



Quality Within Higher Education 2017

A Summary Report



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann





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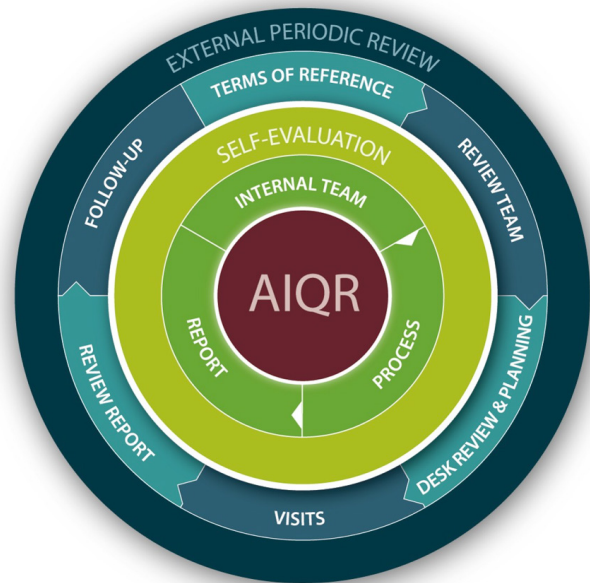
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Quality Within Higher Education 2017

Foreword

Each year, QQI prepares a summary of the Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Reports (AIQRs) published by publicly regulated Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Ireland. This summary report brings together information provided for the reporting period 1 September 2015 to 31 August 2016, to identify themes occurring across the institutions and to highlight quality activities undertaken during the period. For QQI, and the wider public, this publication demonstrates the many QA activities being undertaken, the resulting improvements made and the adherence of institutions to national and international QA guidelines and procedures.



Furthermore, there are benefits for HEIs as the report helps them to not only publicise their own good practices but also to make them aware of good practices in other institutions and, thus, identify common themes across the sector. At the same time, the individual AIQRs also demonstrate a commendable diversity within the Irish Higher Education (HE) sector. Indeed, this is reflected in one of the emerging features of this year's reports, namely an increased focus by institutions on adapting QA practices to their own strategic mission.

QQI regards the AIQR as a partnership, with the agency acting as a facilitator in a mutually beneficial process. In particular, QQI would like to acknowledge the valuable input from institutions and representative bodies in the development of the AIQR process. Institutional feedback on the AIQR has acknowledged the positive impact of having a single repository for internal QA policies and procedures, although institutions have also highlighted the significant time investment required to complete the report. QQI recognises this extra workload but believes that, as the process becomes further embedded as part of institutional QA activities, all stakeholders will see the advantages of the AIQR for years to come.

Padraig Walsh
 CEO
 Quality and Qualifications Ireland



Quality Within Higher Education 2017

Key Findings

- The AIQRs clearly demonstrate that Quality Assurance (QA) initiatives are having a positive impact on Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEI)s leading to improvements to both student and staff experiences.
- As with the previous reporting period, despite cutbacks, work continues across HEIs to improve the student experience, with institutions continuing to focus on initiatives aimed at enhancing the first-year experience and improving progression rates.
- The depth and breadth of QA activities varies across institutions and sectors, with a stronger emphasis on programme focussed quality reviews in IoT returns. A focus on creating a quality culture at institution and unit level is evident in most reports, as is a clearer mission-centred focus in QA initiatives.
- The AIQR itself is universally seen as a useful and worthwhile exercise, despite the extra workload demands that it creates.
- Changes to QA across both sectors reflect an institutional desire for continuous improvement and enhancement in this area, as well as an ongoing need for regard to the developing suite of core and sector-specific QQI Statutory QA Guidelines and the revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015).
- The codification of QA frameworks, with a view to streamlining ongoing QA activities, is an important feature of quality in HEIs.
- The profile of quality offices is increasing with new positions and committees being established in many institutions, while QA is also becoming an area of growing strategic importance to Irish HEIs.
- Data continues to play an increasing role in QA in Irish HEIs, with the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) in particular providing a way for institutions to benchmark nationally. Also, many HEIs are using their own institutional research functions to gather information to support QA.
- The impact of reduced funding, the Employment Control Framework and additional strategic planning relating to regional mergers and alliances continue to have an impact on the effectiveness of QA.



Section 1

Summary Report Background



Section 1

Summary Report Background



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

This report, based on the AIQRs of Designated Awarding Bodies and Institutes of Technology for the Reporting Period 1 September 2015 – 31 August 2016, is a summary of quality assurance and enhancement within the following institutions:

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

The AIQRs summarised in this report were submitted to QQI in February 2017. Accordingly, this is the AIQR 2017 Summary Report based on the information submitted by the institutions in their 2017 AIQRs and pertaining to the academic year 2015/16.



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

While the AIQR process necessitates a significant time investment from institutions, it has a number of tangible benefits. The publication of reports helps external stakeholders to understand how quality is assured within an institution. The AIQR also provides QQI with an assurance that QA procedures are being implemented on an ongoing basis within institutions and that regulatory requirements are being met. Information captured by multiple AIQRs will be used by institutions and review teams for subsequent cyclical reviews. This will assist with documentation management for institutions in future reviews and reduce the burden on institutions to provide the Review Team with a significant amount of documentation in advance of their visit.

This report is a synopsis of the information communicated by institutions in Parts 2-6 of the AIQR only and is presented under four headings:

- Quality Assurance Developments;
- The Effectiveness and Impact of Quality Assurance;
- Quality Enhancement Highlights; and
- Objectives for the Coming Reporting Period (2016-17).

The next series of reports (to be completed by institutions early in 2018) will cover the period September 2016 to August 2017.



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Section 2

Quality Assurance Developments



Section 2

Quality Assurance Developments



Overview

Internal quality initiatives and quality assurance procedures are being adapted to align more closely with the specific missions of individual HEIs.

In general quality offices have a prominent role in terms of governance and strategic planning. Findings from QA activities are presented regularly through governance and decision-making structures within institutions.

Institutions are continuously improving and enhancing QA policies and procedures, with a particular emphasis on compliance with the revised ESG 2015 and QQI QA policy and guidelines.

As well as constantly reviewing and updating QA processes and procedures, institutions are also revising the function and broadening the remit of their Quality Offices. Institutional commitment to quality is further reflected through the creation of new quality-related roles and committees.

The codification of quality assurance frameworks is becoming an important feature of internal quality assurance systems, particularly as a way to streamline ongoing QA activities.

Institutions are identifying risk management as a specific focus for QA at a strategic level.

Concerns relating to student retention and progression are being addressed through the creation of new policies and procedures relating to the student lifecycle.

Data is beginning to play a wider role in improving the student experience. The use of institutional research functions is helping in this regard, as is the institution-specific information gleaned from the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE).

The reform of the Irish Higher Education (HE) landscape and the cumulative effects of funding cuts and the Employment Control Framework continue to impact on quality and quality assurance across all institutions.

