's website. The most recent AQR covers the period 1 September 2021 to 31 August 2022 and has informed the CINNTE cycle of institutional review of RCSI. Part A of the AQR sets out in detail the internal framework and procedures for governance of QA within RCSI. The QEO has also published the document, Quality Assurance Framework 2022-23, which sets out in detail the governance structures and procedures. The framework and procedures were reviewed in depth by the review team and shown to be robust.

RCSI has a strong foundation in quality enhancement, driven by institutional vision, mission, values and with faculty dedication and strong stakeholder engagement. The review team found that the institution might further enhance its practices by adopting comprehensive evaluation frameworks, improving graduate tracking methods, involving PSRBs more actively in internal quality processes, and addressing attainment gaps. These efforts could ensure a more nuanced understanding of quality and lead to targeted enhancements, aligning RCSI's educational practices with the highest standards of excellence.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

The ISER asserts that RCSI aims to develop and maintain a quality culture. Based on the evidence presented to and interrogated by the review team, the team concludes that this aim continues to be achieved. The review team observed several key elements within the institution's quality framework which reinforced the importance of quality within RCSI. For example:

- The role of the Quality Committee fulfils a critical role in RCSI's quality framework. The Committee is chaired by the Vice Chancellor (VC) which sends a clear signal about the importance that the VC and the institution place on quality throughout RCSI. Noting positively the inclusion of external specialists within the committee's membership, **the review team commends the added value of the contribution provided by external committee members.**
- The RCSI Strategic Plan 2018-22 placed significant emphasis on quality as one of its three foundational elements. The recently published new Strategic Plan 2023-2027, Innovating for a Healthier Future, retains the explicit underpinning of quality as one of its four key principles.

The review team commends the leadership, shown through the actions and behaviours of the executive team, in prioritising quality within RCSI.

The governance framework for RCSI is set out in section 1.1 of the 2023 AQR. The framework reflects the incremental development of RCSI over the past two decades.

Periodic reviews of governance within RCSI are well described in the ISER. The review team recognised the proactive approach to ensuring governance is fit for purpose. However, the team found some of the structures of governance overly complicated and, in some cases, confusing. For example:

- Membership of Council remains heavily weighted towards professional surgeons through their status as Fellows of the College,

with only two lay representatives who may bring useful expertise from outside the profession. The inclusion of lay members with specialist and relevant expertise on some Council committees is commendable. As the nature of higher education in Ireland continues to change, RCSI may also wish to consider expanding the number of lay members on Council with expertise in other fields of education and business. This may enhance the effectiveness of Council by placing RCSI at an advantage when considering new pressures and opportunities.

- The review team questioned the appropriateness of having the same chair (the Chair of Council) for both the Boards for Medicine and Health Sciences and for Surgery and Postgraduate Faculties, to which both Boards report. The review team advised that separation of the governance and academic governance responsibilities, as is the norm in Irish HEIs, would create a more robust governance structure by securing greater independence with appropriate checks and balances.

- The SMT plays a key role in the management and governance of quality. The review team commented on the low numbers of academic representatives on the SMT, albeit the team is led through the academic roles of Vice Chancellor (VC) and two Deputy Vice Chancellors (DVCs).

As RCSI grows in size and complexity, the review team concurred that it would be important for the institution to continue to review periodically its governance structures to ensure that assurance on matters of academic quality in particular is maintained. Equally, governance will continue to benefit from the independent challenge and support that informed external members can bring.

The RCSI Quality Framework 2022-23 is published on the RCSI website and sets out in detail the quality procedures and governance structures. **The review team recommends that, as RCSI continues to grow, it should keep under review the appropriateness of the structures and processes of governance.**

The review team also commented positively on the inclusion of students and representation of their views in many aspects and at many levels of governance. In the team's discussions with students, it was clear that students clearly recognise the value RCSI places on their views and perspectives. The students met by the review team demonstrated a high level of commitment to supporting the university in its pursuit of quality.

The function of management of quality in RCSI's international campuses is clearly set out in the Quality Assurance Framework 2022-23, Annex A. The balance is well struck between devolving responsibilities for quality where local regulatory needs must be satisfied, and those managed centrally, to ensure consistency and integrity of academic standards across RCSI.

The review team explored the role of the Academic Integrity Working Group (AIWG) which reports to the Quality Committee. It has a specific role in ensuring policies relating to academic quality are kept up to date to reflect for example, the emerging impact of artificial intelligence and plagiarism. AIWG also is an example of good practice where its parent committee, the Quality Committee, identified emerging risks and put in place a mechanism that was fit for purpose, proportionate and mitigated the risks to academic quality.

All constituent departments of RCSI are subject periodically to internal quality reviews (IQRs) which are overseen and administered by the QEO. The scope of the reviews includes professional support units and overseas branch campuses, in addition to the schools and academic units based in Dublin. The reviews include self-assessment, external validation, and quality improvement planning. It was evident from discussions with academic and professional leaders throughout the university, that the IQRs were a valuable tool in quality enhancement and continuous improvement. **The review team commends the inclusion of professional services within the scope of the reviews, recognising that quality enhancement requires a full-institution commitment across internal organisational boundaries.**

PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Oversight of the development, enhancement, and periodic review of programmes of education rests with the Awards and Qualifications Committee (A&QC). The review team explored in depth the role of A&QC and the procedures which it oversees.

Periodic Programmatic Reviews

All programmes leading to awards in the NFQ are subject to periodic quality reviews which build on a self-evaluation report by the relevant programme team, with support from the Registry. A review panel of three members, two of whom are external to RCSI, undertake a two-day review. The outcome of the review is presented both to the MHSB and to the NUI Senate. The reviews, which are overseen by the A&QC, are considered within RCSI as a positive mechanism for ensuring and enhancing quality at programme level. The review team concurred with the view within RCSI that programmatic reviews provide a highly effective mechanism in enhancing quality at programme level, with key elements of self-reflection and evaluation and of external and independent input.

Although the review team was assured that the programmatic reviews make effective use of data analysis as an evidence base from which to draw conclusions and recommendations, the team was unable to access this analysis directly: this factor contributed to the team's wider conclusion that analytical data is not used as widely, transparently or effectively as it could be within RCSI.

New Programmes

The review team considered the process for the development and approval of new programmes. A&QC is responsible for the approval and validation of new educational programmes leading to RCSI awards.

The review team was advised that there was a strategic and pragmatic approach for the development and approval of new programmes; individual proposals are assessed on a case-by-case basis. This may be a useful approach while the number of new programmes remains low, and

the review team considered examples of how this has been beneficial to accommodate different programme sizes and complexities. However, with nearly 100 programmes now in RCSI's portfolio, the review team advocated for the consideration of a more standardised approach to programme development and review.

While A&QC, reporting to MHSB, oversees the process for approval of new programmes, SMT signs off on the business case for new proposals. The SMT typically considers impact on resources and the commercial viability of the programme based on market projections before A&QC invests significant time in considering the academic proposal. External reviewers advise on broader academic elements of a new programme, for example on entry requirements for new programmes. Separating and sequencing the approvals on finance/resources and academic design and content ensures that energy and effort is not diverted by developing an academic proposal that is not deemed to be commercially or financially viable, or which has a business risk profile that is not acceptable. The review team considers this to be a pragmatic approach, while recognising the frustration expressed by some staff associated with the length of time that the whole process takes.

The review team was provided with examples of recent enhancements in the process. For example, review panel members reviewed issues alongside proposers as they emerged rather than in response to the completion of a proposal prior to presentation to A&QC. The review team observed that this change in process was seen by A&QC members as a positive enhancement and concurred that this was likely to lead to improvements in both efficiency and outcomes. It also reduces the risk of significant effort being expended unnecessarily in the development of an unsuccessful proposal. The change also demonstrated the ability and willingness of A&QC to self-reflect on its processes and effect changes where improvements had been identified. **The review team commends the robust process for, and oversight of new programme developments and approvals as exemplified by A&QC.**

STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT, AND DEVELOPMENT

Through the ISER and meetings with staff, the review team received a clear picture of how staff are managed, motivated, and led. The team concluded that the culture of "mission driven, and values underpinned" is manifest at all levels and in all parts of the university.

The review team commended the emphasis placed on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and acknowledged RCSI's achievement of the Athena Swan Bronze award as a successful manifestation of this approach. The Athena Swan award was cited widely by those met by the review team as a positive success and a clear statement of commitment by the university. The review team learned about some challenges facing RCSI in recruiting and rewarding staff presented by the cost of living and an international recruitment environment where rewards offered by RCSI may not always be competitive. These challenges are acknowledged by senior management and by HR colleagues who have brought creativity and expertise in adopting mechanisms and structures which enable RCSI to remain attractive as an employer. The review team experienced first-hand the enthusiasm and commitment of staff to RCSI which reinforces the outcomes of staff surveys indicating that staff are overwhelmingly supportive of working at RCSI, also reflected in the low turnover of staff in most areas.

