Quality in Irish Higher Education

SEPTEMBER 2019
Cover images: Institute of Art, Design and Technology (left); Maynooth University (right).
QQI’s unique position as the agency that spans all post-secondary education and training means that we have been centrally involved in many of the transformations and developments that have occurred in education and training in recent years. Our independent evaluations of providers and our research and analysis of provider-led evaluations provide high-level advice to policymakers and funders on quality in the education and training system.

This QQI Insights series aims to analyse and demonstrate the impact of measures taken by QQI to improve and enhance the quality of education and training for the benefit of learners. These Insights demonstrate how the work of QQI delivers impact through the promotion of quality improvement among education and training providers, and how this, in turn, enhances the experience and outcomes of learners. They also analyse our qualifications systems to better inform education and labour market decision-makers.

Topics chosen for the series stem from stakeholder feedback, common themes emerging from our independent evaluations of providers of education and training and our analysis of provider-led evaluations, and areas of national policy interest. Ultimately, the Insights series aims to shape a fuller understanding of quality and qualifications in education and training, to inform and influence policy, and to play a role in driving future transformation across the education and training sectors.
Acknowledgements

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Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), in its **Statement of Strategy 2019-2021**¹, commits to analysing and demonstrating the impact of measures taken to improve the quality of education and training for the benefit of learners. This report is a summary of the Annual Institutional Quality Reports (AIQRs) of Ireland’s public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), which demonstrate both adherence to national and international quality assurance (QA) standards and guidelines, and a commitment to the enhancement of quality in Ireland’s HEIs.

The reporting period for the AIQRs comprising this report was 1 September 2017 to 31 August 2018. As a collective summary, this synthesis report affirms the sector-wide commitment of Irish HEIs to quality assurance and enhancement, and to continually improving the learner experience; it also reveals the increasingly complex nature of QA processes and activities in contemporary Irish higher education.

This *synthesis report* will be of interest to the institutions themselves, and to the Department of Education and Skills, the Higher Education Authority (HEA), and other national and international stakeholders. It also provides an important platform from which to disseminate best practice across the system.

The AIQR process forms part of QQI’s QA framework of engagement with the HEIs. This framework includes the **CINNTE Institutional Quality Review** process, which was launched in 2017. The AIQRs are a critical source of information for Institutional Self-Evaluation Reports (ISERs) and CINNTE Institutional Review, providing documentary evidence of the evolution and development of an institution’s quality system.

The findings in this report show that, at a strategic level, QA and quality enhancement are well embedded in the institutional strategies and objectives of Irish HEIs. The report also illustrates, in a wider sectoral context, the integration of other national initiatives into institutional QA and their impact.

The AIQR process, now in its third cycle, is a partnership approach and QQI has committed to working in the coming year in partnership with the HEIs to further enhance this process, to ensure a responsive and dynamic quality reporting process.

Padraig Walsh  
CEO

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Executive Summary and Findings

This synthesis report provides a summary and documentary analysis of the information submitted to QQI by Ireland’s public HEIs in the Annual Institutional Quality Reports (AIQRs) 2017-2018 for the period 1 September 2017 to 31 August 2018.²

It represents an amalgam of the information provided by the institutions about quality assurance (QA) approaches, developments and quality enhancements. Institutional QA is context sensitive and the outcomes reported on in each AIQR are specific to that institution. However, core themes and trends can be identified, and these are reflected in the findings. The findings reflect both common themes arising and diversity across the sector.

There are new and emerging themes in the reports for this period, and ongoing enhancement of core thematic areas and outcomes that were reported on in previous periods. The themes are reflective of elements of QQI and European guidelines, and of issues in contemporary Irish higher education.

Indicative examples and case studies from the institutions’ reports are included in this synthesis report. The case studies were selected to reflect diversity in the types of institutions and topics. The individual case studies are descriptive and provide a narrative of QA in action in a range of thematic areas. As a collective, the case studies provide a comprehensive picture of QA in Irish higher education.

Findings

The AIQRs confirm that QA in Irish HEIs is thorough and that institutions have comprehensive processes in place to assure academic standards and the quality of the student experience. The quality environment is multi-layered and multi-dimensional, reflecting the complex and multi-faceted nature of Ireland’s HEIs. The reports affirm the strategic commitment of Irish HEIs to the continuous development and enhancement of quality and demonstrate the positive impact of QA on students, staff and other stakeholders.

There is sector-wide evidence of systematic engagement with students, staff and external stakeholders in order to enhance quality. Also evident is the systematic review and improvement of processes across institutions, including technological transformations and innovations, both to streamline and optimise operational processes, and to enhance teaching and learning activities and resources. The key findings are summarised under particular core themes below:

Assurance of Standards and Compliance

The reports confirm that QA in Irish HEIs is comprehensive and provides institutions with assurance in respect of academic standards and the quality of teaching and learning and of the student experience. The reports also confirm compliance with QQI Statutory QA Guidelines (Core) and sector-wide compliance with The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)³.

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² Note the AIQR report submitted for the now dissolved Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) represents the period 1 September 2017-31 December 2018
Use of Feedback
As in previous reporting periods, there is strong evidence that institutions are continuing to use feedback – and are improving their processes for obtaining and measuring feedback – from students, staff and other stakeholders in order to enhance teaching and learning as well as institutional processes.

Data and Information Management
The reports also demonstrate a well-embedded and systematic use in Ireland’s HEIs of data feedback mechanisms from a range of sources to enhance the student experience.

Strategic Alignment of Institutional QA with National Policy Objectives
Alignment, integration and impact of national policy goals and objectives into institutional QA is evident in the reports. For example, the impact on QA governance of developments and improvements in gender equality, in line with national policy objectives, can be seen in the review of QA governance committee composition and structures undertaken and reported on by many institutions.

This is similarly reflected in a growing focus on societal engagement and impact⁴, and the integration of society/community engagement activities and processes for measuring impact and enhancing teaching and learning into the institutional QA framework, which is a new and emerging theme. The benefits of such activities to both teaching and learning was reported by one institution to be reflected in graduate attributes. Sustainability was also identified as a strategic focus across the sector; the monitoring of sustainability targets, and the development and integration of sustainability modules into programmes was reported on.

Learner Transition, Support and Wellbeing
Consistent with previous reporting periods, supporting learners in the transition to higher education and enhancing the first-year experience remains a key focus of QA.

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developments and enhancements throughout the sector.

A range of access and transitioning support initiatives are also in place and are continually being enhanced, for example through the use of digital/technology mediums. Also evident is a diverse range of initiatives to enhance student supports and well-being.

Institutions did not report on enhancements or outcomes in relation to any specific divergence in supports and resources, or enhanced provision of specialist supports to meet the different needs and ensure the well-being of diverse cohorts of non-traditional learners, e.g. international learners, apprentices and mature learners; consequently, the account of the diverse nature of emerging learner supports and resources is incomplete.

Research Provision

The ongoing enhancement and development of research provision is a sector-wide strategic theme arising in the reports. Institutions reported positively on research collaborations and high levels of excellence attained in research provision.

Expansion of research provision is a focus and objective in the reports of the Institutes of Technology (IoTs). This may reflect impending processes to establish Technological Universities and criteria for some of these institutions.

The reports also suggest some expansion of collaborations between the IoTs and the universities on research programmes, and new transnational partnerships and collaborations being developed.

The enhancement of the QA framework (governance and regulations) for research provision, and the outcomes of institutional internal reviews of current research degree output at NFQ level 9, are not articulated in the reports from the IoTs and it is therefore not possible to surmise the extent to which such developments have been implemented, or the impact that internal reviews have had on research degree output. The number of research reviews conducted for the reporting period is low in comparison to other internal reviews reported.

It is expected that the impact of Ireland’s Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes on institutional QA governance and regulations for research provision will be apparent in the next reporting period.

Institutions did not specifically report in their AIQRs on research and teaching & learning linkages or on the impact of research activity on the curriculum; it is therefore not possible to surmise from the reports whether processes are in place and integrated into institutional QA to measure the impact of research activity on student experience.

Panel Composition

Panel composition and profile varied significantly between sectors and institutions, for both internal programme approval process and review. As illustrated in the table in section 5, the IoT sector used a higher proportion of domestic chairs and experts for panels, with the UK being the most commonly used international source. The institutions’ commitment to learner representation is clear, but levels of student representation on panels is low. Challenges in sourcing student representatives are also noted from the reports and these challenges remain to be addressed within the system.

Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning

Industry/work placement is highlighted in the reports as being a feature of many programmes in both the Designated Awarding Bodies (DABs)
and IoTs. Apprenticeship provision is a long-term feature of provision in the IoT sector, both pre-2016 apprenticeships, and increasingly, new apprenticeship programmes. Expansion of apprenticeship opportunities is a strategic action in the national Action Plan for Education 2019.

The reports did not include any specific outcomes or impacts of, or planned QA enhancements or developments in relation to work placements/work-based learning (WBL), and assessment and on-the-job mentoring. Planned expansion of new apprenticeship programmes (with the exception of one new planned programme reported) was not identified as a strategic focus or priority for the IoTs and did not surface as a core theme. Reference to apprenticeship provision is mentioned in a small number of the reports from the IoT sector, and the complexity and challenges of implementing QQI QA guidelines for apprenticeships is noted in one report. It is not possible however to extrapolate any findings on QA enhancements/developments or impacts on the QA of apprenticeships or WBL during this reporting period. In light of the national policy objective of increasing the number of new apprenticeship programmes and, given that there are relatively new QA guidelines in place, this may be an omission.

Periodic Internal Reviews

There was significantly less divergence between the DABs and IoT sectors in this reporting period, as distinct from the previous period, in relation to the types of reviews completed and the units under review. As outlined in Section 5 and illustrated in Table 1, there is significant diversity between individual institutions, but institutional diversity is a feature of both the DABs and the IoTs.

Digital Transformations and Innovation

Technology enhancements and digitalisation is evident in the reports, with leadership and innovation a demonstrable feature of Irish higher education. A range of initiatives and innovations were reported on, including technology enhancements in teaching and learning, and in QA governance and operational processes.

Collaborations and Partnerships

Collaborations and partnerships are a sector-wide feature of Irish HEIs. Institutions reported on the positive impact and outcomes of collaborations, within and between the DABs and IoTs, and with other stakeholders.

International collaborations with other institutions and stakeholders were a feature of the reports received from the DABs; collaboration with local/regional employers and regional clusters, with other IoTs and with further education and training through the Education and Training Boards, featured in the reports submitted by the IoTs.

Leadership and Best Practice

The reports demonstrate a high level of excellence across the higher education sector and best practice and leadership from many institutions in several thematic areas, in both national and international contexts.
1. Background and Context

1.1 Annual Institutional Quality Report (AIQR)

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is responsible for the external QA of higher education in Ireland. One of the functions of QQI is to monitor and review QA in Irish HEIs. The AIQR is an annual report on internal QA in Ireland’s public HEIs, that is provided by institutions to QQI. The AIQR is an integral part of QQI’s quality framework and engagement with institutions. Its structure and content reflect the ESGs7 and QQI Statutory QA Guidelines (Core).8

For each institution, the AIQR documents and captures QA activities, developments, enhancements and impacts during the reporting year. This provides QQI with an assurance that QA procedures and improvements are being implemented on an ongoing basis, and that regulatory requirements are being met.

The AIQR can be considered to consist of two parts:

- **Part 1** provides information on institutional QA governance structures, meeting schedules and QA policies and procedures.
- **Parts 2-6** provide information on QA activities, themes, changes/developments, enhancements and impacts in an institution during the reporting year.

The AIQRs are published on the QQI website. The annual publication of AIQRs provides up-to-date information on QA activities in institutions, which is useful for prospective and current students, other stakeholders and members of the public. The AIQRs also form the basis for biannual dialogue meetings between QQI and the institutions.