2.1 Strategic Importance of QA

The strong relationship between quality assurance and enhancement systems and an institution's strategic objectives was reflected throughout this year's reports. Across both sectors, institutions highlighted many QA activities which were seen to be supportive of broader strategic objectives. Many submissions highlighted the increasingly prominent roles given to Quality Offices (or equivalent) in terms of governance and strategic planning during the reporting period. Furthermore, for many institutions quality assurance and enhancement has a central role in strategic planning.

Some specific examples include:

- Two institutions explicitly articulate the central role of QA in their strategic plans.
- A Quality Promotion Office was established with an extended remit that includes institutional research and analysis and support for the strategic planning activities of a university.
- After consideration of the 2014/2015 AIQR, an institution's governing body invited the Registrar to present on quality assurance and enhancement issues.
- Following a review of QA policies and procedures, Quality Committee business is now a standing item on the agenda of all governance committees within an institution.
- A Quality Promotion Committee was given an updated remit and terms of reference, which emphasised the link between quality and the university's strategic and annual planning process.
- In one institution, Quality Assurance initiatives are aligned with strategic objectives through the executive structure, school review process and programme design and development.

The AIQRs for the reporting period demonstrated an ongoing commitment to the development, implementation and maintenance of QA policies and procedures within Irish HEIs. A number of institutions reported the review, updating or enhancement of QA policies and systems during the period in question. In relation to QA enhancement and strategic planning, a recurring theme was the importance of the Mission-Based Performance Compacts with the Higher Education Authority (HEA). Indeed, this mission-based approach has influenced approaches to QA throughout the HEIs, with internal QA procedures becoming increasingly diverse. This difference is often attributable to a QA focus that relates to an institution's mission, which can vary broadly between the DAB and IoT sector.

An increasingly common feature of institutional quality assurance systems is the codification of a quality assurance framework, often aimed at synthesizing existing QA activities at an institutional level.

For example:

- Maynooth University's approach to quality assurance and enhancement was reaffirmed and codified in a new 'Framework for Quality Assurance and Enhancement' during this reporting period.
- At Trinity College Dublin (TCD), the 'Framework for Quality Assurance in Trinity' was formally approved.
- University College Dublin (UCD) published and launched strategies in the 'UCD Quality Framework', relating to areas such as: research, innovation and impact; the library; IT; and campus development.
- Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) developed the 'Quality Assurance Framework for Waterford Institute of Technology'.

Another area becoming increasingly important for QA at a strategic level was Risk Management. During the reporting period, one institution (TCD) established a Risk Management Group, while another (University of Limerick) formally approved a Risk Management Policy.

The following are some other noteworthy QA activities that supported strategic objectives:

- Following the increased emphasis on research reviews noted in last year's report, TCD conducted the first review of a Trinity Research Institute (Trinity College Institute of Neuroscience).
- Also relating to research, NUI Galway focused on a major thematic Review of Research Performance.

Highlighting Good Practice Good Practice Case Studies

At University College Cork, the model of academic quality review encourages self-evaluation of the quality of the student learning experience and of academic standards for taught provision. A new initiative developed in the reporting period led to all disciplinary areas engaging in review from 2016/17 onwards being encouraged to identify and include a good practice case study as part of the self-evaluation process. These case-studies will form part of the Self-Evaluation Report and will be published as part of the follow-up to academic quality review. This enhancement-focused self-evaluation initiative requires active consideration of the practices which are working particularly effectively in a school or academic unit, which are then highlighted and shared as part of the academic quality review process. It is also an opportunity for disciplinary areas and the university to make visible the varied range of activities and initiatives directed towards providing an excellent student learning experience. [from UCC AIQR]



2.2 Changes to QA

As with previous years, there were many changes to QA across both sectors in the reporting period, reflecting both an institutional desire for continuous improvement and enhancement in this area and the ongoing need for adherence to the revised ESG 2015 and the developing suite of core and sector-specific QQI Statutory QA Guidelines. In relation to the latter, specific examples include:

- A new template for Annual Programme Board reports, which better reflected the requirements of the AIQR, was piloted.
- In light of the publication of the QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines and the sector-specific QA Guidelines, institutions reviewed QA policies and activities, such as the institutional quality manual, quality review procedures and the schedule of meetings.
- One institution mapped its provision to the ESG 2015.

In relation to changes to procedures and policies, the following were reported:

- At DCU, the template for Programme Chairs to complete Annual Programme Review was reviewed by the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning, with the development of a revised template agreed and rolled out during the academic year.
- New and revised sections were developed in the Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT) Quality Assurance Handbook.
- At UL, following feedback from external quality reviewers, the quality review process and guidelines for both academic and support units were reviewed.

The commitment to quality assurance and enhancement at governance level was apparent, with many institutions recording new positions/roles and new committees/working groups relating to QA. Some specific examples of this include:

- The Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown (ITB) created the position of Academic Quality Manager, whose role is to harmonise QA and Quality Enhancement processes within the Technological University alliance with DIT and IT Tallaght. Equivalent position appointments have been made by DIT and IT Tallaght.
- IT Tralee appointed a new Registrar and Assistant Registrar, leading to a full review of the existing QA procedures and QA manual.
- Maynooth University established a new Quality Committee with revised Terms of Reference.
- TCD introduced key posts with a QA/Enhancement function: Director of Student Services; Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education; Transition to Trinity Officer; Associate Professor in Inter-Professional Learning in the Faculty of Health Sciences.
- A full-time Director of Quality was appointed at University College Cork (UCC).

- UCD established a number of new key offices and posts in the reporting period which have a quality assurance and enhancement dimension: new University Secretariat; Director of University Governance; new Vice-President and Deputy Vice-President for Global Engagement; Director of Major Strategic Partnerships; and Director of Human Resources.
- WIT appointed a new Head of Quality Promotion and Policy Development.

Changes to QA in relation to the student lifecycle was an emerging theme, dovetailing with ongoing concerns across both sectors relating to student retention and progression. For example:

- DCU approved a set of overarching Admissions Principles, providing a core set of values to underpin admission to the university.
- During 2015-16, IT Tallaght introduced a new provision to support students at award stage repeating for honours; previously, students recording a fail grade were capped at a pass award.
- 'Progression with Credit Deficit' was approved along with the guidance notes for specifying prerequisite learning for academic modules at IT Tralee.

Highlighting Good Practice Quality Enhancement Issues Log

During the reporting period, Dublin Institute of Technology developed a Quality Enhancement Issues Log for issues arising from review processes that lie outside the direct remit of a unit under review and within the remit of central services or the institute's Senior Leadership Team (SLT). The log records actions required, in addition to responses and updates to ensure visibility for students and staff. An example of how this issues log works in practice relates to data from ISSE 2015 and DIT student feedback processes. In 2015, a number of Academic Council meetings were dedicated to a consideration of this data, the positive points that had emerged, and how the institute should respond, in terms of identifying existing policies and strategies already in place and possible new initiatives that might be required. The Quality Enhancement Issues Log captured those initiatives that need to be actioned by central Directorships and SLT. It was agreed that these actions should be widely communicated to students via student ezines. Also, Colleges agreed to communicate certain key points to their student body.
[from DIT AIQR]



2.3 Data and the Student Experience

A growing area across all HEIs is the use of data as a tool to both improve the student experience and allow institutions to benchmark nationally. In particular, data relating to students is becoming a key touchstone for self-reflective analysis across all institutions and is being used to inform the improvement of QA activities and the student experience in general.

