A thematic analysis of reports on the approval and review of programmes of higher education in the universities, RCSI and DIT in the period 2015 - 2018

QQI
insights

Contents

List of abbreviations

AQR	Annual Quality Review
CoE	Council of Europe
DAB	Designated Awarding Body
DCU	Dublin City University
DIT	Dublin Institute of Technology
ENQA	European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ESCO	Classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations
ESG	Standard and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
HEA	Higher Education Authority
IoT	Institute of Technology
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education, ISCED 2011 indicates level of programme on an eight-level system, ISCED-F 2013 indicates broad field of study
MU	Maynooth University
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NUI	National University of Ireland
NUI Galway	National University of Ireland Galway
PRG	Peer Review Group
QA	Quality Assurance
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RCSI	Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
RFT	Request for tender
SOC	Standard Occupational Classification
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
TU Dublin	Technological University Dublin
UCC	University College Cork
UCD	University College Dublin
UL	University of Limerick

1 Introduction

QQI wish to acknowledge that this thematic analysis report draws extensively on the initial thematic analysis commissioned by QQI in 2019.

The analysis undertaken in the initial thematic analysis project focused on the content of a selection of reports produced between 2015 and 2018 by the designated awarding bodies (DABs). The findings of the initial them atic analysis have been complemented by information provided by the universities and supported by IUA, to produce this report.

These reports concern the approval of new taught higher education programmes (i.e. courses) or the review of continuing programmes, including in the context of the review of an academic unit (e.g. faculty, school, department).

The analysis does not extend to the efficacy of the institutions' processes for the approval and reapproval or review of programmes.

During the timeframe for this analysis (2015-2018), the DABs comprised the Irish universities, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. This analysis is part of a wider series of thematic analyses of higher education programme approval and review reports produced by QQI, the Institutes of Technology and Professional, Regulatory or Statutory Bodies (PRSBs) during 2015-2018. The institutions included in this analysis are listed in Figure 1-1 below.

Dublin City University (DCU)

Dublin Institute of Technology[1] (DIT)

Maynooth University (MU)

National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway)

Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI)

Trinity College Dublin (TCD)

University College Cork (UCC)

University College Dublin (UCD)

University of Limerick (UL)

Figure 1-1 DABs included in this thematic analysis

This analysis focusses exclusively on content within the selection of reports concerning programme approval or the review of continuing programmes,

including in the context of the review of an academic unit. In some cases, DAB programme approval or review processes do not result in a report at all but rather another formal documented output tailored to the specific programmes as required by institutional governance structures. In many others, the reports considered in the analysis are not considered by the DABs themselves to be the outcome of such processes. Therefore, the extent of the DABs' programme approval and review processes are not reflected by the selection of reports in this analysis. Any comparison done in this analysis should be considered in this context.

Examples of recent curricular review initiatives outside the remit of this analysis have encompassed all DAB provision, setting ambitious academic targets for the (re-)development of programmes which are strategically aligned with institutions' missions and purpose. They have also sought to ensure that programmes are up to date in the context of their discipline and the institutional pedagogic approach.

For this analysis, QQI wished to focus exclusively on programme approval and review reports. This analysis aims, among other things, to explore how the selection of reports are presented and inform about the quality of the associated programmes and the standards of the associated qualifications. This is done from the perspective of public information and for the benefit of a range of stakeholders, and the commissioned analysis included suggestions to make the processes more accessible in this regard.

In many cases, reports included in the selection were not designed by the DABs to be understood on a stand-alone basis, and not designed to serve this purpose. In some cases, the nature of the formal documented output produced is technical in nature. Moreover, this analysis does not cover the other methods by which DABs communicate to the diverse range of relevant internal and external stakeholders during programme development and review. The analysis should be considered in this context.

To help put things in context and to illustrate the richness in variety of autonomous approaches across the sector, Section 2 outlines the respective purposes and key stages, as well as reports or documented output, of the comprehensive and rigorous programme approval and review processes in each of the DABs.

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[1] Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) is Ireland's first technological university, established on 1 January 2019, taking over the operations of the three preceding institutions, Dublin Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Blanchardstown and the Institute of Technology Tallaght. The thematic analysis project is for the period 2015 to 2018 and predates the formation of TU Dublin. Reports were created and the analysis was undertaken when the three institutions were in existence.

They are also documented in the QQI AQR series, available on the QQI website here.

We hope that this analysis will provide useful insights from examining programme approval and review processes, help disseminate examples of effective practice, and help institutions reflect on their reporting practices.

A glossary of the terms used throughout this report is provided in Appendix C.

A thematic analysis of reports on the approval and review of programmes of higher education in the Universities, RCSI and DIT in the period 2015-2018

[6]

2 Institutional contexts

This section was kindly contributed by the IUA in consultation with the relevant DABs.

As autonomous institutions with well-established traditions, unique contexts and diverse programmes, the DABs employ different approaches to programme approval and review. These are documented in annual quality reports submitted to QQI, and published as the Annual Quality Review (AQR) series on the QQI website here. DAB approaches are in full alignment with related statutory obligations and enabling guidelines. In the case of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area 2015 (ESG) enabling framework, there is no explicit statement about the format of programme review, nor the outputs.

As such, DAB processes and policies vary from institution to institution. They have been developed to enhance the overall purpose and coherency of the programme, support the student learning experience and ensure best practice. Moreover, they are continually innovated to meet a variety of needs. Overall, they are configured to meet an outcome-based, rather than process-based, approach, as specified as desirable in the ESG and QQI Quality Assurance Guidelines.

The ESG does not include an explicit statement about the format of programme review, nor the outputs. The only publication requirement stated is that of revised programme specifications, which are published in DABs' Academic Calendars/ Books of Modules, for example. Due to the variety of autonomous approaches to programme approval and review across the DABs, including those that do not result in a report but rather another formal documented output, the selection cannot be said to be a representative sample. Reports included in the selection were not necessarily designed by the DABs to be understood on a stand-alone basis, and the reports were not designed to be similar. Moreover, this analysis does not cover the other methods by which DABs communicate to the diverse range of relevant internal and external stakeholders across the extensive lead-in period and ensure transparency regarding the outcomes of programme approval and review processes. The analysis should be considered in this context.

All DABs' quality assurance and enhancement processes are in full alignment with the related provisions set out in The Universities Act, 1997, The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 and Amendment Act 2019, and QQI Statutory Core and Topic Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines. They are also in alignment with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area 2015 (ESG) as an enabling, rather than, prescriptive framework. The DABs' processes are designed having regard to, among other things, policies and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners and the National Framework of Qualifications.

Irish DABs have primary responsibility for reviewing and improving the effectiveness of their internal quality assurance policies and policies. As mentioned, the DABs employ different approaches as autonomous institutions with unique contexts. These are documented in annual quality reports submitted to QQI, and published as the Annual Quality Review (AQR) series on the QQI website here. QQI is responsible for carrying out external reviews on the effectiveness of institutions' quality assurance procedures on a cyclical basis. The reports of these external reviews, which are published on the QQI website, verify that DABs' quality assurance processes are in compliance with the above statutory obligations and in line with enabling guidelines.

As well as demonstrating accordance with requirements and guidelines, the DABs strive to continuously seek to improve their processes. In doing so, DABs build on their well-established traditions and institutional strategies, and engage in critical reflection and benchmarking in order to innovate to meet a variety of needs.

Especially for this analysis, each DAB has provided a synopsis of the respective purposes and key stages of programme approval or the review of continuing programmes, including in the context of the review of an academic unit (e.g. faculty, school, department). The reports or documented output from these processes are also outlined, including information and reflection on programmes, the curriculum, teaching and learning approaches, etc. These synopses are provided in order to give context to the extent of the DABs' processes and policies not reflected in the selection of reports in this analysis and how they fit into the broader quality assurance and enhancement frameworks. This illustrates the richness in variety of comprehensive and rigorous approaches across the sector, which can provide valuable learning for all.

Further information on the QA processes is also available in the QQI Annual Quality Review (AQR) series available on the QQI website here.

2.1 Dublin City University (DCU)

At Dublin City University (DCU), the approach to QA and enhancement is in full alignment to the provisions set out in the Universities Act (UA) 1997, the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (QQI) Act 2012, the 2015 European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) and QQI published guidelines.

2.1.1 Programme Development and Approval at DCU

At DCU, every proposed new programme must undergo a two-stage process of approval, referred to as validation (stage 1) and accreditation (stage 2).

Validation (stage 1) involves the assessment of the proposed programme's relationship to the university strategy and its likely viability. Validation further considers the underlying educational philosophy, appropriateness of the programme's learning outcomes, and the coherence of the underlying philosophy to the programme's overall purpose.

Accreditation (stage 2) involves scrutiny of the proposed programme by a group of external experts (academic and, where appropriate, other professional experts) of the appropriateness of academic content and standards, and whether or not the programme meets the nationally and internationally accepted requirements for the award(s) to which it is designed to lead.

The accreditation report, one of the selection of reports in this analysis, refers to the document approved by the DCU Academic Council. The purpose of this report is as a technical document, providing Academic Council information and oversight of the key academic governance arrangements for the programme and the outcomes of the external accreditation process. Its goal is to provide assurance and oversight to Academic Council of the rigour of the process, and documentation of any academic matters for recommendation or consideration prior to programme launch.
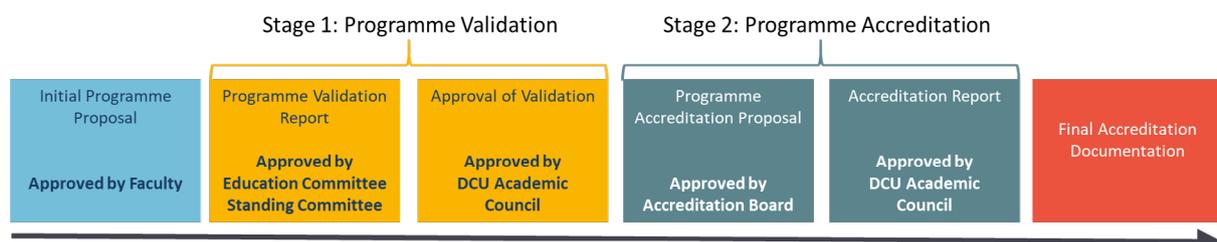
2.1.2 Programmatic Review at DCU

Annual Programme Review Process
The Annual Programme Review (APR) allows for regular monitoring of all taught programmes and is managed by each Faculty in DCU. For each taught programme at DCU, the process:

- ensures appropriate articulation between the initial validation and accreditation of programmes and their development over time;

- ensures that issues highlighted in previous annual and periodic reviews have been/are being appropriately addressed;

- ensures that curriculum, programme design, content and assessment are regularly reviewed;

- ensures that issues highlighted by external examiners have been/ are being addressed appropriately;

- considers student recruitment and registration, and marketing initiatives to support recruitment;

- considers student academic performance and student progression;

- ensures that issues highlighted by student feedback have been/ are being addressed appropriately, and that feedback is provided to students on these issues;

- reports on proposed changes to academic structures for the following year, and provide a rationale for proposed changes.

DCU Programme Approval Process

Stage 1: Programme Validation   Stage 2: Programme Accreditation

| Initial Programme Proposal

Approved by Faculty | Programme Validation Report

Approved by Education Committee Standing Committee | Approval of Validation

Approved by DCU Academic Council | Programme Accreditation Proposal

Approved by Accreditation Board | Accreditation Report

Approved by DCU Academic Council | Final Accreditation Documentation |

Periodic Programme Review

The Periodic Programme Review (PPR) takes place on a 5-year cyclical basis, with a focus on critical evaluation of the impact of incremental change. The PPR process draws on the cycle of Annual Programme Review (APR) reports and includes a critical evaluation of the programme of study since initial approval, or the previous PPR review, as appropriate. The outcomes of PPR inform DCU's internal quality review process, which addresses larger-scale issues regarding the quality, structures and processes of Faculties in a developmental and strategic manner. The PPR report is reviewed by an external reviewer, approved by DCU University Standards Committee, who is asked to comment on the Programme Team's summary report and accompanying documentation by means of an

External Reviewer report. This report is reviewed and discussed at Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee and Faculty Management Board.

The PPR reports provided by DCU for analysis within this document has two purposes. Firstly, the reports present the findings of the reflective analysis from programmatic review, generated to provide a context and evaluative information to support the external review of the programme. Secondly, they include the commentary and notes of the external review in response to the internal reflective analysis. The nature of the documentation produced is therefore often technical in nature and used for the purpose of programme-level and faculty-level discussion and planning.

DCU Annual Programme Review Process

DCU Periodic Programme Review Process

2.1.3 Unit Level Quality Reviews

Areas reviews are conducted on a cyclical basis, typically once every seven years. The reviews are based on a self-assessment approach, followed by a peer review group visit, and conclude with the development of a quality improvement plan by the unit under review in response to the recommendations of the peer review group. Unit level internal reviews consider a range of issues include the structure, strategy and planning, organisation and management of organisational units, and the effectiveness of communication and provision of information. For academic areas, unit-level reviews provide an opportunity for critical reflection on approaches to teaching and learning, research and scholarship, and university service and external engagement.

The DCU unit level quality reviews included in this analysis are the final Peer Review Group report, written by the externally-led review group. This report is designed to summarise the key findings of the external review panel, including commendations and recommendations as a result of their review of a specific unit. Their primary audience is the unit under review, and university committees tasked with oversight and governance of the quality review framework at DCU. These reports are also published on the DCU website.

DCU Unit Level Reviews

Level of Review	QA Procedure	Report	Audience
Institutional	QQI External Cyclical Reviews	Institutional Review Report	QQI, Institution, general
Institutional	Cross- institutional Thematic Reviews	Final Peer Review Group Report	University staff and students, general
Unit/ Area	Review of Academic Areas	Final Peer Review Group Report	University staff and students, general
Unit/ Area	Review Professional Support Areas	Final Peer Review Group Report	University staff and students, general
Programme	Programme Validation	Programme Validation Report	DCU Education Committee
Programme	Programme Accreditation	Programme Accreditation Report	DCU Academic Council
Programme	Annual and Periodic Programme Review	APR/ PPR Reports	Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees; External Reviewers (PPR)

2.2 Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)

The academic governance structure of the former Dublin Institute of Technology is provided in the diagram below. Please note that with the establishment of the Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin), the structure presented below is currently being phased out and replaced by the new University Academic Council and sub-committee structure.

The processes outlined below are described in full in the Handbook for Academic Quality Enhancement. These processes have and will continue to apply for TU Dublin City until the new TU Dublin Quality Framework is approved and implemented.

All of the processes described here aim to ensure compliance with the relevant policies and regulations and alignment with the institutional Strategic Plan. Furthermore, the processes enhance the quality of the programmes through internal and external peer review and through consideration and discussion at institutional committees.

### 2.2.1 Programme Validation process
Purposes
The general purpose of the validation process for a new major award is to ensure that:

- the programme is consistent with the Institute's Development Plan, existing policies and the Strategic Plan;
- the programme satisfies a market niche and that its learning outcomes meet the requirements of industry/ community and/ or the professions;

- the academic standards of the programme are appropriate given the programme level and the award;
- there are sufficient resources and facilities available to deliver the programme;
- the requirements of QQI in relation to access, transfer and progression, learning outcomes and standards are met.

Key stages of process

- New Programme Proposal (Q1A form): this is a proposal to develop a programme. Approval at this stage is not approval to deliver the programme. The Q1A is a relatively short form which outlines the academic structure of the programmes, its aims and objectives, its alignment with the institutional Strategic Plan and the resource implications. Hence, the proposal is evaluated in relation to the market demand for the programme, alignment with the institutional Strategic Plan, and resourcing matters. It is considered at College level and submitted to relevant institutional committees for consideration and approval.

- If approved, a planning Programme Committee is established that develops the programme documentation.

- A Validation Panel is appointed by Academic Quality Assurance Committee, including approval of external panel members (at least one from industry and at least one from academia).

- The Validation Panel receives the programme documentation and briefing notes provided by the Quality Assurance Office. The Panel visits the School and meets with relevant management and

DIT Academic Governance Structure
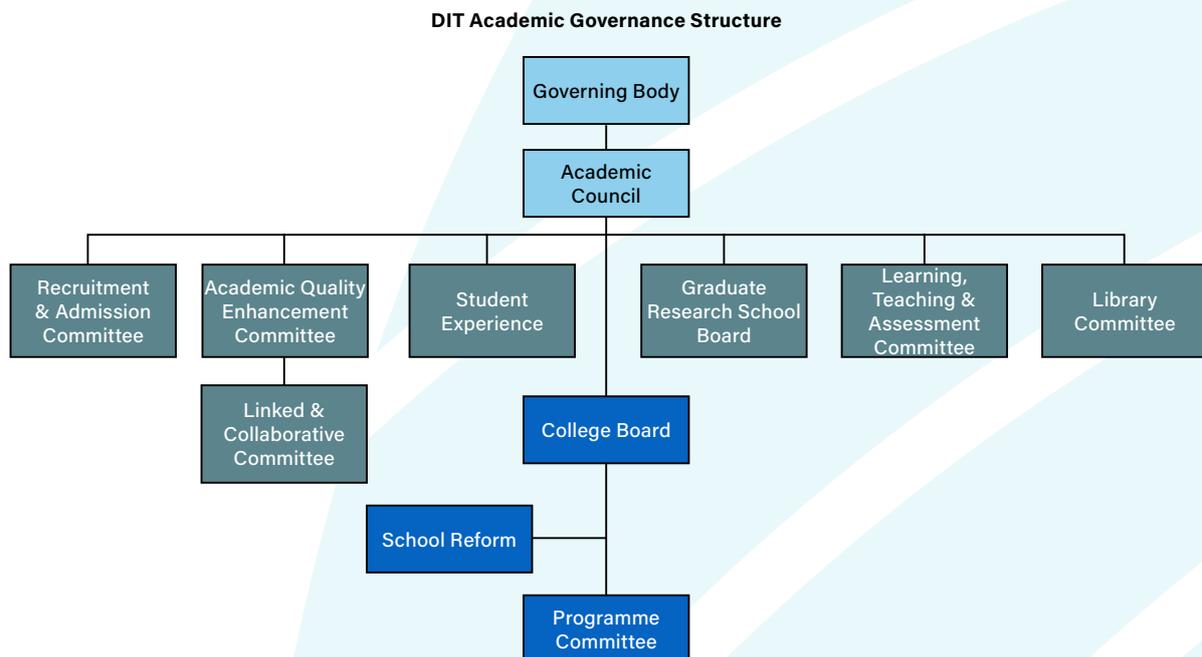
teaching staff. It also visits the facilities that will be available to students on the programme.

- The Validation Panel drafts a report which is forwarded to the School. The report includes an overall recommendation of approval where agreed by the Panel and may also include conditions of approval and recommendations.

- The School responds to the report and provides revised programme documentation as appropriate. When the Panel is happy with the response and that any conditions of approval are met, the report and the School's response goes forward to Academic Quality Assurance Committee for consideration and recommendation for approval to Academic Council.

- Once the report is adopted by Academic Council, the Report of the Validation Panel and School's response to associated conditions and/or recommendations are published on the institution's website.

The primary intended audience for Validation Panel Report are members of the Academic Quality Assurance Committee and members of Academic Council. It is considered alongside the programme documentation and the School's response to the report. It is not meant to be a stand-alone document describing all aspects of the programme. Its primary purpose is to convey the views of the Validation Panel and their recommendations.

2.2.2 Programme Annual Monitoring Process

Purposes

The main purposes of the annual monitoring of programmes are to:
- Critically evaluate the programme and its delivery;

- Follow-up from previous years' reports;

- Ensure that academic standards are maintained on the programme;

- Consult and consider the reports of external examiners and the feedback from students, staff and PRSBs;

- Allow the Programme Committee an opportunity to reflect on and implement corrective measures and other modifications on an annual basis;

- Put in place an action plan for the development and enhancement of the programme;

- Enable the College Boards to fulfil its responsibility for the quality of programmes within their remit;

- Ensure that, where appropriate, the institution is in a position to take action in order to enhance the quality of its programmes.

Key stages of process

- The annual monitoring process report is compiled by the Programme Committee in October of the academic year subsequent to the year under review.

- The report includes the following: the previous Programme Action Plan and commentary on how this has been implemented; stakeholder inputs received from external examiners, students/ staff, programme advisory boards, PRSBs or external reviews; significant developments or special circumstances affecting the year; resource issues should be addressed to improve the operation of the programme and which have affected programme delivery in the year; the operation of partnership arrangements where this applies: a reflection on performance indicators including applicable statistics on student admissions: first destinations and examination results (relevant statistics are provided through the institutional reporting system); examples of best practice; a commentary on Academic Council Theme; Programme Action Plan including priorities for action for the forthcoming year, based on the issues identified in the previous sections, and indicates how these should be implemented.

- College Board ensures that all annual monitoring reports are completed and develops a College Action Plan.

- The College Action Plan is a live document that tracks progress on actions identified.

- The College Action Plans are then submitted annually to Academic Quality Assurance Committee.

- The Colleges also highlight actions that are outside the remit of the College. These actions are then prioritised and included in the institutional Quality Enhancement Plan.

2.2.3 Programme Review process

Programme reviews may take place at the behest of the College Board, Head of School, or the Academic Quality Assurance Committee, as an outcome of annual internal or external monitoring processes as appropriate to the programme modifications process, or in advance of the School Review process. Such a review provides an opportunity for the Programme Committee to conduct a major critical evaluation of the programme, consider the specific issues that have triggered the review, and to make significant changes to the programme, where appropriate.

Purposes

The programme review process will:

- Ensure that academic standards continue to be maintained on the programme and meet institutional requirements for the relevant award;

- Ensure that a market demand exists for the programme and that it continues to be academically viable and sustainable;

- Allow the Programme Committee the opportunity to obtain feedback on the programme from students, external examiners, industry and the professions and other external peers and to review the content, relevance, curriculum design and delivery of the programme in the light of that feedback;

- Ensure that cognisance is taken of DIT policies and guidelines related to good practice in learning, teaching and assessment (for example, Student Charter, Work Placement, Graduate Attributes, First Year Experience Framework);

- Ensure that resources are available for the effective delivery of the programme;

- Monitor the effectiveness of the institution's annual monitoring process for the programme and consider the implementation of programme's quality action plans;

- Ensure that the requirements of the QQI in relation to access, transfer and progression and learning outcomes and standards continue to be met.

Key stages of process

The review process is initiated by the School through contact with the Quality Assurance Office.

- Where changes to the programme are proposed that require significant additional resources, a Q1A form should be completed and approved as above (programme validation process).

- The Programme Committee produces a self-study document, in accordance with the institutional template provided, with the programme overview and student handbook(s).

- A Programme Review Panel is appointed by Academic Quality Assurance Committee, including approval of external panel member nominations.

- The Review Panel receives the programme documentation and briefing notes provided by the Quality Assurance Office. The Panel as part of the review event visits the relevant management and teaching staff from the relevant School, as well as a group of students and graduates. It also visits the facilities available to students on the programme.

- The Review Panel releases report which is forwarded to the School. The report includes an overall recommendation of continuing approval where agreed by the Panel. It may also include conditions of approval as well as additional recommendations.

- The School responds to the report and provides revised programme documentation as appropriate. When the Panel is happy with the response and that any conditions of approval are met, the report and the School's response goes forward to Academic Quality Assurance Committee for consideration and recommendation for continuing approval of the programme to Academic Council.

- Once the report is adopted by Academic Council, the Report of the Review Panel and School's response to associated conditions and/or recommendations are published on the institutional website at: https://www.dit.ie/alityassuranceandacademicprogrammerecords/qualityreviewreportsandresponses/.

2.3 Maynooth University

2.3.1 Context

Maynooth University's origins go back to the foundation of the Royal College of St Patrick in 1795. Maynooth University (MU) was established as an autonomous university in 1997 and forms one of four constituent universities of the National University of Ireland. MU has a distinctive disciplinary profile, with research and teaching strengths in humanities and social sciences, science, electronic engineering, business, law and teacher education. It is an internationally recognised institution and is the fastest growing university in Ireland. In the region of 14,300 students from over 95 countries are enrolled in a range of programmes at undergraduate, masters and PhD level.

2.3.2 Governance and management

MU's Governance and Committee arrangements (Figure 1) provide an institutional wide means of ensuring the quality and driving the enhancement of the University's range of activities including, in the case of many of the fora depicted, those activities associated with the design and development, the modification of, and the ongoing quality and provision of the University's suite of academic programmes.

Governing Authority has responsibility for the strategic direction of the University, the management and administration of its revenue and property and the general conduct of its affairs. Academic Council controls the academic affairs of the University including the curriculum of, and instruction and education provided by, the University. The University Executive, chaired by the President, is a team of academic and administrative leaders that assists the President in developing, implementing and reviewing

the University Strategic Plan and in managing the academic, administrative, financial and other activities of the University. The Quality Committee is a joint committee of the Governing Authority and the Academic Council. The role of the Quality Committee is to provide oversight of the University's obligations for internal and external quality assurance and quality enhancement.

Of the various subcommittees of Academic Council, the Academic Programmes Committee and the Graduate Education Committee, play a key part in supporting Academic Council in its role relating to programme development and their ongoing provision.

The function of the Academic Programmes Committee is to oversee on behalf of Academic Council the portfolio of programmes of the University, undergraduate and postgraduate, to ensure that they remain appropriate, relevant and of the highest possible standards. The Academic Programmes Committee brings recommendations to Academic Council regarding the overall structure of the portfolio, the approval of new programmes, changes to

programmes, the withdrawal of programmes and the academic regulations governing programmes. The Academic Programmes Committee seeks the prior approval of the University Executive before making any recommendation to Academic Council that has significant resource implications.