1.2 Synthesis Report Methodology

QQI prepares a synthesis report of the AIQRs for each reporting period to identify sector-wide QA themes, highlight QA development and enhancement activities, and share best practice.

Though there are some metrics/data included in the methodology, this synthesis report is not a quantitative analysis, but rather a qualitative thematic analysis, which includes descriptive case studies extracted from the information provided in the AIQRs by 22 institutions for the reporting period 1 September 2017 to 31 August 2018.9

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8 [https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/QA-Guidelines.aspx](https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/QA-Guidelines.aspx)
9 The AIQR report submitted for the now dissolved Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) represents the period 1st Sept 2017-31 December 2018
This synthesis report is based on the information submitted in the AIQRs for the following institutions:

1. Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT)
2. Cork Institute of Technology (CIT)
3. Dublin City University (DCU)
4. Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)
5. Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT)
6. Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT)
7. Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT)
8. Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown (ITB)
9. Institute of Technology, Carlow (ITC)
10. Institute of Technology, Sligo (ITS)
11. Institute of Technology, Tallaght (IT Tallaght)
12. Institute of Technology, Tralee (IT Tralee)
13. Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT)
14. Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT)
15. Maynooth University (MU)
16. National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway)
17. Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI)
18. Trinity College Dublin (TCD)
19. University College Cork (UCC)
20. University College Dublin (UCD)
21. University of Limerick (UL)
22. Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT)

1.3 HE Landscape

There were several external factors during the reporting period which impacted on QA priorities and activities in the HEIs, as evidence and reported on in the AIQRs.

Technological Universities Act

The Technological Universities Act was signed into law in March 2018, which accelerated the pace of progress on the application for designation as a Technological University for the Technological University Dublin consortium, (TU Dublin: DIT, ITB and IT Tallaght), and for Munster Technological University (MTU) Consortium (CIT and IT Tralee).

QA was identified as a strategic priority and critical success factor in the designation as a new Technological University by all consortium institutions, and in the establishment and success of the new institution. A number of collaborative QA development projects and activities were noted in the AIQRs as being underway or planned for the reporting period. Examples include:

- The consortium partner institutes worked to develop and enhance QA systems, and QA principles for TU Dublin were included in the application for designation as a new Technological University.
- A number of inter-institutional working groups were established to examine QA and enhancement approaches for taught programmes, and to develop a TU Dublin Curriculum Framework, and a unified approach to the management of research degree programmes.
- Extensive collaboration was undertaken between both IT Tralee and CIT to progress the MTU application.

10 For published reports, please see https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Annual-Institutional-Quality-Report.aspx
11 The institute abbreviations in brackets will be used throughout the body of this report.
12 Dublin Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown and Institute of Technology Tallaght were dissolved on 1 January 2019 on the establishment of Technological University Dublin.
• Progress in developing the formal application for a Technological University was reported as a QA enhancement objective and priority for ITC and WIT.

• Working groups were established across ITS, GMIT and LYIT to explore strategies, processes and practices in areas such as research, governance, integration of IT services and academic planning.

Gender Equality and Diversity

The National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions\(^\text{13}\) made particular recommendations to institutions on the development and promotion of gender equality. Three of Ireland’s research funding agencies – Science Foundation Ireland, the Irish Research Council, and the Health Research Board – require institutions, as a condition of funding, to have equality accreditation in place by the end of 2019. Investment in and commitment to establishing and promoting gender equality, and its integration into institutional QA frameworks, were reflected in the AIQRs.

Institutions reported on having secured or being in the process of securing Athena SWAN\(^\text{14}\) gender equality accreditation.

Six institutions reported having achieved the Athena SWAN Bronze Award and having integrated follow-up actions into their quality planning framework.

Four institutions reported that progress was underway on plans to be submitted for the institutional Bronze Award in 2018, with two institutions planning to submit in 2019.

Examples include:

• MU was the first institution to apply for and achieve the Athena SWAN Bronze Award under the expanded version of the charter that includes Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines as well as Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths and Medicine (STEMM).

• TCD updated its Framework for Quality in 2018 to include Athena SWAN accreditation and the Trinity Gender Equality Action Plan.

• Following attainment of the Institutional Athena SWAN Bronze Award in 2017, UCD has delivered on a range of follow-up actions including the development of an Equality Impact Assessment Tool.

• IT Tallaght agreed a Gender Identity and Expression Policy in June 2018.

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\(^{14}\) https://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/
The integration of gender equality objectives and their impact on QA is illustrated in the following case study:

Case Study 1

Gender Equality and Diversity

NUI Galway

Following the adoption of the recommendations of a Gender Equality Task Force, NUI Galway is now committed to a restructuring of all committees and working groups within the University in order that they comprise a minimum of 40% women and 40% men. In this regard the membership of Academic Council has been significantly restructured in 2018/2019 for better gender balance and greater representation across all the academic grades. Membership now totals 117 members – a significant reduction of the previous constituency that included all professorial grades. Since June of 2018, the new members of AC include 43.5% female, 54% male and 2.5% non-specified gender. Other achievements include:

- **Gender balance on committees**: the majority of the University’s major committees and working groups (111) now have a minimum of 40% of both female and male genders (Údarás and 5 sub-committees, 7 central committees and 98 College/School level committees) with 44% of all committees being chaired by women. Since Sept 2015, all interview panel members, all members of the University Management Team, all Deans and Heads of School received unconscious bias (UCB) training. UCB training is provided each semester with the uptake routinely monitored by HR and the OVPED.

- **Equality & Diversity Committees**: The Equality, Diversity & Inclusion structures continue to evolve with the establishment of Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Teams/EDI committees at College/School level. The Support Services Directors Forum has also established an Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Subgroup.

- **Vice-Deans for Equality & Diversity** have been appointed to newly established posts in the Colleges of Business, Public Policy & Law; Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies; and Science.

- **NUI Galway actively supports women to develop their leadership skills through increased participation in the Aurora Women-Only Leadership Development programme**. Since 2015, the University has funded and supported 58 women from all staff categories to attend the programme. As part of the programme, all participants are matched with a mentor. Feedback from participants and mentors has been unanimously positive. A further 15 women will be selected (via a direct application and selection process) to participate on the 2018/19 programme.

- A new **Gender Identity and Gender Expression Policy**, developed by the OVPED following wide consultation, comes into effect on 1st October 2018. The roll-out of the new policy is supported by the establishment of an Ally programme, training and campaign to raise awareness of the new policy.
Professional and Regulatory body accreditation

The reports reflect the strategic importance of securing or maintaining professional or regulatory body accreditation for Ireland's HEIs. In light of the increasing diversity and separate requirements of these bodies, institutions outlined challenges in aligning the requirements of individual professional bodies with their institution's QA framework, curriculum/programme design and approval processes and academic regulations.\textsuperscript{15}

New Performance Compacts with the HEA

During the reporting period, all institutions commenced work on the development and agreement of a new mission-based performance compact with the Higher Education Authority (HEA). The strategic approach to QA in embedding the compacts was reflected in all the reports, specifically Goal 5, ‘demonstrate consistent improvement in the quality of the learning environment with a close eye to international best practice through a strong focus on quality and academic excellence’.

New CAO Points Scheme

This reporting period saw the implementation of the new CAO points scheme arising from a new Leaving Certificate grading scale, which required HEIs to adapt their admissions offices’ systems, align programme entry requirements, and conduct staff training.

Funding Constraints

As in previous reporting periods, the cumulative constraints in funding and resources are continuing to have a major impact on delivering core student support services such as counselling and medical services, as well as on investment in and maintenance of buildings and campus facilities.

Financial constraints within the current core funding model for IoTs and contractual arrangements for academic staff in this sector are impacting on the capacity of institutions to respond fully to national initiatives, e.g. for apprenticeships, and to develop and deliver new programmes in a high-quality learning environment.

The negative effects of the housing crisis on students was highlighted by a Dublin-based institution, DIT. The rise in accommodation costs, coupled with the lack of appropriate and affordable student accommodation, is impacting on student mental health, resulting in increased stress and anxiety and a knock-on effect on the ability of institutions to provide student support/pastoral care services.

Sustainability is also, not surprisingly, a topical issue across Irish HEIs for this reporting period, with some institutions reporting specific targets and achievements in this regard, for example:

- ITB reported achieving 59.9% energy saving from baseline, and, in the reporting period, it was the top-performing third-level institution in the country in terms of energy efficiency, and among the top 3% of public bodies\textsuperscript{16}.
- At GMIT, an ‘Education for Sustainability’ module has been developed as part of the MA in Teaching and Learning, which is offered to all academic staff. It was developed in direct response to the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Ireland 2014-2020\textsuperscript{17}.

\textsuperscript{15} Note: This is reflected in QQI’s recently published Insights Report, Accreditation/Approval of Higher Education Programmes by Professional Bodies, as well as the 2017 QQI report, Professional Body Accreditation in Higher Education Institutions in Ireland.


1.4 CINNTE Institutional Quality Review

QQI commenced the CINNTE Cyclical Institutional Review Cycle during the reporting period, with ITS and LYIT being the first two institutions to undergo cyclical external peer review in 2018.

DCU, MU and NUI Galway were also preparing for CINNTE during this time, with the development of their ISERs. In addition, preparation for the CINNTE review of UCD in 2019 commenced in October 2017 with an initial briefing for the Academic Council Quality Enhancement Committee (ACQEC) and the establishment of a drafting group to lead the compilation of the ISER.

Extensive consultation and engagement with internal and external stakeholders to develop an honest, self-reflective evaluation report on the effectiveness of institutional QA is evidenced in the AIQRs for these institutions.

The AIQRs also reflect the impact of the external review process in informing the evolution of institutional QA system and objectives for future development and enhancement, and the integration of the recommendations of the CINNTE review process into QA planning.

https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Institutional-Reviews07.aspx
The compilation of the ISER in preparation for CINNTE is illustrated in the following case study:

Case Study 2
Preparing for CINNTE Cyclical Review
Maynooth University

Maynooth University submitted its Institutional Self Evaluation Report (ISER) in September 2018, with the main review visit scheduled for December 2018.

The process commenced in autumn 2017 led by the Strategy and Quality Office. An Institutional Coordinator was appointed in January 2018 and an extensive consultation process was undertaken over the three months. This involved customised briefings for the University Executive, the Academic Council, the Governing Authority, each of the three Faculties, the Quality Committee and the Committees for Academic Programmes, Teaching and Learning, Research, Graduate Studies and Internationalisation.

At an early stage, all staff and students were informed of the review, briefings were provided to student leaders and additional questions pertinent to the review were added to the annual Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE). Engagements with students included workshops with academic class representatives and Students’ Union officers, while feedback on specific areas was also sought from the general student body.

Further briefings were provided to staff who were assigned responsibility for preparing initial papers on sections of the ISER. Briefings were supplemented by workshops that were facilitated by the Institutional Coordinator and the Quality Enhancement Officer. In total over 20 briefing sessions and workshops were held.

In parallel with the awareness-raising activities, a cross-institutional representative CINNTE Task Group was established to oversee the planning, development and implementation of the institutional self-evaluation report (ISER). A Consultative Forum was also established to facilitate cross-cutting, collective discussions. The membership included the Faculty Deans, Heads of all academic departments and of the administrative and support units, and student and staff representatives.

The task of developing material was assigned to senior individuals, including members of the Task Group, the University Executive and directors of functions. Using these materials, the Institutional Coordinator and the Quality Enhancement Officer prepared a draft Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats (SCOT) analysis which, following review by the University Executive, was submitted for discussion to each of the three Faculties, the Academic Council and the Governing Authority.

The self-evaluation process was informed by data from a number of sources. Quantitative metrics on student enrolments, progression and completion rates, staff numbers and funding were taken from the University Performance Framework, which is compiled annually by the Institutional Research Office. All indicators used for benchmarking against other universities were based on definitions and census dates used by the Higher Education Authority.