The use of Professional Development Planning (PDP) is clearly an effective mechanism for managing and motivating staff. The review team regarded the removal of a singular performance rating in 2020 as a positive step in overall staff development. The team learnt how the PDP process assists staff in making informed choices about research, while academic freedom is respected and preserved. **The review team commends the value of the PDP process and access to learning and development opportunities for staff.**

Academic promotions have both research and a teaching and learning pathway, in line with contemporary sectoral practice. The review team heard that applicants are asked to indicate whether they have had any periods of protected leave. Although the review team considered that this is a positive step aimed at contextualising an individual's achievements and noted that it was understood by staff in this way also, it was not clear to the team exactly how this information is used. The review team heard that the academic promotions process was not always perceived as sufficiently transparent. For example, some candidates for promotion commented that they had been unaware of the quota for annual promotion opportunities, leaving some feeling demotivated and unsure of the reasons why they had been unsuccessful. Furthermore, staff reported being unclear about how personal circumstances were accounted for on the application form. The review team advised that greater clarity about this process would be welcomed and **recommends that increased transparency of the process and relevant criteria for success would help candidates in their applications and in managing their expectations.**

The review team heard that opportunities for promotion and for pay progression within professional services were comparatively limited, resulting in some staff leaving RCSI to continue their career development. The team encourages RCSI to continue to monitor turnover of professional services staff and potential loss of talent, and to review the framework for their career development within RCSI.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

RCSI is deeply committed to delivering high-quality education to its students, with carefully designed curricula that adopt an evidence-based, innovative approach. This dedication has been consistently maintained throughout the last two institutional strategies, specifically 'Growth and Excellence' (RCSI Strategy 2013-2017) and 'Transforming Healthcare Education, Research, and Service' (RCSI Strategy 2018-2022). Over the past decade, these initiatives have contributed to the development of a distinctive RCSI approach, encapsulated in the RCSI Learning, Teaching, and Assessment (LTA) Strategy (2023).

To strengthen and advance the transformed approach to learning, teaching, and assessment, a Learning, Teaching, and Assessment (LTA) Committee has been established. This committee, appointed as the custodian for the Strategy 2023-2027, will oversee, evaluate, and consider the implementation of the LTA Strategy across existing and future programme offerings. The review team remarked upon the added value to RCSI in establishing this committee.

In the realm of curriculum development, over the past few years, three key undergraduate programmes have either completed or are currently engaged in the process of curriculum transformation initiatives. **The review team commends the approach to curriculum design which places emphasis on enabling diverse teaching and learning approaches, incorporating students as co-creators and active stakeholders in the design process through the StEP (Student Engagement and Partnership) programme.**

The ISER highlighted the establishment of a Health Professions Education Centre (HPEC), which directly supports RCSI in advancing its teaching and learning objectives. RCSI provides accredited faculty development through a Postgraduate Diploma in Health Professions Education, open to all teaching faculty and having graduated 298 participants (2014-2022) (ISER, p.26). **The review team commends the development of the Health Professions Education Centre (HPEC) with its range of opportunities to develop health professional educators.** This includes short courses and the provision of the Postgraduate Diploma in Health Professions Education for those who teach.

Faculty members benefit from various resources aimed at enriching the students' learning journey. These include a facilitated Peer Observation of Teaching process, a consultancy service on educational practices, and assistance for digitally engaged learning. Drawing on their extensive expertise, faculty members ensure students receive the latest and most pertinent information in their respective fields. **The review team commends the close links fostered with clinical placement providers and a responsive approach to programme/organisational development, mindful of the healthcare economy nationally and internationally.**

The review team suggested that it would be advisable for RCSI to carefully evaluate the pedagogic equilibrium between the benefits of early patient contact and the utilisation of simulation, recognising its influence on the overall student experience and their readiness for the workplace. An additional consideration is the current practice at RCSI, where students are often assigned to clinical placements before engaging in simulation exercises. This sequence may inadvertently undermine the full potential of simulation-based learning, which is designed to enhance clinical skills and critical decision-making abilities before direct patient interaction. **The review team recommends that RCSI should reassess the sequencing of clinical placements and simulation sessions, ensuring that students first benefit from the comprehensive preparation offered by simulation experiences prior to embarking on clinical rotations.**

While the ISER did not provide commentary on interprofessional education, during the visit the review team acknowledged the existence of some interprofessional teaching initiatives. However, **the review team recommends that a more profound transformation in curricula be implemented to enhance opportunities for students to engage in interprofessional collaborative learning and practice.** This deliberate change could significantly contribute to fostering a more comprehensive and integrated educational experience for students. **The review team recommends that within the realms of interprofessional education, RCSI should develop further opportunities for students to learn and practise together, recognising that this is common practice in professional provision.**

As mentioned in the ISER and during the main visit, RCSI provides an outstanding learning environment. The main campus houses Europe's most advanced clinical simulation centre. Known as RCSI SIM, this centre aims to enhance patient safety, education, and research through simulation-based learning techniques. The cutting-edge facilities allow students to practice clinical skills

in a secure environment before engaging with patients. Ongoing developments, including a €95 million expansion project and a €22 million Education and Research Centre in Dublin, underline RCSI's commitment to supporting programme development. Moreover, RCSI Bahrain has approved plans to expand its campus, increasing the current usable area threefold by the academic year 2025-26. **The review team commends the wide range of academic and practice-based facilities provided for students, underpinned by its capital investment programme.**

ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS

The RCSI Examination and Assessment Regulations outline thorough procedures for the academic assessment of taught programmes, incorporating essential principles closely aligned with the QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines. These regulations define standards and provide guidance to learners on matters like academic integrity, grade boundaries, progression, supplemental examinations, and appeals. Additionally, for each programme year and module, detailed information is available through "Marks and Standards" documents, offering comprehensive insights into the associated assessments. The review team noted in particular that the Director of Psychometrics offers crucial psychometric assistance to individuals engaged in the development and evaluation of various types of assessments.

Established in 2020, the Academic Integrity Working Group (AIWG) comprises representatives from faculty, staff, students, and international campuses. The AIWG is committed to raising awareness and understanding of the significance of academic integrity. Furthermore, students have access to online tools, such as the Turnitin, an online similarity tool, enabling them to assess their own work.

Assessment security is under continuous review, with ongoing enhancements like the adoption of a unified suite of tools for assessment processes. The Practique platform is employed for creating, storing, and managing assessment content, ensuring secure access for faculty and external

examiners. The system also facilitates online on-site delivery of written examinations, mitigating paper-related risks and promoting sustainability.

In the quest to improve the quality of assessments, a recent introduction to the programmatic assessment in direct entry medicine, starting in 2022/2023, involved the integration of progress testing. This innovative approach, made possible by the curriculum development process for transformative learning in medicine, aims to reduce reliance on high-stakes assessments, addressing issues highlighted by students in past feedback surveys. These programmatic assessments utilise Kaizen, serving as an e-portfolio, providing real-time feedback and an assessment dashboard, and enabling engagement with academic and welfare supports. **The review team commends the successful implementation of Practique and Kaizen platforms for closing the assessment loop in dynamic fashion.**

Regarding differential attainment and awarding gaps, the review team noted that this is not routinely and systematically monitored. In line with good practice observed in the broader HE sector, the review team would suggest that the identification of any possible gaps with appropriate action taken to minimise them if and where they exist is crucial for ensuring fairness in examination processes. A thorough review of RCSI's approach to identifying and addressing any such gaps would enhance transparency and underline the institution's commitment to fairness and equality in education. **The review team recommends that RCSI should develop a deeper understanding of differential attainment and award gaps given the nature of their student cohorts and the importance in demonstrating transparency and fairness in examination processes.**

While the review team appreciated the move to a programmatic approach to assessments, rather than one based purely on end-of-year assessments, it recognised that this could place a heavier assessment burden on students. The team also appreciated that RCSI had reduced the number of progress tests students now undertake. **The review team, noting recent assessment**

literature, recommends that RCSI should review the efficacy of the process of negative marking and its impact on the student experience.

External examiners (EE) are a key element of the quality assurance of assessments. While RCSI identifies suitable EEs, they are formally appointed by NUI. The review team saw a document detailing a shared approach to quality assurance adopted, and the ISER states that improvements to the process are ongoing. EE reports are submitted to NUI in the first instance, and this can have an impact on the timeliness with which RCSI receives the reports and its capacity to implement timely feedback.