The role of the Academic Council Graduate Education Committee is to make recommendations to Academic Council on matters of strategy and policy in relation to postgraduate programmes (taught and research) and to oversee on behalf of Academic Council the growth and development of postgraduate programmes across the university.

2.3.3 Key QA procedures relating to the design, approval, and modification of academic programmes

Quality assurance and enhancement of academic programmes is underpinned by a range of key processes and procedures as detailed below and as depicted in figure 2. Other activities that serve a vital role in informing developments and enhancements that are not detailed below include but are not limited to such practices as student
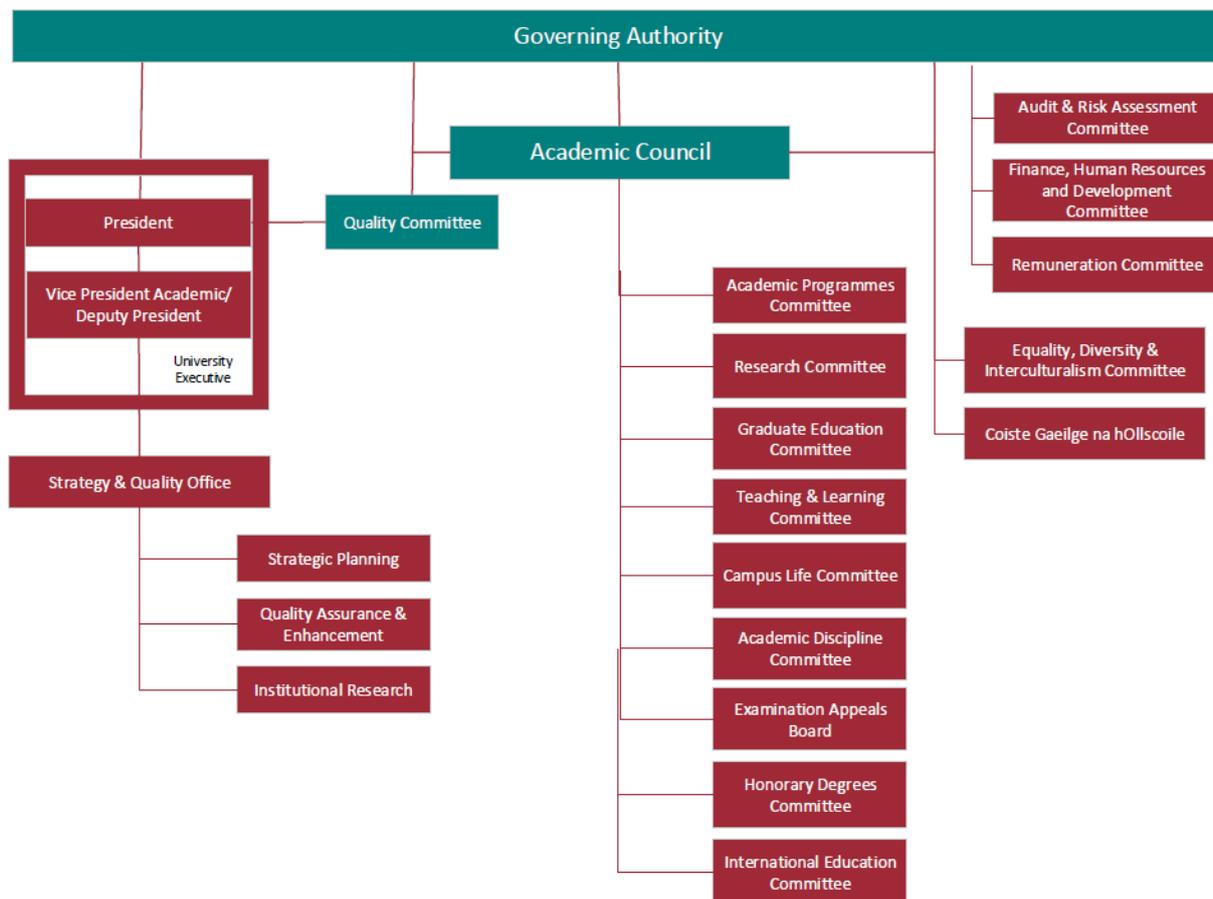

Figure 1: MU's Governance structure and Committees (reference is included to the Strategy & Quality Office that has responsibility for managing the periodic review of the University's academic and support/ professional/ administrative units)

surveys that take place on an ongoing basis at institutional, programme and module level; feedback from students provided via academic unit student: staff committees; the monitoring of performance, progression and completion rates; input provided by external stakeholders: ongoing review and monitoring activities undertaken at department/school level, etc. Outcomes and findings from these various activities inform, as appropriate, the key QA processes outlined below.

2.3.4 Programme design and approval and modifications to existing programmes

Maynooth University has a clearly defined process for approving new programmes and/or making modifications to existing programmes. All proposals are submitted in accordance with standard templates to the Academic Council Office for consideration by the Academic Programmes Committee, and where applicable by the Graduate Education Committee. A guide for the development of programmes and modules ensures programmes are designed in line with University standards: guidance is provided on a range of items including ECTS credits; qualifications and programmes, and the alignment of awards to the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

Programme design and approval

The programme design and approval process is a two-stage review, comprising:

a) A review of the initial proposal (if available, including module descriptors with details of assessment and learning outcomes) by the Faculty Dean, Faculty Executive, Faculty Teaching & Learning Committee, Finance Office, the Academic Programmes Committee;

b) A review of the full proposal (including full module descriptors with details of assessment and learning outcomes), by external reviewers and Faculty.

Level of Review	QA Procedure	Reports	Intended Audience
Institutional	QQI Cyclical Institutional Reviews	Institutional Review Report (Published) Implementation Plan (Published) Follow up Report (Published)	QQI, Institution, General
Unit/Area	Academic Unit Review	Peer Review Report (Published) Quality Improvement Plan (Published)	Governing Authority, Academic Council, University Executive, University Staff and Students, General
	Support/ Professional Unit Review	Peer Review Report (Published) Quality Improvement Plan (Published)	Governing Authority, Academic Council, University Executive, University Staff and Students, General
Programme	Programme Design and Approval	New Academic Programme Proposal Report	Academic Council
	Programme Updates/ modifications	Modified Academic Programme Proposal Report	Academic Council
	Programme Accreditation-PRSBs	Programme Accreditation Report	PRSB, Department/School, Faculty, Academic Council
	External Examiners	External Examiner (EE) Reports Head of Academic Unit EE reports	Programme/Module Coordinators, Vice President Academic, Faculty Deans.

Figure 2: Key QA procedures in place that provide for, or include provision for, the quality assurance and enhancement of the design & development, the modification of, and the approval of academic programmes

Stage I of the process involves:

a) Proposal Preparation in the Department/School.
Course proposal prepared within the relevant academic department/school. The proposal is reviewed by the department/school and signed by the Head of Department/School. The department's/school's review considers: the fit with the departmental priorities; the relationship to other programmes offered in the department/school; the capacity to teach the course. If available, full module descriptors with details of assessment and learning outcomes are submitted along with the proposal at this stage.

b) Review by Faculty Dean, Faculty Executive, Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee, Head of Financial Planning and where applicable, the Director of Postgraduate Academic Programmes.
The proposal is reviewed by the Faculty Dean, Faculty Executive, and the Faculty Teaching & Learning Committee. This step is designed to ensure coordination between departments and schools within the Faculty. The Head of Financial Planning reviews all new programme proposals. Postgraduate programme proposals are also reviewed by the Director of Postgraduate Academic Programmes.

c) Academic Programmes Committee. The Committee considers comments received from the Dean of Faculty the Faculty Executive, the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee, the Head of Financial Planning; and where applicable, the Director of Postgraduate Academic Programmes. The Committee discusses the proposal in light of responses received. It may (i) decline the proposed course, (ii) refer it for revision or clarification, or (iii) recommend that it proceed to the next stage.

If recommended to the next stage, the Committee selects external reviewers, considering gender balance and international/national expertise.

If applicable, the Committee seeks written comments from the Director of Internationalisation, the Placement Officer, the Director of Quality and, other applicable disciplines.

Stage II of the process involves:

a) Full proposal prepared and submitted to the Academic Programmes Committee.
The full proposal is the proposal form used in step 1 (modified if requested), plus the full module descriptions with details of assessment and learning outcomes. It is submitted to the AcademicProgrammes Committee.

b) Faculty and External Review. The Committee sends the documentation to two selected external reviewers and for Faculty review.

c) Final review by the Academic Programmes Committee. The Committee reviews the proposal in the context of the comments of external reviewers and from the Faculties. It will either recommend the programme to Academic Council or refer it for amendment.

d) Approval by Academic Council. The programme is referred to Academic Council for final approval.

Modifications to existing programmes
Proposals are submitted in accordance with a standard template for consideration by the Academic Programmes Committee. Following a successful review by the Committee the proposals are submitted for approval to Academic Council. Modifications proposed can include but are not limited to modifications to existing modules or the inclusion of new, or the discontinuation of existing, modules though to changes to programme structure and credit weightings or to the creation of alternative exit awards at earlier points within an existing programme.

Programme Accreditation – Professional, Regulatory and Statutory Bodies (PRSBs)
The University has many academic programmes accredited by PRSBs; such accreditation is an important aspect of the overall assurance of professional standards and quality of MU offerings. A PRSB usually accredits a programme for a specific time period. The management of the process occurs at departmental level and the Quality Office engages annually with academic departments to maintain an up-to-date database of all PRSB accredited programmes in the University.

External Examiners
Academic standards are monitored and validated by External Examiners appointed, according to University policy, to programmes and subjects in major awards. The reports of External Examiners are reviewed by the relevant departments, the Deans and by the Vice-President Academic. A synoptic report is prepared and is submitted to the VPA and to the relevant Faculty Dean. Observations and comments made by External Examiner are used, as

deemed appropriate, to inform programme/ module development or modifications.

2.3.5 Unit level Quality Reviews

The MU Framework for Quality Assurance and Enhancement (2016) sets out the University's overall policy on internal quality assurance and enhancement. Within its scope is provision for the periodic reviews of units - in the case of academic units this includes a focus on research and scholarship, education, public engagement, and interactions with internal support units. In this context, an evaluation of programme offerings within an academic unit are considered as part of the broader activities of the unit. Specific consideration is given to the quality assurance and enhancement processes, procedures and policies that underpin all activities.

In preparation for a quality review, a unit prepares a self-assessment report (SAR) outlining and reflecting on its activities including, in the case of academic units, consideration of its academic programme offering. The SAR is provided to an appointed peer review group, of which two of its members are external to the University and are from a cognate discipline/ area. Following a site visit to the unit under review and having met and interviewed a range of stakeholders including unit and university staff, students and external stakeholders, the Peer Review Group submit a report that includes commendations on practice and a series of recommendations for change and enhancement for the Unit. The Unit under review is then required to prepare a quality improvement plan (QIP) outlining what measures it will take to address the various recommendations made.   This plan is then incorporated as part of the planning process for the unit. Follow-on reporting and monitoring process also form part of the quality review process.

The Peer Review group report and the QIP (both published on the Quality Office webpage) are submitted to the Quality Committee and to University Executive. Academic Council and Governing Authority are notified of reviews and of the reports produced as they are completed.

The outcomes of unit reviews are used to inform change in practices and, in the nature of the activities the academic unit engages in.   In the case of academic programmes, this may include changes to programme curricula or may result in changes to the suite of programmes on offer. Any changes made are submitted through the standard University process for new programme approvals or programme modifications as outlined previously.

2.4 NUI Galway

The NUI Galway Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy provides the overarching framework for the design and operation of courses and modules. Responsibility for programme design lies with the Colleges and reviewing and revising programme offerings is a key aspect of quality assurance and enhancement. Successful innovation also requires the availability of accurate and timely information and data, basing major decisions on evidence and on a compelling case which is cognisant of the external context, the developments in academic fields, in other institutions, and the identification of future needs. The design of new programmes and the revision of existing offerings can be facilitated by the implementation of Learning Design principles and via the support of expertise in the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) (and, for flexible programmes, Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development (CALPD)), providing scope for innovation in pedagogy, assessment and the effective use of technologies and media.

2.4.1 New programme approval

All programmes undergo a comprehensive and rigorous design process and independent approval process. While processes vary from College to College, proposals for new programmes are frequently initiated at Discipline or School level. All programmes must have Programme Boards who consult various stakeholders including employers and students when designing, revising or evaluating programmes. The approval process from inception to College Board varies from College to College but may include some or all of the following:

- Discipline approval;
- School committee approval;
- School board approval;
- College Curriculum Committee;
- College committee approval.

An outline of the new programme will be developed. This will normally go through a number of iterative stages, which may include some informal consultation with the College Office. A final draft of the proposal for the new programme may be approved at Discipline level and proceed from there to the School Committee (e.g. Teaching and Learning Committee). Schools/ disciplines prepare programme and module templates that include programme objectives, learning outcomes, progression rules, and student workloads (ECTS) that are compliant with the National Framework for Qualifications.

While individual programmes will have their own Programme Level Learning Outcomes, NUI

Galway has developed Graduate Attributes, broader statements of capability and disposition which aim to capture the essence of what it is to be a 'graduate' and be ready to move on to the next level of study, research, employment, cultural or societal contribution. The graduate attribute statements provide an effective means of reviewing programme and course design, highlighting potential areas in which students may be provided with additional opportunities to develop these particular skills and dispositions.

The level of research, analysis, consultation and engagement with stakeholders, detail and discussion will vary from programme to programme depending on the level of innovation and the scale of the programme change involved. Once approved at college level, it is the role of College Boards to bring forward new programmes for approval to Academic Council Standing and ultimately to Academic Council. This is outlined in University Regulation-2-2018 Role and Structure of College Boards.

The relevant College must have approved the required detailed information for the proposed programme, including information on the programme's modules as required by Registry. Academic Council Standing Committee may request that this information be provided to it prior to approving the programme. Academic Council Standing will request documentation in advance of each meeting for new programme proposals. Each new programme approval must be submitted using the standard New Programme Proposal Form. The proposal form includes the following:

- Section 1 New programme summary;

- Section 2 Market research and analysis;

- Section 3 Resources (must be completed before submission to Academic Standing Committee for final programme approval).

The form is accompanied by a guide which is intended to assist programme co-ordinators and schools on how to conduct effective market research for any proposed new programme, as an input into the Market research and analysis section of the New Programme Approval Form. The purpose of the market research and analysis is to give a clear sense of likely demand, offer insights into desired course content and to help identify viable and sustainable programmes. The principles of completing this process include the following:

- Develop curricula which reflect institutional research expertise, are inclusive, and are responsive and attractive to the core student population which NUI Galway wishes to attract to fulfil the university's strategic plan;

- Improve transparency of the progress of programme approval;

- Encourage a more facilitated approach to programme approval;

- More effective and timely launch of new programmes.

When a programme is approved by Academic Council Standing the decision will be documented in the meeting minutes which are then submitted for final approval by Academic Council. Academic Council is the chief academic authority and, subject to review by Údarás na hOllscoile (Governing Authority), controls the academic affairs of the university including the curriculum, instruction and education provided by the university.
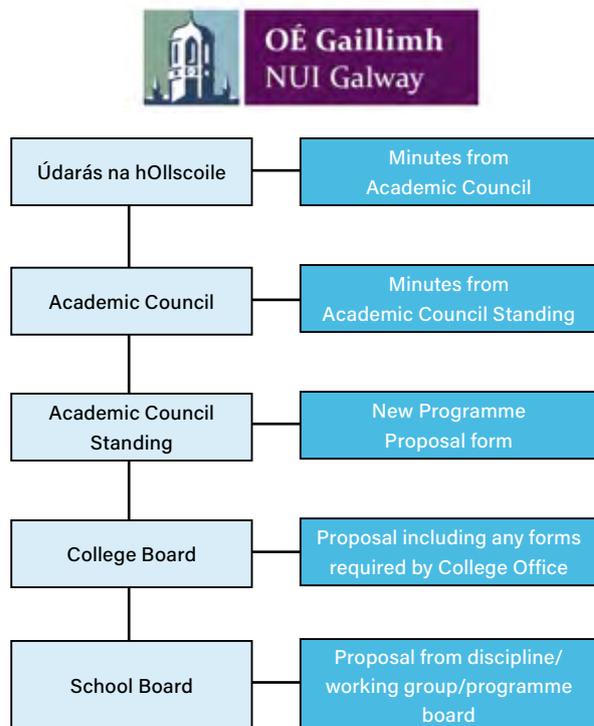

Údarás na hOllscoile	Minutes from Academic Council
Academic Council	Minutes from Academic Council Standing
Academic Council Standing	New Programme Proposal form
College Board	Proposal including any forms required by College Office
School Board	Proposal from discipline/ working group/programme board

Figure 1: New programme approval process

2.4.2 Programme Review

QA006 Review of Taught Programmes is designed to allow programme boards conduct an independent review of programme content and delivery. The reviews involve two interrelated processes: (i) internal Self-assessment by staff; and (ii) external Peer Review by an independent external expert. Reviewers are required to find evidence of compliance against QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines and other relevant national and European provisions and guidelines. All taught academic programmes must be reviewed at least once every seven years and are done locally through programme boards. Reviews

are carried out by an independent reviewer (typically a past or existing External Examiner or equivalent). Accredited programmes are considered to have met the requirements of this policy and are exempt from this process. Reports are made available to those involved with the delivery of the programme under review.

2.4.3 Academic Quality Review

The Quality Office facilitates reviews of the teaching, learning and assessment of all taught programmes within Schools, the details of which are covered in QA003 Review of Schools. Every school must be reviewed every seven years with approximately five or six reviews carried out each year. The final Review Report should communicate major ideas for changes to the way in which the Schools under review can improve quality and performance. Reviewers are specifically required to find evidence of compliance against QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines and other relevant national and European provisions and guidelines or their equivalent e.g. professional accreditations. Reports are made available to the unit under review, University Management Team, Údarás na hOllscoile and are available publicly together with action plans on the Quality Office website.

2.5 Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI)

The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) University of Medicine & Health Sciences was established in 1784 to set and support professional standards for surgical training and practice in Ireland. RCSI has evolved considerably in the intervening years and is both a university and a postgraduate training body in surgery and related specialties. RCSI is the largest medical school in Ireland and awards medical degrees in Ireland, Bahrain and Malaysia. RCSI also provides undergraduate degree programmes in Pharmacy and Physiotherapy in Ireland, undergraduate Nursing degree programmes in Bahrain and masters (taught & by research) and doctoral programmes variously in Ireland, Bahrain, China, Dubai and Malaysia. RCSI became a Recognised College of the National University of Ireland (NUI) in 1978. Following an institutional review commissioned jointly by the Higher Education Authority and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, RCSI independent degree awarding powers were activated by ministerial order in 2010 pursuant to the terms of The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (Charters Amendment) Act 2003. The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 established RCSI as a Designated Awarding Body. In 2019 RCSI received authorisation to use the description 'University' and to style itself accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Amendment Act 2019.

The Medicine & Health Sciences Board (MHSB) is the governing body for all RCSI educational programmes leading to degree awards included within the National Framework of Qualifications, having the delegated authority of the RCSI Council (Figure 1). [The Surgery & Postgraduate Faculties Board is the cognate body governing RCSI postgraduate/ professional training and certification in Surgery and related specialties.] The granting to RCSI of independent degree-awarding powers enhanced its status as a higher education institution both nationally and internationally. However, recognising the visibility and recognition associated with NUI degrees, RCSI values its graduates being graduates of the NUI and so does not invoke its independent degree awarding powers in most circumstances. In light of this, Schedule 3 (9) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 introduced Section 47A to the Universities Act 1997 which provides that the degrees and qualifications of RCSI shall be degrees and qualifications of the NUI where they are approved by the NUI and while RCSI remains a Recognised College of the NUI. This legislative change was reflected

subsequently in an amendment to the NUI Statutes. Accordingly, degrees of RCSI are awards of the NUI.

The RCSI Quality Policy emphasises the paramount importance of delivering a high quality educational and professional development experience to students and professional trainees. The RCSI University of Medicine & Health Sciences Quality Assurance Framework present this policy, the processes implemented to assure and enhance the quality of the educational and training provision and to demonstrate this quality to internal and external stakeholders. As a Designated Awarding Body, RCSI is not a Linked Provider of NUI and therefore does not fall within scope of the Statutory Guidelines for NUI review of Linked Providers. Instead, QQI bears statutory responsibility for approval of RCSI's QA policies and procedures and for periodic review of the effectiveness of those procedures. The QA relationship between RCSI and NUI is described in an appendix to the RCSI Quality Assurance Framework and separately as an NUI governance document.

The RCSI Awards & Qualifications Committee (AQC) is responsible for the approval and validation of new educational programmes leading to RCSI degree awards including within the National Framework of Qualifications. It is responsible also for the revalidation of existing programmes to which Minor or Major Changes are proposed. For new programmes, the process involves two stages: [1] establishment of a Business Case and [2] development of an Academic Proposal. Once a Business Case for a new programme has been submitted, it is reviewed internally by the AQC Business Case Review Panel and feedback is given to the proposer. If/when the final Business Case has been approved by AQC, a recommendation is made to the RCSI Senior Management Team which, if approved, will permit the proposer to progress to the second stage. The Academic Proposal is subject initially to internal review by the AQC Academic Case Review Panel in an iterative process that leads ultimately to external, independent review of the programme proposal by separate RCSI- and NUI-appointed assessors. On successful completion of this external review process, the programme is recommended for approval to MHSB and to NUI Senate. Major changes to existing programmes are subject to a process similar to the Academic Proposal review for new programmes, while minor changes are subject to a less extensive review, with final approval in both cases by MHSB and NUI Senate (Figure 2).

The AQC also administers a rolling cycle of periodic Programmatic Reviews. Reviews focus on the quality assurance arrangements for existing programmes in a particular discipline or subject area. The reviews are carried out in line with RCSI and NUI guidelines and use specific indicators benchmarked to international best practice. The reports arising from the periodic reviews will make judgments about whether programmes continue to meet minimum standards as well as recommending improvements. For programmes undergoing review, the relevant head of academic unit completes a self-evaluation report on the programme which forms the basis for a site-visit by a peer-review panel consisting of a chairperson and two external peer reviewers, one appointed by RCSI and one by NUI. The final report summary is submitted to MHSB for noting, following which it is circulated to NUI to support NUI Senate re-validation of the relevant academic programme for the subsequent cycle (Figure 2).

As a Designated Awarding Body, RCSI is subject to statutory requirements to review the effectiveness of its internal QA policies and procedures through cyclical Internal Quality Assurance Reviews. In conformity with the requirements of the relevant legislation and standards, these QA reviews are characterised by a) the degree to which self-assessment drives the review process and b) the overall focus on quality enhancement. The Quality Enhancement Office (QEO) facilitates four parallel cycles of reviews:

i. reviews of Schools within the Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences;

ii. reviews of Professional Support Units;

iii. reviews of Overseas BranchCampuses & Programmes; and

iv. reviews of Postgraduate/ Professional Faculties.

The outcomes of the range of validation, revalidation and QA processes described above, the resultant reports and their intended audiences are summarised in Figure 3.