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Data were also compiled from a variety of surveys such as the annual Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) and internal MU survey of modules, the Student Evaluation of Learning Experience (SELE), and included more localised and thematic institutional surveys.

In addition, the preparation of the ISER was informed by the consultations undertaken with staff and students over recent years on the reform of the undergraduate curriculum, the reorganisation of the University research institutes, the preparation of the University Strategic Plan 2018-2022, the Campus Development Masterplan, and most recently the successful submission for the Athena Swan bronze institutional award and the successful submission for Green Campus status. The reports of the peer review teams for all units reviewed over the past three years, and the annual reports of external examiners for each discipline, were reviewed during the preparation of the ISER.

Drafts of the ISER were reviewed by the University Executive and by the CINNTE Task Group, the Consultative Forum and the Quality Committee.

The Academic Council approved the final ISER for submission to QQI in September 2018.
2. Strategy, Governance and Management

2.1 Strategic Alignment of Quality

During the reporting period, many of the institutions were in the process of developing or had completed the development and launch of a new strategic plan. Evidence was presented of the strategic importance of quality, and the ongoing and positive impact of QA and enhancement activities on institutional reporting and governance structures and arrangements. Examples include:

- RCSI launched its new Strategic Plan 2018-2022. Quality is identified as one of the three foundations for, and measures of, successful delivery of the plan's provisions.
- The new CIT Academic Plan for 2018-2023, which complements the Strategic Plan, sets out the academic vision, mission and priorities of the institute with regard to its academic activities on each of three core pillars: Ambitious & Visionary Student Scholarship & Teaching; Research and Creative Scholarship; and Community Engagement.
- UCC launched its Academic Strategy for 2018-2022, which provides a framework to support and guide the University in shaping the curriculum offering, enrolment planning and academic governance for the years ahead.
- At UCD, in the 2015-16 and 2016-17 annual quality reporting periods, and aligned to the UCD Education Strategy 2015-2020, a major project for Curriculum Review and Enhancement was undertaken.
- At UL, to support the strategic quality objective, a bespoke quality management system (QMS) was implemented by all support units, based upon the seven quality management principles specified in the ISO9001:2015 quality management standard.
The strategic alignment of quality and critical role of the quality office is illustrated in the following case study:

Case Study 3

Strategic Alignment of Quality

*Dublin City University*

The alignment of DCU’s strategic ambitions and its commitment to quality is embedded in the DCU 2017-2022 Strategic Plan, and is specifically articulated in relation to teaching quality, the quality and impact of research, a commitment to operational excellence and the establishment of a Strategic Partnerships Office.

During 2017/18, the Quality Promotion Office supported establishment of Year 1 implementation priorities for the DCU 2017-2022 Strategic Plan, and the subsequent co-ordination of performance reporting on strategic implementation within the academic year. Internal reporting on strategic implementation in 2017/18 was also completed and shared with all DCU Governing Authority and DCU staff.

During 2017/2018, the University completed the development of five constituent strategies as part of the DCU Strategic Plan 2017-2022, namely

- Teaching and Learning Strategy
- Research and Innovation Strategy
- Internationalisation Strategy
- Engagement Strategy
- Student Experience Strategy

Faculty strategies were also developed to align strategic goals and constituent strategies with the ambitions of individual faculties.

The implementation of the DCU strategy is monitored through a process of rolling planning, which includes an annual period of ‘review and renew’, co-ordinated by the Quality Promotion Office.
2.2 Governance and Management

The Academic Council and sub-committee structure are the primary governance and decision-making structures for QA in Irish HEIs. Programme governance tends to be executed through programme boards, with specific programme boards responsible for the quality and academic oversight of individual programmes/clusters of programmes.

For example, in LIT, for each academic programme delivered across its locations, there is reporting on the effectiveness of the delivery, assessment, and quality of the programme in question through its programme board. School- and faculty-level boards are also an evolving feature of governance in the IoT sector. The commitment to ongoing improvements and enhancements to these governance and executive management structures and arrangements was evidenced in all the AIQRs. Changes and enhancements to QA governance structures were reported by many institutions, with specific changes resulting from recommendations in previous reviews noted by some. Examples include:

- A new Governing Authority was appointed in UL, in accordance with recommendations from previous reviews, which now includes greater external representation, and a revised committee structure.
- UCC completed the acquisition of Irish Management Institute (IMI) with agreed joint academic governance structures for UCC/IMI programmes. The UCC/IMI Integration Committee oversaw all aspects of the merger, including programme approval processes and system integration issues.
- AIT established new sub-committees including an Institute Plagiarism Committee.

- In the previous reporting period WIT reported on an academic governance project, which has been further strengthened during this reporting period by the introduction of training for the incoming WIT Academic Council and the WIT Governing Body.
- TCD reviewed the terms of reference and membership structure of its Quality Committee, to align with the focus on quality enhancement as well as on QA.
- Within UCD, all Periodic Quality Reviews are informed by key metrics aligned with the UCD Strategy 2015-2020.
- At GMIT the sustainability of the Mayo Campus was a key governance challenge addressed during the reporting period; a working group report was produced in October 2017, and an independent expert facilitator has been appointed to work with all the relevant stakeholders to oversee the transition to the future structure and operational model set out in the report.

Certain new appointments and changes to executive reporting structures were also made during this reporting period. Examples include:

- Significant restructuring in GMIT, where the College of Tourism and Arts was split, resulting in the creation of Galway International Hotel School and the School of Design, both of which began operating in September 2017.
- The appointment of a Vice-President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at UCD.
- The appointment of a new President, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar at DkIT; and the establishment of a new Academic Council and subcommittees.
- The appointment of a new President and Registrar & Vice-President for Academic Affairs in CIT.
• LIT has integrated the Head of Quality role with that of the Head of Teaching and Learning, and established a new centre for Teaching, Learning and Innovation.
• The appointment of a new Disability Officer, a new Postgraduate Admissions Officer, and new Senior Quality Officer at IADT.

The impact of new GDPR legislation was also reflected, with institutions reporting the appointment or planned appointment of new data/information and compliance officers.

QA Policies and Procedures
Enhancement and improvement of QA policies and procedures is an ongoing process in the institutions, and a range of policy and process reviews/enhancements and new policy developments have been reported.

For example, IADT conducted a significant review of its full suite of quality policies and procedures and subsequently developed three new policies and updated several existing ones.

Management of Linked Providers
A notable feature of the AIQRs of the universities is the enhancements to quality oversight and governance of linked providers. Examples include:

• UL instigated a process to facilitate an annual quality reporting mechanism with the Garda College, a linked provider of UL. The process involves the completion of an annual quality report followed by an annual dialogue meeting.
• DCU Education Committee agreed a working definition and broad approach to management of the QA of Linked Provider relationships.
• At TCD a Procedure for Approval of Linked Providers’ QA Procedures and a Linked Provider Appeals Procedure were both approved by the Board.
• UCD updated the working draft Guidelines for its Linked Provider Institutional Review.
**Case Study 4**

**Quality Assurance Governance in Practice**

*Dundalk Institute of Technology*

At Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT), five scheduled meetings of Academic Council were held during 2017/18, in addition to two special meetings, one of which was called to deal with routine matters while the second meeting focused on the related issues of the ongoing academic planning portfolio process and the upcoming Institutional Review.

Regular items for Academic Council meetings included ratification of student results, ratification of programme validation reports, consideration of reports from subcommittees, consideration of annual programme monitoring reports and recommendations, approval of external examiners, approval of conferring prizes, changes to entry requirements for specific programmes and ongoing work in relation to routes of entry for Northern Ireland candidates.

Presentations were made by colleagues with a view to keeping Academic Council informed of academic issues of relevance, e.g. student feedback, academic portfolio planning and Institutional Review. New academic policies and procedures approved by DkIT Academic Council in 2017/18 are outlined in section 1.2 above.

Four to five meetings of each of the six Academic Council subcommittees were held during 2016/17, giving a total of 27 subcommittee meetings.

Meetings of Leadership Team were held approximately once every two weeks.

Eleven meetings of the Institute’s Governing Body were held during 2017/18, one each month with the exception of August 2017.

Three meetings of the Institute Management and Planning Committee (IMPC) were held during 2017/18. Topics discussed included data protection, international student repeat attending, admission of mature students, exam paper templates, retention of student electronic assessment materials, access rights to mailing list, data breaches and use of shared drives, broadsheet changes, conferring and the Institute Calendar.

Five meetings of the Institute’s Academic Heads Forum (AHF) were held in 2017/18 to discuss issues such as programmatic review processes, graduation, student retention, timetabling issues, the AMBITION framework, Technological University, TEL survey, plagiarism training, Moodle and collection of student fees. Some of these topics were also referred to IMPC. There were also presentations to the committee by the Assistant Registrar (Programme Monitoring Process and Conferring) and the E-Learning Co-ordinator (results of TEL Survey).
2.3 Collaborative, Transnational and International Provision

Collaborations and partnerships are a feature of Irish higher education; inter-institutional partnerships within and between universities and the IoTs and with other national and international partners are expanding. Collaboration and engagement with a range of external stakeholders, including industry, local government/agencies, civic organisations and groups, is a strategic focus of all of the HEIs, and activities and impacts are reflected in the reports. Examples of inter-institutional collaboration include:

- GMIT worked with NUI Galway to redevelop a joint foundation programme in Business and STEM; the programmes were approved through the relevant quality procedures in both institutes with the first intake planned for 2018-19.
- WIT reported on a complex joint programme with the Irish Prison Service (IPS).
- In addition to the validation of a new joint BSc (Honours) in Industrial Physics, the reporting period also saw the awarding of the first joint CIT/UCC PhD.
- At DkIT there was a collaborative initiative with Louth Leader Partnership on a 14-week ‘taster’ programme, which in 2017/18, involved 38 participants.

In the context of transnational collaborations and international provision, examples of developments during the reporting period include:

- During the reporting period, the first enrolment onto CIT doctoral programmes of candidates based at the University of Applied Sciences, Karlsruhe, Germany, took place. These candidates are supervised by graduate supervisory panels based in both Cork and Karlsruhe.
- At UL the Quality Support Unit undertook a scoping exercise in relation to Collaborative and Transnational Provision (TNE). This involved analysing current practice in Ireland, the UK and internationally, including quality-related requirements and a gap analysis, with recommendations for improvement.
- At TCD the Global Relations Office was planning to provide an annual report to the Planning Group on International Activity. This will enhance TCD’s preparedness for the introduction of the International Education Mark (IEM) and will supplement the information provided in the Undergraduate Student Mobility Report, which focuses on incoming and outgoing student mobility under Erasmus and Student Exchange Agreements.
- At AIT, the International Office carries out an annual review of agreements with partner universities in the EU and non-EU once a year, usually in November.
Collaboration and partnership in practice is illustrated in the following case study:

Case Study 5

Collaboration to support Lifelong Learning

Institute of Technology, Carlow

Almost 39% of learners enrolled on programmes at Institute of Technology Carlow are drawn from the lifelong learning sphere, and goal 3 of the Institute’s Strategic Plan outlines its commitment to the development of Strategic Collaborations and Partnerships. This goal has led to the creation of the Extended Campus as an element of its lifelong learning commitment, with the defined aim of developing collaboration opportunities with local and national employers.

The creation of an Extended Campus followed the Institute Strategic Review conducted in 2010, which identified the requirement to create closer links with industry, education and collaborative partners. A significant proportion of the Institute’s lifelong learners are now registered through the Extended Campus, which is part of the Faculty of Engineering.

The Extended Campus currently links the fields of aviation, transport, emergency services and defence studies, and develops the leadership, management and technological capabilities of linked organisations and individuals. It builds on collaborative programme development with partners such as the Defence Forces (DF), Dublin Fire Brigade (DFB), Dublin Airport Authority (DAA), Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) and more recently with organisations such as the Chartered Institute of Logistics & Transport (CILT), Lloyds Pharmacy Group, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and the Local Authority Services National Training Group (LASNTG).