A developing trend is the use of institutional research functions to collate and analyse quantitative and qualitative data to help enhance the student experience. For instance:

- At Dublin City University, units are encouraged and supported by the institutional research function within the university to collect and use both quantitative and qualitative information to support self-assessment.
- A review of the findings from student surveys undertaken at Maynooth University over the past three years was compiled by the Institutional Research Office and presented at various quality assurance decision-making fora.
- During the reporting period, RCSI initiated a Data Warehouse project which involves the implementation of a business intelligence solution to automate the reporting of Metrics/Key Performance Indicators.
- UCD Registry provides a student engagement dashboard which allows staff in programme and school areas to identify students who may be struggling or potentially heading for difficulty so that timely, targeted and successful interventions and supports can be offered.

By far the most used source of data was the Irish Survey of the Student Experience (ISSE), which is run on an annual basis for a three-week period that is specific to each institution. A number of reports highlighted some concerns with student participation rates but, where this was the case, institutions proactively addressed the issue. Institutions used the ISSE information in a variety of ways:

- Most Quality Offices analyse and present the data to Academic Council and other leadership groups.
- At Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) an in-depth statistical analysis of the institute's performance against the 11 indices of the ISSE was piloted by the Department of Mathematics.
- Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) is currently developing a reporting and analysis mechanism which will allow individual schools and departments to consider their performance on the various metrics and indices of the ISSE, comparing them with GMIT, Institute of Technology and national figures, in addition to viewing trends over time.

Other sources of data generated and used across institutions to support QA and the improvement of the student experience included:

- Student profile and performance data
- Student retention/progression data
- Student feedback information
- Various targeted student surveys (e.g. first year, postgraduate research, graduate employment/study status)
- HEA First Destinations Report
- Key Performance Indicators and Metrics
- Learning Management Systems
- External Examiners Reports
- Research/Research Centre Reports

Overall, the 2015-16 AIQRs demonstrate that the use of data to support QA has led to tangible improvements across the HE sector. Some examples include:

- Data from the ISSE showed there was a lack of timely written and oral feedback from lecturers at AIT. After addressing this at faculty level, considerable improvement has been reflected in the subsequent ISSE - from 19% in 2014, the number of first years who stated that they never received feedback fell to 10% in 2016.
- As a direct result of analysing ISSE data, ITB implemented a number of changes across all programmes, including the adoption of smaller class sizes, the addition of clinics and support for students, and a review of timetabling to minimize gaps between classes.
- Based on UCC's biennial LibQUAL survey and regular meetings with the university's Student's Union, the Library has implemented the three most requested services, namely, increased opening hours including a 24/7 pilot at examinations time, increased numbers of electrical and USB charging points and enhanced Wi-Fi coverage.

2.4 Factors Impacting on QA Implementation

As with the previous reporting period, the two main factors identified as impacting on QA implementation in the 2015-16 AIQRs were:

1. The continuing evolution of the Irish Higher Education landscape;
2. The effects of funding cuts and employment control.

The ongoing reform of the HE landscape – through various mergers, alliances, collaborations and incorporations – was mentioned by all institutions as a significant factor impacting on quality and quality assurance during the reporting period. Specifically, submissions highlighted the work taking place to assure consistency of QA across merged or incorporated institutions. Of particular relevance in the IoT sector is the impact on QA policies of the Technological University Process.

While there was less emphasis placed on the impact of funding cuts in HE than in previous reports, the issue remains a recurrent theme. In this iteration of the AIQR, across both sectors emphasis was placed on the cumulative effects of reduced investment in HE and the lasting impact of the Employment Control Framework. However, institutions noted that in spite of cutbacks the quality of the student experience continued to be enhanced, whilst staff were commended for assuring and maintaining standards of quality despite the general strain on resources.

Another area of significant impact on internal quality assurance identified was the changing external quality environment in the reporting period, during which QQI published both Core and Sector-Specific QA Guidelines. Furthermore, in the DAB sector, a specific factor impacting on QA is the additional responsibility in relation to the evaluation of linked providers, where an award of a DAB is delivered through a linked provider.

A factor of positive impact noted by a number of institutions was The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. The forum offered a much-needed source of funding and support for teaching and learning development projects, and encouraged cross-institutional collaboration at a national level.

There were also other specific factors reported that have impacted or will impact on quality and quality assurance.

- The implications of the new CAO points scale to be introduced for the 2017 Leaving Certificate cohort were considered by CIT academic and administrative units and the Institute's Academic Council during the reporting period.
- Through engagement with the student body, DIT noted concerns from students regarding the wider impact of financial issues on the student experience. The institution plans to review these concerns and assess the evidential impact on quality with a view to addressing issues that are in its control.
- The continuing articulation of international students onto various programmes at the Institute of Technology, Tallaght, notably Engineering and Science, required an emphasis on QA procedures as part of the agreements.
- MIC, UL and LIT agreed that a federated Limerick Graduate School should be created in order to facilitate closer integration, resource-sharing, and jointly-delivered services for students of each of the individual graduate schools.

Highlighting Good Practice

Managing the Impact of Incorporation on Quality Assurance



An example of the type of merger/incorporation which can impact on internal QA is the incorporation of St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Mater Dei Institute of Education and Church of Ireland College of Education into DCU. The final stages of the DCU Incorporation Programme took place in the reporting period. This type of incorporation significantly impacts on QA, and the Directors of Quality in DCU and St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, in particular, worked closely on the alignment of QA processes between both institutions. For instance, this saw the Director of Quality Promotion at DCU attending the St Patrick's College, Drumcondra Quality Promotion Committee meetings. It is expected that the Incorporation Programme will continue to impact on the timing, format and outcomes of quality reviews regularly in the coming years. An important quality initiative that encouraged staff engagement with the incorporation process was a cycle of over 50 Incorporation Programme Workshops facilitated by the DCU Training and Development Section. These sessions specifically met a need for face-to-face communication relating to the incorporation programme, which had been previously identified through staff engagement focus groups. Furthermore, they provided the opportunity for staff to meet colleagues from across the 'new' DCU and to engage directly with the incorporation programme. [from DCU AIQR]

2.5 Internal Reviews in the Reporting Period

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

- Validation/Programme Approval
- Research Accreditation/Validation
- Programme Review
- Research Review
- School/Department/Faculty Review
- Service Unit Review
- Review of arrangements with a partner organisation

Reporting on various categories of reviews set out in the AIQR is not yet sufficiently consistent across all institutions to draw reliable conclusions. Accordingly, in the next reporting period QQI intends to provide further direction to institutions to ensure a more accurate representation of the types of review being undertaken.

Nonetheless, certain general trends were apparent across the reports. These included:

- A difference in approach between DABs and IoTs in relation to the unit of focus for reviews. Notably, in the IoT sector there was a proportionally larger number of programme-based reviews.
- An increasing number of Service Unit Reviews was evident across all HEIs.
- Across both sectors ongoing cycles of School/Department/Faculty Review are continuing (further evidenced in the reporting of upcoming review plans).
- There was a small proportional growth in research reviews across institutions.