2.5.1 Governance schema
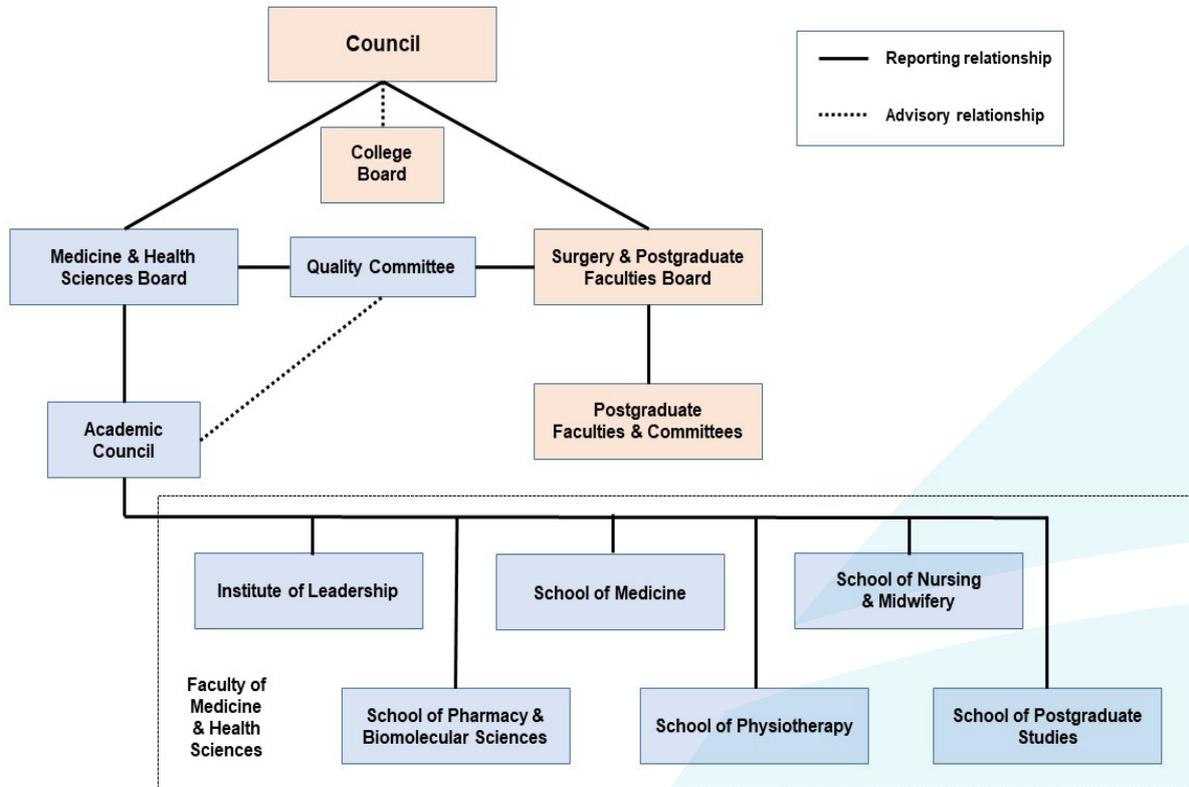
2.5.2 Process map
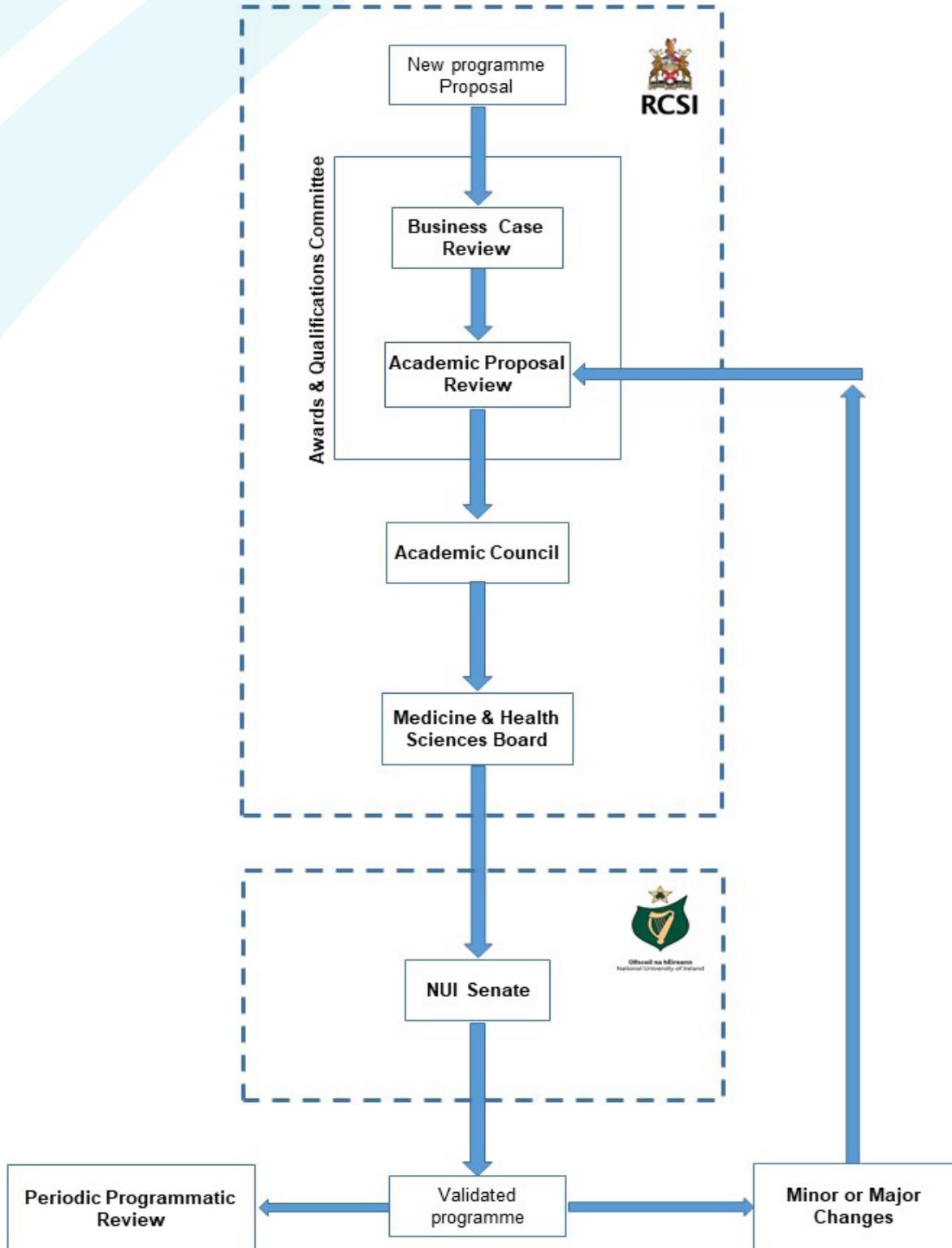
2.5.3 Process outcomes, reports and intended audiences

RCSI

Level of Review	DAB procedures resulting in a report	[1]Main role of the report; [2] Additional role(s) re approval / reapproval of programme	Intended Audience
Institutional	Self Evaluation in preparation for QQI periodic Institutional Review	Evaluation of effectiveness of RCSI QA procedures	QQI Review Panel
	RCSI-UCD Joint Institutional Review of RUMC (co-owned branch campus)	Final Report of externally-led Peer Review Panel (published)	RUMC, University Governance, External Stakeholders
Unit/ Area	Internal QA Review – Schools in FMHS	Final Report of externally-led Peer Review Group (published)	Area under Review, University Governance, External Stakeholders
	Internal QA Review – Admin Units		
	Internal QA Review – Postgraduate Faculties		
	Internal QA Review – overseas campuses		
Programme	Programme proposal documents	Evidence base for Programme Validation process	University Academic Council & Governing Board; NUI Senate
	Internal & External Reviewers' reports		
	Programmatic Review Reports	Programme re-validation	
	PRSB Accreditation SERs & Reports	Programme accreditation by PRSB	Relevant School, University Governance, External Stakeholders
	Annual Programme Monitoring Reports	Programme performance analysis	University Academic Council
Module	Student Satisfaction & Engagement Data	Module performance analysis	University Academic Council
	External Examiner Reports		
	Internal Performance Analysis		

2.6 Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin(TCD)

2.6.1 Context

Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin was established in 1592. As Ireland's oldest University, the legal basis to grant Awards is enshrined in the Schedule 1 of the University Division in the 2010 Consolidated Statutes of Trinity College Dublin and the University of Dublin. Trinity is recognised as a Designated Awarding Body in the Irish Universities Act 1997 and the Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education & Training) Act 2012.

2.6.2 Academic Governance and Quality Assurance

The Universities Act 1997 vests the Designated Awarding Body authority in the University Council. Council is responsible under the College Statutes (pg.191) for College's academic affairs and the establishment of regulations concerning the academic and other requirements to be fulfilled to achieve the academic standing necessary for the conferral of degrees and other academic qualifications. The Graduate Studies Committee and Undergraduate

Framework for Quality in Trinity College			
QA Processes	**Outputs**	**Reporting**	**Enhancements**
Reviews - Academic (School, Programme, Trinity Research Institutes) - Admin/Unit Reviews - Schedule of Reviews - Thematic Reviews	**Reviews** - Review report, Implementation Plan (IP) and Progress Report (PR) to Quality Committee (QC), Council and Board and/or Taskforces established	**Reviews** - Analysis and escalation of review themes - Reporting to QQI via AIQR - Publication of reports on QO website	**Reviews** - Process Improvements - Restructuring - Case Studies
External Examiners (EE) - External Examiner Process	**External Examiners (EE)** - Response to EEs from Schools - Action Plans to address EE recommendations - Database of issues by theme to inform targeted improvements - Consolidated list approved by Council	**External Examiners (EE)** - Issues of concern escalated to relevant College Officers - Re-current/College-level issues reported via Annual Faculty Quality Report (AFQR) to Council	**External Examiners (EE)** - QA of EE reports - Policy/Process improvements e.g. EE website and EE Policy
Academic Programmes - Programme Design & Approval - New Programme proposals reviewed externally - New Programmes considered by USC, GSC and Council - Curriculum Review - Professional/Statutory Body Accreditation	**Academic Programmes** - Establishment of new Programmes in College systems - Inclusion of programme on NFQ and Irish Register of Qualifications	**Academic Programmes** - Linked Provider (LP) proposals are considered by ACDC - All New Programme proposals considered by USC/GSC, Council - Schools respond to Accreditation recommendations - New Programmes listed in SL and DGS annual report	**Academic Programmes** - Publication of new programme proposals on Trinity website - Maintenance of accreditation master-list - Curriculum enhancements
Student Evaluation - UG Module/PG Programme evaluation - National Student Survey.ie - International Student Barometer - Student Focus Groups	**Student Engagement** - School Action Plan to address student evaluation outcomes - Closing the student feedback loop	**Student Engagement** - Report on National Student Survey.ie to QC and Council - Report on International Student Barometer (ISB) to QC and Council - Annual revision of Student Partnership Policy to Council	**Student Engagement** - Student Partnership Policy initiatives - Student Success Strategy (as part of the System Performance Framework) - Staff: Student liaison Committees
Alignment with QQI Policy - Approval of Linked Providers (LP) QA Procedures - Due diligence of Collaborative / Transnational Partnerships - Annual Reporting to QQI - Development and Review of Trinity QA Policies and Procedures - Code of Practice for International Learners - International Education Mark	**QA Regulation** - Revision/update of LP's Policies and Procedures - Escalation of cross-Faculty issues to College	**QA Regulation** - Report on Approval of Linked Provider's QA Procedures to Quality Committee & Council - Annual Institutional Quality Report (AIQR) to QC, Council, QQI	**QA Regulation** - Fulfilment of Trinity's duties as a Designated Awarding Body (DAB) - Compliance with QQI Act 2012 & QQI QA guidelines and codes
Institutional - Strategic Planning - Institutional networks e.g. LERU, COIMBRA, IUA - Alignment with EU initiatives and HEA regulatory framework - Trinity Gender Action Plan - Athena Swan Action Plan	**Institutional** - Mission-based performance compact with HEA - Sectoral-wide projects	**Institutional** - Provost's Annual Review - Reporting on Institutional Strategies	**Institutional** - Provost Teaching Award - Teaching Innovation Award - Revision of Policies/Procedure in line with national/ international policy directives. - Establishment of School Athena Swan Self-Assessment Teams to pursue Athena Swan applications

Fig. 1: Framework for Quality Trinity College Dublin.

Studies Committee are academic committees of University Council. New and revised course proposals are considered first by the relevant academic committee, prior to being sent for external review, and the final course proposal being submitted to University Council for final approval. The Quality Committee considers academic quality review reports (School, Programme and Research), Annual Faculty Quality Reports, and reports on outcomes of the national StudentSurvey.ie and recommends these reports to University Council for final approval.

The Framework for Quality (refer to Fig. 1), provides an overview of the institution level quality processes. It defines the Plan- Do- Check Act cycle that pertain to Quality Reviews (yellow outline) and Academic Programmes (red outline), in addition to complementary processes: the External Examination (orange outline) and Student Evaluation (black outline).

The Framework for Quality is supported by:
▪ Trinity's quality review procedures and quality review process map are available on the Quality Office website (https://tcd.ie/teaching- learning/quality/).
▪ Course Development guidance and templates are available from the Academic Affairs website (https://www.tcd.ie/teaching-learning/academic-affairs/course-development/).

▪ Detail process maps for undergraduate course proposals, postgraduate courses proposals are also available.
▪ Academic Policies and Procedures available from http://tcd.ie/teaching-learning/academic-policies/.
▪ Academic Regulations are available from the College Calendar website and includes level descriptors for Major, Minor, Special Purpose and Professional Awards on the NFQ.

Fig. 2 outlines the process outcomes, the final reports and intended audience of programme approval and review processes, at the culmination of a 12-18-month lead in period where supporting due diligence processes and internal and external consultation is conducted. For course proposals this includes a market feasibility study, curriculum mapping for Dual Degrees, alignment to undergraduate curriculum architecture pathways for Single, Joint or Major with Minor Awards, review by external disciplinary experts as required under ESG 1.2, and incorporation of any recommendations arising from the external review process in the course proposal document prior to submission to the University Council for approval. The discussion and formal approval of the Course Proposal appear in the University Council minute, that serves as the formal approval document and trigger for follow-up processes such as the establishment of the programme in College systems. All course proposals approved by University Council are published on the Academic Affairs page of the university's website

Level of Review	Examples of DAB Procedures	Role of Final Report	Intended Audience
Institutional	QQI External Cyclical Review	Compliance with Universities Act/ QQI Act Effectiveness of Trinity's QA Procedures, T&L, Research, Student Experience	College Board, University Council, Quality Committee. DES/HEA/IUA/QQI. External Stakeholders/Partners, Public, Staff, Students.
	Linked Provider External Reviews	Effectiveness review of providers QA procedures, aligned to QQI guidelines	Academic Council, College Board, Linked Provider Governance staff students, QQI
Unit/ Area	Internal Review – Schools (inc. associated Research Centres)	Effectiveness of Trinity 's QA Procedures, Academic Standards, Inform strategy.	Academic Council, College Officers, Schools, External Stakeholders/Partners, Students
	Internal Review- Administrative	Effectiveness of Trinity 's QA Procedures, Professional standards, Inform strategy	College Board, College Officers, Unit under Review, External Stakeholders, Students
Research	Trinity Research Institutes (TRIs) (inc. associated Research Centres)	Effectiveness of Trinity 's QA Procedures, Research standards, Inform strategy	Academic Council, College Officers, Research funders/Partners/Collaborators. Schools, Staff
Programme	New Programme Design and Approval - Course Proposals	QA new programmes/academic standards, listing in College Systems, on NFQ, Marketing and Recruitment	Academic Council, Partner Universities, Academic Registry, QQI, Global Relations, CAO, Schools, Applicants
	Programme Quality Reviews inc Dual and Joint Awards	Effectiveness of Trinity QA Procedures, curriculum standards, QA Collaborative and transnational partnerships. Inform strategy	Academic Council , College Officers, Schools, Partners Universities, Employers, QQI
	External Examiner Reports	QA of Academic Standards	Programme Directors/ Module Coordinators, College Officers
Module	Approval of stand alone modules	Curriculum architecture, academic standards	Graduate Studies, Joint Honours Office, Academic Registry, Schools, Students
	Student Evaluation of Module via Surveys/Focus Groups	Module enhancement , QA of T&L, Assessment & Examination, Workload	Programme Directors/Module Coordinators, Students

Fig. 2 Process outcomes, reports & intended audiences

where they can be accessed by staff internally. Quality Review Reports, including Programme Quality Reviews are published on the Quality Office website: https://www.tcd.ie/teaching-learning/quality/quality-assurance/reviews/reports.php.

Following initial approval, Trinity has procedures to address substantive change to modules, the addition of new modules or new strands to an existing programme, and the cessation or suspension of a programme. Full re-approval of a programme has been triggered by changes in external regulatory contexts, e.g. change in relevant European Directives, PRSBs' requirements, or internal change initiatives as occurred under the Trinity Education, that involved an institutional-wide review of the undergraduate curriculum.

The Terms of Reference for a Trinity Programme Quality Review include requirements for External Reviewer panels to:

(i) to provide assurance to the University Council, students', and external stakeholders that the academic standards on the programme included within the relevant level on the National Framework of Qualifications;

(ii) to assess the strategic direction of the programme in the context of School and College strategy, internal and external developments and, when necessary, to facilitate large-scale changes or discontinuation.

Following a Programme Quality Review, the report and its recommendations are considered by Quality Committee and recommended to University Council, who can direct that a revised course proposal be submitted to University Council at a later date, as outlined in Fig. 3 below..
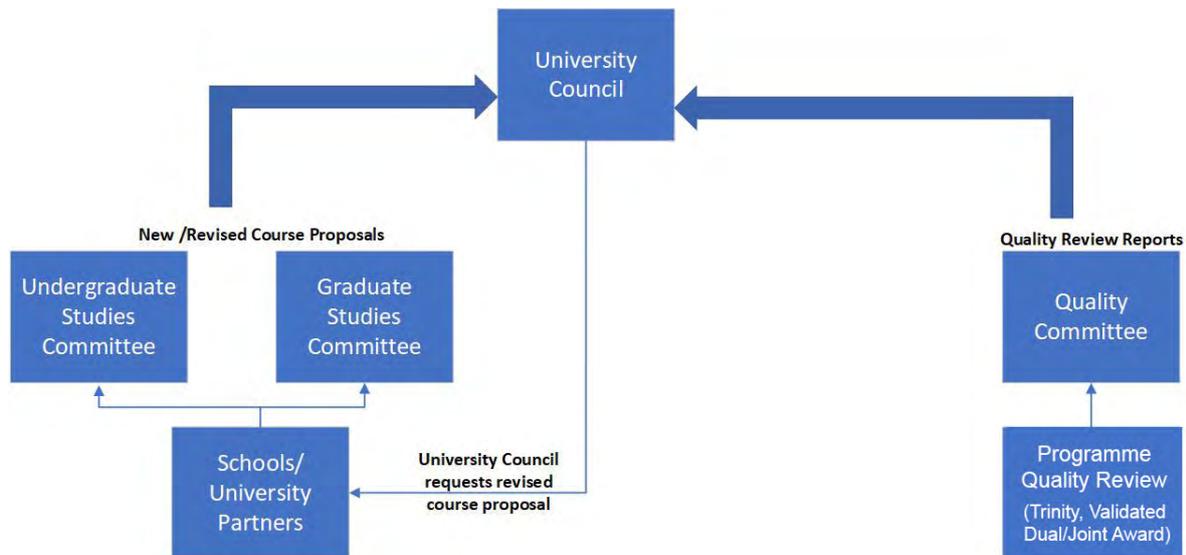

Fig. 3. Pathways for new and revised course proposals

2.7 University College Cork (UCC)

University College Cork is recognised as a Designated Awarding Body under the provisions of the Universities Act (1997) and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

2.7.1 Introduction

There are three inter-related domains which support the development, establishment and maintenance of the quality of the University's programmes of study leading to awards on the National Framework of Qualifications. These are:

- Academic Governance providing the institutional policy infrastructure for programmes

- Institutional policy and procedures for programme approval and review

- Periodic quality review which occurs at unit level and fulfils an assurance and enhancement function

2.7.2 Academic Governance Structure

Academic Council, in law, is the primary internal authority responsible for academic affairs. The authority of Academic Council is set out in full in the Universities Act, 1997, Section 27 of the Act. www.irishstatutebook.ie/1997/en/act/pub/0024/index.html and in Chapter C of the Principal Statute for University College Cork : www.ucc.ie/en/ocla/statutes/statutes/.

Internal revisions in academic governance must not undermine the legal powers granted to Academic Council but must enable it to discharge its responsibilities effectively and, in practical terms, must enable the alignment and integration of University/College academic governance arrangements with an appropriate balance being struck between accountability and autonomy. Operationally this means that Academic Council retains authority on policy matters with University-level Committees and College Councils advisory to Academic Council, whilst in fact undertaking much of the preliminary work for purposes of efficacy.

Academic Governance of Programmes of Study

The Academic Council shall, subject to the financial constraints determined by the Governing Body and to review by it, control the academic affairs of the University, including the curriculum of, and instruction and education provided by, the University. According to Principal Statute, "each College's academic responsibilities are owed to the Academic Council".

The specific objectives of Academic Council in relation to programmes of study include the following which are consistent with the functions of the University are:

(a) to design and develop programmes of study;

(b) to establish structures to implement those programmes;

(c) to promote the highest standards of teaching and learning;

(d) to make recommendations on programmes for the development of research and more generally to promote the advancement and dissemination of knowledge.

Academic Council has delegated authority to Academic Board for programme approval and curriculum review and change. Academic Council requires the Academic Development and Standards Committee to review all reports from Programme Approval for the purposes of quality enhancement and policy development.

Academic Board

Academic Board is the senior University Standing Committee of Academic Council, established in University statute, responsible for the discharge of functions delegated to it by Council and for the formulation of strategy and policy to meet the University's education and research objectives. The Academic Board, as the senior Standing Committee of Academic Council, shall consider and consult on business from other Council Standing Committees and College Councils prior to bringing forward policy recommendations and proposals to Council for approval. Amongst its functions this includes:

(a) Strategy and policy relating to education and research, including: academic planning and development; academic cooperation between UCC and another body; the organisation of teaching and examination and the award and revocation of UCC degrees.

(b) Strategy and policy relating to academic staff promotion, establishment, and development.

(c) Policies, rules and procedures concerning the approval, periodic review, quality assurance and enhancement of academic programmes and the maintenance of academic standards of UCC awards.

Academic Council- Academic Development and Standards Committee (ADSC)

A standing committee of Academic Council which is responsible for bringing forward policy and procedures and review policies and procedures to enhance the quality and to maintain standards of UCC awards. The committee will advise in relation to UCC's academic framework to support internal and institutional compliance with the National Framework of Qualifications. The Committee shall also advise

Academic Board on the impact of national and international developments on UCC's arrangements underpinning academic standards. This includes:

a) Policy and procedures governing programme approval and review including arrangements for the approval and review of taught programmes offered in partnership;

b) Proposals for the development of UCC's academic framework ensuring continuing alignment with national and EU developments in higher education and quality assurance and enhancement of UCC's taught provision;

c) Proposals to assure institutional oversight of the University's responsibilities relating to Professional, Statutory and other accreditation bodies;

d) On behalf of Academic Board and Academic Council, ADSC reviews Programme Approval Panel reports;

e) Revaluates the overall performance and opportunities for enhancement in academic standards, advising Academic Board as appropriate.

College Councils

At the College level, College Councils have a range of delegated responsibilities and roles from Academic Council and Academic Board in relation to academic programme development, examinations, student recruitment and applications and curriculum changes etc. College Councils are governed by College Rules as approved by Governing Body.

2.7.3 New Programme Design, Development and Approval

New programme proposals may be developed in response to institutional needs and strategy, and/or in response to identified national skills needs in industry, community, professional and other settings. Preliminary discussions occur within a School/Department or between groups of Schools/Departments and involves consultation with internal stakeholders (e.g. Undergraduate and Graduate Studies Committees,) external disciplinary and industry experts and collaborating partners where relevant.

UCC has a well-established process for the approval of new programmes in accordance with QQI

Academic Governance Structure Diagram

Academic Council & Academic Board

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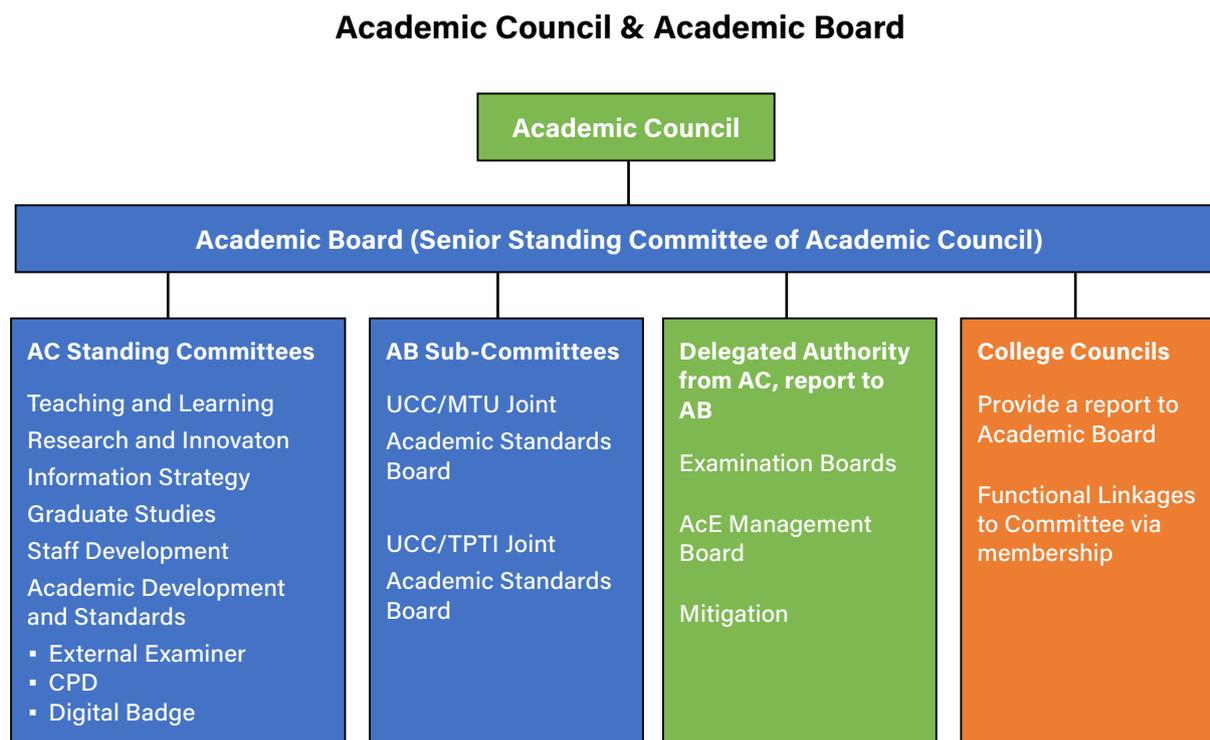
core statutory quality assurance guidelines and the European Standards and Guidelines. All new programmes undergo a comprehensive and rigorous review and approval process by a Programme Approval Panel (normally 12 + members) comprising:

- external academic and disciplinary experts

- employer/industry representatives

- learner representatives

- internal senior academics representing Academic Council, Academic Board and College committees (not associated with the programme)

- professional service staff (ex officio)

- external collaborative partners (where required)

New programme approval process is a two-stage process. **Stage 1** (Outline Programme Proposal) involves the approval of the business case by Academic Board following initial consideration by the contributing Schools and Colleges. **Stage 2** (Full Programme Approval) involves consideration of the quality and standards of the proposed programme by a Programme Approval Panel.