In addition, through the Lifelong Learning Faculty, a significant relationship with An Cosán in West Tallaght, Dublin, one of the leading providers of community education in the country, has been developed, whereby a range of An Cosán’s programmes have been validated by the Institute.

The provision of validated programmes with the above organisations extends nationally, with programmes provided at the Institute’s main campuses at Carlow, Wexford and Wicklow, and in a number of other locations nationwide. Providing quality education across multiple campuses has enabled learners to engage with third-level education at a local level. Strategic development of collaborative partnerships between IT Carlow and other public and private organisations is ongoing and is underpinned by a proven record of accomplishment in the areas of work-based learning, recognition of prior learning and flexible provision.

Continuous Professional Development for Collaborative Partners

IT Carlow has hosted staff development workshops on the theme of innovative teaching and learning strategies for staff members from its collaborative partners, e.g. the Defence Forces, An Cosán, Tivoli, Gestalt, and the Local Authority Services National Training Group (LASNTG), further enhancing its collaboration with these organisations. In addition, sessions were provided for staff in Carlow College on assessment practices and writing learning outcomes.
3. Effectiveness and Impact of Quality Assurance

3.1 Data and the Student Experience

Structured processes and controls to collect and analyse data for informed decision-making and enhancement of QA systems are well developed in Irish HEIs. Data is used systematically in the QA and management of the student learning experience and in the monitoring and enhancement of key processes.

Information is gathered from a variety of sources including national initiatives such as the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE\textsuperscript{19}), Graduate Destinations Survey\textsuperscript{20}, and the Data Enabled Student Success Initiative (DESSI\textsuperscript{21}); and from internal sources including faculty/programme/module level student surveys, programme board reports, internal review reports and external examiner reports. Examples of how student-related information was gathered and acted upon include:

- At AIT, data obtained from ISSE is used at meetings of faculty and programme boards while VLE (Moodle) is used to record attendance and logins with follow up by faculty. Systems used by the library and the academic writing centre provide data on student engagement to inform the provision of services to students.
- ITB developed a Learning Analytics and Strategy Policy document for the application of Learning Analytics (LA) to support the learning experience of the student as the primary stakeholder, and to provide relevant and up to date business intelligence to all stakeholders to inform decision-making.
- The UCD Student Feedback on Modules Survey is an all-university, anonymous, online student feedback mechanism used to ensure that students are given a voice in the module enhancement process.
- Survey data collection in RCSI (both in Ireland and overseas) is centralised and managed by the Quality Enhancement Office (QEO). Feedback from undergraduate students is collected twice a year at the end of each semester, and postgraduate students are typically surveyed either once a year or on a modular basis.
- An online tool (Academic Department Report/Plan) to support data informed decision-making and learning analytics – was developed in IT Tralee. This online tool is centrally populated (through the Central Student Data Office) with the relevant data for analysis and interpretation by academic departments.
- At MU, the implementation of quality reviews is underpinned by the provision of standardised data sets to all academic departments by the University’s Institutional Research Office.

\textsuperscript{19} [http://studentsurvey.ie/](http://studentsurvey.ie/)
\textsuperscript{20} [https://hea.ie/statistics/information-for-institutions/graduate-outcomes-survey/](https://hea.ie/statistics/information-for-institutions/graduate-outcomes-survey/)
Initiatives were also undertaken in many institutions to enhance and increase student participation in student feedback and engagement initiatives. Examples include:

- Encouraging relevant student cohorts to participate in the ISSE. DCU, in partnership with its Students’ Union, co-ordinated a promotional activity on all three teaching campuses.
- CIT undertook a promotion of ISSE, which encompassed information campaigns through various media, student-leader activity, and more direct engagement of the academic departments; this raised the completion rate of the main 2017 ISSE to 32.4%.
- IADT reported one of the highest national completion rates for the ISSE in 2017, resulting from cooperation between its Students’ Union, academic staff and the Student Experience team.
The use of student data in practice in QA is illustrated in the following case study:

Case Study 6

Completion and Retention Statistics

Limerick Institute of Technology

Access, transfer, progression, retention and successful completion are key areas of the student experience. During the reporting period, a sub-committee of LIT’s Academic Council was reformed and renamed as the Academic Council Sub-Committee for Student Support and Retention. The Council has also authorised an increased role and voice for student representatives throughout its activities.

LIT’s Student Retention Strategy is designed to be an overarching strategy, drawing together relevant themes and key activities in order to support the retention of students and the completion of their studies.

The intended audience for the retention strategy is all LIT staff. As an active and iterative strategy, it is designed to support LIT’s commitment to provide excellent and inclusive higher education with first class student support and facilities, and outstanding opportunities for learning for local, national and international students. The strategy also supports the Institute’s aim to provide an outstanding student experience, which is academically rewarding and personally fulfilling for students. Diagrammatically, the influence of QA and improvement is depicted as follows:

LIT’s Retention Collaboration Model:

One of the key indicators that will enable LIT to judge whether it is successful in achieving its ambitions in relation to student retention and completion will be whether it can meet the HEA Compact Performance Objectives targets for new three-year period 2018/019 to 2020/2021.
3.2 Information Management

QA management information systems and learner information systems, though diverse in approach across the institutions, are comprehensive, and a range of improvements and enhancements were undertaken during the reporting period. Examples include:

- At TCD, the Quality Committee moved to electronic circulation of papers via Boardpad as part of the College’s Digital Transformation Strategy.
- A number of data dashboards were developed in AIT, including a student lifecycle dashboard that monitors students from application to completion.
- In IT Tralee, a system that records and tracks the decisions of Academic Council and its sub-committees was developed and implemented in the Office of the Vice-President of Academic Affairs and Registrar (VPAAR).
- At LIT, a digital repository of the academic record was developed – the Quality Drive includes a record of Academic Council and associated documentation, as well as faculty, department, and programme board documentation. LIT also implemented GURU, a secure examination management system, across all its campuses.
- GMIT developed and launched a Registrar’s SharePoint site to improve communication on institutional QA policies and procedures.
- WIT introduced a number of new processes to enhance student access to the portfolio of full-time courses. In addition, an online solution was developed to facilitate student access to evidence of registration. Student registration was moved on line and over 2,000 students were registered in this way.
- A major digitisation process was reported by the Academic Affairs Administration in CIT; one key project was the development of a bespoke Exam Paper Management System (MAXe) to enable automated submission of end-of-semester exam papers to examiners across all HEI campuses.
- At DIT a new Programme and Module Catalogue has been developed to provide up-to-date information on programmes and modules for staff, students and the public, to support QA processes, and to facilitate the production of institutional data to support the Performance Compact with the HEA.
- ITB began using Gmetrix training software, which aims to help students study for their exams in a more convenient manner, as they are now able to access information anywhere.
- At UL, significant development of the Quality Support Unit’s (QSU’s) survey and data analytics-related systems and processes software has provided more robust survey management and reporting mechanisms in UL.

Survey Data and Metrics

Institutions use a wide range of metrics and survey data to evaluate the effectiveness of QA processes and specific initiatives. Examples of metrics reported include:

- WIT’s report on the effectiveness of its ‘Right Student Right Programme’ initiative, which led to a 3% increase in registrations in the summer of 2018 (up from 1,988 to 2,042).
- CIT’s report on effectiveness measures the integration of entrepreneurship education and an entrepreneurship culture within
the institution, which is reflected in a further increase in recent graduates declaring themselves self-employed in the annual Graduate Outcomes (First Destination) Surveys.

- At ITS, a Programme Monitoring Report, with key performance indicators (KPI) to allow for a five-year trend analysis, is prepared each year for each programme as part of the monitoring process. The KPIs include CAO Applicants, CAO Average Points, Registrations, Pre-Exam Attrition, Pass and Retention Rates.

- Using the HEA’s definition of progression (i.e. presence on the 1 March in the year following entry) GMIT reported on a 79% progression of first-year students from 2016/17 into 2017/18, representing an increase of 3% on the previous year.

- At DkIT, student progression data for all students was computed on a school, department, programme, stage and NFQ-level basis and circulated to programme boards for consideration. The overall progression rate for all students was 83%, representing an increase on the two previous reporting periods.
Measuring impact using quantitative data analysis in QA is illustrated in the following two case studies, where institutions conducted qualitative surveys and longitudinal analysis to measure quality impacts:

**Case Study 7**

**Perceptions of Quality**

*NUI Galway*

The outcome of a staff survey, which measured changes in internal perceptions of quality, illustrates the enhancement and transformative nature of QA and the embedding of a quality culture, not just in [the] institution, but in the complexity and detail of all institutional quality reports.

A survey conducted of staff in NUI Galway in 2017 showed that prior to the introduction of QA in 1995 the University exhibited traits of what is called a reproductive culture where individual, rather than group expertise, defined quality and where QA transparency was poor.

Between 1995 and 2010, the University migrated towards a more reactive culture by establishing its own internal rules for QA focused mainly on a procedure for the internal quality review (QR).

This reactive culture, although accepting of the need for external rules, perceived quality as externally imposed. Since 2010, the culture has become more responsive so that QR is now leaner, more evidence-based and focused on creativity and enhancement.

In addition to QR, additional QA processes now incorporate benchmarking, structured policies and procedures and research assessment. QA is also now part of a tripartite approach that links quality, strategy and performance.

The survey gives strong indications that the University’s QA has migrated towards a more responsive culture where QA is a process of transformation and continuous improvement.

**Case Study 8**

**Longitudinal Analysis of Peer Review Reports**

*Royal College of Surgeons Ireland*

RCSI conducted a longitudinal analysis of Peer Review Group reports (2011–2016), which identified a time sequence of recommendations and commendations reflecting the journey that RCSI has made towards maturity as a university-level health sciences higher education institution.

The impact is reflected in the implementation of recommendations to develop internal management structures to support unit heads. It is notable that a number of the units which have been subject to internal QA review have created internal posts whose focus is on QA.
3.3 Learner Resources, Supports and Wellbeing

The availability of extensive resources and supports for learners in all HEIs was evidenced in the reports. Enhancements and innovations in teaching and learning were reported, including increased use and embedding of digital/technology enhancements and approaches. Individual institutional philosophies and underlying approaches to teaching and learning are explicitly outlined in some of the reports, and more implicitly in others.

There is a sector-wide focus on supporting the transition to higher education, and in enhancing retention and progression rates for traditional and non-traditional learners. Examples include:

• At UL, the Student Engagement and Success Unit (SESU) ran a second pilot of the module 'Making the Leap', which looks at the differences between second- and third-level education, expectation setting, supports and services for new students, time management and approaching the first assessment. The 848 evaluations provided by students in the 2017/18 pilot were used to modify the content further.

• ITC developed a Learner Engagement, Retention and Progression Framework. Other initiatives include the Academic Success Programme and Peer Assisted Learning (PALS) programme, Maths Learner Support Centre and the Academic Writing Centre, an online induction programme for all incoming students, Academic Success: Skills for Learning, Skills for Life. The Institute reported that these initiatives resulted in ITC having the highest retention rate in the sector.

• WIT introduced a new category of Repeat Learner to facilitate the provision of adequate engaged support to a learner for any module that they must repeat.

• At TCD, the Student Life Committee developed a network of student spaces throughout College called 'Zón Mac Léinn' – informal spaces open to all students to relax, socialise and collaborate.

• At IT Tralee, the Health Promotion and Retention Project is an initiative introduced to Year 1 students during their induction programme in the Health and Well-being Sessions. In this reporting period, there was almost 100% attendance among incoming first-year students.