The tables which follow summarise other data relating to the composition of review panels and the profile of review panel chairs.

Composition of Review Panels (%)¹

Profile of Panel Members	Overall	Designated Awarding Bodies	Institutes of Technology
Internal	17	28	9
National	58	26	80
UK	21	40	8
EU	7	5	9
Student	4	7	3
Other	5	5	5

Review Chair Profiles (%)²

Profile of Chairpersons	General	Designated Awarding Bodies	Institutes of Technology
Internal	15	30	5
Similar institution	63	59	67
Different institution	12	2	19
International	27	52	10



¹ Note: Percentages do not total 100% as some panel members fall into two categories (e.g. internal and national) Figures have been rounded up/down to the nearest whole number.

² Note: Percentages do not total 100% as some chairs fall into two categories (e.g. similar institutions and international). Figures have been rounded up/down to the nearest whole number.



Section 3

The Effectiveness and Impact of Quality Assurance



Section 3

The Effectiveness and Impact of Quality Assurance



Overview

Institutions regard QA as being effective and use independent feedback to confirm this, mainly in the form of external reviewers, external examiners and the HEA.

As with the use of data to improve the student experience, institutions are relying more heavily on quantitative data to demonstrate the effectiveness of their QA frameworks.

QA policies and procedures are seen to have a tangible impact, with the recommendations of quality reviews and their subsequent implementation cited as a major factor.

Key quality enhancement themes are:

- Student retention and progression, a concern which is being addressed at many institutions
- Industry engagement and professional value/recognition of teaching programmes
- Internationalisation and creating international links
- Continuing professional development of staff

3.1 Effectiveness of QA Policies and Procedures

One of the main indicators of the effectiveness of internal QA were commendations and feedback from external reviewers (taking part in quality reviews, programmatic reviews, etc.) and from external examiners (at programme/module level). Another external barometer of effectiveness which was mentioned was institutional Mission-Based Performance Compacts with the HEA. Overall, the effectiveness of QA policies and procedures was measured by institutions in a variety of ways.

- One institution, GMIT, reported that they had undergone an institutional review by the European University Association (EUA) and cited the positive findings of the expert panel as indicative of the effectiveness of the institute's QA procedures.
- Some institutions reported on the effectiveness of QA to highlight areas of concern, which in turn could be addressed by the Quality Office (or equivalent).

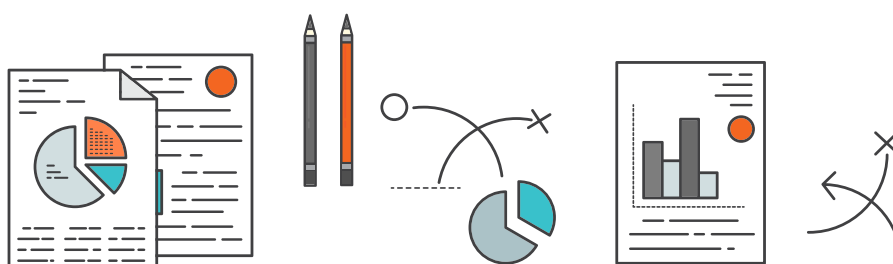
Highlighting Good Practice Annual Faculty Quality Reports



At Trinity College Dublin devolution of quality reports to faculties was regarded as highly effective, as it encouraged ownership of key quality processes at local level. The Annual Faculty Quality Report (AFQR) is a vehicle for implementing the Framework for Quality at Trinity, for sharing good practice across schools and for identifying recurrent QA issues. In the reporting period, the 2014/15 AFQR reports were considered by the Quality Committee and an overview of key QA activities and common issues across faculties was published in a consolidated report. The effectiveness of the process was highlighted in the reporting period, when the impact of the implementation of mandatory module evaluations was raised in the AFQRs. This led to a consultation process with schools to address issues surrounding low response rates in some faculties, which was attributed to the introduction of on-line surveys and survey fatigue. The AFQR is an example of an effective QA procedure that leads to tangible QA improvements at school and college level. For instance, two identified enhancements in the reporting period that arose from the 2014/15 AFQRs were the initiation by the Faculty of Health Sciences of a thematic review of clinical placements, and the introduction of a Dean's medal to award to clinical colleagues in recognition of their work. [from TCD AIQR]

Quantitative evidence was provided by some institutions. For instance:

- At CIT, a comparison of first year non-progression rates for full-time programmes at NFQ levels 6, 7 and 8 in 2014/15 and 2015/16 provided evidence that the effectiveness of the retention initiatives developed by CIT's Student Support, Engagement and Retention Initiative grew in line with their increasing breadth and depth of implementation.
- At Maynooth University, the Quality Office requested that each academic department provide a progress report on the implementation of the recommendations from their last review. A summary synthesis established that 82% of the 191 recommendations made by the review teams for all departments had been implemented.



Highlighting Good Practice Assessment of Compliance



During the reporting period, the University of Limerick's Quality Support Unit published an Assessment of Compliance policy and procedures document outlining how compliance with statutory requirements are integrated into the university's quality assurance policies and procedures. In practice, when the university is notified of an external quality requirement, the Quality Support Unit coordinates an exercise that assesses the extent to which the university complies with the requirement. The first such exercise was conducted to assess the university's compliance with the 'Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners'. The published document demonstrates the effectiveness of the particular QA procedure, providing an evidence-based overview of: (a) how compliance with the Code is integrated into the University of Limerick's quality assurance policies and procedures, and (b) how the University of Limerick complies with each of the specific criteria included in the Code. [from UL AIQR]

3.2 Impact of QA Policies and Procedures

Across both sectors QA policies and procedures are clearly having a tangible impact, both in terms of module/programme delivery but also more broadly at an institutional level. The most cited factor in terms of impact were quality reviews, the recommendations of which have led to the development and implementation of quality enhancements for a broad cross-section of stakeholders. In this regard, some specific impacts of quality reviews were:

- Maynooth University reported a number of impacts stemming from quality reviews including review of academic workloads, reform of first year curriculum, strengthening of international links, greater clarity on expectations regarding academic standards, and university level revision of marks and standards.
- At UCD, the annual publication of 'Examples of Positive Practice identified in UCD Quality Review Reports (September 2015 - September 2016)' demonstrated the impact of quality assurance and enhancement procedures through their implementation within the reporting period.
- An impact of feedback from external quality reviewers and internal quality team members at UL was the revision of the quality review process and guidelines for academic and support units. Also at UL, in response to recommendations arising from quality reviews, a 'Data Working Group' was established to investigate solutions for reporting on performance metrics at a faculty or division level, to complement the reporting capability required at institution level.

- WIT's international process review led to a number of impacts in their international processes including: a review of admissions, including engagement with NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centre); a review of entry requirements and English language requirements; and a focus on student services for international students.