UCC adopts a **risk-based approach** to new programme approval where the level of scrutiny and composition of the Programme Approval Panel is determined by the Academic Board at Stage 1 of the approval process. The credit volume and type of award as well as inclusion of partner institutions, informs the Academic Board decision when approving the operational arrangements for stage 2 approval.

Stage 2 Programme Approval is designed to provide assurance to the university, students and external stakeholders that:

- the programme adheres to institutional policies and procedures;

- aims and learning outcomes are clear and coherent and the proposed NFQ level of the award is in accordance with national standards;

- curricula, teaching, learning and assessment methods enable students to reach the appropriate standard to achieve the award;

- adequate arrangements to support the student experience and monitor student performance programme;

- there are sufficient resources, learning, physical, and staffing, to support proposed programme aims and objectives;

- the programme meets industry needs;

- the programme provides employability prospects and routes for progression to other programmes for graduates;

- Programmes take appropriate account of relevant external discipline benchmarks and Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body requirements;

- in the case of joint and dual degree programmes due diligence of the curriculum and learning experience in the partner institution is completed.

Outcomes of Programme Approval Panel

The outcome of the Programme Approval Panel event is a comprehensive report capturing an overview of the discussion and the key points that the panel requires the programme team to address to secure approval. This report highlights areas of good practice and highlights issues/considerations for the University for ongoing enhancement. The programme is granted approval once all requirements specified by the Programme Approval Panel have been addressed. The Programme Approval Report is a resource for the programme team which informs ongoing curriculum review and enhancements.

The delegated authority of Academic Board to Programme Approval Panels, is overseen by the Academic Development & Standards Committee which formally receives all Programme Approval Panel reports.

2.7.4 Ongoing programme monitoring and review

Programme curricula are monitored on an on-going basis taking account of student feedback, progression data, External Examiner's Reports, disciplinary changes/advances, professional body requirements and in response to the changing needs of industry/employers and learners, to ensure the integrity, quality and standards of the University's programmes portfolio. Annually there is a systematic process of curriculum review and renewal, which is managed according to the University's academic governance and curriculum changes policies and procedures. The output of which is the University's publications (University Calendar; Book of Modules; Programme Marks & Standards). Outcomes of the initial Programme Approval Panel report also inform curriculum change.

The University has established procedures for curriculum review and approval pathways according to the extent of changes being proposed. This process is underpinned by the University's standards for curriculum development and approval to ensure that the standards and agreed learning outcomes for programmes continue to be met. Ongoing monitoring and review processes lead to proposals for curriculum change which is reviewed and approved by the relevant College Curriculum Committee /Academic Board (in-line with the University defined classification of programme change types). The outcomes of this curricular review and change process are maintained as part of the University's internal repository.

2.7.5 Strategic programmes review

The University is currently engaged in a strategic curriculum transformation which encompasses review and development of all taught programmes at undergraduate and graduate level. The priorities, criteria and action lines are set out in the Academic Strategy for the Connected Curriculum (2018-2022) https://www.ucc.ie/en/registrar/theconnect eduniversity/academicstrategy/ with oversight from Academic Council.

2.7.6 Periodic Quality Review

Quality assurance and enhancement policy at UCC is informed by international best practice and has regard to the requirements of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012 and with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015). Our guidelines are comprehensive and include our objectives, principles and process. https://www.ucc.ie/en/qeu/ . Periodic review processes encompass: Academic quality review; research quality review; professional services review.

The methodology for the periodic review process follows the 4-stage process of:

- Self-evaluation
- Appointment of a peer review panel and site visit
- Publication of a peer review report
- Follow-up and quality enhancement

The overarching objectives of academic quality review at UCC are to enable Schools, through evidence-based self-evaluation, to:

i. Reflect on and promote the strategic enhancement of their academic activities to ensure an outstanding learning experience for all students (enhancement dimension).

ii. Evaluate the effectiveness of their processes for assuring academic standards and provision, in line with the University's academic mission and strategy (assurance dimension).

Full details of the Academic Review approach can be found here: https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/support/qualityenhancementunit/guidelines/GuidelinesforPeriodicQualityReview(Academic)(1).pdf

Information on the documentary requirements for self-evaluation for Academic Review is set out here: https://www.ucc.ie/en/qeu/guidelines/

All review reports and recommendations arising from periodic review are considered by the Quality Enhancement Committee and senior management. Recommendations arising from review are responded to by the area under review and are subject to a follow-up process. Key issues arising from review are analysed and reported to the Quality Enhancement Committee and the University Management Team as part of the integration between quality and strategic planning actions and processes. Annually, the QEC reports on the key issues, improvements and themes from University-wide periodic review to Governing Body, which then refers the report to Academic Council for consideration and action. Reports of periodic review are published on the University's website: https://www.ucc.ie/en/qeu/reports/

Self-evaluation (SER)	Site Visit	Panel Report	Unit's Quality Enhancement Plan

2.8 University College Dublin (UCD)

2.8.1 UCD Governance and Oversight on Quality Assurance

UCD's governance arrangements ensure that operational objectives are aligned with its mission and strategy, and that quality assurance is embedded throughout all levels of the governance infrastructure. Governance and oversight on quality assurance activity is the responsibility of UCD Governing Authority as required under the Universities Acts 1997, Section 35, the 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012, UCD Charter and UCD Statutes, and in alignment with the 2015 European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, and QQI Guidelines and publications.

2.8.2 UCD Programme Governance

UCD Academic Council has responsibility for advising the Governing Authority on procedures for quality assurance aimed at improving the quality of education and related activity. Academic oversight includes directing the educational matters of the University on curriculum, education provision, academic policy and regulatory oversight through approval of Academic Regulations and student codes, guidelines procedures and academic policies. Academic Council oversees an academic governance framework which is made up of a number of sub-committees, and has a key role in setting the annual work programme and reporting requirements for these committees including responsibility for quality oversight. Terms of reference are in place for all committees and are published.

Under delegated authority from Academic Council, programme boards have responsibility to Academic Council or its relevant committees for the design, development, regulation and quality, and for overseeing the delivery of the programmes under their remit. Boards will recommend the structure and content of their programmes, and any regulations or policy which govern them, and make decisions or recommendations regarding the admissions, progression, continuation, and graduation of the students registered to these programmes. This includes responsibility for overseeing and enhancing the academic quality of the programme and the student learning experience.

UCD Governance Committee Structure

(Note: Draft as of January 2021; maybe subject to change; further detailed information is available at University Governance)
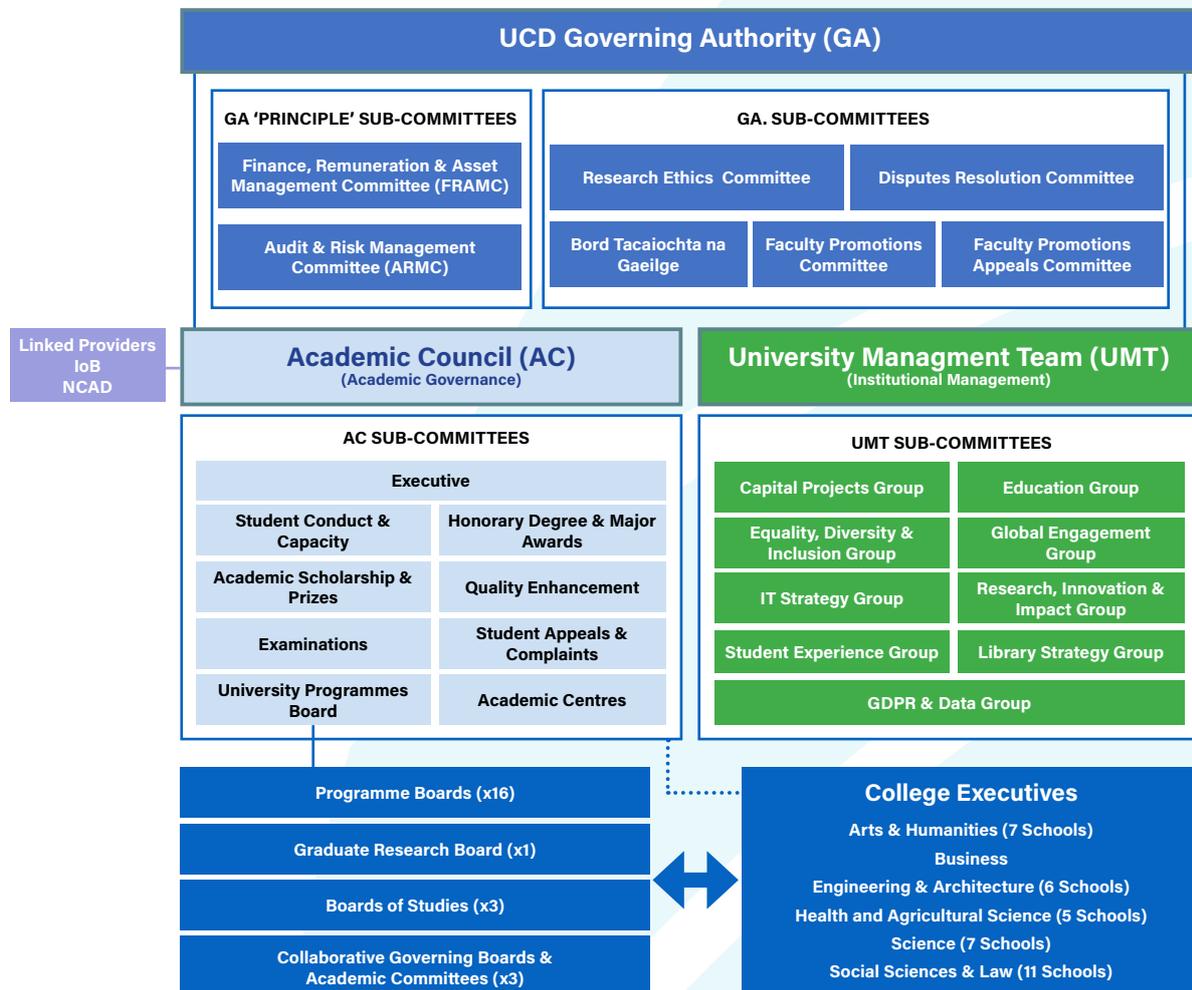
2.8.3 UCD Programme Development and Approval

The procedures and requirements relating to programme design are contained in the UCD academic Regulations, which are a high level, overarching framework covering the University's educational offerings and which define the parameters within which programmes may be designed, and developed - this includes support for a modularised and trimesterised curriculum, utilizing the European credit transfer system (ECTS) for all of its programmes. A significant number of UCD programmes, schools and institutes are also accredited by national and/or international professional statutory and regulatory bodies. This external accreditation complements the various internal quality assurance and enhancement process as articulated under the UCD Quality Framework.

The UCD Programme Development, Approval and Review Framework (PDARF) sets out the formal institutional approval process by which new programmes and programme changes are developed, approved and implemented through the University's academic governance structures, including Academic Council and its relevant sub-committees. The strategic case for a new programme of study must be signed by the Head of School, College Finance Manager and College Principal and then approved by the relevant College Executive and the University Management Team (UMT). The academic aspects of a new programme must be signed by the Head of School and Chair of the Governing Board and then approved by the relevant Governing Board and/or the University Programmes Board (UPB) depending on the type of the programme proposal e.g. collaborative programmes will require provision of additional information and approvals. The Curriculum Team in Administrative Services (a unit of UCD Registry) provides support and advice to staff and faculty across 37 schools/ units on curriculum management and programme development and approval. Extensive support for programme and module design and enhancement is available through UCD Teaching and Learning, including courses, workshops, self-help online guides, resources and customised support for programme teams.

2.8.4 UCD Programme Review
University Led Programme Review

In 2016 the University undertook a University-led curriculum review process of its undergraduate and graduate taught programmes provision. The university-wide review focused on articulating learning outcomes that students are required to achieve, and the process of how the University organises, delivers and assesses our curriculum to embed and assure these outcomes for students.

Programme Review
Regular monitoring of UCD programmes by the University is managed by the relevant programme boards under delegated authority of Academic Council. The purpose and function of the programme boards are:

- The board is responsible to the Academic Council or its relevant committee for the design, development regulation and quality, and for overseeing the delivery of the programmes under its remit.

- The board is responsible for monitoring the overall performance of students registered to these programmes, including Erasmus+, Exchange and Occasional fee-paying students, monitoring their progression and ensuring their academic welfare.

- The Board will recommend the structure and content of these programmes, and any regulations or policy which govern them, and make decision or recommendations regarding the admission, progression, continuation and graduation of the students registered to these programmes.

Terms of reference are in place to support the boards and include oversight and enhancement of the academic quality of its programmes and the student learning experience. All programme boards report annually to Academic Council or its relevant committee.

The University also operates a University-wide online module student feedback system which is used to enhance modules. Extern examiners also play a key role in assuring the academic standards and integrity of modules, awards and assessment practice, supporting module development, and contributing to the enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment. Extern examiners' reports are reviewed annually by the University and include the response by schools to extern recommendations.

Monitoring and Review of Collaborative and Transnational Programmes
Development and approval of new collaborative programmes or amendments to existing programmes adhere to the PDARF requirements and programme boards outlined above. The University also has in place a formal quality review process for monitoring and review of its collaborative and transnational programmes and associated partnerships which

PDARF Form - Completion Process	Signed by	Approval	University Level (where applicable)	Actioned by
PDARF 1 Partnership Proposal	HoS/College Finance Manager/ College Principal	College Executive	GEG approval: intemationalagreements@ ucd.ie and UMT approval: umt@ucd ie	UCD International/ University Secretariat
PDARF 2 New Programme Proposal (Also submit PDARF 1 if includes external partnership)	HoS/College Finance Manager/ College Principal	College Executive	UMT approval: umt@ucd.ie	University Secretariat
PDARF 3 New Programme Academic Structure Proposal (PDARF 2 must be approved before PDARF 3 submission}	Head of School/ Chair of Governing Board	Governing Board	Dependent on type of new programme	Curriculum Team, UCD Registry
PDARF 4 Collaborative Programme Supplement (PDARF 1 & 3 may need to be submitted)	Head of School/ Chair of Governing Board	Governing Board	UPB approval programmes@ucd.ie	Curriculum Team, UCD Registry
PDARF 6 Structural Elective or Specialisation Proposal/ Change	Head of School/ Chair of Governing Board	Governing Board		Curriculum Team, UCD Registry
PDARF 7 Programme Change Proposal (PDARF 14 may need to be submitted with PDARF 7)	Head of School/ Chair of Governing Board	Governing Board	Dependent on type of new programme change	Curriculum Team, UCD Registry
PDARF 8 Pathway Programme Proposal	Head of School/ Chair of Governing Board	Governing Board	UPB approval programmes@ucd.ie	Curriculum Team, UCD Registry
PDARF 14 Derogations	No signatures	Governing Board	UPB approval	Curriculum Team

Figure 4 – PDARF Flowchart – Approval steps for new programme proposals and changes to programmes

is managed by the UCD Quality Office with specific guidelines and procedures. The process is conducted on a 7-year cyclical basis that includes a self-assessment report, site visit, peer review report, quality improvement plan, and progress report on implementation of the QIP. This process is also supported by an annual programme review process with oversight from Academic Council Quality Enhancement Committee on delegated authority from Academic Council. Review Group reports and Quality Improvement plans are published on the UCD Quality Office website following consideration by ACQEC, UMT and Governing Authority. Implementation of the recommendations are also embedded into the University's annual planning and strategic process.

2.8.5 UCD Unit Reviews

A formal quality review of schools and supports units takes place on a cyclical basis, typically every seven years and managed by the UCD Quality Office. It is enhancement focused and requires the completion of a self-assessment report by the school/ unit, a site visit, Peer Review Group report, Quality Improvement Plan, and Progress Review Plan. For school's undergoing review they are required to self-reflect on the effectiveness of their programme(s) monitoring and review arrangements in relation to curriculum development and review, and teaching, learning and assessment. Support Unit reviews include a reflection on their programme supports provision. Inputs to reviews include faculty and staff, students, employers, graduates and other relevant stakeholders. Review Groups are required to comment on the self-assessment report and provide recommendations and commendations on programme provision and supports.   Review Group reports and Quality Improvement plans are published on the UCD Quality Office website following consideration by ACQEC, UMT and Governing Authority. Implementation of the recommendations are also embedded into the University's annual planning and strategic process.

2.8.6 Process outcomes, reports and intended audiences

Level of Review	QA Procedure	Report	Audience
Institutional	QQI External Cyclical Reviews	Institutional Review Team Report	QQI, University faculty and staff, students, employers, graduates and other stakeholders
	Thematic Review	Peer Review Group Report	University faculty and staff, students, QQI and other stakeholders
	Curriculum Review	University Report	University, Academic Council, colleges and schools
	Linked Provider Reviews	Peer Review Report on Approval of Quality Procedures Peer Review Group Report on Effectiveness of Linked Provider quality review procedures	University, Linked Provider, students, employers, QQI and other stakeholders
School/ Unit	Review of schools	Peer Review Group Report	University faculty and staff, students, employers, QQI and other stakeholders
	Review of Professional Support Units	Peer Review Group Report	University faculty and staff, students, employers, QQI and other stakeholders
Programme	Programme Validation (approval and monitoring)	PDARF Submission	Academic Council and/or relevant sub-committees, UMT, UMT Global Engagement Group, UMT Education Group
	Programme Accreditation (review)	PDARF Submission Peer Review Group reports PSRB reports	Academic Council and/or relevant sub-committees, UMT, UMT Global Engagement Group, UMT Education Group
	Collaborative and transnational programme review	PDARF Submission Review Group reports	Academic Council and/or relevant sub-committees, UMT, UMT Global Engagement Group, UMT Education Group, QQI and external stakeholders
	Annual and periodic programme review	Annual programme board reports, Review Group reports	Academic Council and relevant sub-committees, QQI and external stakeholders

2.9 University of Limerick (UL)

With close to 16,500 students, including more than 2,000 international students each year, the University of Limerick (UL) is a young and enterprising university with a proud record of innovation in education and scholarship.

UL offers more than 70 undergraduate programmes across Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences; Education and Health Sciences, Science and Engineering and the Kemmy Business School. UL also delivers a strong postgraduate offering with more than 100 taught postgraduate programmes to Doctoral and Post-doctoral level. Programmes are developed and evaluated in a cyclical manner in accordance with policies and procedures approved by its Academic Council.

2.9.1 New Programme Development

In accordance with QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guideline 3.1 (Programme development a nd approval) and European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) no. 2 (Design and approval of programmes), the University follows a well-established, rigorous process for developing and approving new programmes. All

new programmes must align with the institutional strategic plan, with justification included in approval documentation, and must comply with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The NFQ level, award type, learning outcomes, entry requirements, total credits, calculated credits, mode of delivery (full-time, part-time, blended, distance, evening, etc.), progression points and core pathway must all be specified on the programme submission application form for subsequent consideration by the approving groups.

New programmes are formally approved in five stages by five different groups: the host department, host faculty, University Teacher Education Board (UTEB) in the case of interfaculty teacher training programmes, Executive Committee, Academic Programme Review Committee (APRC) and Academic Council. Academic Council approves the accreditation of new programmes on the advice of APRC. Students and representative stakeholders of the academic units (faculty and department/ school) proposing the programme are represented on Academic Council (Figure 1). Table 1 describes the output, intended audience and publication mechanism involved in this process.

Table 2-1: Outputs and audience for New Programme Development Processes

Output	Description	Intended Audience	Publication
Programme specification document	Detail of programme i.e. alignment with criteria, programme learning outcomes, entry requirements, curriculum, additional operational information	Department Management Faculty Management Academic Programme Review Committee Academic Council Academic Registry	Internal
Compliance Recommendations	Recommendations to Programme team from APRC on matters to be addressed prior to recommendation for accreditation	Course Director and Programme Development Team Head of Department(s) Dean(s) Faculty Assistant Dean(s) Academic Affairs	Internal
Compliance Report	Report to APRC from Programme team on matters addressed prior to recommendation for accreditation	Academic Programme Review Committee	Internal
Recommendation of Programme Accreditation	Record of recommendation to Academic council via APRC report	Academic Council Head of Department(s) Dean(s) Faculty	Internal
Record of Programme Accreditation	Recorded in proceedings of Academic Council	Course Director Academic Council Head of Department(s) Dean(s) Faculty Academic Registry	Internal

2.9.2 Annual Review

Each Faculty is responsible for ensuring that all taught programmes offered (or coordinated) by the faculty undergo Annual Programme Review. Academic programmes, where there is progression from an award level to the next higher award level may be considered as one programme for the purpose of the Annual Programme Review (i.e. progression from Certificate, Higher Certificate, Diploma, Degree, and Higher Diploma to the next higher award level). The annual review will normally occur in January for all academic programmes. In the case of inter-faculty programmes, the Assistant Deans of Academic Affairs of the relevant Faculties will agree a coordinating Faculty to manage the Annual Programme Review. The outputs, intended audience and publication mechanism for this process in outlined in Table 2. Figure 2 in Appendix 1 demonstrates the relationship between annual review, programme modification and periodic programme review.

Output	Description	Intended Audience	Publication
Annual programme report	Report of the findings of the annual review	Faculty Board Academic Programme Review Committee Academic Council	Internal
Faculty Report	Aggregate report of the programme reports in a Faculty	Faculty Board Academic Programme Review Committee Academic Council	Internal

Table 2-2: Output and audience for Annual Programme Review

2.9.3 Modifications to Programmes following annual review or other initiatives, e.g. PRSBs recognition

The purpose of programme modification is to make material changes to a programme or its constituent modules arising from internal and external feedback mechanisms, e.g. annual programme review, staff change, external examiner recommendations or PRSBs' requirements. The outputs of this process are similar to those of a new programme accreditation.

2.9.4 Cyclical Department/ Faculty Review

As a Designated Awarding Body, University of Limerick is statutorily required to review the effectiveness of its internal quality assurance policies and procedures through the internal review of its faculties, departments, service and support functions. As well as demonstrating compliance with the statutory requirement, these reviews provide a structured opportunity for the area under review to engage in self-reflection and benchmarking with national and international practice. They also provide a framework by which external peers can evaluate, report upon and suggest improvements to the activities of the area under review.

Output	Intended Audience	Publication
Self-Evaluation Report	Unit Under Review Peer Review Group	Not published
Peer Review Group (PRG) report	Unit Under Review University Community	www.ul.ie/quality

Table 2-3: Outputs and audience for Programme Modifications Process

Output	Description	Intended Audience	Publication
Revised Programme specification document	Detail of proposed programme/ modular changes	Department Management Faculty Management Academic Programme Review Committee Academic Council Academic Registry	Internal
Compliance Recommendations	Recommendations to Programme team from APRC on matters to be addressed prior to recommendation for accreditation	Course Director and Programme Development Team Head of Department(s) Dean(s) Faculty Assistant Dean(s) Academic Affairs	Internal
Compliance Report	Report to APRC from Programme team on matters addressed prior to recommendation for accreditation	Academic Programme Review Committee	Internal
Recommendation of Programme Accreditation	Record of recommendation to Academic Council via APRC report	Academic Council Head of Department(s) Dean(s) Faculty	Internal
Record of Programme Accreditation	Recorded in proceedings of Academic Council	Course Director Academic Council Head of Department(s) Dean(s) Faculty Academic Registry	Internal

2.9.5 Periodic Programme Review[2]

Academic Programmes accredited by the Academic Council of the University are subject to the Annual Programme Review process and are normally accredited for an initial period of five years. The objective of the Programme Review is to review the programme(s)' aims and objectives, programme outcomes and Annual Reports, and make recommendations to the Academic Programme Review Committee on the continued suitability and quality of the programme offered.

Output	Intended Audience	Publication
Self-Evaluation of programme	Programme Teams of Programmes Undergoing Review Peer Review Group Academic Programme Review Committee Academic Council	Not published
Peer Review Group (PRG) report	Programme Teams of Programmes Undergoing Review Academic Programme Review Committee Academic Council	

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[2] This process is due to commence at University of Limerick in 2021/22 academic year

Appendix 1: Outlines of Key Programme Accreditation and Review Processes

Course Team develops detailed Programme document using templates from VPA&R Office

Resubmits programme

Email alerts are sent to support departments Divisions and Faculties requesting feedback

The host department of Course Director is identified as Coordinating Department

Course Team considers and responds to recommendations of APRC

Programme considered by Department(s)

Refer back to Course team

Course Team reviews feedback

Refer to Course Team and Department(s)

Approved by coordinating department

No

Programmes considered by Faculty (ies)

Programme development terminated

Approved by Coordinating Faculty

Refer back to Faculty/Course Team or Programme development Terminated

Programme considered by Executive

Approved by Executive

Programme considered by APRC

Recommendations to Academic Council

Academic Council requested to endorse recommendations of APRC.