SUPPORTS FOR LEARNERS

RCSI provides a range of supports for learners including academic and pastoral support, student-life support, IT and campus support as well as postgraduate support. Overall, support tools for learners attracted positive feedback from students, both in RCSI Student Focus Groups and during the interviews conducted as part of the main visit by the review team. **The review team commends the range and accessibility of support provided for students across programmes and locations.**

RCSI articulates its dedication to supporting students with an extensive induction and orientation programme designed for new students undertaking principal undergraduate programmes. Commencing at the beginning of each semester in their first year, this six-week initiative involves the allocation of an academic mentor/personal tutor during the registration process. However, during various interviews conducted as part of the main visit, the review team noted areas for enhancement in this orientation programme, particularly instances where assigned tutors did not actively reach out to students. Therefore, **the review team recommends that RCSI should strengthen its personal tutoring model, ensuring a consistent level of support at all levels for students throughout their academic journeys.**

To fortify the overall support framework, the review team advised that RCSI should formalise training for all research supervisors to ensure they are fully

briefed and have full understanding of their role and responsibilities. Building upon the observations made during interviews conducted as part of the main visit, highlighting areas for improvement in the orientation program for undergraduate students, the team wished to extend similar scrutiny to the induction of postgraduate students. While the review team is aware of the challenges of providing a rolling programme of induction events for PGRs because of the frequency of their registration periods, however, the students met by the team advised that they were generally unaware of the recorded and other resources made available to support them. Ensuring a smooth and more attuned induction process will establish a robust foundation for PGR students and align with RCSI's evident dedication to providing comprehensive support to all students throughout their academic journey. **The review team recommends that RCSI should ensure that postgraduate students have accessed the induction processes in a timely manner. The team also recommends that RCSI should formalise training for all research supervisors to ensure they have full understanding of their role and responsibilities.**

To enhance the support infrastructure, **the review team recommends that RCSI should develop and implement a comprehensive training programme and support system specifically tailored for Students' Union officers and class representatives**. While there is a training programme in place for learning community student leaders, there is currently no equivalent provision for those in Students' Union roles or serving as class representatives. Drawing from insights gained during the main review visit interviews, the team suggest that extending targeted training to Students' Union officers and class representatives would empower them to play a pivotal role in fostering a positive and supportive academic environment in their specific roles.

The review team found much to commend across the available support services. However, it noted a lack of awareness among students regarding their availability and the appropriate channels for accessing them. Consequently, the review team strongly advises that RCSI should implement comprehensive communication strategies to

ensure that all students are well-informed about the range of support services available to them and are enabled to readily access these resources.

INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

The strategic plan of RCSI for 2018-2022 strongly prioritised the investment in IT infrastructure, systems, and capacity building. IT oversees the management of information systems and security, with relevant policies accessible on the staff portal. These encompass guidelines on data encryption, access control, remote access, backup, and recovery, as well as protocols for email and internet usage. In terms of quality assurance, RCSI undergoes two external audits annually: one for IT and Cyber Security conducted by Deloitte Ireland, and another for IT General Controls overseen by PwC Ireland. Internal audits are carried out on a three-year cycle and are reported on annually, and these have led to, for example, a stress test on cyber security.

RCSI makes use of several data sources, including Quercus, Agresso, CampusTIES, Pratique, Kaizen, and Feedback Surveys. However, in recognising progress made to date by RCSI, the review team noted a deficiency in the lack of a comprehensive data governance framework, impeding the holistic view and access of the data set across the range of RCSI departments and services. Consequently**, the review team recommends that RCSI should continue to enhance the use of data across the university including the embedding of dashboards or similar tools to enhance the holistic management and accessibility of data across these multiple sources.**

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

The work of the university in this area has become a significant strength, as evidenced in the relevant section of the ISER report, which was both reflective and the most data-rich section of the report. Whether attracting new students, communicating with current students and staff or with other external stakeholders and the wider public, it is clear that RCSI has developed a degree of professionalism in this space that is commensurate with the high aims of the institution

to be a leader both nationally and internationally.

The review team found that communication of clear, accurate and current information was considered critical to the achievement of RCSI's strategic goals. The review team met with expert staff which were dedicated to the provision of accurate, timely and up to date information to prospective students, learners, staff, and the public. It was clear from the meetings that the strategies outlined in the ISER were largely effective, and that staff and students alike generally felt informed about the institution and considered themselves to be in tune with the institutional mission.

Some of the work in this area has been put on a new footing relatively recently – the Marketing Team was established only in 2020, for example. There was some acknowledgement from RCSI colleagues in the meetings with the review team that even greater collaboration between the communications team and academic and research colleagues could further enhance the university's reputation, by building on excellence in teaching and research across the institution to enhance the university's role as a thought leader across the wider sector.

OTHER PARTIES INVOLVED IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

A wide range of external partners contribute to the successful delivery of the university's mission, including hospitals, accreditation partners (both in Ireland and overseas), professional bodies and other partners. This engagement and range of well managed partnerships ensure that students gain the necessary professional expertise during their studies so that graduates are fit to practice in their respective professions, with qualifications that are properly accredited and recognised. This is an essential aspect of ensuring that RCSI graduates are among the most sought after in Ireland and overseas, which in turn plays a significant part in the recruitment of students and staff.

a. Hospital Partners
Beaumont Hospital in Dublin and the Bon Secours group (a private, not-for-profit group), which operates hospitals throughout Ireland, are key

hospital partners. The review team met senior representatives of both partner bodies who emphasised that education is at the core of their engagement. Bon Secours was closely involved in setting up the Professional Diploma in Clinical Leadership programme with the RCSI, and more than 100 staff to date in the Bon Secours group have completed RCSI programmes. Beaumont Hospital also emphasises the importance of education and ensuring it is core to its operations, by ensuring continued access for students to clinicians thus affirming that "education remains central to our ethos" [ISER].

b. Professional Bodies and Accreditation
RCSI is a designated awarding body and is empowered under Irish legislation to make its own awards. However, it is also a Recognised College of the National University of Ireland (NUI), and its degrees and other qualifications are degrees and qualifications of the NUI. While this relationship has evolved and changed as a result of RCSI's degree awarding powers, the arrangement was described to the review team as a "complex but effective relationship." Although the relationship had changed as a result of the conferment of degree awarding powers in RCSI, a close working relationship remains in place, for example through the programme awards. NUI formally appoints

external examiners and receives external examiner reports, the NUI Registrar co-chairs award boards, and the NUI jointly appoints external assessors for new programme proposals. The review team found the processes to manage this relationship to be robust.

Among the bodies which accredit the university's academic activities are the Irish Medical Council (IMC), the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI), CORU, which regulates Health and Social Care professionals, and the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI). Standards are benchmarked internationally, against equivalents in the UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, while all of these are also required to abide by the 2005 EU Directive on Professional Qualifications. All PSRBs consulted during the review reported that there had been no issues with accreditation. In respect of fitness to practice, all bodies reported that instances of students not achieving this status were rare and that there is no higher incidence of this in RCSI than in other institutions.

The review team acknowledged RCSI's positive approach to stakeholder engagement, and noted the enthusiasm with which representatives from Professional, Statutory, and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) wished to be further involved in internal

quality processes, especially in the programme review processes. The team observed that PSRB insights could provide valuable industry perspectives and more seamless alignment of programmes with regulatory guidelines.

c. Other Partners

The Dublin Fire Brigade formed a partnership with the RCSI in 2000 to support the training and upskilling of paramedics for the ambulance services they provide across Dublin City. This is reviewed periodically and discussed at the Joint Programme Board, which meets at regular intervals. The Irish Hospice Foundation runs two master's programmes and a professional certificate in collaboration with the RCSI, which are also subject to professional accreditation in the areas of counselling and bereavement. Munster Technological University, in collaboration with Castel Education and the RCSI, delivers International Medical and Pharmacy Commencement Programmes in Tralee, Co. Kerry. RCSI approves marks, sets standards, and appoints external examiners. These programmes offer specific pathways for international students to pursue careers in medicine, pharmacy and physiotherapy and are reviewed periodically. Following the review visit, the review team subsequently saw evidence that the management of partnerships with other HEIs and organisations are well managed and that robust procedures are in place to support programme development, monitoring and review in a collaborative manner. This evidence reassured the review team that the review and governance structures ensure that collaborative programmes- meet the needs of students and align with relevant professional standards accordingly.

d. Conclusion

The review team concluded that engagement with external bodies in the context of quality assurance and building positive relationships is a strong feature of the university's ethos. Regular meetings are held between the relevant bodies and RCSI, both formal and informal, and the external representatives met by the team during the review visit reported a culture of "positive collaboration" and "a collaborative and supportive relationship" [ISER].

SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

As noted in section 2, the review team found the ISER to be a comprehensive document that provided the basis for further exploration of the RCSI's activities. In the context of monitoring and review, the review team sought to explore the extent to which the university engages in reflective practices beyond the beginning and end of any review and accreditation cycles. As the ISER states: "Self-monitoring and review are at the heart of RCSI's culture". These processes are led by the Quality Enhancement Office (QEO), which is "the functional professional service with responsibility for implementation of processes and the operation of the Quality Committee," as stated in one meeting. This office also acted as the coordinating hub for the development of the ISER and the Institutional Profile.

a. Self-Evaluation

At the time of the review visit, RCSI had recently concluded its previous strategic plan Transforming Healthcare Education, Research and Service (2018-2022) and had just commenced its new plan Innovating for a Healthier Future (2023-2027). A strategy tracker is used by SMT to monitor progress against milestones. RCSI undertakes multiple surveys of staff, students and governance committee members, in addition to focus groups, as part of its self-evaluation.

b. Monitoring

The review team learned that surveys are an important part of monitoring, although it was noted that the usual caveats around surveys applied, for example variable participation rates.

c. Reviews

The QEO, in line with sector recognised practice, administers a six to seven-year cycle of review for both academic and professional service units which, in the case of the academic units, complements the professional bodies' accreditation cycle. International regulators include Malaysian Medical Council, Malaysian Qualifications Agency, the Kingdom of Bahrain Education and Training Quality Authority and the Bahrain Higher Education Council.