Other specific impacts of QA that were identified include:

- The implementation of an Enterprise Reporting Portal at CIT enabled faculties to make available summary reports on key programme performance indicators to heads of department and programme boards, thus enabling identification of positive outputs and areas for change on a programme-by-programme basis.
- The impact of a 'Quality Assurance Framework – Gap Analysis' report commissioned by GMIT was to reassure the institution that its framework was fit for purpose, and to recommend a course of work to revise all codes of practice to the most recent national and international standards.
- At NUIG, an evolving Policies and Procedures Repository is enhancing internal communication on QA and improving compliance with internally agreed policies.
- At TCD, the impact of the first postgraduate research survey was the introduction of 'Postgraduate Teaching Assistants Introduction to Teaching at Trinity Seminars' and a new module, 'Teaching and Supporting Learning'.

Highlighting Good Practice Embedded Award

During the reporting period, Waterford Institute of Technology enhanced the quality infrastructure for non-major awards by clarifying, simplifying and embedding new regulations for the approval and management of these types of awards. On using a wider range of award types, there was a growth in the use and uptake of minor and special purpose awards, with 309 minor/special purpose awards made in 2016. In addition, it worked to recognise the progressive nature of learning and the learners' achievement of different levels of awards on the NFQ as they progress. A new structure to recognise this progression is the embedded award, an award that is generic to the overall programme based on the numbers of credits and learning achieved as the learner progresses (i.e. a level 6 award is recognised after two years of appropriately mapped learning) regardless of whether or not the learner exits. It would therefore be only available to learners on application and would not form any part of the expected learner progression pathway. This approach has been approved by the Academic Council and the necessary infrastructure is being built to allow it to be implemented in 2017/18. [from WIT AIQR]



3.3 Key Themes arising from Implementation of QA Policies and Procedures

Interestingly, the approach to QA in some institutions is shifting from the implementation of QA policies and procedures to a focus on embedding a quality culture at both an institutional and unit level. There were a number of other prominent themes that recurred in a number of institutions:

- Student retention and progression, a concern which is being addressed by the various learner support mechanisms being put in place at many institutions. This is reflected in a strong student-centred approach to QA initiatives during the reporting period, with an increasing focus on the student experience, particularly that of first-year students.
- Industry engagement, in relation to both teaching and research, as well as the importance of professional value/recognition of teaching programmes. Further to this, enterprise and innovation, and their relation to research, was a recurring theme.
- At an organisational level, internationalisation and creating international links was seen as being of strategic importance, as was the continuing professional development of staff.

Individual themes clustered in five main areas: Teaching and Learning; The Student Experience; Moving Towards a Quality Culture; Research; and Institutional Strategy. These are outlined in the following tables:

Teaching and Learning

Assessment	Research-led Teaching
Curriculum Development	Student Feedback

The Student Experience

Student Supports	Student Engagement
Graduate Profile and Career Path	Student Retention/Progression
Student Learning Experience	The First-Year Experience

Moving Towards a Quality Culture

Embedding a Quality Culture	Development/Review of Quality Manuals
Alignment of QA policies with ESG 2015	Research Quality

Research-led

Research, Enterprise and Innovation	PhD Completion Rates
Research Strategies	External Funding
Research Mentoring	Research-led Teaching

Institutional Strategy

Resources (staffing, space, facilities)	Internationalisation and International Links
Staff Development	Professional Value/Recognition of Programmes
Recruitment and Marketing	Industry Engagement

Highlighting Good Practice

Analysis of Themes arising from Programme Review



Part 3 of the AIQR asks institutions to thematically analyse key recommendations, commendations and conditions arising within the implementation of QA policies and procedures. Across both sectors, these analyses proved somewhat inconsistent in the returns for this reporting period. However, some institutions did engage in productive, self-reflection of themes arising from quality reviews.

One such example was at CIT, an institution which saw a high level of programmatic review in 2015/16. During this period, the Institute was recipient of 23 expert panel reports, from which thematic analysis of commendations, recommendations and requirements yielded 384 thematic units. These units were then distilled into ‘top themes’, which included: Student Supports, Welfare and Feedback; Research and Postgraduate Research Study; Staffing and Staff Development; External Engagement; Professional Value, Graduate Profile and Career Path; Assessment Methodology and Scheduling; Work Placement; Programme Structure and Subject Streams; and Student Supports. Strategically, this enables the Institute to identify future quality enhancement themes. [from CIT AIQR]





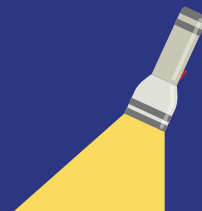
Section 4

Quality Enhancement Highlights



Section 4

Quality Enhancement Highlights



Overview

During the reporting period, improvements and enhancements impacting on QA or Quality, as noted by the institutions, occurred across a wide variety of areas including:

- Teaching and Learning (e.g. improved feedback timeframes for coursework)
- Research (e.g. support systems for staff established)
- Student Recruitment, Retention and Support (e.g. initiatives to support first-year students)
- Quality Assurance Processes (e.g. introduction of an annual quality enhancement topic)
- Staff Development/Support (e.g. support for staff pursuing teaching and learning qualifications)
- Mission-focused Enhancements (e.g. civic engagement initiatives)

4.1 Teaching and Learning

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

- ISSE feedback that highlighted student concerns about the timeliness and quality of feedback on their work led to a change in practice at AIT; the positive impact of this has been reflected in a significantly higher satisfaction rate with respect to feedback during the most recent ISSE return.
- At CIT, enhancements to the virtual library infrastructure included a link-up with Google Scholar and a thorough redesign of the CIT Library Website.
- DCU Business School was awarded accreditation by the world's oldest and most prestigious global accrediting body for business schools, AACSB.
- In 2016, a system for the online management and submission of external examiner reports using the Guru system was fully implemented across DCU.
- A Return of Coursework Policy was developed at TCD in response to feedback from students that there were significant delays in some instances in obtaining feedback on course work.
- DCU initiated work on a project that aims to build digital literacy and engagement for students and teachers by exploring the question: 'What works and why?'

- IT Tallaght introduced recognition of student volunteering and other such initiatives for academic credit, including a Certificate in Volunteering and an elective module on Active Citizenship.
- The Centre for Teaching and Learning at Maynooth University organised a workshop on student assessment that included inputs from international experts and was attended by representatives from all academic departments and the relevant support/administrative units.