• At IADT, an all-Institute initiative to support and facilitate the integration of all incoming first-year students, The First Year Matters (FYM) programme, is run over the first four weeks of autumn term and is co-ordinated by the Students' Union and the FYM team.
Learner support and engagement in practice is illustrated in the following case study:

Case Study 9

Student Engagement

Cork Institute of Technology

Student engagement and communication activities during the reporting period focused on three interrelated key dimensions: collaborative engagement; communication & information provision; and strategic external partnerships and dissemination.

Growth of Collaborative Student Engagement Initiatives

The various student engagement initiatives continued to grow under six core programme strands:

- The Good Start Induction Programme;
- Early Alert & Intervention / Academic Success Coaching;
- Peer Assisted Learning and Support (PALS);
- The Academic Learning Centre (ALC);
- SParQ@CIT (Student Partnership in Quality) / NStEP (the National Student Engagement Programme); and
- Transitions to CIT (department-led induction projects supported by AnSEO).

A sample of student engagement enhancements in the reporting period includes:

- **Good Start** – AnSEO registered approx. 8,000 direct interactions with students during the Good Start programme in Semesters 1 and 2, of which more than 80% occurred in the first semester.
- **Academic Success Coaching** – AnSEO success coaches interacted with ca. 2,100 new first-year students through in-class workshops offered jointly with an increased number of CIT academic departments.
- **Transitions to CIT** – AnSEO supported 44 department-led ‘Transitions’ projects, including staff-student ‘meet & greets’, welcome breakfasts, ice-breaker and team-building activities, role model seminars, site visits and ‘Meet Our Graduates’ events.
- **SParQ@CIT** (Student Partnership in Quality): A total of 20 SParQ events at department, school or faculty level took place in the Faculty of Business & Humanities and the Faculty of Engineering & Science in 2017/18, with 438 student and 135 staff participants.
- **NStEP**: CIT was invited by the HEA, QQI and USI to host the national launch of NStEP Networks in November 2017.
- **The Academic Learning Centre (ALC)** saw weekly walk-in attendances of 150 students on average.
- **PALS**: 112 students were trained by AnSEO as PALS Study Leaders and PALS Social Mentors.

continued >>
Case Study 9 (continued)

Enhanced Communication and Information Provision

During the reporting period CIT’s online presence was further enhanced. Examples include:

- **New CIT AnSEO Website**: In September 2017, AnSEO launched its new and interactive CIT Student Engagement Office website, providing an overview of the Institute’s student engagement programmes.

- **Social Media Presence**: AnSEO continued to use the CIT social media platforms extensively (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat) to connect with students and staff on platforms favoured by them.

- **Dedicated Student Engagement Email Address**: the creation of a dedicated student email address allows for AnSEO student engagement emails to be sent directly to all CIT students.

External Partnerships and Sharing of Good Practice

AnSEO connected with the student-led Learning Network; the Learning Innovation Network (LIN); SParQS (Scotland); BCU; NStEP; the European Centre for Peer-Assisted Learning and Support (SI-PALS) at University of Lund; MMU; and the National Centre for the First Year Experience at the University of South Carolina.
3.4 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

The pursuit of excellence and the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning is a key strategic focus for Irish HEIs. The systematic framework for ensuring quality of teaching and learning in institutions is evidenced in the AIQRs and includes a range of internal operational processes to ensure the efficacy and quality of teaching and learning, many of which are reported on in other sections in this synthesis report e.g. from student feedback/evaluations, internal reviews etc.

A range of developmental enhancement projects and evidence of research-informed approaches to teaching and learning in contemporary higher education was also evident in this reporting period. Examples include:

- DIT established a number of Teaching Fellowships, and the resultant research output has contributed to policy and practice throughout the Institute; the fellowships will be continued in TU Dublin.
• At DIT also, a ‘Co-CREATE: Collaborative Curriculum Reimagining and Enhancement Aiming to Transform Education’ project, aims to develop a University-wide curriculum framework and implementation plan that can be used to strengthen the University programmes and enhance the learning experience for all students.

• At CIT, a set of new/revised modules for the MA in Teaching & Learning in HE was rolled out, and, in addition, the staff members working towards a master’s degree may take individual modules to inform their teaching and learning practice.

• At ITS, a new Director was appointed and the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) became embedded in the Institution; a range of CPD activities were conducted for staff.

• At UCD, a number of projects were being managed through its Teaching and Learning Unit, including:
  » seminars and training events on embedding digital skills in the undergraduate curriculum
  » technology-enhanced learning
  » research-teaching linkages
  » reflection on MCQ exams
  » groupwork challenges and solutions
  » learning from student feedback
  » assessment of complex knowledge
  » programme assessment and feedback enhancement
  » inclusive module design, and
  » tutor and demonstrator induction sessions.

• At UL, the Student Evaluation of Teaching and Learning (SET) is used by the Centre for Teaching and Learning to gather in a structured manner feedback from students about individual approaches to teaching. In the reporting period, 236 lecturers requested a SET, which involved 366 modules and 5,247 student responses.

• During the reporting period, a team of TU Dublin academics, in collaboration with counterparts in Durham College and University of Ontario Institute of Technology, developed the Active Learning Strategies for Higher Education Handbook, which was launched in January 201922.

Assessment of Learners
Continuous improvement to learner assessment processes was evident in the AIQRs for the reporting year. Examples include:

• UCD launched a new project to develop an Assessment Enhancement Implementation Framework (AEIF).

• DIT completed its review of General Assessment Regulations. This review process will also inform the design of unitary student assessment regulations for TU Dublin.

• ITB joined an international collaborative group that is developing online tools to inform and foster Academic Integrity.

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Enhancement to student assessment is illustrated in the following case study:

**Case Study 10**

**Enhancement of Student Assessment**

**Dundalk Institute of Technology**

At DkIT feedback from both students and staff had indicated that student groupwork was a source of stress and needed more support and guidance. During 2016/17, a framework for assessed groupwork was developed and approved by Academic Council. Training was provided for both staff and students and funding was obtained from the NFETL for a seminar on groupwork.

The Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching carried out a review of the effectiveness of these guidelines during 2017/18. There is encouraging early evidence of impact on student experience and lecturer practice, however the impact at programme level is more limited. Ongoing support is needed for full implementation. A proposal to report this evaluation has been accepted for the Journal of Higher Education Pedagogies Special Issue on Transforming Assessment and the report is currently under review.

**External Examiners**

External examiners have been and continue to be an integral part of the process of QA of learner assessment in the sector. All of the institutions reported on the impact of external examiners reports in informing and enhancing processes. External examiner training is conducted, in the main, on an annual basis by most institutions.

For example:

- At LYIT external examiners are appointed for a three-year period, which may be extended by one further year. All external examiner reports are submitted to the Registrar’s Office and then forwarded to the relevant school for consideration by the appropriate programme board(s). At the end of the academic year a list of external examiners who have completed their term is submitted to each school by the Registrar’s Office.

- Ongoing improvement in the external examining processes, including technological enhancements, were also reported.
Quality in Irish Higher Education

External examining enhancement in practice is illustrated in the following case study:

Case Study 11

External Examining Enhancement

Trinity College Dublin

The External Examiner Enhancement project in Trinity College Dublin, which was initiated in response to a Council request for more reliable procedures to support the central role of the external examiner in the QA of undergraduate and postgraduate education, concluded in September 2018 with the following deliverables:

1. A designated email address to be established for all (undergraduate and postgraduate taught) external examiner reports externreports@tcd.ie.
2. A centralised storage folder for secure access by schools to external examiner reports for undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses.
3. A designated external examiner website that provides a one-stop-shop of information and resources to support the external examiner process including a link to the role of external examiners in each school.

In addition, a revision of the External Examiner Policy, clarifying the position in respect of remote attendance by examiners at Courts of Examiners, was approved by Council in April 2018.

In response to the introduction in May 2018 of the EU General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), a new procedure was developed to address the potential breach of the GDPR posed by the transfer to external examiners of students’ assessed work (exam scripts, continuous assessment etc.) in advance of the Courts of Examiners meetings.

The procedure for the transfer to external examiners of students’ assessed work stipulates that students’ work (both hardcopy and electronic) must be securely transferred to examiners and that examiners are responsible for the secure storage and disposal of students’ work. In the case of a doctoral thesis, the student’s written permission must be obtained where the external examiner wishes to retain student work beyond the examination period. In addition, where the students’ exam scripts or coursework is being sent outside the EU for examination, the student should be notified of this.

The procedure was approved by Quality Committee and Council in October 2018 and changes to support implementation of these changes were made to:

1. The Annual External Examiner Report Template which was updated to stipulate that external examiners confirm, in writing, that they have securely deleted or disposed of any electronic files or hard copy printouts of scripts and/or coursework upon completion of their external examining duties.
2. The Advisory Guidelines on the EU General Data Protection Regulation, which were developed to outline the role of external examiners as third party data processors of student personal data and the actions to be taken to promote compliance with College procedures on GDPR.

continued >>
Case Study 11 (continued)

3. The Thesis Submission Guidelines and Intention to Submit Form were updated to ensure that a student’s written consent is obtained should the external examiner wish to retain a copy of their thesis beyond the examining period.

It is expected that the information and system enhancements arising from this project will help to streamline and optimise the external examiner process.

Key milestones have been identified for assessing the impact of the project, these include:

(i) an improvement in the ease and accuracy of reporting on the return rate of external examiner annual reports for the Annual Faculty Quality Report 17/18 (February 2019),
(ii) adoption of GDPR compliant methods of delivery of student’s assessed work to external examiners
(iii) adoption of the new report template by external examiners confirming compliance with disposal requirements for students’ assessed work
(iv) the percentage of external examiners submitting expenses claims for disposal of hard /printed copies of students’ assessed work in September 2020.
3.5 Professional Development and Support

Systematic approaches and processes for staff development was evidenced in all of the reports. These include staff induction and mentoring, job rotation, a range of thematic CPD seminars and workshops, and opportunities for staff to achieve formal qualifications at NFQ level 10. There was strong evidence of collaboration and practice sharing at institutional level and through national projects.

For example:

- At UL, the President’s Excellence Awards for Staff was established to recognise outstanding contributions by staff to the overall goals of the University and the campus community, which are awarded in five categories: Innovation; Leadership; Student Experience; Exceptional Team Member; and Business Transformation/Excellence.
- RCSI implements an annual Professional Development Planning (PDP) process for staff, and provides peer observation, allowing the staff to experience different teaching styles and receive feedback on their own teaching style.
- A variety of CPD seminars and workshops are offered by the Teaching and Learning Unit in CIT includes the ‘Breakfast Seminar Series’ and ‘Conversations on Teaching & Learning’.
- LIT and UL received €150,000 funding for their project, the ‘Professional Development Capacity Building in Higher Education: Extending Provision for National Impact through a Flexible Pathways Approach’.
- At IADT, over 372 participants in the teaching and learning area engaged with staff development.
- Institutions reported involvement in a range of national projects through the National Forum for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning in HE. One example is the Teaching and Learning Centre in ITC which leveraged funding to work with other Teaching and Learning Centres across the technological sector on the ATLAS (Aligning Teaching and Learning across the Technological Sector) project; the aim of which is to align accredited provision in teaching and learning to the National Professional Development Framework.
- During the reporting period, GMIT collaborated with LYIT, IT Sligo, St. Angela’s College and NUI Galway on a professional development programme for managers in Irish higher education, which focused on building teaching and learning champions across the West/North West Higher Education Cluster.
4. Internal Approval and Periodic Reviews

4.1 Internal Approval and Reviews

The effectiveness of QA processes in institutions is evaluated through periodic internal reviews. Internal peer review processes involve evaluation undertaken by internal and external panels with national and international representation. Different types of reviews were undertaken on a systematic basis in institutions during this reporting period, including:

- Programme approval and reviews
- Research review
- School/department/faculty review
- Service unit review
- Review of partnerships/collaborations
- Process review
- Thematic review

As reflected in previous reporting periods, reporting on the categories of reviews is not sufficiently consistent in AIQRs to draw reliable conclusions, and the criteria for determining the unit of review and focus of review are not always clear.