A programme of internal quality reviews is also undertaken by the Bahrain QEO., A Peer Review Group is appointed to act as critical friends, in undertaking the review. This group typically includes external experts and student reviewers. External stakeholders are invited to meet with the review group including to provide public perspectives. A thematic analysis was carried out in 2022 after some twenty-nine quality reviews, and this led to follow-up actions at both departmental and institutional level.

d. Conclusion

Overall, the review team found that there is a strong culture of self-evaluation, monitoring and review that involves both internal and external stakeholders as well as independent reviewers. Moreover, there is a clear culture of identifying and acting upon potential enhancements that can be made from these processes. The review team heard details of the arrangements made regarding a new international partnership and the delivery of a new programme. During the planning phase of this project the main review team understood how RCSI's mission, strategy, governance, and quality assurance processes worked together providing evidence of best practice in strategic programme development.

RESEARCH

RCSI is among the leading academic institutes in Ireland for research output and impact, and its bibliometric data compare very favourably with other Irish third level institutions. As a health science-focussed institution, it places a premium on translational research, with a clear focus on the development of medicines, devices, technologies, and system changes to tackle important healthcare issues, inform policy and clinical practice and enhance the quality of education of healthcare professionals for the benefit of society and patients. Research innovation and collaboration with industry and with other third-level institutions, both nationally and internationally, is at the core of this. RCSI leads or is a partner in thirteen research centres or training programmes, including four SFI inter-institutional research centres. The review team noted that there have been notable increases in research income and research output in recent years as the university has expanded its activities,

and that this has also included increased research activity in its Bahrain campus.

a. Research Strategy

The review team found that a clear strategy to enhance and deepen existing research strengths is in place. As part of this, the StAR programme for the strategic recruitment of high potential research-focused academic roles has clearly been successful. There are six research clusters and seven emerging areas of excellence. The review team observed how RCSI has measured its success using the standard metrics (research income, citations, international publications, grant income, industry collaboration) and has also tracked its impact in policy and practice, nationally and internationally. Progress against RCSI's strategic research aims is measured using an institutional strategy tracker, which is updated by milestone leads every quarter. **The review team commends RCSI's commitment to the development of educational research.**

Sustainability and EDI feature in the strategy. For example, Green Lab accreditation is a KPI for all labs, while all capital projects focus on sustainability. Embedding the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG) in the culture is a current aim. Similarly, the team found that several positive measures around EDI have been taken in respect of workload allocation models and mentoring. This focus is captured in RCSI's recent Institutional Athena Swan Bronze renewal submission. The review team heard that well received and valued supports are in place for those returning to work from protected leave. Although RCSI's consideration of EDI analytics has focussed primarily on gender to date, it was noted that the university has recently broadened this focus to include other protected categories.

b. Research Governance

The university has a Research Strategy Committee, whose function is to identify "strategic opportunities to grow RCSI research and innovation activities and improve the University's research performance and impact" [ISER]. Research ethics is overseen by the Animal Research Ethics Committee (AREC) and the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), which are served by a common chair and convenor. The

review team heard how these bodies evaluate ethical dimensions of research and issue ethical approval, thereby ensuring that research is conducted ethically and providing "a level of protection for the researchers, participants, and the institution."

Given the nature and increasing volume of the research, the review team noted that the work needed to ensure that ethical standards are met can be both expensive and time consuming, and this work continues to grow as the University expands. Many of the challenges are external, and ethical considerations and alignment with core values and mission inform all decisions about new collaborations, such as international joint PhD programmes, with world-class centres. The review team suggested that RCSI could mitigate some of the challenges in this area by ensuring that resourcing keeps pace with growth.

c. Research Metrics

The review team heard that the metrics used by the university are entirely in line with those used by other Irish HEIs, and the institutional performance ranks among the best in Ireland. Among the research metrics presented in the institutional report were Industry Collaboration, Citation Count, Citations per Publication, Publications in Q1 Journal, Publications in Top 10% Journal Percentiles, Field-Weighted Citation Impact, International Collaboration and more. The review team observed that in almost all research measures the university is in the top half of Irish third-level institutions that have a medical school.

d. Research Supports

The university has in place a principles-based workload allocation model and mentoring system for staff. The review team heard that staff are encouraged in their research to aim for quality over quantity, targeting top journals that are open access, and DORA principles inform mentoring.

As noted above, additional support is put in place for staff returning from protected leave and crucially, significant support has also been put in place for those recruited under the StAR scheme. **The review team also commends the development of positive and supportive research community and development framework which enables early career researchers to thrive.**

The review team observed lively discussion across the field about authorship order and how this is decided. The team noted that this is conducted in a collegial fashion in the university, and the team would encourage continued engagement, in the interests of career development, with this enlightened approach to authorship ranking.

e. Postgraduate research students and postdoctoral colleagues

The review team found a wide range of support to facilitate postgraduate and postdoctoral supervision and career progression. The application of this support varies, and among postdoctoral students in particular, this challenge was deemed to be similar to those in other HEIs, where postdoctoral students often face challenges in "putting down roots" because of the short-term nature of their contracts. The review team recognised this as a common sector challenge not one particular to RCSI itself.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

The Alignment of the Institution's Mission and Targets for Quality

The review team found that RCSI's vision mission statement and core values provide a strong guiding framework for the University, underpinning the direction of and purpose for its activities. This vision statement articulates RCSI's ambition to be at the forefront of efforts to improve global health and it signifies leadership, innovation, and a commitment to making a positive difference in the local and global health outcomes.

Innovative and Effective Practices for Quality Enhancement

The review team found that RCSI has a strong foundation in quality enhancement, built on its approach to quality assurance as a tool for institutional learning and driven by institutional vision, mission, values and with faculty dedication and strong stakeholder engagement. The team concurred that RCSI might further enhance its practices by adopting comprehensive evaluation frameworks, improving graduate tracking methods,

involving PSRBs more actively, and addressing attainment gaps. These efforts would ensure a more nuanced understanding of quality and lead to targeted enhancements, aligning RCSI's educational practices with the highest standards of excellence. **The review team recommends that RCSI should review the way in which it tracks graduates once they have left the institution using qualitative and quantitative data to understand trends as well as preparedness for practice.**

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION
Implementation of Access, Transfer and Progression

Access
RCSI provides comprehensive information about student admissions, covering both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, accessible through various platforms including prospectuses, webpages, and online tools. These resources offer detailed insights into academic prerequisites, program specifics, financial considerations, as well as practical guidance related to travel, visas, and accommodation. Furthermore, the online portal grants access to some policy documents,

bolstering transparency for applicants.

The review team found that the employment of skilled copywriters plays a critical role in ensuring that the disseminated information is not only culturally sensitive but also easily comprehensible for international audiences. This commitment to clarity is vital for prospective students, fostering fairness in the selection process.

Additionally, the team observed that RCSI recognises the significance of personalised assistance exemplified through the employment of dedicated staff members to furnish prospective students with detailed information. The review team found that these staff members had a high level of cultural awareness which supported the development of a highly effective multicultural environment (including overseas campuses) in which RCSI provides a positive student experience for its international students.

To further enhance the applicant experience, the review team suggests consideration of the inclusion of specific details about campus facilities. This might encompass information about available accommodations, as well as introductions to key faculty and staff members who

would be pivotal contacts for incoming students, both for general inquiries and during their initial weeks at the institution. Additionally, RCSI might consider the value of providing insights into the array of extracurricular activities available for incoming students as a means of enriching their understanding of campus life, promoting a holistic view of their potential academic journey. This holistic approach would not only enrich the informational resources but also nurture a sense of belonging and community among prospective students, thereby elevating their overall experience. In turn, the review team suggests that this information is then proactively shared with senior students beyond the first year of their programme.

Transfer Policies
In line with the current policies at RCSI, the institution permits transfers in exceptional cases, with a particular emphasis on postgraduate programmes. The review team found that this level of flexibility could prove invaluable for students who find themselves in need of altering their academic trajectory after commencing their studies, although this transfer option is not currently extended to undergraduate programmes. The review team observed that prohibition on transfers for undergraduates, even from other institutions, including RCSI's international campuses, could potentially pose limitations for students who aspire to switch fields and could have the potential to dissuade prospective students who prioritise flexibility in their educational pursuits.

The review team found that the dissemination of RCSI's policies on recognition of prior learning was indicative of an effort to acknowledge and value the diverse educational backgrounds of prospective students. The team recognised that while this approach can encourage a more inclusive learning environment, a lack of specific details about how this policy works, including the assessment methods and criteria, can leave a gap in understanding its practical implications.

Scholarship Programmes
The team found evidence of RCSI's dedication to broadening participation in its educational programmes through its multifaceted approach, which includes a range of scholarships aimed at supporting prospective students.

In particular, the team noted the positive impact of the Traveller Community Access Programme Scholarship and the institutional effort focused on enhancing the representation of the Traveller Community within RCSI's undergraduate medicine, physiotherapy, and pharmacy programmes. By offering this scholarship, the team noted that RCSI not only provides financial assistance but also creates a nurturing environment where students from diverse backgrounds can succeed academically.