Highlighting Good Practice QA of Experiential Learning

During the reporting period, the Quality Enhancement Office at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland instituted a new work-stream to quality assure experiential learning. Experiential learning is a key component of almost all RCSI undergraduate, postgraduate and professional education and training programmes in the health professions. This new process involves periodic surveys of trainees and trainers before and after each training rotation or course. Analysis and reporting of the survey data provides a key evidence base in evaluating the trainee experience and other aspects of the process. The programme will be expanded in the next reporting period to encompass experiential learning by undergraduate Pharmacy students of RCSI, UCC and TCD. Future plans for this work-stream include the development of frameworks for the quality assurance of postgraduate training sites and, ultimately, the expansion of the work-stream to encompass all postgraduate training schemes and experiential learning in all RCSI undergraduate programmes. [from RCSI AIQR]



4.2 Research

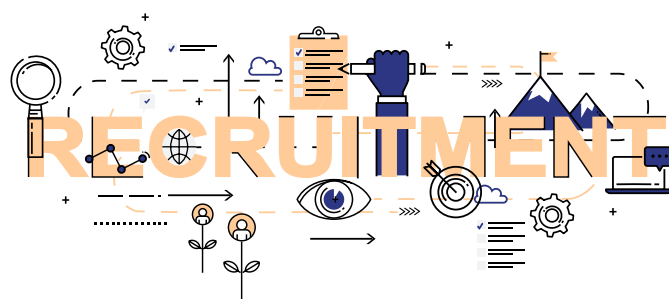
During the reporting period, many quality improvements and enhancements occurred in the area of research:

- GMIT have set up a research society to support staff doing research. It gives staff a forum for sharing experiences, attending relevant staff development events, and undertaking accredited learning related to research. Also at GMIT, a research development day targeted at early stage researchers was devoted to funding and the experiences of postgraduate supervision.
- An Innovation and Entrepreneurship Hub was established in 2015/16 at TCD.
- UL's new Strategic Plan for 2015 to 2019, 'Broadening Horizons', launched in the reporting period, commits to establishing new international research networks and doubling research income from EU funding sources over the next five years.
- DIT developed a schools-based research support programme, 'Empowering Our Schools', the objective of which was to support research development planning.

4.3 Student Recruitment, Retention and Support

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

- DIT established a 'First Year Framework for Success' aimed at enhancing first-year student success for all DIT students. Specifically, a checklist was designed for staff to support incoming first-year students.
- DIT established a Widening Participation sub-committee and a revised definition for widening participation in DIT was developed. Further to this, the DIT Widening Participation Annual Fund, as part of the DIT Equal Access Funding Agreement, was established and 6 innovative Widening Participation projects across DIT were funded.
- In collaboration with the student union and student body, IADT has developed a student-centred induction process.
- ITB offered a Peer Mentoring Programme to all incoming students to Year 1 of study.
- At IT Sligo, the ISSE Report was broken down to programme level, to provide all stakeholders with more detailed information on student feedback.
- Ongoing retention initiatives at IT Tallaght aimed at addressing first-year student attendance helped with early intervention and resulted in improved retention rates compared with the previous year.
- IT Tralee developed and delivered a Student Health and Wellbeing programme of activities.
- TCD engaged in a number of activities to enhance the student experience, including: appointing a Transition to Trinity Officer, whose role is to support students in the transition to third level education; an 'Orientation for new students' website was launched as a resource for both 'traditional' students and visiting/Erasmus students; a more student-friendly and interactive homepage which incorporates social media feeds was developed.
- UCD launched the UCD Writing Centre, which provides free, one-to-one tuition and a range of workshops on all aspects of the writing process.
- UCD introduced a new operating model for Student Advisors.
- CIT designed an early intervention programme, 'Academic Success Coaching', to help academic departments identify and support incoming first-year students at risk of disengaging.
- The DIT College of Sciences and Health piloted a College-wide extended induction programme for first-year students.
- The Academic Writing and Maths Learning Centres were established at GMIT to provide additional one-to-one and small group support to students.
- A Student Engagement and Retention Officer was appointed at GMIT.



Highlighting Good Practice

NStEP: National Student Engagement Programme



A number of institutions piloted National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP), in conjunction with the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), the Higher Education Authority (HEA), and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). A collaborative initiative, NStEP works under the guidance of the National Student Engagement Principles laid out by the HEA and aims to develop student capabilities to engage at all levels across the higher education system. From a QA perspective, the programme will develop student capabilities to engage in quality enhancement, quality assurance and other related activities at all levels of the higher education system and will support institutions in developing processes and activities which support/facilitate the meaningful engagement of students. The pilot phase of the project took place during the reporting period, when NStEP training for class reps was developed by the NStEP Working Group. The Working Group is comprised of representatives from the HEA, QQI, USI, CIT, CIT Student's Union, LYIT, LYIT Student's Union, NCI, NCI Student's Union, NUIG, NUIG Student's Union, WIT, WIT Student's Union, ISSE, National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning and sparqs (the Student Partnerships in Scotland agency).
[from usi.ie/nstep]

4.4 Quality Assurance Processes

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

- GMIT provide training on the QA framework to all new external examiners and student representatives. Also, the GMIT Registrar delivers a QA roadshow to academic units once every year.
- At LYIT, a significant enhancement of the internal QA system was the introduction of a new Central Services Periodic Review Process. Also at LYIT, a new internal Student Survey Working Group has been established to work on enhancing survey response rates and on analysing survey results and their implications.
- At LIT, a working group reported on a 'root and branch' review of compliance with ESG 2015 and QQI requirements, leading to changes to existing policies and regulations.
- The DCU Quality Promotion Committee agreed to develop an Annual Quality Enhancement Topic.
- UL completed a successful Quality Improvement Programme review to maintain its recognition for being in substantial conformity with The Forum on Education Abroad's 'Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad'.

Highlighting Good Practice

QA Practice Notes



At UCD, a set of 'Practice Notes' was developed to provide the UCD community with key relevant summary information on quality assurance and enhancements aspects and to contribute to the ongoing development of a quality culture across the university. 'Practice Notes' are designed to provide the UCD community with key relevant information relating to national, international and/or sectoral quality assurance and enhancement policies, guidelines, legislation and other publications. They may be based on a particular topic or theme, or provide a quick reckoner vis-à-vis relevant legislation or publication. They offer staff general outline guidance in relation to the subject matter. Thus far, Practice Notes have been developed on the following topics: QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines; Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners and the International Education Mark (IEM); QQI Sector Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies (DABs); European Standards and Guidelines (ESG 2015); National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ); and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. [from UCD AIQR]

4.5 Staff Development/Support

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

- Another cohort of DkIT academic staff completed the MA in Learning and Teaching in 2015/16. There were 9 MA and 9 Certificate graduates and 29 additional faculty members and external colleagues progressed on the programme.
- The GMIT Centre for Education Development was established for staff to share good practices. In addition, GMIT ran annual staff development days/week in June.
- IT Carlow continued to foster staff development, with a further graduating class from the Institute's MA in Teaching and Learning.
- At TCD, the establishment of the Trinity Centre for Gender Equality and Leadership (TCGEL) was approved. Its remit is to create sustainable, structural and cultural change throughout the College to deliver an inclusive community in which women and men participate at all levels, and where all are recognised fully for their contribution to the university.
- A Technology-Enhanced Learning Unit was approved by UL's Executive Committee and is proposed as a one-stop shop for faculty wishing to engage with and explore the potential of technology-enhanced pedagogy in their teaching.

4.6 Mission-focused Enhancements

- UL Engage was established with the aim of integrating civic engagement into the university's core missions in research, teaching and internationalisation.
- IT Tralee participated in a new project to pilot the Carnegie Community Engagement Assessment Framework in Ireland. The Carnegie Foundation had not until then classified campuses outside the United States, but had granted permission for the Community Engagement Framework to be employed, for the purpose of possible adaptation, in Ireland. This was a year-long Irish study and was the first pilot study of the Elective Community Engagement Framework outside of the US higher education sector.
- NUI Galway became the first university outside of the US to open a Blackstone Launchpad on campus. This is a multidisciplinary entrepreneurship programme that encourages and supports students, staff and graduates to turn business ideas into reality.
- TCD developed a partnerships toolkit which will support the development of international partnerships and exchanges.