The disruptive impact of the Technological University legislation can be seen in this period with DIT reporting slippage in the schedule of reviews, as preparation for TU status put pressure on schools, units and offices.

All of the institutions have developed and are working within a planned schedule of reviews, although there are significant variations in the types of reviews undertaken within these schedules.

Of note is the small number of research reviews undertaken during this reporting period in all institutions; with three DABs, and four IoTs reporting having completed research reviews.

As illustrated in Table 1 below, Ireland’s HEIs continue to review and enhance their programme offerings across all levels with a focus on Springboard+23 programmes, including Higher Diplomas, being reported on from the IoT sector.

The table indicates variations in new programme approvals during the reporting period, with some institutions reporting what appears to be a very high number of new programme approvals in comparison to other institutions in the sector.

Some enhancements of strategic approaches to new programme development were implemented during the reporting period; one example was the development of Academic Portfolio Planning at DkIT.

23 https://springboardcourses.ie/about
TABLE 1: Categories of Internal Reviews Completed in the Reporting Period expressed as a %
TABLE 1: LEGEND

- Number of Programme Reviews completed in the reporting year
- Number of Service Unit Reviews completed in the reporting year
- Number of School/Department/Faculty Reviews completed in the reporting year
- Number of Reviews of Arrangements with partner organisations completed in the reporting year
- Number of Research Reviews completed in the reporting year
- Number of new Programme Validations/Programme Approvals completed in the reporting year
- Number of Other reviews completed in the reporting year

TABLE 1: NOTES

- DCU reported having conducted 16 research reviews.
- ITS completed 14 research reviews, with one review per student registered in the reporting period.
- ITS include the CINNTE Institutional Review as the response to school/department/faculty reviews.
- AIT had 10 articulation agreements reviewed during the time period.
- DIT reported on completion of four school reviews during the reporting period.
- DkIT validated programmes for 12 major and 12 non-major awards. The major awards excluded exit awards, and six awards that were re-validated.
- ITB completed a review of its School of Business.
- IT Tallaght had nine new programme validations completed and all current programmes re-validated during its school/department cyclical reviews. For the school/department/faculty reviews, three schools reported, with eight departments represented.
- NUI Galway did not report the specific number of programme reviews completed because all taught programmes (e.g., BSc, MSc) are to be reviewed as part of the institutional QA process for reviews of school; and all taught programmes must be monitored by programme boards and external examiners annually as part of the institutional QA process.
- UCC conducts its programme reviews through a periodic review process, and all curricular changes are overseen by the Academic Programmes and Regulations Office (APAR). Of the research reviews completed, the most recent was completed in 2015. For reviews with partner organisations, there is a Joint Academic Standards Board with CIT to ensure collaboration and uniform academic standards. In addition, the UCC-Turning Point Training Institute Joint Academic Standards Committee oversees the MSc in Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy Programme and reports to both the Board of Directors of TPTI and UCC’s Academic Board.
- UL reported 23 new programmes, in addition to the modification of 116 existing programmes.
Internal periodic quality review in practice is illustrated in the following case study:

Case Study 12
Periodic Quality Reviews
University College Dublin

The effectiveness of QA processes and their impact on different academic schools and support services across the University are evaluated through Periodic Quality Reviews coordinated by the UCD Quality Office.

The scope of the Periodic Quality Reviews of academic and support units within UCD covers, for example: organisation and management; staff and facilities; resources; teaching and learning; research; programmes; external relations. Particular emphasis is placed on the student experience, and students are key stakeholders who meet with each Review Group.

The focus of Periodic Quality Reviews of support services is on the quality and effectiveness of the services provided, the processes and systems that monitor and support those services, and the overall contribution to the strategic development and effective operation of the University. All Periodic Quality Reviews are informed by key metrics aligned with UCD Strategy 2015-2020 and are benchmarked against comparable institutional data, where available.

The Academic Council Quality Enhancement Committee (ACQEC), via the UCD Quality Office, regularly seeks both formal and informal feedback from members of Review Groups about the UCD periodic quality review processes and procedures.

A short survey is sent to all reviewers, both internal and external to UCD, who participated in quality reviews completed during the preceding period. For this reporting period a total of 23 surveys were circulated, to which there were a full 23 responses (100% response rate), with equal engagement from external reviewers and internal reviewers. Feedback from Review Groups is a key mechanism for determining the effectiveness of the QA framework at UCD.

The impact of implementing the QA framework within UCD tends to be reflected in continuous incremental enhancements rather than fundamental shifts in policy and/or procedures year on year. For example, changes to a module's assessment profile, further enhancing the reporting template for annual reporting on collaborative provision, or the redevelopment of a school's workload model.

In the context of the Periodic Quality Review of academic and support units, the most important aspect of the quality assurance and enhancement process is the unit's engagement with the recommendations for improvement that have been generated by the Review Group and the development of a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) to address those recommendations.

Each Review Group Report is considered by the University Management Team (UMT) and is discussed with the Chair of the Review Group. The UMT prepares a commentary on the findings of the Review Group, and both this commentary and the Review Group Report are considered by the Governing Authority. The UMT also meets with the unit head to discuss the QIP.
The University monitors the implementation and progress of the planned actions approximately 12 months from the initial production of the QIP. This formal stage requires the relevant unit to draft a QIP Progress Report and a meeting involving the Registrar and Deputy President, the Chair of the Review Group, and representatives of the relevant unit is convened to review and discuss progress. This process is an example of the impact of the UCD Periodic Quality Review process.

As part of the internal reflection of the outputs of the Quality Review Reports, an Annual Institutional Report on Quality in the preceding year is provided to the Governing Authority, Academic Council and the University Management Team, which incorporates an analysis of key issues or themes arising from the Review Group Report recommendations for improvement. Examples of these Quality Improvement Plans and annual reports are available at UCD Quality Office – Reports and Publications.

Review Group Report findings can be grouped under five key themes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>The Student Experience</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Institutional Strategy</td>
<td>Research-led</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assessment</td>
<td>• Student Learning Experience</td>
<td>• Alignment of QA policies with ESG 2015 &amp; QQI/Statutory QA Guidelines (Core)</td>
<td>• Resources (staffing, space, facilities)</td>
<td>• Support for PhD students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student Feedback</td>
<td>• Student Engagement</td>
<td>• Research Quality</td>
<td>• Internationalisation &amp; International Links</td>
<td>• Research Mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Curriculum Development</td>
<td>• Graduate Profile and Career Path</td>
<td>• Staff Development</td>
<td>• Staff Development</td>
<td>• Research Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Diversification of Pedagogical Approaches</td>
<td>• The First-Year Experience</td>
<td>• Alignment of School/Unit/University Strategies</td>
<td>• External Funding</td>
<td>---</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Follow-up is an integral part of the process. The individual Review Group Report recommendations are considered and actioned as appropriate, at school/unit and/or institutional level. The decisions on improvement, which are made in the follow-up to self-assessment and review, provide a framework within which each unit can continue to work towards the goal of developing and fostering a quality culture in the University.

Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) and annual reports are made available to view in the UCD Quality Office. These include:

- Quality Review Reports
- Institutional Review Reports
- Thematic Review Reports
- Collaborative/Transnational Provision Reports
4.2 Review Panel Composition and Representation

As can be seen in tables 2 and 3, the composition of both review and programme approval panels varies across the sector. There would seem to be an overreliance on internal domestic expertise in some institutions and differences between practices in the DABs and the IoTs. The inclusion of external and international chairs appears limited in the IoT sector, where chair profiles are in the main internal or selected from a similar institution, with international experts included in only a very small number of IoTs.

International Representation

The benefits of including international peer review panel members is illustrated in the report submitted by UCD, which details the positive impact of utilising peer review reports in the quality enhancement cycle and on the importance of the currency of the knowledge and experience of review groups.

“The participation of senior international faculty and staff in Review Groups helps to benchmark UCD’s provision against leading world institutions and also serves to promote UCD’s profile globally. External members of the Review Groups are generally drawn from within the top 1% of global higher education institutions (and/or subject rankings).

In 2017-18 external reviewers were from Monash University (Australia), University of Melbourne (Australia), Rowan University (USA), University of Leeds (UK), Sheffield University (UK), University of Oxford (UK), University of Essex (UK), University of Leicester (UK), Imperial College London (UK), University of Birmingham (UK), University College London (UK), University of Liverpool (UK), Newcastle University (UK), University of Ulster (UK), Bangor University (UK), Spanish National Research Council (Spain), Stockholm University (Sweden), Dublin City University (Ireland)."

Institutions may not all be categorising panel members in the same way in their AIQRs and additional guidelines to ensure common interpretation and enable reliable inter-institutional comparisons to be made were requested by CIT. QQI acknowledges that this would enhance future AIQRs.

Some clarifications were provided: for example, GMIT reported that the percentage of internal staff involved in validation panels is higher than normal given that a large proportion of panels were for non-major awards, such as Special Purpose Awards or related to a differential validation process.
### Notes

- CIT reported that the category “International” is treated as NOT mutually exclusive with regard to Similar Institution and Different Institution. Where the panel chair is affiliated with an institution or organisation based outside of Ireland, the percentages may therefore not add up to 100%.
- The section of ‘Other (Industry)’ was added by IADT and IT Tralee.

### Table 2: Profile of reviewers and chairs internal approval/evaluations and reviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chair Profile (expressed as a %)</th>
<th>Internal</th>
<th>Similar Institution</th>
<th>Different Institution</th>
<th>International</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIT</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CIT</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCU</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td>DIT</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>DkIT</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td>GMIT</td>
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<td>100%</td>
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<td>IADT</td>
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<td>ITB</td>
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<td>ITC</td>
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<tr>
<td>ITS Tallaght</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT Tralee</td>
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<td>ITB</td>
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<td>LyIT</td>
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<td>MU</td>
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<td>NUIG</td>
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<td>RCSI</td>
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<td>TCD</td>
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<td>UCC</td>
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<td>UCD</td>
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<td>UL</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>WIT</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Student Representation

Student representation on internal review/approval panels also varies and was reported on by a small number of institutions, as can be seen in the table. While all institutions reported commitment to student engagement and representation, there would seem to be practical challenges in implementing this. The challenges of including student representatives in internal review panels was noted by RCSI.

“The RCSI Quality Committee and Quality Enhancement Office remain committed to substantive student involvement in Internal QA Review processes, through membership of Peer Review Groups (PRGs). Unfortunately, RCSI Student Union (SU) posts are of one year in duration and are not sabbatical in nature; this means that SU Officers are on a steep learning curve when elected and must balance substantial ongoing coursework in their SU roles throughout their term of office.

As a result, recruitment of student members to join PRGs for internal QA reviews is very difficult. However, students are involved in the governance of RCSI QA policies & procedures through SU representation on the Quality Committee and on the governing committees and boards to which it reports. RCSI does recruit students for review panels conducting Institutional Reviews of its overseas Branch Campuses; these tend to be international students external to RCSI with previous experience of QA review processes in higher education.”
TABLE 3: Notes

- CIT reported that ‘National’ was taken as meaning ‘affiliated with an institution or organisation based in Ireland other than CIT’.

- DCU included the following recomposition of the three panels for:
  - External Affairs – two Internal, three External (two Irish and one UK); chair was Irish Industry
  - President’s Office – two Internal, three External (two Irish and one UK); chair was ‘Irish Similar Institution’
  - School of Maths – two Internal, three External (two Irish and one UK); chair was ‘UK Similar Institution’

- ITC reported that their policy has been updated to include student representation on all panels from the next reporting period.
During the reporting, some enhancements were undertaken to improve student representation as illustrated in the following case study:

Case Study 13

Student Reviewers Digital Badge

University College Cork

The Quality Enhancement Unit analysed the reports from reviews undertaken during 2017-18. An analytical report was generated which summarised the primary recommendations and provided an overview and analysis of the findings contained in panel reports at School/Department, College, and University level. In total, seven academic reviews were undertaken, generating 162 recommendations.