Figure 1: New Programme Accreditation Workflow

Annual Course/Programme Evaluation Process

| Exit Survey | Student Survey.ie | Professional Accreditation Outcomes | University National Policy & Context | Course Data (enrolment, progression etc | Graduate Outcomes | External Examiner Reports |

Course Review Board

Annual Course Report and Action Plan

Programme Modification

Faculty Board

Faculty Report & Action Plan

Periodic Programme Review

APRC

Consideration of reports, action plan and recommendations issued

Academic Council

Thematic Actions

Figure 2: Annual Programme Review Process

2.10 National University of Ireland (NUI)

2.10.1 Introduction

National University of Ireland (NUI) is empowered under its charter and by statute to recognise other institutions of higher education, referred to as Recognised Colleges and is responsible for the academic standards of its degrees and other qualifications awarded in those institutions. NUI became a Designated Awarding Body (DAB) under the terms of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 further cementing its authority in law to award degrees and other qualifications in recognised colleges that are termed "Linked Providers" in the Act. [3]

The approval, monitoring and periodic, external review of academic programmes in the Recognised Colleges is a key objective of NUI policy and related procedures and NUI places significant importance on independent disciplinary expertise for peer review during the approval and review stages of program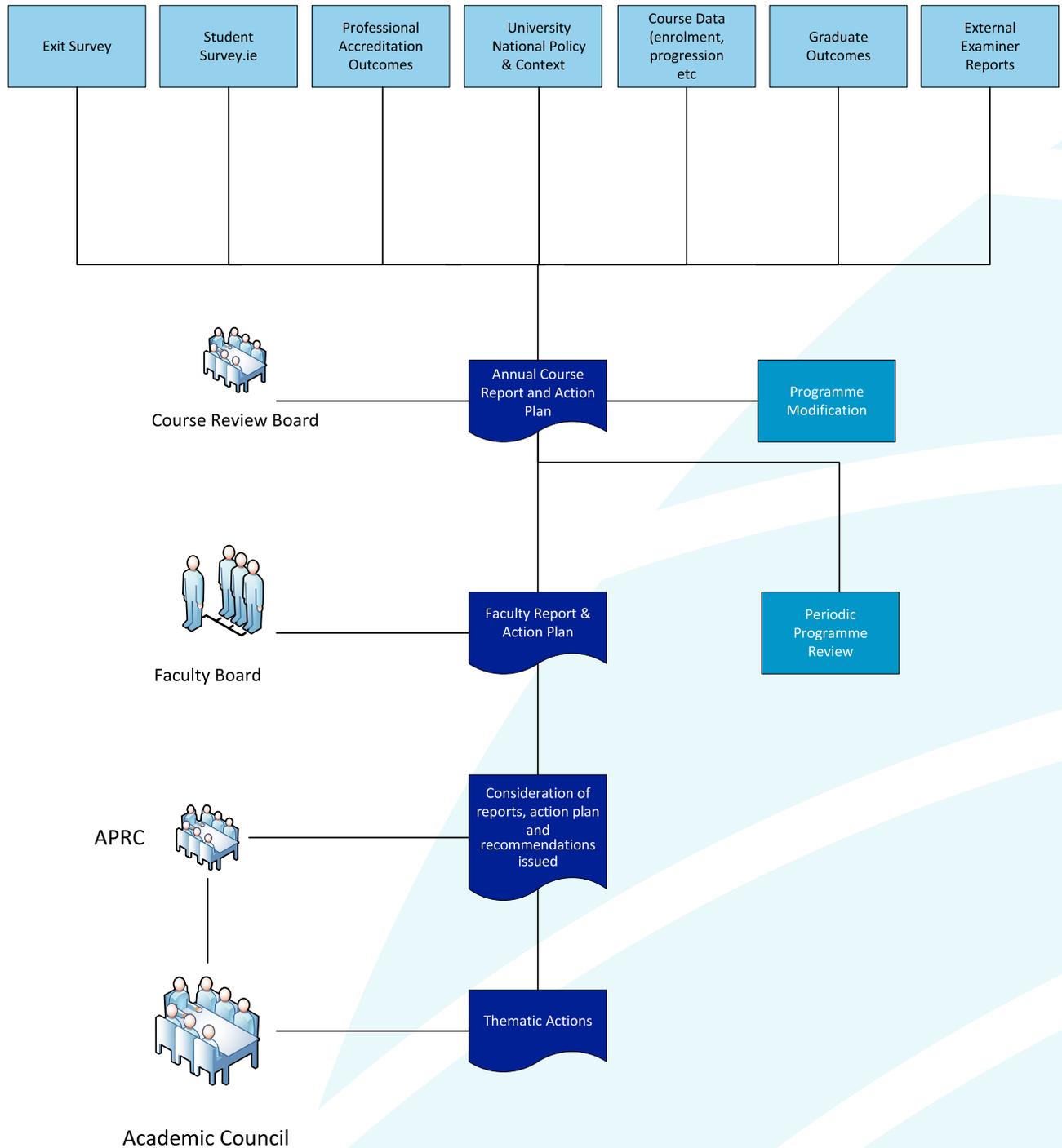mes. NUI also appoints and receives reports from External Examiners at subject (and sometimes programme) level in the Recognised Colleges.

This is a key feature of the overall quality assurance process in the Recognised Colleges, guided by NUI regulations that are governed by the University Senate (Governing Body).

The University ensures that programmes seeking approval meet the requirements set out in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) so that students can attain NUI qualifications.

NUI policy for Quality Assurance states that Recognised Colleges have primary responsibility for the quality of their educational programmes and the continued quality enhancement of that academic provision. They are however guided by NUI as the DAB in line with national policy and European best practice guidelines where relevant. More specifically, NUI is responsible for the cyclical and comprehensive review of the effectiveness of the quality assurance provision in Linked Provider colleges where NUI degrees and other qualifications are awarded.

As part of its approach to fulfil these responsibilities, NUI has a range of policies, procedures and guidelines (see appendix 2).

2.10.2 Key Stages of Programme Approval

a. A Recognised College will undertake the design and internal evaluation of a programme to be offered to its students before it is submitted to NUI.

b. Submissions for new programmes, or programmes where there are major changes, are submitted to NUI for approval by Senate. A submission will include a range of detailed documentation including technical details of the programme linking it to the appropriate level in the NFQ. It will map the specific knowledge, skill, competence and learning outcomes of the programme and will include details of the governance and financial structures in place to support the programme and professional or regulatory accreditation as appropriate.

c. All programmes are subject to a rigorous external and independent review. The level of scrutiny depends on the award-type and size of the programme, e.g. a new programme leading to a major award will require the appointment of two programme assessors whereas programmes with a smaller credit volume and leading to a non-major award will only require external review by one assessor[4].

d. All new programmes and existing programmes with major changes are subject to approval by the NUI Senate.

See Appendix 1.

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[3] At present there are two types of provider institutions with the status of a Recognised College of NUI:
  (i) A provider institution that is also the holder of the status of designated awarding body under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. Here, the responsibility for approval of the quality assurance provision for that institution lies directly with QQI.
  (ii) A provider institution that is deemed a "linked provider" under the Act 2012. Section 2(3) states that "a linked provider is a provider that is not a designated awarding body but enters into an arrangement with a designated awarding body under which arrangement the provider provides a programme of education and training that satisfies all or part of the prerequisites for an award of the designated awarding body".
[4] Shorter programmes leading to awards designated as Special Purpose or Supplemental awards are also subject to periodic external review but are not confined to the 5-year cycle. It is expected that these are reviewed periodically in accordance with the Recognised College's policies and procedures for quality assurance and enhancement.

Appendix 1: Processes for (i) New Programmes and (ii) Proposed Major/Minor Changes

Process of Approval for New Programmes

Senate Approval

Programme documentation finalised and recommendations for approval submitted to senate

Review by 2 Extern Assessors:
1 NUI-appointed
1 RC-appointed

Review by RC-appointed Extern Assessor

Review by RC-appointed Extern Assessor or NUI-appointed Extern Examiner

Submission of programme documentation to NUI

Major Award

Minor/Special Purpose/ Supplemental Award

Minor/Special Purpose/ Supplemental Award

Major Award

Minor/Special Purpose/Supplemental Award (> 60 ECTS)

Minor/Special Purpose/Supplemental Award (< 60 ECTS)

Figure 1: Process for New Programmes

Process for Notifying Senate of Major/Minor Changes to Existing Programmes

Senate to Approve

Programme documentation finalised and recommendations for approval submitted to Senate

Review by RC-appointed Extern Assessor *or* NUI-appointed Extern Examiner

Senate to Note

Documentation detailing minor change(s) to existing programme submitted to Senate for noting

Review by RC-appointed Extern Assessor *or* NUI-appointed Extern Examiner

Notification to NUI of major/ minor change to programme

Programme: Major Change

Programme: Minor Change
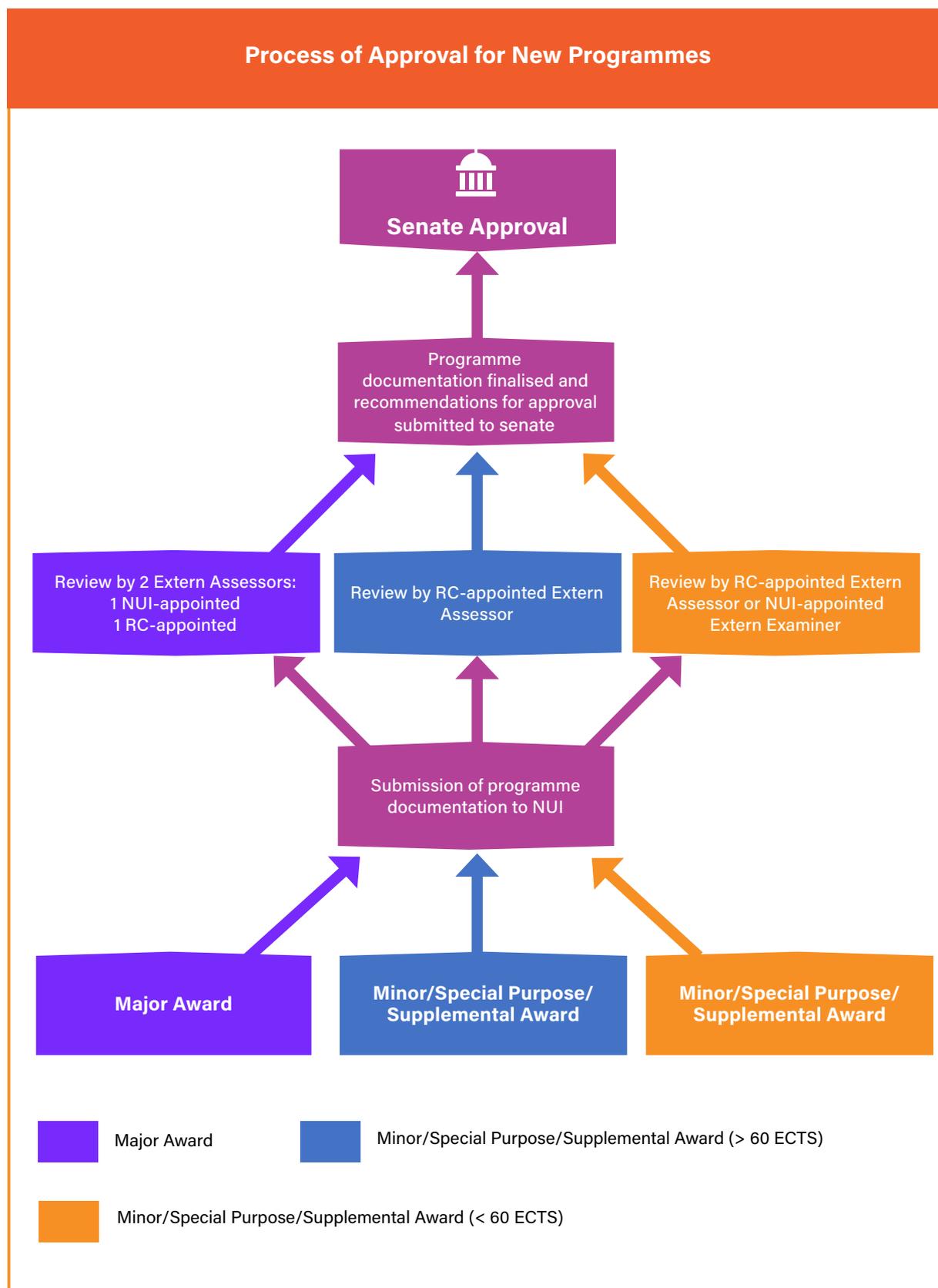
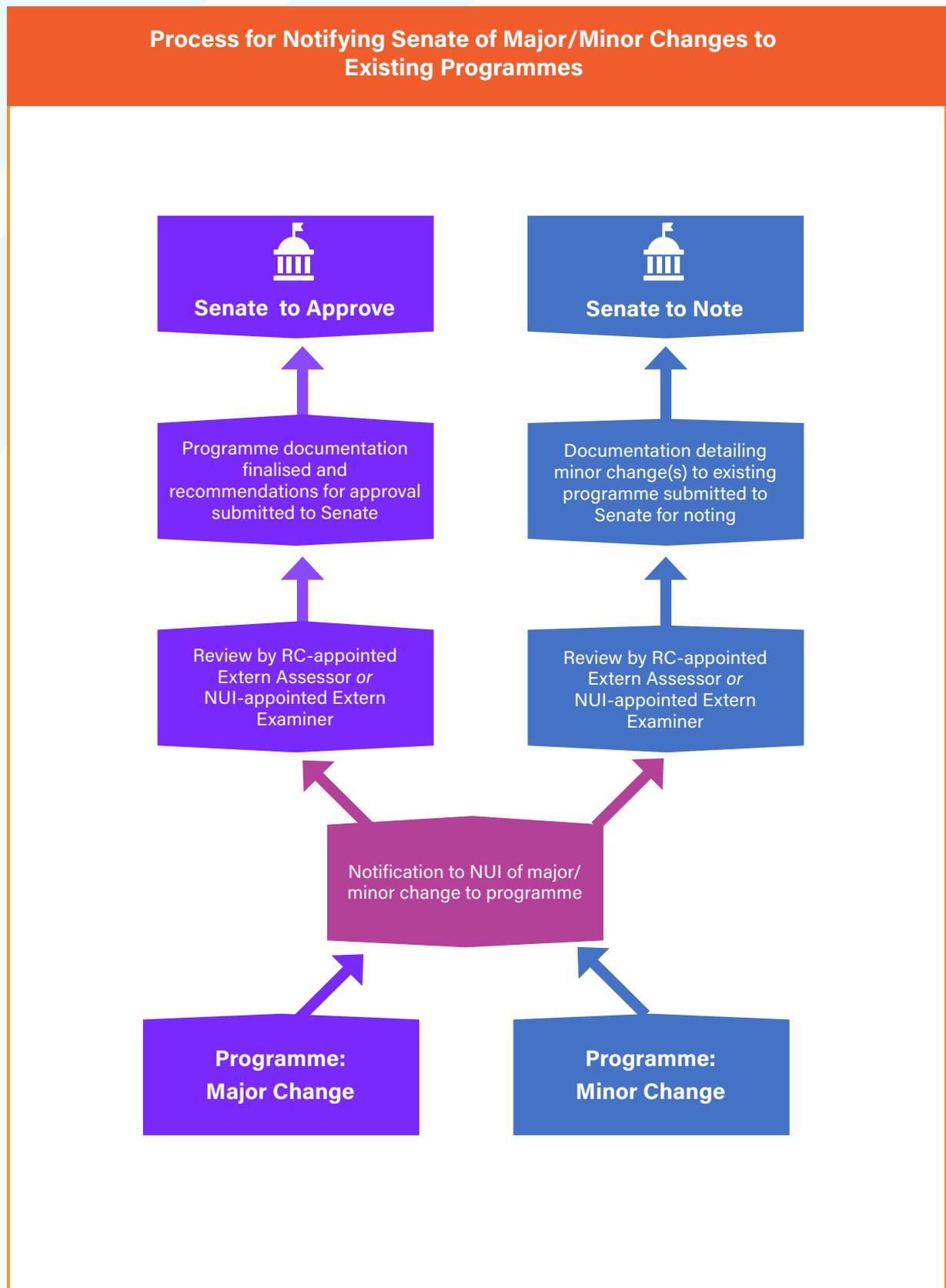*Figure 2: Process for Programmes with Proposed Major/Minor Changes*

2.10.3 Key Stages of Periodic Programme Reviews:

a. NUI's periodic programme review oversight role involves the following three core elements:

   - ensuring that the Recognised College's periodic programme review policies and procedures are aligned with NUI's overall QA policies.

   - participation in periodic peer review panels, through appointed external expert(s).

   - reporting on the outcome of periodic reviews to NUI Senate, to support the re-validation of programmes on a cyclical basis.

b. A Recognised College is required to periodically review all programmes leading to NUI degrees and other qualifications. The cycle of programmatic reviews will usually be completed within each CINNTE review cycle.

c. Programmes leading to major awards (including all associated exit awards and minor awards) are subject to periodic external review at least once every five years following original programme validation and accreditation.

d. A Peer Review Group (PRG) comprising external and independent reviewers appointed by the Recognised College undertakes the review and includes an NUI-appointed member.

e. The final report of the PRG is submitted to NUI detailing recommendations together with a response from the Recognised College to any issues raised.

f. A recommendation regarding the re-validation / accreditation of a programme (or suite of programmes) is made to Senate.

Appendix 2: NUI Policies, Procedures, Guidelines

NUI (2019), *Guidelines for the Periodic External Review of Programmes Leading to NUI Degrees and Other Qualifications in Recognised Colleges that are also Linked Providers of NUI*

NUI (2020), *Regulations, Procedures and Guidelines for the approval of New Programmes and changes to Existing Programmes in the Recognised Colleges*

NUI (2019), *NUI Extern Examiners Primary Degree and Taught Postgraduate Courses in NUI Recognised Colleges*

3 Approach to the analysis

3.1 Selection of reports analysed

Appendix B provides a list of the limited selection of reports included in this analysis. Some were obtained from the DABs' websites, others were provided directly by the DABs for the purpose of the analysis following a request by QQI. Examples of such reports are also made available through AQRs.

Most of the reports considered arose in the context of three distinct types of processes:

- New programme approval processes
- Programme review processes (not annual reviews)
- Academic unit review processes

The following table provides a breakdown of the reports selected for analysis.

Reports included in this analysis	
New programme approval reports[5]	Number
Reports with external input	17 from 5 DABs
Programme proposals	14 from 4 DABs
Total programme approval reports[6]	31 from 9 DABs
Programme/ academic unit[7] (including a linked institution) review reports[8]	
Academic unit reviews	22 from 9 DABs
Programme reviews	6 from 5 DABs
Total programme/ academic unit review reports[9]	28 from 9 DABs
All reports/ proposals	59 from 9 DABs

Table 3-1 Reports included in this analysis

Few programme review reports were available on DAB websites for 2015-2018. Other supporting documentation and documented output relating to programme approval and review processes, including responses from programme teams, were excluded from this analysis, e.g. inputs from academics, learners or external stakeholders that was documented within internal quality assurance processes and minutes of committee meetings.

3.2 Analysis

The method of analysis followed that used for the other reports in this series of thematic analyses. The commissioned analysis included reading each report, looking for the following information which was considered significant, and entering it into a database where available:

- details of the evaluation or review group;
- details of meetings involved in the evaluation or review;
- content categorised during the commissioned analysis as 'recommendations';
- content categorised during the commissioned analysis as 'commendations';
- content categorised during the commissioned analysis as 'conditions'.

In recording the information on the evaluation groups, interpretations were made to categorise and include only the decision makers; co-ordinators and recording secretaries were excluded from the analysis. No personal information was recorded.

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[5] These reports relate to processes for the establishment of new programmes. The reports are listed in Appendix B. The DABs processes vary, and the analysis further stratifies report types.

[6] A maximum of four reports of this type were selected per DAB, 36 were provided by DABs. CAO lists of undergraduate programmes would suggest that up to 100 new programmes were commenced in the 2015 to 2018 period. The numbers of non-CAO and postgraduate programmes may be higher. Therefore, the selection of reports is a small proportion of the total number of programme approvals.

[7] Academic unit normally refers to a department, school or faculty but in one case we include a linked institution in this category.

[8] This includes three reports from two institutions relating to linked institution or collaborative programmes.

[9] There were approximately 90 evaluation reports covering academic units and periodic programme reviews for the period 2015 to 2018 available on the DAB websites. Twenty-eight reports were selected for analysis allowing for the identification of major themes in the review reports.

Where available in the report, the following was recorded:

- Gender breakdown;
- Affiliation of the individuals[10];
- Function of individuals, e.g., chairperson;
- Academic expertise of the individuals in the discipline;
- Other expertise of individuals, e.g., expertise in other disciplines and/ or in quality assurance.

The category 'recommendation' is used here to signify an opportunity for improvement, identified by the panel in the report or in the commissioned analysis. In practice, it is often the case that institutions have recognised such opportunities for improvement themselves and presented them for exploration by the panel, in a spirit of critical self-reflection and in order to get value from the process. The category 'commendation' is used to signify a strength, identified by the panel in the report or in the commissioned analysis. The category 'condition' is used to signify a mandatory requirement set down in the report.

It should be noted that these categories are not necessarily used across all DABs or across all reports. In many cases, they have been applied retrospectively in the commissioned analysis. It is also worth noting that commentary by the panel in reports may not necessarily be reflected in recommendations or commendation, for example where the panel have examined the programme and no comments were recorded.

The subjects of recommendations or commendations were further analysed using *a priori* categories used for the other reports in this series. These categories are used in the commissioned analysis to characterise content within the selection of reports and are not criteria for judging the reports' fitness for purpose or as a checklist. There is no such checklist in related statutory obligations or enabling guidelines, e.g. there is no explicit statement about the format of programme review, nor the outputs, in the ESG.

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[10] For reports on linked institutions' programmes or units, the individuals from the awarding institution were considered to be external to the linked institution.

4 New programme approval reports

4.1 Introduction

Generally, when a new programme is being considered for approval the following, in the view of the commissioned analysis, are among the typical questions that might be considered:

(a) Is the programme consistent with institutional and academic unit (e.g. faculty, school, department) strategies?

(b) Can the programme be resourced?

(c) Does the programme comply with expectations (e.g. qualifications standards)?

(d) Can the programme meet professional or regulatory accreditation criteria, if applicable?

(e) Does the programme comply with the academic policies of the institution and the academic unit?

4.2 Panel reports on proposed new programmes

This section focuses on a sub-selection of evaluation reports produced by panels. Three of the DABs require such panels with external membership to report on proposed new programmes. Several DABs do not use a panel report-based programme approval process and therefore the findings in this part are not informed by the practices in those institutions. Those DABs use process(es) including reporting structures that require input and evaluation by a range of stakeholders including external experts. Caution should be exercised in interpreting the results of the analysis in this sub-section as the number of considered reports is small and six DABs in the sector are not represented.

Table 4-1 suggests a list of topics that are considered by the commissioned analysis to be useful to address in a new programme evaluation-type report. These are suggested in the commissioned analysis from the perspective of such a report being understood on a stand-alone basis by internal and external audiences who may have an interest in, and benefit from, reading it.

Table 4-2 maps the extent to which these suggested topics are explicitly addressed in the sub-selection of new programme evaluation-type reports across the three DABs.

Reports included in this analysis were not necessarily designed to be understood on a stand-alone basis, and the analysis should be considered in this context. Owing to the variety of autonomous approaches across the DABs, topics referenced in Table 4-2 below as not being explicitly included in the sub-selection of reports may have been addressed or featured in another stage of the lead-in or process, in documentation circulated to the review panel, or in another documented output.

4.3 Proposals for new programmes

Six institutions require that a proposal for the establishment of a new programme be presented to the institutional body tasked with the approval of new programmes. In three of these institutions, external reports are required in addition to these proposals. For the six institutions, the following analysis will focus on content within the programme proposals.

Table 4-3 posits a list of topics that are considered in the commissioned analysis to be useful to address in a new programme proposal. These topics are inspired by ESG 1.2. It is worth re-emphasising that the ESG is an enabling, rather than, prescriptive framework which allows for flexibility in approach. Evidence that could be presented to address the topics are also suggested in the commissioned analysis.

As before, these suggestions are made in the commissioned analysis from the perspective of such a proposal report being understood on a stand-alone basis by internal and external audiences who may have an interest in, and benefit from, reading it. Reports included in this analysis were not necessarily designed to be understood on a stand-alone basis, and the analysis should be considered in this context. Owing to the variety of autonomous approaches across the DABs, topics referenced in the tables below as not being explicitly included in the sub-selection of proposal reports may have been addressed or featured in another stage of the lead-in or process, in documentation circulated to the review panel, or in another documented output.

