



Perspectives from a University-wide Research Quality Review – the Highs and Lows!

**A TRADITION OF
INDEPENDENT
THINKING**



UCC

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Beginning of Research Quality Review at UCC

- Research Quality Review (RQR) process introduced in 2008/09
- Proposed by University Management Team and approved by Quality Promotion Committee and Governing Body
- University-wide process to assess quality and level of research activity with emphasis on generating recommendations for future development
- Research indicators (4): focused at School/unit level in terms of output, research related activities, funding and peer esteem
- Outcomes of the first RQR, illustrated:
 - Success of the research institute strategy in terms of research quality
 - Reliability of Panel scoring of overall evaluation based on assessment criteria
 - Research outputs of academic units: 27% evaluated as excellent and 10% as outstanding

Research Quality Review 2015

- 2014/2015 RQR development of approach with external advice
- Design and implementation of approach overseen by RQR Steering Committee, chaired by Registrar, members of ACRIC and QPC
- Revised model: four stage process
 - Self-assessment (Research Statement)
 - Peer-review
 - Site visit by Chairs and Disciplinary Vice-Chairs
 - Review report
- Research activity indicators (5) defined: postgraduate environment **new**
- Method of assessment:
 - Assessment of staff research output during the 5 year period of evaluation across 5 point scale
 - Overall Research Evaluation for each disciplinary Unit assessed 5 point scale
 - Relationship between ORE and a portion of Unit's resource allocation
 - Disciplinary areas identified and grouped: 15 clusters

Scale and Scope of RQR 2015

- Research defined as “original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding” inclusive of:
 - Pedagogical research
 - Applied and practice-based research
 - Creative research
- Research submissions included all staff – with provisions for special circumstances
- Each research submission for assessment contained:
 - A research statement: contextual information and overview
 - A research description which sets out the extent and boundaries of the research carried out.
 - Information provided on the six Research Activity Indicators
- 5 Panel site visits over a period of 3 months. Recruitment of 15 Panel Chairs, 69 Disciplinary Vice Chairs and 245 remote reviewers. 97% of the reviewers were international

Research Activity Indicators (RAI)

Individual Focus

- Research activity indicators 1-3
- RAI 1 - **Selected Published Output (25%)**: 5 selected research outputs between 1 January 2008 – 31st December 2014 with accompanying rationale for selection
- RAI 2 - **Total Published Output for period 2008-14 (15%)**: researchers assessed in terms of their total output during the period as represented on the Institutional Research Information System IRIS
- RAI 3 - **Peer Esteem (15%)**: assessment of the overall scholarly standing of researchers, for example: fellowships, honours, invited plenary presentations, translation of work into other languages

Research Activity Indicators Unit

Focus

- **RAI 4 – Research-Related Activities (15%):** Information about research activity in narrative form in addition to individual IRIS profiles. Units present activity within and beyond the Unit by individual or groups of researchers in the Unit
- **RAI 5 - Post-Graduate Research Education (15%):** Central information on postgraduate research will be provided including numbers; completion times, monitoring processes
- **RAI 6- Research Income (15%):** Central information on research income of the Unit within the context of the national research landscape relevant to researchers in the appropriate disciplines. This will also be informed by the contextual information provided in the Research Statement

Review Structure

- Peer Review Panels (15) appointed, based on disciplinary clusters with variation in size according to the size and complexity of the cluster of academic units and disciplines
- Peer Review Panels received material in advance and majority of reviewers worked remotely.
- Chairs visited the University twice:
 - before the exercise for briefing and to ensure consistency of approach and,
 - together with the disciplinary vice chairs, after the remote review of submissions had taken place.

Site Visits 1 & 2

- **Site Visit 1**

- Information and briefing meetings between Panel Chairs and members of the Steering Committee.
- Briefings with Colleges and RICUs on prevailing research and graduate education conditions.

- **Site Visit 2**

- Chairs and Disciplinary Vice Chairs for:

- Presentation from academic units on research activity.
- Meetings with staff, researchers and postgraduate research students.
- Meetings with relevant Officers of the University.
- Visit to facilities of units.
- Consideration of the reports of the remote reviewers.
- Agreement on results.
- Drafting of report according to guidelines and criteria for assessment

Learning from the process: areas to address

- Capacity of information systems to deliver required data in format needed
- Clarity about publications to be included
- Remote reviewer process
- Building more universal engagement in the RQR, where engagement was good units were better placed to showcase the quality of their research
- Central objectives of the review process and understanding
- Links between assessment of research quality and resource allocation
- The benefits and perceived disadvantages of using reviewers from national systems with well established research evaluation systems
- The importance of paying close attention to the qualitative commentary in the reports, as well as scores

Learning from the process: themes

- Key themes emerging across the reports
 - Achievements and staff commitment in straitened times
 - **Staffing:** research leadership, promotion and sustainability
 - Investment in research infrastructure: physical and human
 - **Academic workload:** balance between teaching and research in international context
 - Funding streams diversification
 - Postgraduate education of very good quality
 - **Research strategy implementation:** local and institutional integration

Issues for future research strategy

- Increased focus on publication in high impact journals
- Enhanced engagement in open access repositories - CORA
- Focus on articulating impact of research
- Development of research leadership – strategic investment in staff to ensure international visibility - ERC
- Importance of coherent research strategy – University – College – School – RICU
- Interdisciplinary RICUs continue to perform at a high level
- Diversification of funding sources

Quality Improvement Process

- Quality Improvement Process oversight by the Quality Promotion Committee with reports to University Management Team and Governing Body
- Levels in the improvement process:
 - College Quality Improvement Plans detailing planned actions
 - Priorities for development and enhancement of RQR process
 - Research strategy development and support for research
 - Strategic planning at University Management level, both annual 2016/17 and formulation of 5 year strategy 2017-22
- Timing and format of next RQR at UCC?

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RQR Report available at: <http://www.ucc.ie/en/qpu/rqr-1415/>