Highlighting Good Practice Quality Assurance of Undergraduate Curriculum

Maynooth University has recently developed a new model of undergraduate education that focuses on, amongst other things, deep engagement with a student's chosen disciplines and the intellectual skills of analysis, reflection, critical thinking and clear communication that prepare students for today's world of work. To achieve the objectives of this new curriculum, known as Maynooth Education, a detailed suite of initiatives has been put in place. In order to support this, a number of QA-related roles were created across the university during the reporting period. These include the following appointments: a Dean of Teaching and Learning, with responsibility for overall leadership and co-ordination of the curriculum and the supporting experiential learning activities; a Lecturer, whose role is to lead and coordinate the provision of first year critical skills modules; a Programme Advisor, to coordinate advice on all aspects of the curriculum to students. Finally, a new post of Experiential Learning Officer was established to develop and coordinate the co-curricular dimension of student learning. [from MU AIQR and www.maynoothuniversity.ie]





Section 5

Objectives for the Coming Reporting Period (2016-17)



Section 5

Objectives for the Coming Reporting Period (2016-17)

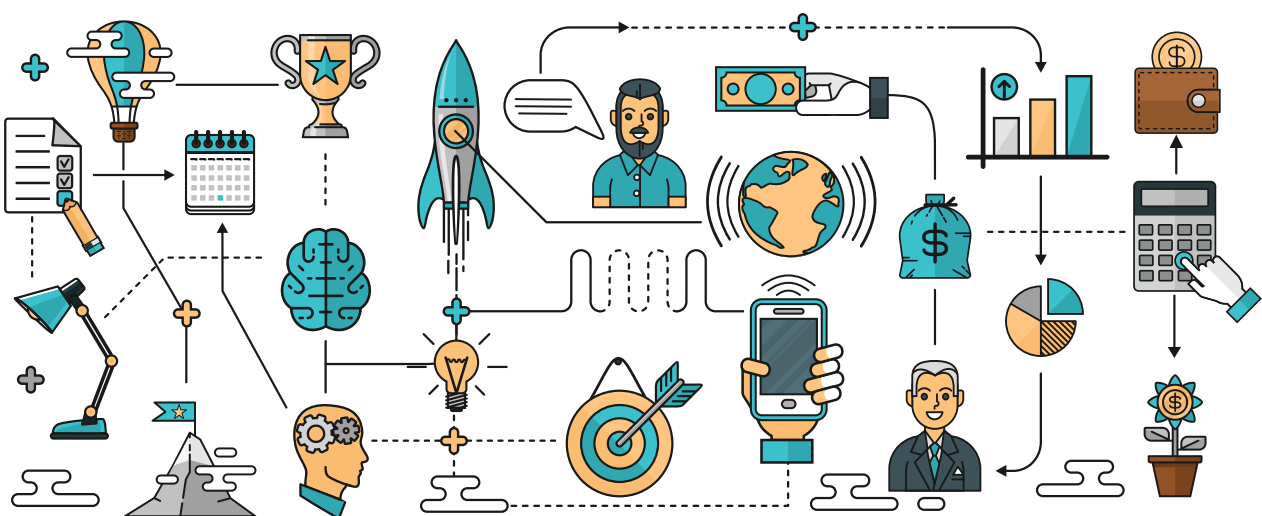


For the period 2016-17, institutions reported a wide variety of planned activities. These initiatives, which can be loosely grouped under the headings that follow, demonstrate the commitment of all institutions to the continuous improvement and enhancement of quality and quality assurance in Irish HE.

5.1 Quality Assurance

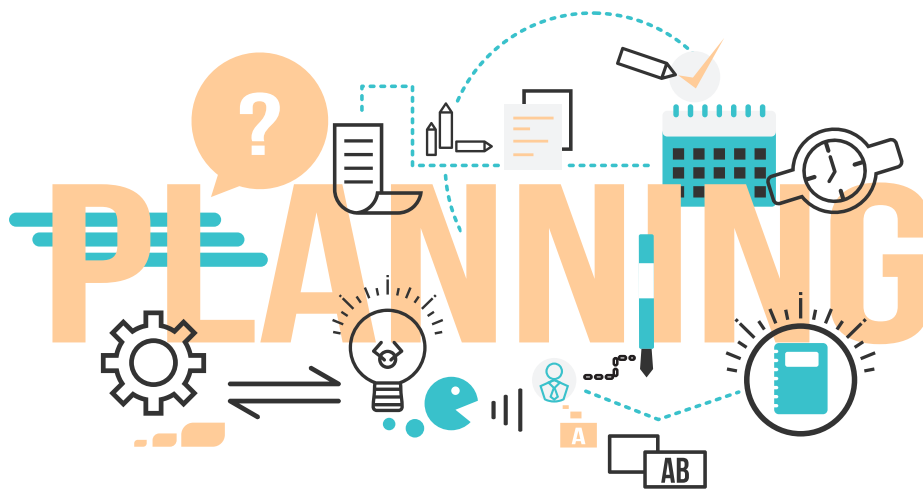
Plans at individual institutions in relation to QA Guidelines:

- Ongoing review of all relevant policies and procedures to ensure alignment with regard for the *QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines*.
- Further alignment of institutional policies and procedures in line with *QQI Statutory QA Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies*.
- Further embedding of new and updated QQI policies and procedures, especially the new draft Programme Review and Revalidation templates and manuals.
- Developing an overarching institutional quality policy and framework document which adheres to QQI Guidelines and to the ESG 2015.
- Researching and documenting compliance with *QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines*, ESG 2015, and *Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners* (at postgraduate level) and European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning.



Other QA-focused plans:

- Reviewing a Quality Office with a view to enhancing the use of standardised reports to support areas undergoing quality review.
- Further updating and developing an Online Quality manual.
- Developing and embedding the procedures for periodic review and annual monitoring of academic units based on pilot activity in 2015/16.
- Enhancing existing internal codes/ practices and approaches for collaborative provision.
- Continuing implementation of Quality Review of research.
- Enhancing communication with internal and external stakeholders on quality assurance issues through the redevelopment of key websites.
- Developing a website which will be a quality driven platform to host exemplars of best practice on engaged research and learning.
- Undertaking the next phase of an internal Curriculum Review and Enhancement project.
- As part of activities geared to the Transformation into a Technological University (TU), ITB, DIT and IT Tallaght have commissioned corresponding Academic Quality Teams to review current programmes portfolios, processes for the introduction of new programmes meeting the TU designation criteria, application and admissions processes, examination processes, and marks and standards.