Table 4-1 Posit of topics suggested to be usefully addressed in a stand-alone new programme evaluation-type report

Topics suggested in the commissioned analysis to be usefully addressed in a stand-alone new programme evaluation-type report	Indicative examples	Potentially of interest to
Award details	For example: award type and programme title, duration in stages and ECTS credits, NFQ and EQF levels, ISCED 2011 and ISCED-F codes, ESCO classification, faculty, school or providing department.	All stakeholders
Standards used in the determination of the award	For example: The relevant NFQ award-type and any institutional standard are stated.	Regulatory agencies, academic board, foreign agencies
Rationale for the provision of the programme	For example: The objectives of the programme and how it fits with the overall strategy of the faculty/institution.	External stakeholders
Discussion of features of note in the programme	For example: broad discussion of the programme that situates it among programmes with similar titles or in the suite of programmes in the institution.	External stakeholders
Details of the external panel members	Sufficient detail to show that the panel has the range of skills and experience necessary to make a judgement on the programme.	All stakeholders
Statement on conflicts of interest	Positive statement that there are no material conflicts of interest.	All stakeholders
Approval criteria	For example: the criteria for approval utilised by the institution could be listed and each addressed.	Academic Council, programme development team
Programme learning outcomes	The intended programme learning outcomes are explicitly stated and mapped to the applicable standards.	Learners, employers
Programme schedule	For example: a list of modules/credits to be passed by learners in order to gain an award. It synopsises the curriculum and assessment.	Learners, employers, other DABs, internal stakeholders
Commendations	Highlight good practice.	Programme development team, Academic Council
Recommendations	Identify opportunities for improvement.	Programme development team, Academic Council, institution
Conditions	Conditions are confined to those measures necessary to allow the programme to satisfy the approval criteria.	Programme development team, Academic Council
Response to the report	The relevant academic unit responds to the conditions and recommendation in the report.	All external stakeholders
Acknowledgements		All internal stakeholders
Sign off	Signature of the chairperson of the evaluation panel and the date. Any response is affirmed by the relevant authorities in the institution.	All stakeholders

Caution should be exercised in interpreting the results of this analysis as the number of proposals is small and three institutions in the sector are not represented. Based on the sub-selection of proposal reports considered, the following aspects were discerned in the commissioned analysis:

- Most programme proposals state the objectives and intended programme learning outcomes;

- Programme proposals do not tend to include explicit information on the EQF level; however, programme information indicates the NFQ level, and the NFQ is mapped to the EQF;

- ISCED codes are not a feature of programme proposal documentation and may not be required for institutional purposes;

- Evidence of external involvement in programme design or consultation on aspects is not necessarily included in the sub-selection of reports.

Evidence of learner involvement is not necessarily included in the sub-selection of reports.

4.4 Recurring topics in programme approvals reports

This section analyses a sub-selection of 12 reports (Appendix B) that evaluate new programme proposals and involve substantial external input. The sub-selection of reports are from four institutions and cover undergraduate and postgraduate programmes across a range of diverse disciplines.

Content within the sub-selection of reports is analysed to identify material that were categorised in the commissioned analysis, using *a priori* terms, as: commendations, recommendations or conditions. The categorisation term 'commendation' is used to signify a strength. The categorisation term 'recommendation' is used to signify an identified opportunity for improvement. The categorisation term 'condition' is used to signify a mandatory requirement set down in the report. In practice, it is often the case that institutions have recognised such opportunities for improvement themselves and presented them for exploration by the panel, in a spirit of critical self-reflection and in order to get value from the process.

Table 4-2 Features of new programme evaluation-type reports produced by those institutions that require panels with external membership to consider programme proposals

Topics addressed	Extent to which the sub-section of new programme evaluation-type reports explicitly address the topics outlined (based on a sub-selection of 12 reports from three institutions)
Award details	All institutions' reports provided some of these details, and one institution's reports provided most of them.
Standards used in the determination of the award	One of the three institutions explicitly referred to the NFQ level in its reports.
Rationale for the provision of the programme	Reports generally included a discussion of the rationale for the provision of the programme. The extent of this varied.
Discussion of features of note in the programme	Two institutions' reports addressed this topic.
Details of the external panel members	These were provided by all.
Statement on conflicts of interest	Such statements were not included in any of the reports.
Approval criteria	Approval criteria were not explicitly included in the reports.
Programme learning outcomes	Two institutions' reports included statements of programme learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skill and competence. The third did not but did comment on the suitability of the programme learning outcomes.
Programme Schedule	One of the three included a programme schedule in the reports.
Commendations	Two of the three institutions' reports included commendations.
Recommendations	All of the reports included recommendations. One institution's reports included a level of detail that helped explain the rationale for the recommendations.
Conditions	Two of the three institutions' reports included conditions.
Response of the institution/ department to the report	None of the reports included such responses.
Acknowledgements	Acknowledgements were included in each institution's reports.
Sign-off	None of the reports included sign-off details.

This material is further categorised using another set of a priori categories that will be described below. The numbers of commendations, recommendation and conditions vary by institution, discipline, award level and evaluation panel.

Caution should be exercised in interpreting the results of this analysis as the number of programmes is small at 12, and five institutions in the sector are not represented.

4.4.1 Categorising the topics

Content within the sub-selection of reports (12) was analysed to identify material that the commissioned analysis categorised as:

- Commendations
- Recommendations
- Conditions

This material is further categorised to identify the topics involved using the following (mostly a priori) categories listed in Table 4-4. In the commissioned analysis the categories using the most recent version of QQI's main validation criteria were developed, among other sources, to attempt to provide a common basis for discussion across all four sectors considered in this series of thematic analyses. QQI's criteria were designed to be extremely general and align with ESG guidelines, and this makes them well suited to this purpose.

An element categorised as a commendation, recommendation or condition might contain material that involves more than one topical category. Consequently, the number of categorised items exceeds the number of recommendations, conditions, and commendations.

4.4.2 Analysis

The following sections provide frequently occurring examples of the types of recommendations, conditions and commendations made by the external panel in the report for the improvement of programmes. In practice, it is often the case that institutions have recognised such opportunities for improvement themselves and presented them for exploration by the panel, in a spirit of critical self-reflection and in order to get value from the process.

Table 4-3 Posit of topics suggested to be usefully addressed in a stand-alone new programme proposal

Topics suggested to be usefully addressed in a new programme proposal, inspired by ESG 1.2	Indicators that might feature directly or indirectly in programme proposals	Proposal reports from 6 institutions
Institutional processes exist for the design and approval of programmes	1. Institutional processes exist for the approval of programmes that involve bodies that have institute-wide remit.	Yes
	2 Processes specify necessary elements in the design of the programmes.	Yes
Programmes designed to meet specific objectives, including programme learning outcomes.	3. Specification of programme includes objectives and programme outcomes. 4. Approval report notes the appropriateness of objectives and outcomes. (Not applicable to these institutions as they do not produce approval reports)	Variable
Qualification refers to a level of the NFQ and to the EQF.	5. Basic programme information indicates the NFQ level of the programme. This is in addition to the award title unless there is wide agreement between institutions on award titles.	Yes
	6. EQF level.	No
Programmes designed involving learners and other stakeholders	7. Inclusion of learners or learner surveys in the design process or learners or learner representative's participation in the approval process.	Variable
	8. Inclusion of other stakeholders, e.g. employers or PRSBs in providing input to the design process or participation in the approval process.	Variable
Programmes benefit from external expertise and reference points	9. Inclusion of external experts in the design process or the approval process.	Variable
	10. Explicit consideration of PRSBs' requirements, or of best practice in the field of learning.	Variable
Expected workload is defined in ECTS	12. Schedule of necessary and/or sufficient modules for completion of the programme is provided each specified by expected workload.	Yes

Caution should be exercised in interpreting the results of this analysis as the number of programmes is small at 12, and five institutions in the sector are not represented.

Assessment

The commissioned analysis identified 12 conditions and 10 recommendations (see Table 4.2) associated with assessment processes:

- Revising assessment processes to ensure innovation and variety was included as either a condition or a recommendation across five programmes;

- Assessment of dissertations was subject to conditions requiring a graduated form of assessment as distinct from pass/ fail;

- Work placement assessment was considered, with reflective journals suggested as an instrument of assessment; in one case, the programme team was encouraged to consult the teaching and learning unit within the institution for advice on assessment of e-portfolios;

- The provision of assessment schedules to learners was a condition of two evaluation panels.

Access, transfer and progression

Evaluation panels sought to regularise and broaden access to programmes. For example:

- One evaluation panel required that the eligibility requirements align with the institution's usual requirements, rather than elevated requirements specific to that programme;

- Programme teams were urged, in three cases, to broaden access to postgraduate programmes by specifying which undergraduate qualifications would be deemed suitable to allow entry to the postgraduate programme. It was recommended in two of these cases that pathways for those with Ordinary Bachelor Degrees with suitable relevant experience be provided.

Concept and development of the programme

This area attracted the most commendations and some recommendations in the sub-selection of 12 reports.

Table 4-4 Categories for analysing content within programme approval reports

A priori topical categories, inspired by QQI's main validation criteria	Comments
Access, transfer and progression	Entry requirements, pathways for transfer from programmes and articulation to further higher-level programmes
Assessment	Assessment strategy, assessment instruments and the alignment of assessments with module outcomes
Concept and programme development	The rationale for the programme, its purpose, involvement and impact of stakeholders, comparison with and differentiation from similar programmes
Curriculum	The set of modules, the content of the modules and the module outcomes; issues to do with structure of the programme, ECTs credits and the overall coherence of the learning experience
Information	Information to learners and prospective learners about the programme
Management	Quality management of the programme
Objectives and Outcomes	Objectives of the programme, the minimum intended programme learning outcomes and the minimum intended module learning outcomes.
Resources	Physical and IT resources as well as the learning resources specified for each module.
Staffing	Quantity and skill set of staff delivering the programme and supervising learners. It includes staff support, development and management. May include staff contracts.
Teaching and learning	Teaching processes and expected learning processes. Directed, supervised and independent learning, blended learning and online learning.
A posteriori categories	
Documentation	This refers to the quality and comprehensiveness of the documentation describing the programme.
Engagement	This refers to the level of engagement of institutional staff with the external evaluation panel.
Institutional services and policies	Where institutional supports have not been utilised to the full, or when specific policies have not been followed.

- Panels commended innovation in the development and design of programmes in four programmes.
- One programme attracted a condition that a vision for the programme be defined and that this vision be carried through to the programme learning outcomes.

Curriculum

Much attention was paid to the curriculum, in particular regarding conditions and recommendation.

- In the case of the one commendation, the panel praised the inclusion of both professional and technical skills in a specialist postgraduate programme;
- Conditions were set for the preparation and organisation of work placements. Where access to work placement was restricted, panels recommended that it be made accessible to all learners. Where it was absent, some panels recommended introducing it into the programme.
- Work placements and study abroad opportunities featured in recommendations.
- Recommendations about the structure of programmes included the timing of some modules, the necessity to emphasise the themes of the programmes from an early stage, and the importance of the programme's structu re in ensuring the learner's development.
- Some panels recommended a reduction in the number of electives available to learners, others suggested increasing the range of electives.
- In two programmes, increasing learners' exposure to ethical issues was recommended.

Outcomes and objectives

The objectives of the programme, as well as the intended programme and module learning outcomes, appeared in both conditions and recommendations.

- In six of the 12 programmes, minimum intended module or programme learning outcomes were subject to conditions or recommendations.
- In two cases, the outcomes were seen as not sufficiently aligned with the objectives of vision of the programme.
- Some module outcomes on one Master's programme were seen as not reflecting a Master's level learning.
- In one case, the programme team was referred to DAB's policy on the writing of programme outcomes.

Institutional services and policies

In some cases, evaluation panels encouraged programme teams to avail of specific institutional services or referred them to institutional policies. For example, the following recommendations were made:

- It was recommended that programme teams adhere to institutional recruitment strategy;
- One programme was required to adhere to institutional marks and standards on assessment;
- One programme team was advised to seek support from the institution's teaching and learning facility.

Table 4-5 Categorisation table

Category	Recommendations (%)	Commendations (%)	Conditions (%)
Assessment	10 (9%)		12 (14%)
Access, transfer and progression	7 (8%)		4 (5%)
Curriculum	34 (30%)	1 (8%)	31 (36%)
Concept/ development	9 (8%)	4(34%)	4 (5%)
Outcomes and objectives	7 (6%)		15 (19%)
Learning resources	9 (8%)		
Information	6 (5%)		3(3%)
Management	3 (3%)	1 (8%)	
Staffing	3 (3%)	1 (8%)	
Teaching and learning		2 (17%)	
Institutional services and policy	3 (3%)		2 (2%)
Documentation	6 (5%)	1 (8%)	3 (3%)
Miscellaneous	18 (16%)	2(17%)	13 (15%)
Total	**115 (100%)**	**12 (100%)**	**87 (100%)**

4.4.3 Findings and suggestions

The commissioned analysis considers the publication of stand-alone new programme approval reports to be an opportunity to make the programme approval processes more accessible from the perspective of public information and for the benefit of a range of stakeholders. New programme approval processes should confirm that intended programme learning outcomes are aligned with the relevant NFQ award-type descriptors, any disciplinary or professional standards that apply, and any institutional graduate attributes that must be achieved. For accessibility reasons, it could be useful for new programme approval reports to explicitly include confirmation of these matters in a single publication. Including EQF levels and ISCED codes would facilitate international comparisons. Discussion of the Council of Europe (CoE) purposes of higher education[11] could be helpful to include, e.g. preparing students for active citizenship and supporting their personal development, not only preparation for sustainable employment.

As mentioned above, caution should be exercised in interpreting the results of this analysis as the number of programmes is small at 12, and five institutions in the sector are not represented.

- A wide range of curricular topics were the subject of conditions and recommendations for improvement.

- The main recurring topics in the sub-selection of 12 reports were:
  - assessment and the need for variety of assessment instruments;
  - the encouragement of the widening of access routes to postgraduate programmes;
  - the provision of work placement, its management and assessment;
  - revision of module and programme learning outcomes.

- Where purpose is mentioned, it usually relates to preparation for sustainable employment. Systematic discussion of the programmes in light of the CoE's four purposes of higher education[12] could be a helpful feature of reports.

- The periodic thematic analysis of new programme approval reports by institutions would support them in identifying recurring topics and the efficacy of reporting on programme approval for the purpose of academic governance and accountability to external stakeholders. Some DABs analyse their academic unit reviews in this way from time to time.

- Programme development teams could benefit from consulting with specialised support services, such as teaching and learning units, prior to submission of a programme for approval. This is already the practice in many DABs. It helps to:
  - ensure that institutional learning is shared at a timely point in the process and that institutional policies are adhered to;
  - contribute to the continual enhancement of practice in curricular design, assessment and delivery;
  - assist development teams in the writing of programme and module learning outcomes.

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11 Recommendation Rec (2007)6 by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers on the public responsibility for higher education and research, http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/News/pub_res_EN.pdf

12 Recommendation Rec (2007)6 by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers on the public responsibility for higher education and research, http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/News/pub_res_EN.pdf

5 Academic unit and programme review reports

5.1 Introduction

This analysis focusses exclusively on content within the selected reports concerning programme approval or the review of continuing programmes, including in the context of the review of an academic unit. Reporting on the review of academic programmes is not necessarily distinct from reporting on the review of academic units. Accordingly, both types of reports are considered here.

This section analyses quality review process for the review of units and programmes, which is broadly similar across the DABs, as follows:

- An academic unit undertakes a self-evaluation and produces a self-evaluation report (SER);

- A Peer Review Group (PRG) is established by the institution consisting of internal and external experts, both national and international, to conduct the review;

- The PRG visits the academic unit and conducts a series of meetings;

- The PRG reports on its findings and makes commendations and recommendations;

- The academic unit addresses the recommendations by producing a follow-up report.

5.2 Reports analysed

Most of the reports considered in this section are all published on institution websites, those that were not published were provided to QQI for the purpose of this analysis. There were approximately 90 review reports (academic unit and periodic programme review) available on institutional websites for 2015-2018.

A sub-selection of 28 reports, including six programme review reports and three reports involving linked colleges or collaborative educational provision, was analysed. Each of the reports was produced by a PRG.

Most of the reports considered in this section were obtained from the DABs' websites, others were provided directly by the DABs for the purpose of the analysis following a request by QQI.

The sub-selection of 28 reports was made to ensure the inclusion of:

- Reports from each DAB;

- Reports from each of the years 2015 to 2018;

- Reports from varied sizes[13] of academic unit, e.g., faculty, school, department;

- Programme review[14] reports, which not all of the institutions publish;

- Reports on academic units where PSRB[15] reviews were available;

- Reports covering a range of diverse disciplines;

- Reports covering transnational and collaborative provision (few of these reports were available on institutions' websites).

Table 11–1 (Appendix E) lists the 28 reports analysed along with the numbers of elements categorised as commendations and recommendations respectively in each case.[16] Three of the reports involve collaborative or transnational educational provision, Table 11–2 provides additional details.

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[13] E.g. MU Department of Design Innovation consists of five full-time academic staff, a studio manager, executive assistant, a part-time programme coordinator and part-time programme manager. The Department offers two undergraduate and two taught postgraduate programmes and a structured PhD programme. In contrast, DCU Faculty of Engineering and Computing consists of three schools, School of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering, School of Electronic Engineering and School of Computing. In 2015 it had 211 staff.

[14] Several of the reports classified as academic unit reviews could have been classified as programme reviews e.g. Kaplan (business programmes) Singapore and Hong Kong.

[15] Professional, Regulatory or Statutory Body, e.g. Medical Council, Dental Council, Nursing and Midwifery Board, and Engineers Ireland.

[16] The number of commendations, recommendations and conditions included in individual reports identify the recurring themes within the reports. In some cases, commendations and recommendations had multiple subsections. Subsections do not contribute to the numbers in Table 6-1. The numbers should not be used as a basis for comparing programmes, academic units or institutions, as they can be influenced by the:
- type of review e.g. academic unit or programme review;
- PRG report template;
- size of the academic unit (number of the programmes, number of learners, number of staff);
- discipline area, whether the programme(s) is accredited by a professional body or regulator; and
- composition of the review group.

5.3 Content within the reports

5.3.1 Structure and contextual information provided

Owing to the variety of autonomous approaches across the DABs, the structure of and content within the selection of reports varies between institutions. It tends to differ between programme review reports and academic unit review reports.

The type and volume of information provided in reports on PRG membership is similar.

Reports were not designed to be similar, and the analysis should be considered in this context.

Most of the reports outline the review process or state its objectives. Most describe the academic unit or programme(s) though the level of detail varies.

The commissioned analysis considers the following to be key headings to be usefully addressed in reports: staff numbers, learner numbers, and statistical data on retention, progression and learner performance. Analysis of data provided in reports demonstrated that the level of detail across the identified key headings varied widely between and within institutions.

Most of the sub-selection of reports address the following categories:

- Vision/strategy
- Organisation and management including financial management
- Staffing
- Resources and accommodation
- Teaching, learning and assessment
- Curriculum/academic programmes
- Learner support
- Research
- Engagement
- Quality assurance.

The following subsections outline the kinds of topics addressed and highlight some recurring topics raised in the sub-selection of 28 reports[17]. Figure 5-1 shows the seven most frequently recurring categories of commendations and recommendations by frequency of occurrence. These areas are further analysed below.

Table 11–3 and Table 11–4 analyse the commendations and breakdowns by report type and category. Table 11–5 analyses the kinds of meetings recorded in each of the (28) reports.

Commendations	Recommendations
Staff	Staff
Curriculum	Curriculum
Teaching, learning and assessment	Research
Management	Management
Research	Strategy
Engagement	Engagement
Learner supports	Learner supports

Figure 5-1 The seven most recurring commendations and recommendations

5.3.2 Vision/ Strategy

As is to be expected, the information provided under this category varied between and within reports and institutions. Topics included:

- The strategic plan for the academic unit and alignment with strategy of the institution;
- The reputation of the institution including the ranking position;
- The focus of the strategic plan, for example, increasing the number of non-EU learners on programmes, introducing online courses, increasing research volume and developing new programmes;
- Growth in learner numbers.

Several of the reports commented on the reputation and ranking position of the institution and five reports commended the academic unit for well-developed strategies that were aligned with their institution's strategy.

The focus of the strategic plans as reported in several reports was on increasing revenue – for example, by increasing the number of non-EU learners, introducing monetised online courses, increasing research volume and developing new programmes. The impact of such initiatives on existing resources was rarely mentioned in the reports.

Significant growth in learner numbers was mentioned in several reports but in many cases data on learner numbers was not included.

28 recommendations were made in 14 of the 28 reports in relation to strategy. Recommendations in relation to strategy were categorised in reports under various headings, e.g. strategy; research strategy; international strategy; work placement; teaching and learning strategy. Recommendations in relation to strategy were mainly in respect of:

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[17] As reports were not designed to be similar, similar commendations or recommendations are presented under different heading categories, e.g. a recommendation under the curriculum heading in one report might have a counterpart under the teaching and learning in another.

- Developing a strategy;

- Reviewing an existing strategy;

- Identifying key performance indicators;

- Identifying and securing the resources to deliver the strategy;

- Linking academic unit strategies to the institution's strategy.

Example of a recommendation:

"The strategic plan should include a detailed analysis of each of the current programmes including: their current level of resource support, the potential for, and cost(s) of expansion, their degree of integration with programmes across the School; and, support of students, especially with regard to the balance of workloads across the modules and with work placements."

5.3.3 Organisation and management including financial management

As is to be expected, the information provided under this category depended strongly on the local situation and the type of review that was undertaken.

Reports for collaborating providers tended to focus on:

- the collaborative arrangements in place;

- risks involved;

- the memoranda of agreement;

- input into the programme provision of those involved in the collaboration.

Several of the reports noted the challenges of tight staffing constraints. The impact of austerity on resources and staff was a dominant feature in 14 of the sub-selection of 28 reports. Lack of succession planning was noted in several reports, as was lack of opportunities for promotion in both academic and technical areas. Other topics included:

- Maximising the sharing of classes/ modules, reduction in practical hours;

- Terms of reference for committees;

- Issues associated with the size and diversity of provision;

- Issues with multidisciplinary programmes and the management of these across academic units;

- Development of an economic model to enhance school income and a transparent workload model for academic staff;

- Undertaking staff feedback surveys.

Eight percent 22 of the 277 identified commendations related to management and a further 2 percent 6 (out of 277) to leadership. Commendations mainly related to:

- Ongoing management of the programmes;

- Managing with a sense of collegiality and collaborative spirit;

- Leadership in developing a culture of trust and honesty;

- Management of partnerships;

- Regularity of meetings;

- Managing budgets.

Table 5-1 Analysis of data provided in reports.

Institution / Faculty/School/ Programme(s).	Staff Numbers	Learner numbers	List of programmes	Statistical data on retention, progression and learner performance
Dublin City University	100%	50%	100%	50%
Dublin Institute of Technology	0	67%	100%	0
Maynooth University	33%	33%	67%	0
National University of Ireland, Galway	0	0	0	0
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	50%	50%	100%	0
Trinity College Dublin	33%	33%	67%	0
University College Cork	0	33%	100%	33%
University College Dublin	67%	33%	67%	0
University of Limerick	33%	33%	67%	0
Grand Total	**39%**	**36%**	**71%**	**11%**

Examples of commendations:

"*The panel particularly commended the engagement of the programme directors in the ongoing management and development of the programme*"

"*The management of the partnership is undertaken by the [...] Strategic Board. This meets twice yearly, in Europe and in East Asia. The Board makes key operational and strategic decisions on the direction of the partnership. The Review Group confirmed that the partnership was progressing well and that the oversight of the partnership was creating a clear sense of direction to align the efforts of [...] staff.*"

52 of the 519 identified recommendations related to management, across 21 of the 28 sub-selection of reports, across both academic units reports and programme review reports. This included 16 out of 22 academic units reports and 5 out of 6 programme review reports. It involved nine percent (43 out of 462) of the recommendations in academic units reports and 16 percent (9 out of 57) of those in programme reviews reports. Recommendations were mainly related to:

- Structure, e.g. reviewing structures, roles and responsibilities;

- Programme management and development;

- Organisation, e.g. streamlining processes, recruitment of school manager, over-reliance on key individuals;

- Communications;

- Safety;

- Facilities;

- Succession planning.

Examples of recommendations:

"*It is essential that you restructure the organisation, leadership and strategy of the activities of the School, using the resources available to you within the university and external facilitation as appropriate.*"

"*Programme delivery, student voice and communication would be enhanced if the schedule of formal meetings was prioritised, took place and actions and outcomes implemented and communicated both up and down the college and across departments.*"

"*To ensure that a diverse teaching team is used to avoid all the teaching and support being offered by two people.*"

"*The formal mechanism for collecting student feedback on the way each of the programmes are managed and delivered should be further enhanced – the Student Forum provides some opportunity for this, but this should be further enhanced so that it might more closely resemble formal Staff-Student Committees. The Review Group recommends that all stakeholders, including the College Principal and staff, are provided*

with the annual programme monitoring reports, and are made aware of issues which may arise and any and all actions planned to address them."

5.3.4 Staffing

The majority of the 28 reports made recommendations in relation to staffing. The predominant staffing issues related to financial constraints within institutions. The main topics raised were:

- Staff numbers;

- Workload models;

- Staff development.

Among the topics noted are high learner-staff ratios; over-reliance on temporary staff; staff workload in terms of module-coordination, marking assessments and examinations, developing and delivering new programmes; vacant posts not being filled; lack of promotional opportunities for both academic and other staff. It was also frequently reported that academic staff also wanted to see greater transparency in workloads or the implementation or review of a workload model.

Reference to staff development tended to focus on career guidance and mentoring of academic staff, external mentoring of senior staff, supportive policies for dealing with stress, and upskilling of academic and other staff.

Succession planning was also a matter for concern in several institutions. Several reports commented on the stress staff were experiencing.

Staffing gave rise to commendations or recommendations in 82 percent (23 of 28) of the reports**.** Twelve percent (32 of 277) of commendations and 16 percent of recommendations (82 of 519) were in relation to staff (Table 11–3 and Table 11–4 **).** Many of these are similar to those under operations and management.

Commended practices included:

- the collegiate approach of staff in delivering on the academic unit's mission (most reports highly commend this);

- staff engagement with the review process;

- the culture of team-work;

- the maintenance of standards of teaching and research despite increases in learner numbers;

- the quality of the academic profiles of staff;

- the number of researchers with large numbers of citations;

- the contribution of non-academic staff to academic units.