In addition to the Traveller Community Access Programme Scholarship, the team learned that RCSI offers a variety of scholarships to prospective undergraduate students. According to the ISER, there are more than 60 students benefitting from RCSI scholarships, a testament to the institution's commitment to providing equal opportunities for all. These scholarships serve as a vital resource, easing the financial burden on students and enabling them to focus on their studies and personal growth. **The review team commends RCSI's steadfast commitment to fostering inclusivity and diversity through its various scholarship programs, particularly the Traveller Community Access Programme Scholarship.**

Moreover, the review team acknowledged the efforts by RCSI to recognise the unique challenges faced by students who are not only pursuing academic excellence but also excelling as elite athletes. To support these exceptional individuals, RCSI's competitive scholarships and bursaries are tailored to their needs ensuring that student-athletes can balance their rigorous training regimens with their demanding academic schedules effectively.

While the institution's commitment to widening participation is evident, the team found that providing additional details about the extensive range of scholarships available would offer prospective students a more comprehensive understanding of the financial support options at RCSI.

The team suggested that RCSI could further inspire and encourage talented individuals from various backgrounds to pursue their educational aspirations, fostering an even more inclusive and vibrant student community by actively promoting the diverse array of scholarships among the student community. **The review team recommends that RCSI should ensure the range of support available for access students is clearly communicated and actively targeted to those students with identified needs.**

PROVISION OF PROGRAMMES TO INTERNATIONAL LEARNERS

RCSI is recognised for its purposeful 'international outlook' with its long standing, deliberative approach to internationalisation. The university's Institutional Profile states:

As one of the world's truly global education institutions, RCSI internationalises on many levels through branch campuses, international students and faculty, staff and student mobility initiatives, international collaborations, alliances, and partnerships.

As such, much of the content in the main body of this report applies to RCSI's diverse international learners. According to 2021/22 figures, students attending RCSI represented 97 nationalities while 47% of students were domiciled outside the EU, totalling 2204. Students are inducted and integrated though a range of activities with an emphasis on cultural awareness and competence. RCSI has international campuses in Bahrain, Malaysia and is forming a new partnership with Soochow University (China) in Pharmaceutical Sciences.

International provision is subject to RCSI's quality assurance processes in addition to any local requirements. This is detailed in Memoranda of Understanding and enacted through RCSI's quality assurance processes, committee structures and activities. Professional accreditation is undertaken for all relevant programmes mirroring processes in place for main campus provision.

In terms of programme initiation, the review team

heard from colleagues at the main review visit about the careful and considered approach to building partnership relations and new programmes that are strategically aligned with the university's academic ambition and emphasise the importance of delivering a high-quality student experience. The review team heard details of the carefully planned launch a new international partnership and the delivery of a new programme with Soochow University in China. During the planning phase of this project the main review team understood how RCSI's mission, strategy, governance, and quality assurance processes worked together providing evidence of best practice in strategic programme development. **The review team commends the careful and considered approach to building partnership relations which is strategically aligned with the University's academic ambition.**

The cessation of partnership arrangements is also of equal importance. However, the review team found that, in respect of the communications associated with the winding down of the partnership with Perdana University in Malaysia, this was undertaken in a less systematic way. **The review team recommends that RCSI should keep under review its approach to communication, for example, when it is necessary to make major changes to a partnership such as during the exit strategy process.**

During the main review visit the review team heard from senior representation from Bahrain, Malaysia and Soochow, China. The team found that, for existing programmes, there was consistent representation in RCSI governance and QA matters, as well as within the quality offices in overseas campuses. Partnership leads and year leads across programmes reported effective and regular inter-communication between colleagues with those in overseas campuses confirming that they had contributed to the development of the ISER.

International students commented positively on the mobility exchange programme with comparable curricula facilitating smooth transfers. Students reported that feedback was effective through class representation and monthly meetings with receptive academic staff.

Section 4

Conclusions

Conclusions

OVERALL FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The review team acknowledged the hard work, enthusiasm, and engagement of colleagues at the RCSI in preparing for and hosting the main review visit for the CINNTE review. The team recognised the significant amount of work associated with the preparation of the ISER and accompanying supporting information. The documentation provided was of high quality and the team was also very appreciative of the responsiveness to requests for additional supporting information. The week-long main review visit was well organised, and the review team appreciated the active engagement of staff and students at the panel meetings. All participants made valuable contributions to the review process and the review team would like to thank the senior leadership team, the Quality Enhancement Office, the Institutional Review working group, staff, and students for giving their time so generously to this review.

The review team found RCSI to be an institution where quality assurance procedures are well embedded and clearly understood with a strong culture of quality enhancement and a positive balance of education, practice and research. RCSI is strategically driven with an ethos of collaboration, ownership, and accessible leadership that places value on its staff expertise. It is characterised by a strong student and customer focus across all teams and a culture of delivering on its promises. The team saw evidence of RCSI's agility and responsiveness to the internal and external environment and to the needs of the healthcare economy.

The review team would also like to thank colleagues at QQI for supporting the review team to conduct this evaluation according to CINNTE methodology. The review team was highly appreciative of the support, organisation and training provided.

The next sections of this report will cover the commendations and recommendations made by the review team.

FINDINGS

Commendations

The review team commends the following:

Governance and management of quality assurance

1. the way in which RCSI leverages the benefits of its small size and flat structure to facilitate effective communications between stakeholders (p.20).
2. the leadership, shown through the actions and behaviours of the executive team, in prioritising quality within RCSI (p.21).
3. the added value of the contribution provided by external committee members (p. 21).
4. the robust process for, and oversight of new programme developments and approvals as exemplified by A&QC (p 23).

Quality enhancement

5. the inclusion of professional services within the scope of the reviews, recognising that quality enhancement requires a full-institution commitment across internal organisational boundaries (p.22).
6. the value of the Professional Development Planning process and access to learning and development opportunities for staff (p24).
7. the development of the Health Professions Education Centre (HPEC) with its range of opportunities to develop health professional educators (p.25).
8. the close links fostered with clinical placement providers and a responsive approach to programme/organisational development,

mindful of the healthcare economy nationally and internationally (p.25).

9. the successful implementation of Practique and Kaizen platforms for closing the assessment loop in a dynamic fashion (p.26).

10.1RCSI's commitment to the development of educational research (p.31).

11. the development of a positive and supportive research community and development framework which enables early career researchers to thrive (p.32).

Student experience

12. the approach to curriculum design which places emphasis on enabling diverse teaching and learning approaches, incorporating students as co-creators and active stakeholders in the design process through the StEP (Student Engagement and Partnership) programme (p.25).

13. the wide range of academic and practice-based facilities provided for students, underpinned by its capital investment programme (p.26).

14. the range and accessibility of support provided for students across programmes and locations (p.27).

15. RCSI's steadfast commitment to fostering inclusivity and diversity through its various scholarship programs, particularly the Traveller Community Access Programme Scholarship (p.33).

Internationalisation

16. RCSI's careful and considered approach to building partnership relations which are strategically aligned with the university's academic ambition (p.34).

Recommendations

The review team made the following recommendations, many of which have already been identified through the self-assessment process and wide engagement with students, staff, and external partners. The review team, therefore, recommends that:

Governance and management of quality assurance

1. RCSI should make more effective and visible use of data to underpin decision making (p.21).

2. [as it continues to grow] RCSI should keep under review the appropriateness of the structures and processes of governance (p.22).

3. increased transparency of the [academic promotions] process and relevant criteria for success would help candidates in their applications and in managing their expectations (p.24).

4. RCSI should formalise training for all research supervisors to ensure they have full understanding of their role and responsibilities (p.27).

5. RCSI should develop and implement a comprehensive training programme and support system specifically tailored for Students' Union officers and class representatives (p.27).

Quality enhancement

6. [within the realms of interprofessional education] RCSI should develop further opportunities for students to learn and practise together, recognising that this is common practice in professional provision (p.25).

7. RCSI should develop a deeper understanding of differential attainment and award gaps given the nature of their student cohorts and the importance in demonstrating transparency and fairness in examination processes (p.26).

8. a more profound transformation in curricula be implemented to enhance opportunities for students to engage in interprofessional collaborative learning and practice (p.25).

9. RCSI should continue to enhance the use of data across the university including the embedding of dashboards or similar tools to enhance the holistic management and accessibility of data across these multiple sources (p.28).

10. RCSI should review the way in which it tracks graduates once they have left the institution using qualitative and quantitative data to understand trends as well as preparedness for practice (p.32).

Student experience

11. RCSI makes more effective use of the data gathered about medical placements to advance clinical education through increased transparency in reporting (p.20).

12. RCSI should reassess the sequencing of clinical placements and simulation sessions, ensuring that students first benefit from the comprehensive preparation offered by simulation experiences prior to embarking on clinical rotations (p.25).

13. [noting recent assessment literature] RCSI should review the efficacy of the process of negative marking and its impact on the student experience (p.26).

14. RCSI should ensure that postgraduate students have accessed the induction processes in a timely manner (p.27).

15. RCSI should strengthen its personal tutoring model, ensuring a consistent level of support at all levels for students throughout their academic journeys (p.27).

16. RCSI should ensure the range of support available for access students is clearly communicated and actively targeted to those students with identified needs (p.34).

Internationalisation

17. RCSI should keep under review its approach to communication, for example, when it is necessary to make major changes to a partnership such as during the exit strategy process (p.34).