The training and selection of student reviewers takes place in collaboration with the Students’ Union. Training sessions are facilitated in a group setting and are followed by individual training in advance of the review. Peer-to-peer training has also been facilitated. The Quality Enhancement Unit collaboration with the Students’ Union has been enhanced and facilitates student engagement and participation in the review.

Digital Badge

UCC has developed a digital badge for its student reviewers. UCC’s Peer Review process seeks to align with UCC’s strategic commitment of delivering “an outstanding student-centred teaching and learning experience with a renewed, responsive and research-led curriculum at its core.” Having student representation on the Review Panel is critical to this mission and is in line with codes of good practice outlined in the ESGs. UCC was the first Irish University to incorporate student reviewers as full panel members of the review process, and the digital badge responds to UCC’s values of responsiveness, transparency, integrity, equality, diversity and respect by committing to student participation and providing a platform for the student voice at the highest levels of representation within the Institution. The digital badge is designed to enhance student citizenship and leadership in the University.

The ‘Quality Peer Reviewer’ digital badge is the University’s way of acknowledging the valuable contribution of individual students to quality enhancement at UCC. As full panel members, student reviewers are required to engage fully with the review process, in line with the professional standards expected of all panel members. The requirements for attaining the digital badge involve approximately 30 hours of student effort in five stages: training; critically appraising review documentation; participation as a full panel member; contributing to the panel report; and submission of an artefact/report in the form of a briefing/reflection on the process, which is assessed by QEU. All student reviewers who participated as panel members in 2017/18 applied for and were awarded a ‘Quality Peer Reviewer’ digital badge.
5. Quality Assurance Developments and Enhancements – Emerging Themes

Technology Enhancements and Digitalisation

The development of technology enhancements and digital innovations to support programmes, learners and learning activities was evident across the sector during the reporting period. QQI’s Topic-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes have been developed to provide guidance to providers on the QA and quality enhancement of blended learning, and some institutions reported developing/and or reviewing their procedures in line with these guidelines. Examples include:

- At ITC, a roadmap was developed for the implementation of pilot blended learning programmes in conjunction with these guidelines – furthermore, a new learning technologist will be appointed.
- At UCD, the new version of the UCD Mobile App was launched in August 2018 and is available to students and staff to download free. New features include student orientation information and schedules, registration information and video guides for all students.
- WIT Literacy Development Centre (LDC) launched a podcast series called ‘Conversations in Adult and Further Education’, which explores theory, practice and policy in an easily understood format, covering topics that are useful for tutors working in the Further Education and Training sector and who are enrolled on programmes in the LDC.
- At ITB, new tools have been developed to support learning, including:
  » ePortfolios using LiveBinders to provide employability-focused evidence of professional development.
  » Padlet – An online resource to allow students create a shared digital noticeboard to aid group work.
  » PVM (Photo-Voice Methodology) which allows assessments to be developed that are more participatory and reflective of the student’s experience.
- At IADT, Digitary Core was introduced on a pilot basis to enable students to go online to obtain their transcripts and grade mailers at the end of each exam session. Additional training and implementation are planned for the next academic year before the system is rolled out across the Institute.
Technological enhancement and impact on QA in practice is illustrated in the following case study:

**Case Study 14**

Technological Enhancements and Digitalisation

*Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology*

**Blended and Online Learning Policy**

An increase in programme proposals relating to online delivery triggered the development of GMIT’s Blended and Online Learning Policy, which was approved by Academic Council towards the end of last year and is aligned to the QQI *Topic-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes*. It outlines GMIT’s policy for the delivery of programmes leading to an award or to specified credits towards an award of the Institute delivered, supported or assessed through means which may not require the student to attend on campus. It is intended to support GMIT in developing flexible learning opportunities and providing greater access to higher education. It also guides GMIT in managing the potential risks posed by challenges and complexities in the arrangements for blended and online learning programmes and in safeguarding academic standards. It covers academic standards, programme design and delivery, student information and support, student assessment and staff professional development in online teaching and learning.

**GURU**

Following a review of examination processes, GURU, a system for the secure creation and transfer of examination material between lecturers, external examiners, school offices and the Examinations Office, was piloted last year. The pilot was reviewed and deemed a success and was rolled out to all schools during the reporting period, with relevant training resources supplied.

The annual QA dialogue with Heads of School and Department was wide-ranging and constructive; one of the themes to emerge was external examining. It was suggested that the role of external examiners should be reviewed to ensure that its effectiveness is optimised. Work is continuing on the development of online resources to train and support external examiners; however, issues raised in relation to 'closing the loop' and the timeliness of receipt of external examiner reports should be resolved with the adoption of the GURU system.

**Digital Innovations in Teaching & Learning**

Online courses/resource toolkits were developed for staff in online teaching development skills and programme design. The range of modules available to staff on the MA in Teaching and Learning was enhanced with the addition of a Certificate in Education for Sustainability.

The ‘Academic Success’ online course suite and ‘Get Ready Education’ were merged into one online course that is now integrated on GMIT Moodle and available to all Learning and Innovation Skills (LIS) lecturers to blend into the LIS module learning experience with first-year groups. A copy of the course is available to view on [www.cpdlearnonline.ie](http://www.cpdlearnonline.ie)
Recognition and Access
Commitment to and focus on ongoing enhancements to widen access were evident across all the institutions. Examples during the reporting period include:

- WIT introduced common entry programmes and now offers at least one common entry programme in each of the five academic schools, giving students an enhanced choice across their portfolios.
- A collaborative project, involving DCU, ITS, MU and DIT, the Student Success Toolbox, created a suite of digital tools to increase retention and completion rates, particularly for flexible learners (undergraduate adult, part-time and online/distance learners).
- CIT reported having further enhanced customised and flexible learning opportunities for a wide range of learners. CIT’s Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Service was featured in the Unlocking Talent: Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning video on the European Commission’s Audiovisual Services.
- At ITS, the RPL Assessment Portfolio helps students build an online portfolio to help learners gain access or advanced entry into higher education.
- During the reporting period, IADT became part of the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) and Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) schemes and new student entrants joined IADT through the programmes. AT IADT also, the Student Experience team offered ‘a College of Sanctuary’ place to a first-year student with refugee status. The Institute aims to widen this initiative and offer two sanctuary places per year to asylum seekers or refugees.
- To support and encourage applicants for RPL, the myexperience.ie online tool has been developed by the colleges in the Connacht Ulster Alliance. Version 3 of the My Experience RPL assessment tool was released in 2018; new features include enhanced administration features and a portfolio assessment report attachment add-on. Approximately 90 applications were made through myexperience.ie during the reporting period.
Recognition and access in practice, and learner impact, is illustrated in the following case study:

**Case Study 15**

**Widening Access**

*Institute of Technology Tralee*

**Access21@ IT Tralee** is a project that has been running since academic year 2016/17 between IT Tralee and three DEIS schools in Kerry. Achievements of the project to date are:

- the educational aspirations and attainment of Irish second-level students from geographical areas where attendance at third level is historically low, have been raised
- partner schools have been supported to develop and promote 21st century teaching & learning environments
- the STEM/CS capabilities of teachers across the Irish second-level education system have been increased.

Quality assurance improvements and impacts have been recorded in a number of areas including:

- strengthening the Access21@IT Tralee concept
- structuring the delivery of this programme
- efficiency in the delivery of this programme
- strengthening staff involvement
- quality of student involvement with key subjects
- the relationship between IT Tralee students and students from our partner schools.

Quality enhancement highlights during the year included:

- Planning sessions with participating schools
- Train the Trainer sessions with schools (Mentoring & Leadership)
- Access21@IT Tralee Mentor Workshops
- School visits (Consultation/Troubleshooting with Teachers)
- Implementation of IT Tralee Access 21 Mentors mentoring in partner schools
- Campus visits for participating schools
- First Access21@IT Tralee ‘Get Together’.

**Access21@ IT Tralee** rolled out five major initiatives:

- the setting up and implementation of the ITT ‘Getting College Ready’ calendar of events
- the setting up of an Access21@IT Tralee budget which has been instrumental in ensuring the smooth running of the project
Case Study 15 (continued)

- Access21@IT Tralee: The first Access 21 ‘Experience Day’, when 160 second-year students from IT Tralee partner schools experienced college life in IT Tralee and were treated to a showcase of the final projects of IT Tralee final year students
- IT Tralee Access 21 Mentors set up mentorship arrangements with mentees in our partner schools
- IT Tralee Access 21 Student Ambassadors visited partner schools and engaged with students by relating their own path to college and the obstacles they overcame, which struck a chord with DEIS students with notable engagement recorded.

Access21@ IT Tralee hosted the first research seminar where the Trinity Access 21 research team presented the findings of their work in 2017-2018 which reflected an improvement in Access 21 student confidence in the following key skills:
- A sense of purpose in education
- Aspirations and goals
- Active engagement with education
- Wellbeing, self-worth, student voice, the student-teacher relationship.

The Institute, together with its South Cluster partner HEIs (CIT, UCC, WIT, ITC), applied to the HEA for the PATH 2 1916 Bursaries and the PATH 3 Access Initiatives. This collaboration:
- presented an opportunity for the five HEIs in the South Cluster to share practices
- brought about the development of a regional Access Strategy
- was instrumental in synergising experience, expertise and resources towards shared goals and minimising duplication of effort across the region and ultimately nationally
- pools the respective experience and knowledge in each HEI in respect of the most under-represented groups and builds capacity across the region to identify and respond efficiently and effectively to the needs of these students.

The 1916 Bursary Fund provides financial support through bursaries to first-year undergraduate students. Seven bursaries were awarded to IT Tralee students in academic year 2017/18. These students will receive up to €20,000 over the course of their studies.

PATH 3 aims to fund objectives associated with Goal 5 in the National Access Plan, namely developing regional and community partnership strategies for increasing access to higher education by under-represented groups. The HEA hopes that the funding will help 2,000 new Access students from under-represented groups to get into third-level education and complete their courses.
Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning

Apprenticeship provision is a feature of provision in the IoT sector. The sector provides a number of phases of pre-2016 apprenticeships as a collaborative provider of SOLAS, and new apprenticeship programmes are an increasing feature of provision for some IoTs, with new collaborative provider partnerships impacting on QA governance processes.

Given the continued increase in apprenticeship numbers and the national priority and focus\textsuperscript{25} on the development and establishment of new apprenticeships, it is disappointing that QA developments and impacts for new apprenticeship programmes were not more widely reported on in AIQRs from the IoT sector.

It is difficult to ascertain from the reports the impact of QQI Topic-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Apprenticeships on the institution’s QA processes, or to report on specific QA enhancements in respect of new apprenticeships and work-based learning and assessment. Enhancements of approaches to apprenticeship programme design and development, and of approaches to learner supports for apprentices, were not widely reported on in the AIQRs.

Examples of reporting include:

- CIT reported on the development of a Bachelor of Arts in Culinary Arts, with an embedded Higher Certificate in Arts exit award / Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Culinary Arts [Apprenticeship Model]. This is a four-year programme apprenticeship programme, with a two-year add-on, validated by IT Tralee.
- GMIT reported a priority focus on developing and supporting a new apprenticeship in the area of manufacturing technology.
- LYIT reported that 50% of its CAO programmes included a structured work placement, allowing students to obtain real-life experience during their education.
- AIT reported on the development of a new BA (Hons) in Design Technology and Innovation (Level 8) programme, an interdisciplinary blended learning programme, which includes a one-year full-time industry placement in year three, and which follows an apprenticeship model.