Examples of commendations:

"*The dedication, commitment and professionalism of academic and support staff was very evident throughout our visit. Students particularly noted the accessibility of staff.*"

"*The scientific approach to staff management in using the workload recognition model for the measurement and use of staff resources.*"

"*The engagement of staff in cross-sectional work which helps both to address imbalance in staff-student ratios per section and to provide opportunities for knowledge exchange and sharing of best practice.*"

"*The teaching team is particularly commended for the work done so far in developing this very modern course and the integration co-ordinator presented a clear vision of the desired aims of the new course.*"

"*The significant number of high-profile researchers with a high level of citations.*"

Other notable topics addressed by recommendations included:

- Increasing staff numbers (11 out of 82);
- Staff workload and the need for a transparent workload model (10 out of 82);
- Staff support and development (16 out of 82).

Examples of recommendations:

"*Greater transparency is required in relation to workloads to address the belief of many staff that they are overworked. The development of a transparent workload allocation may necessitate a review of the organisation and distribution of work activities, including issues such as class sizes.*"

"*The work of administrative staff was highly commended. However, several staff highlighted a need for additional administrative staffing.*"

"*[The PRG recommends that the academic unit] Maintains and implements structures to support and mentor staff across all disciplines within the School as regards their career objectives, by providing better supports to facilitate research and sabbaticals, the management of which should be included as part of annual strategic planning.*"

"*The Review Group recommends that [the centre for distance learning] consider ways in which it can develop the research skills of local staff, for example by encouraging visiting [staff based in the Irish university] to undertake joint research activities with local staff, including delivering research seminars for local staff, industry and the business community while in Singapore and Hong Kong, and by encouraging local staff to visit [the Irish university]. The development of a video to give teaching tips to all faculty (not only those travelling overseas) would also be useful, and technology should be employed to enable staff at all*

locations to interact during teaching and learning events."

"*[The PRG recommends that the academic unit] Develop and/or ensure that School staff are aware of supportive policies for dealing with staff stress and overwork so that staff can regain their health and a healthy work-life balance and can work to their own potential and to the good of the School and the university.*"

"*Urgently appoint both a Programme Director for the Bachelor of Medicine (MB), Surgery (BCh) and Obstetrics (BAO) degree programme (academic post) and a School Manager (senior administrative post).*"

5.3.5 Resources and accommodation

The sub-selection of 28 reports commented on the resources and accommodation/ facilities in most of the institutions.

The reports highlighted that, in many cases, the physical resources available were excellent. With some UK panel members indicating that they are comparable with, if not better than, those available in their own institutions in the UK.

Several reports mentioned the inadequacy of funding for academic units and high learner-staff-ratios. There was some evidence of mismatch between the requirements of teaching and supporting a high-quality educational programme on the one hand and the extremely constrained resources available to do so on the other.

Examples of commendations:

"*The [...] library provides an exceptional learning environment with a very pro-active librarian and unique resources, for example, the map collections are also available to the public. The national value of this collection should not be underestimated, particularly given its significant use by practitioners, which also provides a conduit for the profession to work with the School. As such, the library is also part of the School's outreach in a very positive manner.*"

Examples of recommendations:

"*The Peer Review Group recommends that the current workshop and studio facilities be upgraded immediately and that a decision be taken regarding the resourcing of these facilities in the medium term.*"

5.3.6 Curriculum, academic programmes, teaching, learning and assessment

A wide variety of topics were covered under this category[18] including:

- Strategy underlying the development of programmes;

- Where relevant, programmes meeting professional or regulatory requirements; There was little explicit mention of programme learning outcomes and mapping these to the NFQ, although as mentioned these may have been addressed or featured in another stage of the lead-in or process, in documentation circulated to the review panel, or in another documented output;

- Development of an international curriculum;

- Multidisciplinary programmes;

- Full- and part-time provision;

- Themes within the curriculum and the mix of modules, including the relationship between core and optional modules;

- Innovation in teaching and learning including project-based learning;

- Practice placements;

- Employability skills;

- Range of assessments and assessment schedules.

Assessment of work placements, graduate attributes, and updating curricula to take account of changing work environments were not widely covered in the sub-selection of reports.

Eighty-two percent (23 of the 28) of the sub-selection of reports had recommendations in relation to curriculum, this includes (17 out of 22) academic unit reports and (6 out of 6) programme review reports (Table 11–3 and Table 11-4).

The commendations relating to curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment included:

- Consistency of modules across strands of programmes;

- Best practice guidelines on group work;

- Feedback to students on assessment;

- High employability of graduates;

- Absorbing research into the curriculum;

- Range of modalities of teaching, learning and assessment;

- Introduction of new programmes.

Example of commendations:

"[The PRG commended the academic unit on] Development of best practice guidelines on group work for the College."

"[The PRG stated:] We strongly believe that the BESS programme not only has a strong brand, committed students and lecturing and administrative staff and also an excellent track record by any standard."

"[The PRG commended] The Course Team's dedication to the student experience supported by informative regular feedback and tailored support in meeting individual student needs."

[The panel commended the academic unit on] *"Successful initiatives. These include: the denominated BA in English; BA in Digital Humanities; BA in Film and Screen Media; and the introduction of Creating Writing which is part of the distinctive and highly commendable Creative Practice strand of the School's activities. The latter includes the presence of a screenwriter in residence, a role unique in the Irish university system, as well as that of the Adjunct Professor of Film."*

Recommendations with respect to curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment were made in 93% (26 of the 28) sub-selection of reports. The recommendations addressed topics including:

- Work placement[19];

- Student feedback on assessment;

- Contact hours;

- Fitness to practice;

- Graduate profile and attributes;

- Incorporating material into the curriculum;

- Schedules;

- Development of curricular themes;

- Learner choice (9 out of 79) recommendations.

Examples of recommendations:

"[The PRG recommended that the academic unit] *Introduce the planned additional offerings, e.g. an academic writing module at first year, a creative thinking module, service learning. However, staff have highlighted the considerable resources the latter would require. It is important that [the university] acknowledges the value of this inclusion and provides the support required for staff to effect this important move, which will enhance student engagement in the programme, provide a practical experience linked to their academic learning in CCS, contribute to the identity issue students identified in the survey, and the issue of participation/presence in class identified*

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[18] Some reports separated curricula from teaching, learning and assessment and others did not.

[19] Recommendations in reports in relation to work placement were similar, in that they recommended either introducing a work placement element to a programme or reviewing the operation of the existing workplace element.

by staff. It may be possible to link this support to existing academic writing programmes in the university. Academic staff might also try to incorporate writing and critical thinking skills into their teaching of modules in support of such programmes."

"[The PRG recommended that the academic unit] *To consider if the three leadership/ management modules could be merged [creating potential for some of the eclecticism and collaboration referred to in the strategy] or made more distinct so there is less overlap."*

[The panel recommends that the academic unit] *"Restate and implement a commitment to consistency of teaching, learning and assessment practices across languages, highlighting to students the rationale behind feedback and assessment practices including intentional variability."*

5.3.7 Learner support

Topics addressed include:

- Improving feedback to students;
- Supports for international learners;
- Career guidance and preparation for internships;
- Induction and modules to develop professional skills.

Where learner support was a dedicated section in reports, there tended to be more commendations and recommendations made on the topic of learner support.

Some reports commended the wide variety of supports and services provided. Generally, reports commented that, overall, learners found teaching and learning to be of a high standard.

Examples of commendations:

[The panel commended the academic unit on] *"very good relationships between students and staff and the provision of feedback to students on their performance."*

Recommendations covered a broad spectrum of areas as shown below:

- Feedback by academic staff to learners;
- Customised supports for learners;
- Information on programme supports;
- Career advice;
- Induction programmes;
- Supports for PhD learners.

Examples of recommendations:

[The panel recommends that the academic unit] *"Enhances its communication, information and supports for first year students, and in addition ensures*

consistency of formative feedback to support student learning across all programmes and years."

[The panel recommends that the academic unit] *"Develop a policy on feedback of student continuous assessment, including guidelines on the time between submission of work and feedback, suggested max. 15 working days, and the quality of the feedback provided."*

5.3.8 Research

PRG panels commented on research in most academic unit reports. Themes were specific to the discipline areas. Topics included:

- Management of research themes and research centres;
- Research outputs and emerging international, national and regional networks;
- Developing realistic high-level research strategy;
- Commercialisation;
- Data (in several cases) on the volume of publication per FTE academic staff, on the targets set, and the trends discernible;
- Details (in several cases) on research funding from various sources were provided together with the research themes and number of research centres.

There were commendations in respect of research in the majority of academic unit reports. Commendations addressed:

- Excellence in research;
- Research themes;
- Cross discipline research;
- Embedding research in undergraduate curricula;
- Research strategy;
- Culture of support for research;
- Completion rates for research degrees;
- Development of a learner body with research and critical thinking skills.

Examples of commendations:

"[The PRG commended the academic unit on] *Excellence in research, as signified by:*

- *Delivering research publications at a high level, and investing time in the research environment*
- *Engaging in research conversations in practitioner as well as academic fora, leading to potential impact on practice*
- *Supporting research through 'blocked' teaching duties and other practical means to make the most of limited resources."*

"[The PRG commended the academic unit on] *The successful embedding of undergraduate research in the [...] curriculum.*"

"[The PRG commended the academic unit on] *The Research Committee is actively promoting a developing cross-discipline research culture within the School.*"

"[The PRG commended the academic unit on] *The very active [...] research centres and their rich, original, productive and relevant programmes of activities.*"

[The panel commended the academic unit on] *"Delivering research publications at a high level and investing time in the research environment."*

Recommendations addressed topics including the following:

- Research strategy;
- Management of research;
- Industry interaction;
- Research metrics;
- Information and promotion;
- Staff sabbaticals;
- Some academic units were advised to reflect on the scope of their research themes in the context of the available skill sets and capacity and to organise them into smaller of number of themes/research groups that map on to funding priorities.

Examples of recommendations:

"[The PRG stated:] *We note that the Department is intent on creating a 5-year Departmental research strategy and would recommend that this should include the articulation of a vision for research development and for research leadership, as well as specific and measurable research-related goals. The Department should consider plans for developing a pipeline of experienced practitioners whom it can encourage toward PhD/ research degrees, thereby providing a pool of practitioner-researchers who might sustain and expand the Department's strengths in the short and long term. It should also support the dissemination of department-based researchers' work, e.g. by actively encouraging staff participation at conferences."*

"[The PRG stated:] *A further consideration of the breadth of the research strategy and whether additional focus is required."*

"[The PRG stated that] *When developing the school research strategy, the following should be considered:*

- *In delivering professional degree programmes that embody a studio culture, or entail many faculty-student contact hours, faculty and staff are challenged to preserve time to focus on academic research.*

- *A strategic approach to obtaining adequate research funding should be a priority*

- *Identifying and working with governmental and non-governmental organisations and other 'natural' clients, to develop and pursue a problem-driven, interdisciplinary research programme with high policy relevance*

- *Bringing more attention to the knowledge transfer that the School facilitates through translational research.*

- *The School should ensure adequate resources and attention is given to preparing the next generation of research academicians.*

- *Dedicating more human resources to research support activities—e.g., proposal preparation or liaising with funding agency programme officers*

- *Envisioning and pursuing joint projects with other Irish or European institutions e.g., managing transitions in regional infrastructure systems."*

- "[The PRG recommended that the academic unit] *Develop a realistic high-level research strategy which identifies and focuses investment and effort in a small number of areas in which the GEMS can excel."*

[The panel recommended the academic unit to] *"Enhance the existing research portfolio in the School by leveraging and drawing on the significant research expertise, mind-set and approach within the College e.g. linking with Institutes or Centres (Life Course Institute, Diabetes Centre and Business School etc.)."*

5.3.9 Engagement

Reports addressed both internal and external engagement. Academic units are involved in a wide range of engagement activities including engagement with:

- Enterprise partners and industry;
- Outreach initiatives;
- Alumni;
- International partners;
- Other academic units within the institution;
- Committees within the institution;
- Local support to communities.

In academic units with a high proportion of programmes accredited by professional statutory or regulatory agencies, PSRBs, reported external engagement tended to focus on those organisations.

Topics reported under engagement included:

- Developing strategy and plans around international engagement;

- Prominent positions of leadership in academic societies, journal editorship, accreditation panels and government councils;

- Employability of graduates;

- International learners.

5.3.10 Quality Assurance

Several reports had sections dedicated to quality assurance. Topics addressed under this heading included:

- Compliance with institutional quality assurance policies and procedures;

- Processes for the approval of new academic programmes;

- Review processes and documentation;

- Engagement with external accreditation processes;

- External examiners' reports;

- Formal meetings with learners to obtain feedback;

- Progress made since the last academic review;

- Quality improvement plans.

The sub-selection of 28 reports analysed do not manifest how the ongoing monitoring of programmes, including changes made to programmes and the periodic review of programmes, fits into the review of academic units.

Example of commendation:

[The panel commended the academic unit on] *"The very comprehensive quality improvement plan, which captures all the improvements identified throughout the SAR and assigns accountability, responsibilities and timelines."*

Example of recommendation:

[The panel recommended that the academic unit] *"Develop a school-level risk register that complements the faculty and UL registers, and ensure that this is reviewed, discussed and actioned at least quarterly at executive meetings."*

5.3.11 General observations

There was little evidence provided in many reports to support the findings.

There was little mention in reports of programme learning outcomes and the alignment of programme learning outcomes with the NFQ. Similarly, graduate attributes and their achievement were rarely mentioned in reports.

A recurring theme was to improve learner feedback.

5.4 Meetings referred to in reports

Table 11–5 (Appendix E) analyses the kinds of meetings recorded in each report[20]:

- Eighty-six percent (24 of the 28) reports reported meetings with senior staff within the academic unit and/ or the institution;

- Eighty-two percent (23 of the 28) reports reported meetings with academic staff within the academic unit or involved in the programme;

- Seventy-five percent (21 of the 28) reports reported meetings with learners;

- Sixty-eight percent (19 of the 28) reports reported meetings with other staff, e.g. finance, administration, library.;

- Forty-three percent (12 of the 28) reports reported meetings with graduates;

- Forty-three percent (12 of the 28) reports reported meetings with employers.

Owing to the variety of autonomous approaches across the DABs, the structure of and content within the selection reports varies between institutions. As is to be expected, the level of detail provided on relevant meetings varied across the reports. Some provided a schedule of meetings that took place with a list of those who attended; others comment that there was open engagement by staff and learners with reviewers.

5.5 Quality improvements plans (QIPs)

Table 11–6 lists the QIPs (follow-up to the review report) associated with the sub-selection of 28 reports. QIPs were published for most (73%) of the 22 academic unit reports and one of the six programme review reports.

As is to be expected, QIP detail varied. Several of the plans were detailed, with timelines for implementation, while others consisted of a brief commentary on the findings.

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[20] It was not clear in several reports whom the panels met with; in such cases, the commissioned analysis made assumptions.

5.6 Programme review reports

Six of the 28 reports considered above were programme review reports (Table 5–2).

Topics covered in the sub-selection of six reports for periodic programme reviews can be broadly summarised as follows:

- Standards, aims and objectives of the programme, continued relevance of the programmes;

- Staff;

- Learner support;

- Curriculum, teaching and learning;

- Admissions;

- Statistical analysis of learner performance;

- Research;

- Specifics matters relating to the programme(s).

Three of the six considered reports recommended that the programme learning outcomes be reviewed.

One of the six reports stated explicitly that the programme outcomes were correctly positioned with respect to the NFQ. Benchmarking was mainly carried out against PSRBs' standards.

Three of the six reports for periodic programme reviews provided statistical data.

In three of the six reports, the programme review was undertaken by one individual.

5.7 Findings and suggestions

From the sub-selection of 28 reports, the commissioned analysis interprets the following:

- Academic units of DABs undergo external quality assurance in line with ESG 1.10 on a cyclical basis. The reports are published and made available on the website of the institution.

- The process of academic review is similar in most DABs, i.e., a four-stage process of self-assessment, site visit by PRG, PRG report, and quality improvement plan.

- The reports, when considered as standalone reports, lack contextual information that would help readers from outside of the institutions to interpret them.

- Relatively few programme reviews reports are published.

- As is to be expected, there was variation in the type and volume of information provided in the reports. This is influenced by the institutional approach.

- More statistical data could be provided in the reports on, for example, learner retention, progression and performance.

- The reports on academic units tend to focus on strategy, staff matters and lack of resources

Table 5-2 List of programme review reports analysed

Institution	Title of the report	Programmes covered in the report.
DCU	School of Applied Languages and Intercultural studies.	1. Applied Languages and Translation Studies. 2. BA in Contemporary Culture and Society
RCSI	MSc Nursing (Advanced leadership)	MSc Nursing (Advanced leadership)
TCD	Review of BESS programme.	Multidisciplinary programme- Bachelor in Economics and Social Sciences (BESS).
UCC	Revalidation of the MSc in Data Business (UCC/IMI).	MSc and Postgraduate Certificate in Data Business. (The process that was adopted was to use the process and documentation for a new programme for the revalidation of the programme.
UCC	Periodic Review School of Pharmacy.	Review of the M Pharm degree and B Pharm degree
UCD	Food Regulatory Affairs (Joint Award University Ulster).	Revalidation of PgCert Veterinary Public (VPH) (Part-time /Distance Learning) Joint award university Ulster (UU) and UCD. PgDip/MSc in Food Regulatory Affairs (Part-time /Distance Learning) Joint award university Ulster (UU) and UCD.

with less of an emphasis and depth of coverage on programmes.[21] In several cases, little or no information is provided on the other programmes offered within the academic unit.

- The commissioned analysis suggests making standalone reports more accessible and useful to people from outside the institution by including the below. In many cases, this information is made available in other documents. Contextual information to help locate the institution.

- An outline of the process underpinning the report including experts involved.

- A list of the programmes delivered by the academic unit.

- Summary data on learner numbers, learner workload, award classifications.

- Summary data on learner progression and completion rates, career paths of graduates[22].

- Evidence for the findings for example, features of good practice demonstrated by the academic unit, these can be beneficial to other units in the institution.

- Utilise report templates, where not already used.

- Undertake periodic thematic analyses of academic unit review reports and programme review reports to identify recurring topics[23]. Reflect on (i) how to cascade good practice, (ii) what policies and strategies merit review at institutional level, and (iii) how all the above feeds into staff development activity.

It may be helpful to formally share information arising from reviews with institutional administrative support units, where not already done. For example, information that may help raise awareness of situations that cause workplace stress and find ways to address it in a timely manner.

Matters requiring cross-institutional attention can arise such as the reported lack of transparency in relation to the workload model that appears in several reports.

5.7.1 Programme review reports

From the sub-selection of six reports for periodic programme, the commissioned analysis interprets the following. Caution should be exercised in interpreting the results of this analysis as the number of considered reports is small at six and not all DABs in the sector are represented.

- Publish programme review reports.

- Focus on the quality of programmes (as processes by which learners achieved knowledge, skill and competence), the standards of the qualifications and opportunities for enhancement.

- Consider whether reports are sufficiently transparent on how it is has been ensured that the programme is up-to-date and takes account of the needs of learners and society, in line with ESG 1.9 guidelines on ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes.

- Include or provide a link to intended programme learning outcomes and address their inclusion within the NFQ, EFQ and any other applicable benchmarks.

- Comment on how it has been ensured that the programme enables learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes.

- Comment on the assessment of work placement in cases where internships form an integral part of a programme.

- Provide an insight into the research experiences of learners on taught programmes and into how the evolving curriculum is informed by research activity within the academic unit.

- Comment on the meetings that take place with learners.

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[21] The UCC Annual Quality Review report 2017-2018 in a focus group meeting with chairs and reviewers acknowledged that the quality review *"does not go deep into the programmes and there was a perceived need for this to change especially for programmes which are not externally accredited"*. The focus on staff and resource issues was also highlighted in the findings of the 2016 QQI publication *Quality in an Era of Diminishing Resources – Irish Higher Education 2008-2015,* which considered the impact of austerity measures on national trends in quality reporting.

[22] ESG 1.7 Information Management

[23] Examples of the type of analysis and reports are the UCC Annual Quality Enhancement Report and UL Academic Units Emerging Themes Report April 2018.

6 Evaluation and review panels

6.1 Introduction

This section comments on the external evaluation groups used to report on proposed new programmes and the peer review groups used to report on academic unit, or programme, reviews. For convenience, these groups will be referred to as panels in this section.

6.2 Composition of panels reporting on new programmes

Table 6–1 illustrates the composition of the 11[24] panels reporting on new programmes from DCU, DIT, and UCC.

DCU established an accreditation board to assess each new programme submission and to make recommendations to its Academic Council. The boards were chaired by an internal academic staff member who was not from the proposing school. Each board had four external members. In two of the three reports analysed, the board had an industry representative. In the third case, an additional external academic was included. In each case there was at least one member from outside Ireland. None of the panels included learners.

DIT evaluation panels reported their findings to the institution's Academic Council. Each evaluation panel was chaired by an academic member of DIT staff. Two or three other internal members of academic staff were appointed to the panel. At least one external member representing industry was appointed to the panel, and at least one, and up to three, external academic experts. No learners were included on the panels.

The approval process in **UCC** involved a University Programme Approval Panel (UPAP). This is a group that is representative of the university. The representation from various units is fixed but the personnel may change. It included representatives of the Academic Board, the Academic Council and Academic Regulations Committee. It also included representatives of various support units within the university. Other schools were represented by members of their curriculum committee and their teaching and learning committee. There were at least two external members, and up to four, appointed to the UPAC for each programme approval. In three out of four reports examined there were employer representatives on the panels.

All panels included members from outside the state. All panels included a learner representative. Table 6–1 shows the membership of programme approval panels for the reports analysed.

Table 6-1 Composition of panels reporting on new programmes in three DABs

Programme	Number on Panel	External members of the panel	Internal members on the panel	Females on the panel	Industry/ employers on the panel	Members from outside the state	Learners
DCU B.Sc. in Data Science	5	4	1	2	2	1	0
DCU M.Sc. in Diagnostics and Precision Medicine	5	4	1	3	1	1	0
DCU B. Ed. in Gaeilge with French/ German / Spanish	5	4	1	3	0	1	0
UCC B. Agr. Sc.	17	4	13	6	2	2	1
UCC B. Sc. (Hons) in Medical and Health Sciences	16	2	14	9	1	2	1
UCC M.A. in Irish Language and European Law	9	2	7	2	0	1	1
UCC PG. Dip. in Trauma Studies	15	3	12	8	1	1	1
DIT M.Sc. in Advanced Analytics	5	2	3	3	1	1	0
DIT M.A. in Social Care Leadership and Management	5	2	3	2	1	0	0
DIT B. Sc.(Hons) in Information Systems and Information Technology	6	2	4	2	1	0	0
DIT B.A. (Hons) in International Business and Languages	7	4	3	3	1	2	0
Total	**95**	**33**	**61**	**43**	**11**	**12**	**4**
Average	**8.6**	**3.1**	**5.6**	**3.9**	**1**	**1.1**	**0.4**

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[24] RCSI did not provide information on the personnel involved in evaluation panels.

6.3 Composition of panels for reporting on academic unit, or programme, reviews

6.3.1 Overall composition

Table 6–2 outlines the composition of panels for reporting on academic unit, or programme, reviews.

Forty-four percent (54 of the 124) of the academic unit, or programme, review panel members were female. Twenty-six percent (17 of the 66) external academics were female.

Table 6–3 gives the totals by institution.

6.3.2 External membership of panels for reporting on academic unit, or programme, reviews

All academic unit and programme review panels included members external to the institution. Table 6–4 shows the countries of origin of the external members.

Figure 6-1 shows the external institutions providing members to review panels. Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland did not provide information on the affiliation of external reviewers.

All academic unit or programme review panels had external members. On average there were two external members per panel. Fifty-three percent (66 of the 124) panel members were from outside of the institution. All but three of the external members

Table 6-2 Composition of panels for reporting on academic unit, or programme, reviews

Report	Panel members*	Females	Internal**	learners	Academic experts	Members from Foreign Academic Institutions	Industry/ Professions
DCU School of Nursing and Human Sciences	5	2	2	0	4	2	1
DCU Faculty of Engineering and Computing	4	2	1	0	3	2	1
DCU School of Chemical Sciences	4	0	1	0	3	1	1
DCU School of Applied Languages and Intercultural Studies	2	2	0	0	2	2	0
DIT School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology	5	3	3	0	4	0	1
DIT School of Retail and Services Management	5	1	3	0	4	1	1
DIT School of Food Science and Environmental Health	7	4	4	0	6	2	1
NUIG School of Psychology	3	1	1	0	2	1	1
NUIG School of Medicine	5	1	2	0	4	2	1
NUIG School of Nursing and Midwifery	4	2	1	0	3	2	1
NUIG St Angela's College	3	2	2	0	3	1	0
MU Froebel Department of Education	4	2	2	0	4	1	0
MU School of Business	4	3	2	0	4	2	0
MU Department of Design Innovation	4	2	2	0	4	2	0
RCSI M.Sc. in Nursing (Advanced leadership)***	1		0		1		
RCSI School of Medicine	6	3	2	1	3	2	2
TCD School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences	4	1	0	0	4	4	0
TCD Dental science	3	1	0	0	2	2	1
TCD Review of the BESS programme	4	2	0	0	4	4	0
UCC School of Pharmacy	4	1	2	1	3	2	0
UCC School of English	6	5	3	1	5	3	0
UCC Revalidation of M.Sc. in data Business	8	4	6	0	8	2	0
UCD Kaplan (Business programmes)- Singapore and Hong Kong	4	1	2	0	4	2	0
UCD Food Regulatory Affairs (Joint Award UU)	4	1	0	0	4	4	0
UCD School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental policy	5	2	2	0	5	3	0
UL Department of Psychology	5	1	0	0	3	3	2
UL Graduate Entry Medical School	6	2	0	0	5	5	1
UL School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics	5	3	0	0	3	3	2
Total	**124**	**54**	**43**	**3**	**104**	**60**	**17**

*Panel members excluded facilitators, co-ordinators and recording secretaries
**Internal members included learners and those from associated institutions
*** No information was provided on the panel membership

on academic unit/periodic programme review panels came from higher education institutions from outside the state. External panel members were from 47 different academic institutions, 44 of which were situated outside the state. Nine external panel members came from institutions based in Europe outside of the UK. Thirty-seven panel members were from UK based institutions. Five panel members were from the USA and one was from Singapore. Three external academic unit/periodic programme review panel members were from Institutions within the state, UCD, LIT and UL.