The review team noted that the previous QQI institutional review at RCSI took place in 2013. It was clear that significant action had been taken based on the previous commendations and many of those have been detailed in Section 3 of our report but as a summary include: integrating postgraduate faculties into internal quality review processes, a strong emphasis on developing health professionals' education and educational research, committing to early career researchers' development and further clarification about the quality assurance relationship with the NUI and RCSI.

Section 5

Top 5 Commendations and
Recommendations

Top 5 Commendations and Recommendations

The top five commendations and recommendations are summarised as follows:

Summary of top five Commendations

1. The review team commends the way in which RCSI leverages the benefits of the small size and flat structure to facilitate effective communications between stakeholders (p20)
2. The review team commends the successful implementation of Practique and Kaizen platforms for closing the assessment loop in dynamic fashion (p.26).
3. The review team commends the value of the Professional Development Planning process and access to learning and development opportunities for staff (p.24).
4. The review team commends the approach to curriculum design which places emphasis on enabling diverse teaching and learning approaches, incorporating students as co-creators and active stakeholders in the design process through the StEP (Student Engagement and Partnership) programme (p.25).
5. The review team commends the range and accessibility of support provided for students across programmes and locations (p.27).

Summary of top five Recommendations

1. The review team recommends that RCSI should make more effective and visible use of data to underpin decision making (p.21).
2. The review team recommends that RCSI reassess the sequencing of clinical placements and simulation sessions, ensuring that students first benefit from the comprehensive preparation offered by simulation experiences prior to embarking on clinical rotations (p.25).
3. The review team recommends that RCSI should ensure that postgraduate students have accessed the induction processes in a timely manner (p.27).
4. The review team recommends that RCSI strengthen its personal tutoring model, ensuring a consistent level of support at all levels for students throughout their academic journeys (p.27).
5. The review team recommends that RCSI formalise training for all research supervisors to ensure they have full understanding of their role and responsibilities (p.27).

Overarching statements about Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The review team confirms:

- the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures in place at RCSI and their application across all programmes and campuses;
- that the quality assurance procedures can be considered fully compliant with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and furthermore that these procedures have due regard to QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (QAG);
- that the RCSI is committed to a culture of enhancement of quality through the effective operation of its governance, policy, and procedures, and that these have due regard for the QQI policy for Access, Transfer and Progression;
- that these procedures are fully compliant with the Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes to International Learners.

- The review team concurred that the RCSI is strategically driven with a strong sense of collaboration, ownership, and accessible leadership. There was evidence of how the mission and values of RCSI were embedded across its partner organisations and key stakeholders. It was clear that there was a widespread commitment to a quality culture which had the institutions values and mission at its core. Quality assurance and enhancement procedures were embedded in, and clearly understood across the University. RCSI has a strong student-centred approach to quality assurance and enhancement, underpinned by a culture of valuing staff and their expertise.

Section 6

Institutional Response

Institutional Response

RCSI is a distinctive Higher Education Institution; a focused medicine and health sciences university, coupled in a unique continuum with the national postgraduate and professional training bodies for surgery, emergency medicine, radiology, dentistry, sports and exercise medicine, nursing and midwifery, and pharmacy. As one of the world's truly global education institutions, RCSI internationalises on many levels through our branch campuses, our international students, alumni and faculty, and our numerous international collaborations, alliances, and partnerships. Our core mission is to "Educate, Nurture and Discover for the Benefit of Human Health." Through developing the current and future healthcare workforce, driving research and innovation in health and healthcare, and engaging directly with our community and society, we are committed to creating a healthier future for individuals and communities in Ireland and around the world. The RCSI Strategy 2023-2027 "Innovating for a Healthier Future", is guided by a commitment to prioritise engagement, equality, diversity, and inclusion, sustainability, and quality.

This commitment to quality was reflected in RCSI's whole of institution engagement with the statutory CINNTE Review process. The University's preparations for our Institutional Review afforded staff, students, and other stakeholders the opportunity to reflect on our education, training, research, and public engagement activities. As such we were pleased that the Review Team found "that quality assurance and enhancement are of enormous importance to RCSI" and commended "the leadership, shown through the actions and behaviours of the executive team, in prioritising quality within RCSI."

We were pleased that the commitment within our strategy to "high-quality education and student experience" was recognised by the Team, finding that "RCSI is deeply committed to delivering high-quality education to its students, with carefully designed curricula that adopt an evidence-based, innovative approach." This was further reflected in commendations of student facilities and supports, and the incorporation of students as "co-creators and active stakeholders" in curriculum design. Our commitment to student engagement was also recognised by the Review Team's positive comments on the inclusion of students in RCSI's governance.

Preparations for the Review aligned with the period during which RCSI was developing our new strategy. As such the stakeholder engagement, evaluation and reflection undertaken for both processes provided many synergies. It is therefore most welcome that several of the findings of the Review Team align with the strategic direction charted for RCSI over the coming years.

We thank the Review Team for sharing their insights and expertise and for their collegiate engagement with our staff and students. It was a pleasure to welcome them to RCSI in October 2023 and gain from the external perspectives provided by such high-calibre national and international experts. We are also grateful to the Tertiary Education, Monitoring & Review Unit in QQI for their support and guidance with this important external quality assurance process. Finally, I would like to thank all the staff, students and external stakeholders who engaged with this review. The CINNTE Institutional Review was very much a "team RCSI" project and we were delighted that the Review Team "observed the enthusiasm and engagement of all staff and students it met during the institutional review process."

Professor Cathal Kelly
Vice Chancellor & CEO / Registrar

Appendices

Appendix A: Terms of Reference for the Review of Universities and other Designated Awarding Bodies

These are the Terms of Reference for the Review of a Designated Awarding Body (DAB). The concept of a Designated Awarding Body is derived from the [Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012](#) (The 2012 Act) and is defined as '*a previously established university, the National University of Ireland, an educational institution established as a university under Section 9 of the Act of 1997, the Dublin Institute of Technology[1] and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland*'.

The following institutions are Designated Awarding Bodies:

Atlantic Technological University	Trinity College Dublin*
Dublin City University*	Technological University Dublin
Maynooth University*	Technological University of the Shannon
Munster Technological University	University College Cork*
National University of Ireland	University College Dublin*
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	University of Galway*
South East Technological University	University of Limerick*

* Previously established universities

In 2016, QQI adopted a [policy](#) on cyclical review in higher education which sets out in greater detail the scope, purposes, criteria, model and procedures for review. These are represented in the Terms of Reference and the Handbook for the Review of Designated Awarding Bodies. QQI has introduced an annual reporting process for institutions whereby institutions are required to submit an Annual Quality Report (AQR). The aim of the AQR is to provide a contemporary account of quality assurance (QA) within an institution. Information is provided through an online template, and it is published. Collated annual reports are provided to periodical review teams. Annual reporting allows institutions and QQI to engage on a regular basis. Published annual reports assist with documentation management for institutions in reviews and lessen the burden on institutions in the lead-up to a review.

This review cycle is being conducted in a very changed context for higher education. The landscape for

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[1] The [Technological Universities Act 2018](#) provides for the establishment of technological universities (TUs), as well as setting out their functions and governance structure. Five TUs have been established as designated awarding bodies. Dublin Institute of Technology was one of three institutes of technology merged to form TU Dublin in 2019.

higher education has been significantly reshaped since the last cycle of reviews commenced. Smaller colleges have been merged with universities and many institutes of technology are reorganising and preparing mergers as part of the Technological University process. New alliances and clusters, envisaged by Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape have commenced. A new approach to public funding has been introduced and operated by the Higher Education Authority (HEA). Initiatives for enhancement such as the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) and the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (NFETL) have been formalised at a national level. These developments mean that there are new sources of information and external benchmarks available to institutions that can be used to inform self-evaluation in this review cycle. Key measurements such as entry profiles, student retention, graduate profiles and staff and student satisfaction rates can provide some quantitative evidence of the quality of an institution's offer.

The 2012 Act states that QQI shall consult with the HEA in carrying out the review. QQI has agreed with HEA that this will take the form of engagement with QQI on the Terms of Reference and confirmation of the status of the institution within the higher education system, sharing individual institutional profiles and data with the team.

This is the third review round of the Designated Awarding Bodies that are previously established universities. Previous rounds took place in 2004-2005 and 2009-2012.

1. 2   PURPOSES

The Policy for the Cyclical Review of Higher Education Institutions highlights four purposes for individual institutional reviews. These are set out in the table below.