Access to apprenticeships and an approach to new apprenticeship developments in practice is illustrated in the following short case study:

Case Study 16

Access to Apprenticeship

Dublin Institute of Technology

In 2017/18 the College of Engineering & Built Environment developed an Access to Apprenticeship pilot programme that focuses on the access and transition of young people (aged 16-24) from disadvantaged communities into apprenticeship schemes. The programme is a Level Six CPD and replicates a standard apprenticeship block, running over 12 weeks with 30 contact hours a week. The programme has four main strands: Skill Sampling (across the full range of craft apprenticeships offered by DIT), Personal and Professional Development, Transversal Skills, and Work Placement.

Industry employers were engaged throughout the planning and implementation of the Access to Apprenticeship programme and are key partners in the delivery of the programme. Employer engagement sessions and site visits (including the ESB, SISK, the aeronautical training facility in Dublin Airport) provide important preparation and readiness for students in advance of a two-week work placement.

The first block of 16 students commenced in September 2017, with a further two blocks completing the 12-week programme in semester 2. A total of 48 students enrolled on the programme and 30 students completed all modules successfully. 25 students have progressed to apprenticeship schemes or fulltime employment in an apprenticeship trade. A second pilot phase of the programme commenced in 2018/19.

Logistics Associate Apprenticeship

A Logistics Apprenticeship Consortium was formed in 2017 comprising key stakeholders including employers, occupational associations, relevant occupational regulators and DIT’s College of Business as coordinating provider.

The Consortium responded to the Apprenticeship Council’s call for proposals for new apprenticeships in May 2017 through the proposal of a programme leading to a Higher Certificate in Logistics. Richard Bruton TD, Minister for Education and Skills, announced the approval of 26 new apprenticeship programmes, including the proposed Logistics Associate Apprenticeship, to progress to the development stage. The programme, which was validated in 2018, aims to meet the growing demand for logistics personnel and is targeting two market segments: school leavers with a Leaving Certificate or Post-Leaving Certificate award and existing employees in the transport and logistics industry who may not have a formal qualification.

The programme commenced in 2018 and is offered on a day-release basis over two years whereby the apprentice will spend one day in DIT and four days in the workplace.
Research Provision

Research is a common thematic area and a strategic focus arising across all of the reports, with leadership and enhancement identified as a focus for the DABs; and expansion and enhancement of postgraduate taught and research degree programmes cited as a core objective by a number the of the IoTs.

The National Action Plan for Education 2019 identifies as a key strategic action the maintenance and improvement of standards of research and innovation in Irish HEIs. This national goal is reflected in the goals and ambitions of institutions and the QA activities and plans reported on in this reporting period. Examples include:

- ITB reported on the intensification of postgraduate/research student recruitment to meet TU designation criteria, leading to a doubling in the numbers on its postgraduate student register. One of the immediate impacts from a QA perspective was the intensification of staff development and mentoring to develop staff capacity for research supervision, and the formal agreement and implementation with TU Dublin Alliance (DIT, ITT) of co-supervision arrangements.

- MU focuses on four research institutes: ICT and Mathematics, Social Sciences, Human Health, and Arts and Humanities. The University launched the Arts and Humanities Research Institute in 2018. The University Master’s Taskforce conducted a review of existing taught master’s portfolio provision and examined international best practice; the developmental work will commence in the next reporting period.

- A research statement report prepared by the UCD Research Analytics and Impact Team provides heads of schools and their nominees with a report on activity at University, college, school and institute levels, showing information and metrics on research funding, staff and publications, using a combination of the university business systems and Bibliometrics data.

- TCD and RCSI reported on participation in the pilot ISSE Postgraduate Research survey. The results of the pilot survey align with the results from the TCD in-house postgraduate research surveys and a number of initiatives have been put in place in TCD to respond to these.

- The UL’s Research Impact programme has been singled out by the OECD as ‘an excellent example of emerging good practice which could be mainstreamed across the Irish higher education system and abroad’.

Research Policies and Procedures

Institutions also reported on the development of new institutional research strategies/frameworks and research degree policies and regulations, or updates/changes to same. This was in particular a feature of the IoT reports. It is not possible to ascertain the extent to which these developments and/or amendments during the reporting period were informed by national code of practice/guidelines, such as the National Framework for Doctoral Education. Specific references to the impact of national frameworks on institutional developments and/or enhancements were not made in the AIQRs.

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Examples of developments include:

- At DCU, the Academic Council approved revisions to the policy on Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis.
- CIT Academic Council approved the Researcher Career Framework, which makes provision for career advice, mentoring and pastoral support that is tailored to the needs of individuals.
- At ITC, the Policy and Procedures for Research at NFQ Levels 9 and 10 have been reviewed with regard to postgraduate teaching responsibilities.
- During the reporting period, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for a research partnership programme (EARP) was signed between AIT and Ericsson. The joint research programme commenced in September 2017.
- DkIT admitted 23 new research postgraduate students during 2017/18, the highest number for an academic year to date. 76 research supervisors have been formally trained through the Institute’s structured research supervisory training programme and 10 more are expected to complete training in 2018/19.

Third Mission – Societal Engagement

An emerging theme and an increasing focus for institutions is societal engagement and impact. Examples in this area include:

- At UL, a range of community research initiatives were undertaken in health, social sciences, education and natural sciences, design and engineering. UL reported being the first Irish university to develop impact case studies of some of its research projects.
- AIT was awarded a Certificate of Recognition for the work it carried out with the Carnegie Framework, a framework set up to develop community engagement initiatives and forge stronger links with community groups.
- At MU the Experiential Learning Office expanded and enhanced existing student learning offerings by introducing the Maynooth University Student Experience Awards (MUSE), which recognise and reward student contribution to non-credit bearing activities such as work experience, volunteering, club and society involvement, and student representation.
- At UCC, the ‘Learning Neighbourhoods’ programme, originally piloted by UCC, is working towards building a culture of lifelong learning across the city, and now involves collaboration between UCC, Cork City Council, and Cork Education and Training Board, and is working with organisations and residents in local areas.
- At CIT is involved in the Cork City of Sanctuary (COS) Group, working with other stakeholders to make the city a place of welcome for refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and persons of migrant origin.
- IADT & Marino Institute of Education are lead partners on the ‘Creating Dublin as a Learning City’ project. This HEI cluster also includes NCAD, TCD and UCD in collaboration with Dublin City Council – the project focus is on supporting the access of under-represented groups to higher education.

Embedding community engagement in practice is illustrated in the following case study:

**Case Study 17**

**Community Engagement**

*Institute of Technology Blanchardstown*

At ITB, community engagement activities are embedded in the School of Business programmes, enabling students and staff to support local community organisations, schools and sports organisations while also allowing students to develop key skills. Examples include:

- Coaching clinics and schemes in local schools
- Engagement with local and national sports organisations to link undergraduate research projects with community and industry needs
- Social media training for members of the Fingal Public Participation Network to help ensure communication with stakeholders is optimised through social media
- Fourth-year students in Sports Management & Coaching engaging with community through Bumbleance charity [www.bumbleance.com](http://www.bumbleance.com) includes piloting the ‘School of Excellence’ for primary schools
- Close alliances with the Football Association of Ireland to evaluate some of their key projects, including the ‘Late Night Leagues’, ‘Walking Football’, ‘Integration through Football’, and the ‘Football for All’ programme
6. Conclusions

The AIQRs act as a single transparent repository of contemporary QA in Irish HEIs, and the reports for this period capture QA activities in 22 institutions, encompassing DABs and IoTs. The reports confirm the sector-wide commitment to continuous development and enhancement of QA and demonstrate its positive impact on students, staff and other stakeholders.

The information, content and focus of AIQRs submitted to QQI varies in detail and comprehensiveness, reflecting the diversity in scale and complexity of HEIs. While it is difficult to draw scientific evidence-based conclusions from the data and metrics included in the AIQRs, the reports nonetheless reveal sufficient useful comparative analysis and findings and, most importantly, provide a valuable repository of information about QA in Irish public HEIs.

The reports provide an opportunity for QQI not only to ensure compliance with QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (Core) and ESG, but also to disseminate and share best practice, support the promotion of excellence, and provide a full picture of quality in contemporary Irish higher education.

Consideration and impact of QQI Statutory QA Guidelines (Core) is evident in the thematic areas reported, as well as in QA enhancements and developments. Although it is more difficult to ascertain consideration and impact of QQI Topic-specific QA Guidelines in areas such as Apprenticeship, Blended Learning, and Research, there have nonetheless been noteworthy enhancements and developments reported in relation to all of these areas. However, the impact of systematic QA at institutional level was not made explicit.

QQI will continue to work with the institutions on the enhancement of quality in Irish higher education, including the enhancement of reporting processes through the AIQR – and, in the interests of full transparency, QQI will continue to publish online the reports submitted to it.
## Glossary of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIQR</td>
<td>The Annual Institutional Quality Report is an annual report about internal QA that institutions submit to QQI.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Athena SWAN</td>
<td>A charter that recognises and celebrates good practice in higher education and research institutions towards the advancement of gender equality: representation, progression and success for all.</td>
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<td>CAO</td>
<td>The Central Applications Office, which processes applications for undergraduate courses in Irish HEIs.</td>
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<td>CINNTE</td>
<td>The name given to QQI’s external cyclical review process for evaluating the effectiveness of institution-wide QA policies and procedures.</td>
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<td>DAB</td>
<td>Designated Awarding Body – the term that describes the seven ‘previously established universities’ (PEUs) and RCSI.</td>
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<td>HEA</td>
<td>The Higher Education Authority</td>
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<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
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<td>IEM</td>
<td>International Education Mark. The IEM will be administered and authorised by QQI to foster and strengthen Ireland’s reputation for international education.</td>
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<td>IoT(s)</td>
<td>Institute(s) of Technology</td>
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<td>Internal Review</td>
<td>This is a quality review of a department, school, faculty, service area or theme, undertaken in HEIs on a routine, rolling or demand basis.</td>
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<td>ISER</td>
<td>Institutional Self-Evaluation Report. The ISER is a key component of the CINNTE review cycle and provides a critical reflection on the effectiveness of an institution’s QA processes and procedures.</td>
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<td>ISSE</td>
<td>The Irish Survey of Student Engagement, which is open to first-year and final-year undergraduate, and taught postgraduate students in participating HEIs each February to March.</td>
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<td>Linked Provider</td>
<td>A provider that has an arrangement with a DAB to offer a programme leading to a DAB award.</td>
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<td>Term</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mission-Based Performance Compacts</td>
<td>The 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.</td>
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<td>NStEP</td>
<td>National Student Engagement Programme – a programme that aims to enhance and embed student engagement in higher education</td>
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<td>Policy</td>
<td>A documented statement of a provider’s principles and approach to a particular activity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Programme</td>
<td>A process by which a learner acquires knowledge, skill or competence and includes a course of study, a course of instruction or an apprenticeship.</td>
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<td>Provider</td>
<td>A person or organisation that provides, organises or procures a programme of education and training.</td>
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<td>QA</td>
<td>Quality assurance 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.</td>
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<td>QA guidelines</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>QA procedures</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>QA framework or system</td>
<td>A provider’s quality (assurance) framework or system refers to all of the provider’s internal QA policies and procedures working in concert to form an integrated whole.</td>
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<td>QE</td>
<td>Quality enhancement, which refers to both the improvement and enhancement of the student experience through specific quality initiatives.</td>
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<td>QQI</td>
<td>Quality and Qualifications Ireland</td>
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<td>Reporting period</td>
<td>In this report, the reporting period represents the academic year from 1 September 2017 to 31 August 2018.</td>
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<td>TNE</td>
<td>Transnational Education Provision – higher education delivered overseas from where the awarding body is based.</td>
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30 Note the AIQR report submitted for the now dissolved Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) represents the period 1st September 2017-31 December 2018.