6.3.3 Internal membership of panels for reporting on academic unit or programme reviews

Institutions normally had between one and four members on the review panels who were external to the academic unit being reviewed but internal to the institution. Trinity College Dublin had no internal members of its panels but did assign either one or two facilitators, who were internal to the institution, to the panel.

The internal members were normally senior academics and employees of the institution involved.

Where the review was of a linked institution, there was a greater number of internal DAB staff on the pane l compared to the standard review panel composition. The panel for the linked institution review included staff from central academic services of the DAB.

6.3.4 Members from industry/ employers/ PSRBs on panels for reporting on academic unit, or programme, reviews

Table 6-5 Panel membership from industry, employers and the professions PRSBs shows the panel membership from industry, employers and PSRBs.

Table 6-3 Analysis by institution of panels for reporting on academic unit, or programme, reviews

Institution	Number of reviews	Panel members	Average per review	Female panel members	Average female panel members per review
Dublin City University	4	15	3	6	2
Dublin Institute of Technology	3	17	6	8	3
National University of Ireland, Galway	4	15	4	6	2
Maynooth University	3	12	4	7	2
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	2	7	4	3	2*
Trinity College Dublin	3	11	4	4	1
University College Cork	3	18	6	10	3
University College Dublin	3	13	4	4	1
University of Limerick	3	16	5	6	2
Grand Total	**28**	**124**	**4**	**54**	**2**

*A review report for one of the programmes had one reviewer with no details provided of that reviewer.

Table 6-4 Countries of origin of external members of panels

County of origin	External members	Country of origin	External members
Canada	3	Netherlands	1
Cyprus	1	Singapore	1
Denmark	2	Sweden	1
Finland	1	Switzerland	1
France	1	UK (inc. NI)	45
Germany	1	USA	5
Ireland (exc. NI)	3		

6.3.5 Learners on panels for reporting on academic unit, or programme, reviews

One institution, University College Cork, appointed learners or learner representatives to review panels. None of the other institutions noted the inclusion of learners on the panels. As per Table 6-5, others had internal members which included learners and those from associated institutions.

6.4 Suggestions

Consider including learners on panels for reporting on academic unit, or programme, reviews. This is already done by some DABs and others have more recently changed their policies to include learners on panels. Training for learners can enable and enhance panel contribution.

Consider increasing the number of external academics from continental European countries on panels. This would serve to strengthen the connection with the European Higher Education Area and expose institutions to a wider range of higher education practices.

Consider recording input by employers/ industry or from PRSBs into the development of programmes in reports. This could be done by including them in panels or by noting their input in the reports, including from when they are involved in site visits.

Table 6-5 Panel membership from industry, employers and PSRBs

	Industry/ employers/ PSRBs members		Industry / employers/ PSRBs members
Dublin City University		**Trinity College Dublin**	
Faculty of Engineering and Computing	1	Dental Science	1
School of Chemical Sciences	1	Review of the BESS programme	0
School of Nursing and Human Sciences	1	School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences	0
School of applied Languages and Intracultural Studies	0		
Dublin Institute of Technology		**University College Cork**	
School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology	1	Revalidation of M.Sc. in Data Business in linked institution	0
School of Retail and Services Management	1	School of English	0
School of Food Science and Environmental Health	1	School of Pharmacy	0
National University of Ireland, Galway		**University College Dublin**	
School of Medicine	1	Kaplan (Business programmes) - Singapore and Hong Kong	0
School of Nursing and Midwifery	1	Food Regulatory Affairs (Joint Award UU)	0
School of Psychology	1	School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental policy	0
St Angela's	0		
Maynooth University		**University of Limerick**	
Department of Design Innovation	0	Department of Psychology	2
Froebel Department of Education	0	Graduate Entry Medical School	1
School of Business	0	School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics	2
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	**0**		
School of Medicine	2		
M.Sc. in Nursing (Advanced leadership)	0		
		Grand Total	**17**

Affiliation of external reviewers	Affiliation of external reviewers
Dublin City University	**Dublin Institute of Technology**
Glasgow Caledonian University, UK	University of Washington, USA
Liverpool John Moore's University, UK	University of Washington, USA
University College Dublin, Ireland	Institute of Technology, Limerick, Ireland
York University, Toronto, Canada	University of Surrey, UK
University College London, UK	
Durham University, UK	
National University of Ireland Galway	**University College Cork**
Case Western Reserve University, USA	Lund University, Sweden
Sheffield University, UK	University College London, UK
University of Cumbria, UK	University of Strathclyde, UK
University of Bangor, UK	University of Bradford, UK
University of Dundee, UK	University of Durham, UK
University of Manchester, UK	University of Edinburgh, UK
University of Ulster, UK	University of Sheffield, UK
Maynooth University	**University College Dublin**
Coastal Carolina University, USA	Cornell University, USA
Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design, Denmark	Nanyang Polytech, Singapore
	Newcastle University, UK
Loughborough University, UK	Ulster University, UK
University of Limerick, Ireland	Ulster University, UK
University of Education, Heidelberg, Germany	University of Copenhagen, Denmark
	University of Liverpool, UK
University of St Andrews, UK	University of Sheffield, UK
Trinity College Dublin	**University of Limerick**
Queen's University Belfast, UK	Keele University, UK
University of Science Po, Paris, France	Leeds Metropolitan University, UK
University College, London, UK	University of Cambridge, UK
University of Amsterdam, Netherlands	University of London, UK
University of Calgary, Canada	Durham University, UK
University of Geneva, Switzerland	Coventry University, UK
University of Glasgow, UK	McMaster University, Canada
University of Glasgow, UK	University College London, UK
University of Leeds, UK	University of Exeter, UK
University of Nottingham UK	University of Jyvaskyla, Finland
	University of Surrey, UK

Figure 6-1 External institutions providing members for review panels.

7 Appendix A: Key documents

The following background documents relating to the thematic analysis:

- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area 2015 (ESG)

- QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for use by all providers, April 2016

- QQI Sector Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for use by designated awarding bodies, July 2016

- The Universities Act, 1997 (the 1997 Act)

- The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (the 2012 Act)

- The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019 (the 2019 Act)

- Recommendation Rec (2007)6 by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers on the public responsibility for higher education and research, http:/www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereduucaion/news/ pub_res_En.pdf

- Good practice for the approval, monitoring and periodic review of programme and awards in Irish Universities, Irish Universities Quality Board 2012

- Professional Body Accreditation in Higher Education Institutions in Ireland, Friedman A, Hogg K, Nadarajah K and Pitts R, QQI June 2017

8 Appendix B: List of reports analysed

8.1 New Programme Approval Reports

Institution	Programme title	Type and source of report
DCU	B.Sc. in Data Science	External panel report Programmes supplied by Institution to QQI
DCU	M.Sc.in Diagnostics and Precision Medicine	
DCU	B.Ed. in Gaeilge with French/ German / Spanish	
DCU	M.Sc.in International Accounting and Business	
DIT	M.Sc.in Advanced Analytics	External panel report Reports chosen from the website
DIT	M.A.in Social Care Leadership and Management	
DIT	B.Sc. (Hons) in Information Systems and Information Technology	
DIT	B.A.(Hons) In International Business and Languages	
NUIG	M.Sc. in Applied Multilingualism	Outline programme proposal Proposals provided by Institution to QQI
NUIG	B.A.(Hons) in Maths, Comp. Sc. and Education	
NUIG	M.Sc. in Computer Science	
NUIG	H. Dip in Science in Med. Tech, Reg. Affairs and Quality	
TCD	Master in Pharmacy	Complete programme proposals provided by Institutions to QQI
TCD	Professional Diploma in Orthodontics	
UCC	B.Agr.Sc.	Programme Approval Panel report with external academic, employer and learner input Reports provided by Institution to QQI
UCC	B.Sc. (Hons) in Medical and Health Sciences	
UCC	M.A.in Irish Language and European Law	
UCC	PGDip. in Trauma Studies	
UCD	M.Eng.in Optical Engineering	Outline programme proposals provided by Institution to QQI
UCD	B. Arch. Sc.	
UCD	MA in Theatre Practice	
UCD	BSc. in Food Science with Chinese	
UL	B.B.S with Spanish	Outline programme proposals Provided by Institution to QQI
UL	M.A.in Song writing	
UL	H.Dip. in Software Systems	
UL	Human Nutrition and Dietetics	
MU	M.Sc. Data science	Programme proposal with external reviews provided by Institution to QQI
MU	Ba. B.Sc. Statistics	
MU	B.Sc. In Biological and Geographical Sciences	
MU	B.Sc. in Quantitative Science	
RCSI	M.SC. in Surgery	Programme proposal with external reviews provided by Institution to QQI
	Accreditation/ Approval reports with external input	17 from 5 Institutions
	Programme proposals	14 from 4 institutions

8.2 Academic unit, and programme, review reports

	Type of review	Source of review report
Dublin City University		
Faculty of Engineering and Computing	Academic Unit	website
School of Applied languages and Intercultural Studies	Programme	website
School of Chemical Sciences	Academic Unit	website
School of Nursing and Human Sciences	Academic Unit	website
Dublin Institute of Technology		
School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology	Academic Unit	website
School of Retail and Services Management	Academic Unit	website
School of Food Science and Environmental Health	Academic Unit	website
Maynooth University		
Department of Design Innovation	Academic Unit	website
Froebel Department of Education	Programme	website
School of Business	Academic Unit	website
National University of Ireland, Galway		
School of Medicine	Academic Unit	website
School of Nursing and Midwifery	Academic Unit	website
School of Psychology	Academic Unit	website
St Angela's School review	Academic Unit / Linked College	website
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland		
M.Sc. in Nursing (Advanced leadership)	Programme	QQI
School of Medicine	Academic Unit	website
Trinity College Dublin		
Dental science	Academic Unit	website
Review of the BESS programme	Programme	website
School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences	Academic Unit	website
University College Cork		
Revalidation of M.Sc. in Data Business	Programme	website
School of English	Academic Unit	website
School of Pharmacy	Academic Unit	website
University College Dublin		
College of Business. Business programmes - Kaplan (Singapore and Hong Kong)	Collaborative/ Transnational provision	website
PgC/PgD/MSc in Food Regulatory Affairs, PgCert in Veterinary Public Health, PgD/ MSc Food Regulatory Affairs (Veterinary Public Health (Joint Award UU and UCD)	Programmes /Revalidation Collaborations	website
School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental policy	Academic Unit	website
University of Limerick		
Department of Psychology	Academic Unit	website
Graduate Entry Medical School	Academic Unit	website
School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics	Academic Unit	website

9 Appendix C: Glossary of terms used in this report

Academic Committee/ Council	A top-level deliberative committee with overall responsibility for the governance of academic affairs.
Academic Unit	An academic unit is the faculty, school or department that is the subject of a review. In some cases, for example St Angela's College, it can be a college.
Accreditation	Higher education accreditation is a quality assurance process under which programmes are evaluated by an external body to determine if applicable standards are met. If standards are met, accredited status is granted by the body. The body involved can be a PSRB or an industry body.
Approval	Approval is a process by which an institution determines whether an academic programme meets its academic standards as well as resource and strategic requirements.
Assessment	Learner assessment (specifically assessment of learning) means inference (e.g. judgement or estimation or evaluation) of a learner's knowledge, skill or competence by comparison with a standard based on appropriate evidence. Self-assessment is included in this. Assessment has many purposes.
Assessment instrument	Any assessment task and criteria, along with procedures for its conduct, together with the explicit grading scheme (i.e. grading rubrics).
Award	An award which is conferred, granted or given by an awarding body and which records that a learner has acquired a standard of knowledge, skill or competence.
Award Standards	Award standards are the expected prior learning required to qualify for an Award. Award Standards and award type descriptors are structured and presented under the three main strands: Knowledge, Know-how and Skill, and competence; currently these are further divided in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) into eight to eleven sub-strands (depending on the award-type). The NFQ defines these terms.

Award standards describe the required learning for awards at specified levels. Higher education awards standards are (ideally) concise texts that normally cover broad fields of learning. However, professional qualifications-specific award standards may also be determined where appropriate. |
Commendations	Commendations are made in validation, revalidation and programmatic review reports when panels detect a particular strength. In this review commendations were synonymous with strengths.
Conditions	See weakness(es) below.
Designated Awarding Body	The 2012 Act specifies that certain higher education institutions have statutory powers to make awards, these were the universities, RCSI and DIT.
External examiner	An external examiner is an independent expert who is a member of the broader community of practice within the programme's field of learning and whose accomplishments attest to his/her likelihood of having the authority necessary to fulfil the responsibilities of the role.
Independent providers	The Irish higher education system is conventionally divided into three distinct sectors depending on the level of autonomy of the institutions and their relationship to QQI. The independent providers are those institutions that provide programmes for which QQI is the awarding body. These institutions are typically for profit or not for profit self-funding colleges.
Intended learning outcomes	The intended learning outcomes represent the educational goals. They describe the learning outcomes that the teacher intends that learner will attain as a result of teaching and learning activities (see minimum intended programme learning outcomes below).
Learning environment	Learning environments are diverse. Teachers and other learners are part of a learner's learning environment as are workplace colleagues if applicable. Learning environments have both physical and social structures. Learners interact with the learning environment; the environment responds to the learner, and the learner to the environment.
Learning outcomes	A learner's knowledge, skill and competence change as a result of learning. The learner changes.

Level	This term is used in this report to indicate the level of a programme on the National Framework of Qualification (NFQ).
	The NFQ is a ten-level framework. Higher education awards are those at levels 6 to 10. The major awards at these levels are as follows:
	Level 6: Higher Certificate;
	Level 7: Ordinary Bachelor Degree;
	Level 8: Honours Bachelor Degree and Higher Diploma (HDip);
	Level 9: Master Degree and Post-Graduate Diploma (PGDip);
	Level 10: Ph.D., and Professional Doctorates (not covered in this review).
Minimum intended programme learning outcomes (MIPLOs)	The minimum achievement (in terms of knowledge, skill, and competence) that the learner is certified to have attained if he/she successfully completes a particular programme (i.e. passes all the required assessments). These must always be specific by the provider. A learner who completes a validated programme is eligible for the relevant award if he or she has demonstrated, through assessment (including by recognition of prior learning), attainment of the relevant minimum intended programme learning outcomes. MIPLOs are not normally assessed directly but their achievement is implied by the cumulative achievement of the MIMLOs.
Minimum intended modules learning outcomes (MIMLOs)	Minimum intended modules learning outcomes are written for all modules. They reflect in their language the NFQ level of the module.
Module	A programme of education and training of small volume. It is designed to be capable of being integrated with other modules into larger programmes. A module can be shared by different programmes.
	In describing the educational formation provided by and independent module, it is sufficient to specify (i) the learning outcomes (ii) the assumed prior learning.
Module descriptors	Module descriptors include the title of the modules, the credit volume and level of the modules, the minimum intended modules learning outcomes, indicative content, assessment instruments and schedule and learning resources.
Named awards	Within an award type (e.g. honours bachelor degree) the particular awards that are named with respect to a field of learning (e.g. Honours Bachelor of Science degree). Standards for named awards often include reference to knowledge, skill and competence within a specific field of learning (the standards may be expressed by the MIPLOs approved at validation where a generic QQI award standard is used).
NFQ	The National Framework of Qualifications is a ten-level framework. Higher education awards are those at levels 6 to 10. See entry on Level above.
Opportunities for improvement	See recommendations below.
Panels	Panel is a term used to describe the independent expert groups that evaluate programmes for initial validation and those that are involved in programmatic reviews and revalidations.
Programme	A programme of education and training refers to any process by which learners may acquire knowledge, skill or competence. It included courses of study or instruction, apprenticeships, training and employment.
	A major award programme will normally require some kind of 'cohesion generating 'process which integrates constituent modules so that the minimum intended programme learning outcomes are supported. The cohesion generating process should establish the epistemological and cultural identity of the programme.
Programme accreditation	Higher education accreditation is a quality assurance process under which programmes are evaluated by an external body to determine if applicable standards are met. If standards are met, accredited status is granted by the body. The body involved can be a PSRB or an industry body.
Programme approval	See entry on Approval above.
Provider	A 'provider of a programme of education and training' is a person who or a body which, provides, organises or procures a programme of education.
Recommendations	Recommendations are made by panels in validation, revalidation and programmatic review reports. They are suggestions to improve the programme. They are not required to be implemented by the provider. They are synonymous with 'opportunities for improvement' in this report.

Reports	Reports are those produced by independent evaluation panels. Validation reports are produced following an initial validation event. Programmatic review reports are produced following a programmatic review accompanied by a revalidation report for each programme revalidated during the review.
Review	A review is a process by which a previously approved programme or an existing academic unit is evaluated in terms of the objectives set for the programmes or unit. Reviews are normally periodic and occur on a five- or seven-year cycle.
Weakness(es)	A weakness is an aspect of a programme that requires amendment to ensure that the programme meets the criteria for validation. A condition or conditions are imposed to ensure that the programme can be validated. Conditions are taken to indicate weakness.

10 Appendix D: Lists of Tables and Figures

10.1 Tables

Most of the reports outline the review process or state its objectives. Most describe the academic unit or programme(s) though the level of detail varies.

Table 5–1 details, for example, reporting levels under a selection of key headings.

10.2 Figures

11 Appendix E:

Table 11-1 Academic unit or programme review reports

Institution / Faculty/School/Programme
Dublin City University
Faculty of Engineering and Computing
School of Applied languages and Intercultural Studies
School of Chemical Sciences
School of Nursing and Human Sciences
Dublin Institute of Technology
School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology
School of Retail and Services Management
School of Food Science and Environmental Health
Maynooth University
Department of Design Innovation
Froebel Department of Education
School of Business
National University of Ireland, Galway
School of Medicine
School of Nursing and Midwifery
School of Psychology
St Angela's College Review
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
M.Sc. in Nursing (Advanced leadership)
School of Medicine
Trinity College Dublin
Dental science
Review of the BESS programme
School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
University College Cork
Revalidation of M.Sc. in Data Business. UCC IMI
School of English
School of Pharmacy
University College Dublin
College of Business. Business programmes -Kaplan (Singapore and Hong Kong)
PgC/PgD/MSc in Food Regulatory Affairs, PgCert in Veterinary Public Health, and PgD/MSc Food Regulatory Affairs (Veterinary Public Health) (Joint Awards UU and UCD).
School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental policy
University of Limerick
Department of Psychology
Graduate Entry Medical School
School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics
Grand Total

Table 11-2 Provider and collaboration type of the three evaluation reports analysed

Designated Awarding Body	Collaborating provider	Collaboration Type
NUI Galway	St Angela's College Sligo*	Linked
UCD	Kaplan (Singapore and Hong Kong)	Collaborative/ transnational provision[25]
UCD	University of Ulster	Joint award

Table 11-3 Analysis of commendations

Commendations	Type of review		Total
	Academic Unit	Programme	
Staff	32	0	32
Curriculum	30	2	32
Teaching, learning and assessment	28	3	31
Management	20	2	22
Research	22	0	22
Engagement	17	3	20
Learner support	17	3	20
Facilities	8	0	8
Learning resources	7	0	7
Misc.	5	1	6
Mission	7	0	7
Quality enhancement	7	0	7
Leadership	6	0	6
Quality assurance	5	0	5
Self-study	5	0	5
Strategy	5	0	5
Culture	4	0	4
Finance	4	0	4
Reputation	4	0	4
Access	3	0	3
Collegiality	2	1	3
Communication	2	1	3
Development	3	0	3
External relations	3	0	3
Graduates	2	1	3
Resources	2	1	3
Documentation	2	0	2
Governance	2	0	2
Recruitment	2	0	2
Accreditation	0	1	1
Collaboration	1	0	1
Standards	1	0	1
Grand Total	**258**	**19**	**277**

[25] This programme has subsequently been classified as "Off-Campus Delivery"

Table 11-4 Analysis of numbers of recommendations

Recommendations	Type of review		Total
	Academic Unit	**Programme**	
Staff	80	2	82
Curriculum	59	20	79
Research	53	1	54
Management	43	9	52
Strategy	27	1	28
Engagement	25	1	26
Learner support	20	5	25
Teaching learning and assessment	22	3	25
Quality assurance	18	3	21
Resources	16	3	19
Access	14	2	16
Communication	13	0	13
Finance	11	2	13
External relations	12	0	12
Facilities	12	0	12
Learning resources	8	0	8
Miscellaneous	6	2	8
Graduates	6	0	6
Quality improvement	6	0	6
Mission	5	0	5
Progression	3	2	5
Information	3	1	4
Grand Total	**462**	**57**	**519**

Table 11-5 List of meetings as recorded in reports. It was not clear in several reports whom the panels met with. In such cases assumptions were made.

Institution/Academic Unit	Meeting with senior staff	Meeting with academic staff	Meeting with learners	Meeting with graduates	Meeting with employers	Meeting with others
DCU. Faculty of Engineering and Computing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
DCU. School of Applied languages and Intercultural Studies	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded
DCU. School of Chemical Sciences	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
DCU. School of Nursing and Human Sciences	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
DIT. School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	Yes
DIT. School of Retail and Services Management	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
DIT. School of Food Science and Environmental Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	Yes
NUIG. School of Medicine	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded
NUIG. School of Nursing and Midwifery	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded
NUIG. School of Psychology	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded
NUIG. St Angela's College Review	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	Not recorded	Yes
MU. Department of Design Innovation	Yes	Yes	yes	Not recorded	Yes	Yes
MU. Froebel Department of Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
MU. School of Business	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	Yes	Yes
RCSI. M.Sc. in Nursing (Advanced leadership)	Not recorded*	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded
RCSI. School of Medicine	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
TCD. Dental Science	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded
TCD. Review of the BESS programme	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	Not recorded	Yes
TCD. School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	Not recorded	Yes
UCC. Revalidation of M.Sc. in Data Business. UCC IMI[26]	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded
UCC. School of English	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UCC. School of Pharmacy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UCD. Kaplan (Business programmes)- Singapore and Hong Kong	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UCD. Food Regulatory Affairs (Joint Award UU). Five conditions were also specified.	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	Yes	Not recorded	Yes
UCD. School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental policy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UL. Department of Psychology	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	Not recorded	Yes
UL. Graduate Entry Medical School	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UL School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded

* RCSI do not require a QIP for programme reviews.

[26] This is a programme re-validation report, and operates under the programme approval and review procedures.

Table 11-6 List of Quality Improvement Plans published

Institution / Faculty/School/Programme(s)	Published/Not Published	Brief Comment
Dublin City University		
Faculty of Engineering and Computing	Published on website	Detailed plan with a response from both School and institution
School of Applied languages and Intercultural Studies	None available	
School of Chemical Sciences	Published on website	Detailed plan with response from both School and institution on website
School of Nursing and Human Sciences	Available but not published	On website but password protected
Dublin Institute of Technology		
School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology	Not available	
School of Retail and Services Management	Published on website	Response on website separately
School of Food Science and Environmental Health	Published on website	Response on website separately
Maynooth University		
Department of Design Innovation	Published on website website	Detailed plan on website
Froebel Department of Education	Published on website	Detailed plan on website
School of Business	Published on website website	Detailed plan on website
National University of Ireland, Galway		
School of Medicine	Published with report	Action plan attached to report
School of Nursing and Midwifery	Published with report	Action plan attached to report
School of Psychology	Published with report	Action plan attached to report
St Angela's College Review	Published with report	Action plan attached to report
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland		
M.Sc. in Nursing (Advanced leadership)	None available	
School of Medicine	Published on website	Detailed plan on website
Trinity College Dublin		
Dental science	Published with report	Brief response from School and Dean
Review of the BESS programme	Published with report	Brief response from School and Dean
School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences	Published with report	Brief response from School and Dean
University College Cork		
Revalidation of M.Sc. in Data Business. UCC IMI	Not available	
School of English	Not available	
School of Pharmacy	Not available	
University College Dublin		
Kaplan (Business programmes)- Singapore and Hong Kong	Published on website	Detailed response on website
Food Regulatory Affairs (Joint Award UU). Five conditions were also specified.	Not available	
School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental policy	Published on website	Detailed response on website
University of Limerick		
Department of Psychology	Not available	
Graduate Entry Medical School	Not available	
School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics	Not available	