Purpose	Achieved and measured through:
1. To encourage a QA culture and the enhancement of the student learning environment and experience within institutions	- emphasising the student and the student learning experience in reviews; - providing a source of evidence of areas for improvement and areas for revision of policy and change and basing follow-up upon them; - exploring innovative and effective practices and procedures; - exploring quality as well as quality assurance within the institution.
2. To provide feedback to institutions about institution-wide quality and the impact of mission, strategy, governance and management on quality and the overall effectiveness of their quality assurance.	- emphasising the ownership of quality and quality assurance at the level of the institution; - pitching the review at a comprehensive institution-wide level; - evaluating compliance with legislation, policy and standards; - evaluating how the institution has identified and measured itself against its own benchmarks and metrics to support quality assurance governance and procedures; - emphasising the improvement of quality assurance procedures.
3. To contribute to public confidence in the quality of institutions by promoting transparency and public awareness.	- adhering to purposes, criteria and outcomes that are clear and transparent; - publishing the reports and outcomes of reviews in accessible locations and formats for different audiences; - evaluating, as part of the review, institutional reporting on quality and quality assurance, to ensure that it is transparent and accessible.
4. To encourage quality by using evidence-based, objective methods and advice	- using the expertise of international, national and student peer reviewers who are independent of the institution; - ensuring that findings are based on stated evidence; - facilitating institutions to identify measurement, comparison and analytic techniques, based on quantitative data relevant to their own mission and context, to support quality assurance; - promoting the identification and dissemination of examples of good practice and innovation.

SECTION 2 OBJECTIVES AND CRITERIA

2.1   REVIEW OBJECTIVES

Objective 1

To review the effectiveness and implementation of the QA procedures of the institution through consideration of the procedures set out, primarily, in the AIQR. Where necessary, the information provided by the AIQR is supplemented by additional information provided through documentation requests and interviews. The scope of this includes the procedures for reporting, governance and publication. This also incorporates an analysis of the ways in which the institution applies evidence- based approaches to support QA processes, including quantitative analysis, evidence gathering and comparison. Progress on the development of QA since the previous review of the institution will be evaluated. Consideration will also be given to the effectiveness of the AIQR and ISER procedures within the institution.

The scope of this objective also extends to the overarching procedures of the institution for assuring itself of the quality of its research degree programmes and research activities.

This objective also encompasses the effectiveness of the procedures established by the institution for the assurance of the quality of collaborations, partnerships and overseas provision, including the procedures for the approval and review of linked providers, joint awarding arrangements, joint provision and other collaborative arrangements such as clusters and mergers.

Objective 2

To review the enhancement of quality by the institution through governance, policy, and procedures.

To review the congruency of QA procedures and enhancements with the institution's own mission and goals or targets for quality.

To identify innovative and effective practices for quality enhancement.

Objective 3

To review the effectiveness and implementation of procedures for access, transfer and progression.

Objective 4

Following the introduction of a statutory international education QA scheme, to determine compliance with the Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes to International Learners.

2. 2 REVIEW CRITERIA

Criteria for Objective 1

The Review Report will include a specific qualitative statement on the effectiveness of the QA procedures of the institution and the extent of their implementation. The report will also include a specific statement about the extent to which the QA procedures can be considered compliant with the ESG and as having regard to QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (G). These statements will be highlighted in the Review Report.

The statements may be accompanied by a range of ancillary statements, recommendations and possible recommendations for directions in reference to this objective.

The criteria to be used by the team in reaching conclusions for this objective are:

- *ESG*
- QQI *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (Core)*
- QQI *Sector Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Universities and Other Designated Awarding Bodies*
- QQI *Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Research Degree Programmes*
- Section 28 of the 2012 Act
- The institution's own objectives and goals for quality assurance

Where appropriate and actioned by the institution, additional QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines will be incorporated.

The QQI *Sector Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Independent/Private Providers* may be an appropriate reference document if they have been adopted as their linked provider(s).

Criteria for Objective 2

The Review Report will include a specific qualitative statement on the enhancement of quality by the institution through governance, policy, and procedures.

The statements may be accompanied by a range of ancillary statements and recommendations in reference to this objective. If identified, innovative and effective practices for quality enhancement will be highlighted in the report.

The criteria to be used by the team in reaching conclusions for this objective are:

- The institution's own mission and vision,
- The goals or targets for quality identified by the institution,
- Additional sources of reference identified by the institution.

Criteria for Objective 3

The report will include a qualitative statement on the extent to which the procedures are in keeping with QQI policy for Access, Transfer and Progression.

This statement may be accompanied by a range of ancillary statements and recommendations and possibly recommendations for conditions in reference to this objective.

The criterion to be used by the team in reaching conclusions for this objective are:

QQI *Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression*

Criteria for Objective 4

When the statutory international education quality assurance scheme is in place, the report will include a qualitative statement on the extent to which the procedures are compliant with the Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes to International Learners.

This statement may be accompanied by a range of ancillary statements and recommendations and possibly recommendations for conditions in reference to this objective.

The criterion to be used by the team in reaching conclusions for this objective is the

Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes to International Learners

Key questions to be addressed by the review for each objective

- How have QA procedures and reviews been implemented within the institution?
- How effective are the internal QA procedures and reviews of the institution?
- Are the QA procedures in keeping with European Standards and Guidelines?
- Are the QA procedures in keeping with QQI policy and guidelines, or their equivalent?
- Who takes responsibility for quality and QA across the institution?
- How transparent, accessible and comprehensive is reporting on quality and QA?
- How is quality promoted and enhanced?
- Are there effective innovations in QA and quality enhancement?
- Is the student experience in keeping with the institution's own stated mission and strategy?
- Are achievements in QA and quality in keeping with the institution's own stated mission and strategy?
- How do achievements in QA and quality measure up against the institution's own goals or targets for quality?

SECTION 3 THE REVIEW PROCESS

3. 1 PROCESS

The primary basis for the review process is this handbook.

3. 2 REVIEW TEAM PROFILE

QQI will appoint the review team to conduct the institutional review. Review teams are composed of peer reviewers who are students and senior institutional leaders and staff from comparable institutions as well as external representatives. The size of the team and the duration of their visit will depend on the size and complexity of the institution but in general the review team for a Designated Awarding Body will consist of 6 persons. Each review team includes a Chairperson and Coordinating Reviewer, and may be supported by a rapporteur, who is not a member of the team, to take and collate notes of meetings. A single team may undertake the review of two different institutions.

Reviewers are not QQI employees, but rather peers of the institution. The institution will have an opportunity to comment on the proposed composition of their review team to ensure there are no conflicts of interest, and QQI will ensure an appropriate and entirely independent team of reviewers is selected for the institution. QQI has final approval over the composition of each review team.

There will be appropriate gender representation on the review team. The team will consist of carefully selected and trained and briefed reviewers who have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their tasks. The team will operate under the leadership of the Review Chairperson.

The review team will be appointed in keeping with the following profile:

1. A Review Chairperson

The role of the Chairperson is to act as leader of the review team. This is an international reviewer who is a (serving or recently former) senior third-level institution leader – usually a head of institution or deputy head of institution or a senior policy advisor who:

- possesses a wide range of higher education experience;
- demonstrates a deep understanding of the complexities of the higher education system;
- understands often unique QA governance arrangements;
- has proven experience in the management of innovation and change.

2. A Coordinating Reviewer

The role of the Coordinating Reviewer is to act as secretary to the team as well as to be a full review team member. This is usually a person with expertise in the higher education system and prior experience in participating in external reviews. As the Coordinating Reviewer is responsible for drafting the report, he or she will possess proven excellent writing abilities.

3. A Student Reviewer

The role of the student reviewer is to represent the student voice in the review team. The student reviewer will be typically a PhD student with significant experience of higher education or an undergraduate student

who has completed a specific programme preparing them for the role or who has previously had a key role in other institutional reviews.

4. An External Representative

The role of the external representative is to bring a 'third mission' perspective to the review team.

In addition to the specific roles above, the full team complement will include a range of experts with the following knowledge and experience:

- International reviewer experience
- EQF and Bologna expertise
- Experience of higher education QA processes
- Experience of managing research within or across institutions
- Experience in governance
- Experience and proven ability in the advancement of teaching and learning

Details of review team roles and responsibilities can be found in Appendix B.

3. 3 PROCEDURE AND TIMELINES

The outline set out in the policy (below) will be elaborated further and timelines will be set out to accompany it, through discussion and consultation.

Step	Action	Dates	Outcome
Terms of Reference (ToR)	Completion of an institutional information profile Confirmation of ToR with institution and HEA	9 months before the Main review visit (MRV)	Published Terms of Reference
Preparation	Appointment of an expert review team Consultation with the institution on any possible conflicts of interest	6-9 months before the MRV	Review team appointed
Self-evaluation	Forwarding to QQI of the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER)	12 weeks before the MRV	Published ISER (optional)
Desk Review	Desk review of the ISER by the team	Before the initial meeting	ISER initial response provided

Step	Action	Dates	Outcome
Initial Meeting	An initial meeting of the review team, including reviewer training and briefing	5 weeks after the ISER, 7 weeks before the MRV	Team training and briefing is complete. Team identifies key themes and additional documents required
Planning Visit	A visit to the institution by the Chair and Coordinating Reviewer to receive information about the ISER process, discuss the schedule for the main review visit and discuss additional documentation requests	5 weeks after the ISER, 7 weeks before the MRV	An agreed note of the planning visit
Main review visit	To receive and consider evidence on the ways in which the institution has performed in respect of the objectives and criteria set out in the Terms of Reference	12 weeks after the receipt of ISER	A short preliminary oral report to the institution
Report	Preparation of a draft report by the team	6-8 weeks after the MRV	
	Draft report sent to the institution for a check of factual accuracy	12 weeks after the MRV	
	Institution responds with any factual accuracy corrections	2 weeks after receipt of draft report	
	Preparation of a final report	2 weeks after factual accuracy response	QQI Review Report
	Preparation of an institutional response	2 weeks after final report	Institutional response
Outcomes	Consideration of the Review Report and findings by QQI together with the institutional response and the plan for implementation	Next available meeting of QQI committee	Formal decision about the effectiveness of QA procedures *In some cases, directions to the institution and a schedule for their implementation*
	Preparation of QQI quality profile	2 weeks after decision	Quality profile published