5.2 Strategy

A number of institutions are developing new strategic plans. Various focused strategies were also being prepared, including:

- Academic Strategy
- Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy
- Research Strategy
- Engagement Strategy
- HR Strategy

5.3 Linked Providers

In the DAB sector, a particular focus of activities related to linked providers. Plans included:

- Initiating discussions with Linked Providers with regard to the implementation of Linked Provider QA Procedures.
- Approving Linked Provider QA procedures.
- Developing, documenting and coordinating a process for approving the QA processes of linked providers.
- Reviewing linked/collaborative provision with key partners; review of a Linked Provider; beginning the process of undertaking Linked Provider institutional review, with reference to the effectiveness of their QA procedures.

5.4 New Appointments

Some institutions reported that they planned to make new appointments in key QA areas including:

- A Teaching and Learning Officer
- An Assistant Registrar
- A new Head of Teaching and Learning Centre
- A new Academic Administration and Student Affairs Manager
- A Quality Manager
- A new Research Manager

5.5 Other Objectives

Other objectives mentioned by institutions included:

- Further analysis of ISSE data.
- Developing a peer-mentoring scheme for academic staff.
- Launch of a framework for assessment of student group work.
- Two institutions reported that they planned to pilot DCU's GURU platform for use by External Examiners.
- Development of new Apprenticeships.
- Plan and prepare for Institutional Review.
- Publication and launch of an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report.

Quality Within Higher Education 2017

Conclusions

During the reporting period institutions continued to implement and act on recommendations from internal QA. It is clear from the AIQRs that QA initiatives are having a positive impact on Irish HEIs, leading to improvements to both student and staff experiences. The impact and effectiveness of these activities is attested to by different means, but the most prominent of these were feedback and commendations from external examiners and independent quality review teams.

For the first time, this summary report takes into account AIQRs from both the DAB and IoT sectors. As a result, and more so than in past reports, a variation in QA policies and procedures between institutions is apparent. Quality culture in Irish HEIs is often related to the strategic objectives of an institution, evidenced by varying levels of emphasis on, for example, research, industry engagement, internationalisation, civic engagement. Each sector places a differing emphasis on the unit of review; in the DAB sector the focus is mainly on departments or schools, while in the IoT sector reviews centre on programmes.

This variation is likely a product of legacy QA arrangements and contexts. Furthermore, the nature of QA systems and activities are shaped by the size of an institution and the scale of its provision. For instance, the AIQRs reflect a more distinct institution-owned quality culture in the DAB sector. However, over time and across both sectors, individual institutions are in the process of developing and consolidating their own quality culture in a way that is more closely aligned with their mission.

A theme which was once again reflected in the AIQRs for this reporting period was the lasting effects of funding cuts and the public-sector Employment Control Framework. While the effects of reduced resources were less widely reported in this period, there was a strong sense that the effects of these measures will continue to be felt throughout the HE sector for some time to come. Nevertheless, there was an ongoing commitment to QA in all institutions, with many examples of new quality-related offices, positions and committees being established. Also, QA policies and procedures are being continually revised, due to the developing suite of QQI Statutory QA Guidelines and the revised ESG 2015.

As with the previous period's returns, institutions are focusing much of their QA activity on the first-year experience, in an effort to increase student retention and progression rates. More generally, QA is now clearly central to the improvement of the student learning experience in Irish HEIs, and many quality initiatives were reported within learning and



Conclusions

teaching. Also, there is a growing use of data to support and inform QA policy. The ISSE is used by most institutions in their QA activities and acts as an important source of data, as well as a useful benchmarking tool at a national level.

One area in which AIQRs could be improved is in the institutional analysis of themes arising from quality reviews. In this regard, an opportunity exists for institutions to better synthesize these themes in Part 3 of the report. Indeed, this self-reflective activity is in itself an important tool for embedding and encouraging a quality culture.

Interestingly, a number of institutions mentioned their Mission-Based Performance Compact with the HEA and cited meeting the targets set therein as a signifier of quality. In a quality context there are benefits and challenges to the use of performance compacts for this purpose. While the meeting of targets can be seen as evidence of the effectiveness of QA policies and procedures, it must be stated that QA is an improvement-based approach and therefore cannot be simply aligned to performance-based targets. QA is an ongoing process that promotes and supports innovation and continuous improvement and enhancement of quality in an institution. Furthermore, in any evolving QA system, some innovations will prove successful and others will not. Indeed, there is often significant learning to be gained from an unsuccessful quality initiative. With this in mind, as HEI QA systems mature, the AIQR process would benefit from the reporting of unsuccessful innovations and sharing learnings that can be derived from them.

As a summary of the AIQRs, this report aims to offer a snapshot of the current effective quality assurance practices across the Irish public HE sector. It also highlights the utility of the AIQR process itself, as both a contemporary record of quality within institutions and as a single repository for institutional policies and procedures for QA. Moreover, in their feedback, institutions highlighted the value of the process, despite the workload demands it entails.



Quality Within Higher Education 2017

Glossary

AIQR	Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Report
CAO	The Central Applications Office, which processes applications for undergraduate courses in Irish Higher Education Institutions.
DAB	Designated Awarding Body; a previously established university, the National University of Ireland, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.
ESG 2015	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, May 2015
EUA	European University Association
HE	Higher Education
HEA	The Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institution
Internal Review	<p>This is a quality review of a department, school, faculty, service area or theme, undertaken within HEIs on a routine, rolling or demand basis. It usually follows a procedure of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an initial self-assessment report (SAR) - followed by a 2- or 3-day visit of a peer review team - resulting in a published report with a series of recommendations - followed by the development of a quality improvement plan by the unit being reviewed
IoT	Institute of Technology
ISSE	The Irish Survey of Student Engagement, which is open to first-year, final-year undergraduate, and taught postgraduate students in participating Higher Education Institutions each February to March.
Linked Provider	A provider that has an arrangement with a DAB to offer a programme leading to a DAB award.
Mission-Based Performance Compacts	This Compact is an agreement between the Higher Education Authority and a HEI and is the outcome of a process of strategic dialogue between the two bodies. The purpose of strategic dialogue is to align the missions, strategies and profiles of individual Higher Education Institutions with national priorities, and to agree strategic objective indicators of success against which institutional performance will be measured and funding allocated.

NARIC

National Academic Recognition Information Centre

NStEP

National Student Engagement Programme

QA

Quality assurance (QA) is a term generally used to describe the processes that seek to ensure that the learning environment (including teaching and research) reaches an acceptable threshold of quality.

QA Guideline

Statutory guidance published by QQI to which providers will have due regard when developing, revising or updating their own internal QA system, policies and procedures.

QA Procedures

Translated into practice, a policy must be broken down into clear and coherent procedures. Procedures are the means and methodologies that a provider uses to carry out the intention of a policy.

QA System

A provider's quality (assurance) system refers to all of the provider's internal QA policies and procedures working in concert to form an integrated whole.

QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Programme

A process by which a learner acquires knowledge, skill or competence and includes a course of study, a course of instruction or an apprenticeship.

Provider

A person or organisation that provides, organises or procures a programme of education and training.

Policy

A documented statement of a provider's principles and approach to a particular activity.

Reporting Period

The reporting period represents an academic year from September 1 to August 31.



Quality Within Higher Education 2017
Notes





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