Step	Action	Dates	Outcome
Follow-up	*The form of follow-up will be determined by whether 'directions' are issued to the institution. In general, where directions are issued, the follow-up period will be sooner, and more specific actions may be required as part of the direction.*		
	Preparation of an institutional implementation plan	1 month after publication of review report	Publication of the implementation plan by the institution
	One-year follow-up report to QQI for noting. This and subsequent follow-up may be integrated into annual reports to QQI	1 year after publication of review report	Publication of the follow-up report by QQI and the institution
	Continuous reporting and dialogue on follow-up through the annual institutional reporting and dialogue process	Continuous	Annual Institutional Quality Report Dialogue Meeting notes

Note: *The total period from start to finish is approximately 15 months but will depend on QQI committee meeting dates.*

Appendix B: Main review visit schedule

DAY 1: MONDAY, 9 OCTOBER 2023

Time	Meeting with	Indicative Purpose
09.00 - 09.30	Institutional Coordinator	Meeting with Institutional Coordinator
09.30 - 10.00	Private Review Team Meeting	
10.00 - 10.40	President, Registrar, Deputy Vice Chancellors	Private Meeting with President and Registrar and Deputy Vice Chancellors. To discuss institutional mission, strategic plan. Roles and responsibilities for QA and enhancement.
10:45 - 11.25	RCSI Senior Management Team	Discuss institutional mission, strategic plan. Roles and responsibilities for QA and Enhancement.
11.25 - 11.50	Private Review Team Meeting	
11.50 - 12:20	Governing Authority Representatives	Discuss mechanisms employed by the Governing Authority for monitoring QA and QE and how it ensures effectiveness.
12.25 - 13:00	Quality Committee and Academic Council	Discuss QA structures.
13.00 - 14.00	Review Team Lunch	
14.00 - 14:40	Heads of Schools	Discuss how the University monitors the effectiveness of its QA/QE processes and structures and how it ensures the outcomes are enacted in an appropriate, consistent and timely manner.
14.45 - 15.25	Student Union Officers	Discuss student engagement and student role in the University in QA, Strategic Planning and decision-making processes.
15.25 - 15:50	Private Review Team Meeting	
15.50 - 16.35	Student Representatives (undergraduate)	Discussion with students from all Schools, to include representation from different years, disciplines and service users.
16.40 - 17.20	Student Representatives (postgraduate)	Discussion with students from all Schools, to include representation from different years, disciplines and service users.
17:20 -17:35	Private Review Team Meeting	

DAY 2: TUESDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2023

Time	Meeting with	Indicative Purpose
09.00 - 09.30	Institutional Coordinator	Meeting to clarify issues from previous day and review today.
09.30 - 10.15	Quality Assurance Team / Members of the ISER development group	Discussion on experience of implementing quality assurance throughout the institution and developing the CINNTE ISER.
10.20 - 11.05	Members of Awards and Qualifications Committee	Discuss role of committee in governance of QA procedures for approval of new programmes and modifications to current programmes
11.05 - 11.30	Review Team Private Meeting	
11.30 - 12.15	Members of Research Strategy Committee	Discuss role of committee in governance of QA procedures for research and innovation.
12.20 - 13.05	Members of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee and Health Professions Education Centre	Discuss role of committee in governance of QA procedures for Teaching and Learning, and role of HPEC.
13.05 - 14.00	Review Team Lunch	
14:00 - 14:45	Heads of Postgraduate Faculties	Discuss Quality Management Processes at the Department Level, implementation and how their effectiveness is ensured.
14:50 - 15:35	Academic staff from various schools	Discuss involvement in QA and enhancement.
15:35 - 16:00	Private Review Team Meeting	
16:00 - 16:45	Staff supporting implementation of undergraduate curriculum	Discuss involvement in QA and enhancement.
16:50 - 17:35	Staff from Student Support Services	Discuss involvement in QA and enhancement.

DAY 3: WEDNESDAY, 11 OCTOBER 2023

Time	Meeting with	Indicative Purpose
09:00 - 09:15	Institutional Coordinator	Meeting with Institutional Coordinator
09.15 - 10.00	Senior management from RCSI Bahrain	To discuss involvement in QA and enhancement in International Education.
10.05 - 10.30	Senior management from RUMC (Malaysian Provision)	To discuss involvement in QA and enhancement in International Education.
10.35 - 11:00	Senior Management from SUDA-RCSI International College of Pharmaceutical Innovation	To discuss involvement in QA and enhancement in International Education.
11:00 - 11:25	Private Review Team Meeting	
11.25 - 12.05	RCSI Bahrain Students	To discuss international student provision
12.10 - 13.05	Directors of Research Centres	Discuss the implementation of QA procedures for research
13.05 - 14.00	Review Team Lunch	
14.00 - 14.45	Research Academic Staff	Staff experience of research management and supervision, the relationship between teaching, research and innovation, QA and enhancements and the impacts on the research student experience.
14.50 - 15.35	Postdoctoral researchers	To discuss involvement in QA and enhancement in International Education.
15:35 - 16:00	Private Review Team Meeting	
16:00 - 16:40	Access and Widening Participation: Staff	To discuss QA aspects of student recruitment, admission, progression with particular reference to entrants via Access routes
16.45 - 17.30	Access and Widening Participation: Students	To discuss quality of student experience for those admitted via Access routes

DAY 4: THURSDAY, 12 OCTOBER 2023

Time	Meeting with	Indicative Purpose
09:00–09:30	Institutional Coordinator	Meeting with Institutional Coordinator.
09:30 – 10:00	Representatives from Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)	To discuss arrangements re QA with PSRBs.
10.05 – 10.35	Representatives from collaborative providers and partners	To discuss arrangements re QA with collaborative providers.
10.40 – 11.25	External Stakeholders	To discuss engagement of external stakeholders in strategic management and QA structures.
11:25–11.50	Private Review Team Meeting	
11.50 – 12.35	Staff from Human Resources and Staff Development	To discuss HR procedures that support QA and QE among all staff.
12.40–13.25	Staff from Finance and IT	To consider funding prospects and opportunities to further develop the facilities to support teaching, research and the wider student experience.
13:25 – 14:10	Review Team Lunch	
14:10 – 14:55	Staff from Estates, Library Services, Events etc.	
15:00–16:00	Campus tour to review facilities	
16:00–17:30	Private Review Team Meeting	

Day 5: Friday, 13 October 2023

Time	Meeting with	Indicative Purpose
09:00 - 11:00	Private Review Team Meeting	
10.30 - 11.00	QQI staff and Institutional Coordinator (review team not in attendance)	To gather feedback.
11.00 - 11.30	QQI staff and Review Team	To discuss Review Team's key findings.
11.30 - 12.00	Private Review Team Meeting	
12.00 - 12.30	Meeting with Vice Chancellor, CEO/Registrar and Institutional Coordinator	
12.35 - 13.05	Senior Management Team and invited RCSI representatives for Oral Report	
13.05 - 14.00	Lunch	
14.00 - 17.00	Private Review Team Meeting	

Glossary

Term	Definition/meaning
2012 Act	Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 Revised
2019 Act	Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2019 (Amendment)
A&QC	Awards and Qualification Committee
AIWG	Academic Integrity Working Group
APPEL	Affiliation for Pharmacy Practice Experiential Learning
AQR/AIQRs	Annual Quality Reports/ Annual Institutional Quality Reports
AREC	The Animal Research Ethics Committee
CINNTE	The name and branding given to QQI's first higher education review cycle
CORU	Regulator for Health and Social Care professionals
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DAB	Designated Awarding Body
DVC	Deputy Vice Chancellor
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
EE	External examiner
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015)
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulations
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HR	Human Resources
HREC	The Human Research Ethics Committee
IMC	Irish Medical Council
ISER	Institutional Self-Evaluation Report
ISSE	Irish Survey of Student Engagement
IT	Information Technology
Kaizen	Platform that provides real-time feedback and an assessment dashboard
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
MHSB	Medicine and Health Sciences Board
NFETL	National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning

NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NMBI	Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland
NUI	National University of Ireland
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PDP	Professional Development Planning
PGR	Postgraduate Research
PSI	Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland
Practique	Platform that creates, stores, and manages assessment content
PSRB	Professional, Statutory, and Regulatory Body
PwC Ireland	PricewaterhouseCoopers International Limited
QAG	Quality Assurance Guidelines
QEO	Quality Enhancement Office
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RCSI	RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences
RUMC	RCSI and UCD Malaysia Campus
SFI	Science Foundation Ireland
SIM	Clinical Simulation Centre
SMT	Senior Management Team
StAR	Strategic Academic Recruitment (Programme)
StEP	Student Engagement and Partnership (Programme)
(Athena) SWAN	An equality charter mark framework and accreditation scheme
UNSDGs	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
VC	Vice Chancellor