

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Review of Reviews

**Higher Education Themes
from Review Findings**

October 2014





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Acknowledgement

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) wishes to acknowledge the expert role of Mr. Leon Cremonini, Research Associate at the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies, University of Twente, The Netherlands, in conducting the analysis and drafting this report. Following the publication of the QQI Review of Reviews Report ¹, Leon was requested by QQI to carry out an analysis of key findings of the institutional review reports from 2008 to 2012 of the legacy agencies: the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQA). This comprised a comparative analysis of commonalities and differences of the legacy agencies' findings. Leon was asked to identify the key themes in the findings of legacy reviews incorporating key themes that were common across the different agency review findings and key themes that were unique to the review findings of particular agencies.

Foreword

The Review of Reviews Report recommended that QQI conduct a detailed analysis of the findings of reviews of the legacy agencies to identify key themes and examine system-level findings. While the Review of Reviews Report provided a brief overview of themes common to the reports of both main legacy systems (IUQB and HETAC), this report extends that work by going into greater detail to seek, extract and highlight common themes in the findings of legacy reviews of the IUQB, HETAC and the NQAI, and identify any themes unique to a particular review type. The legacy review findings comprise the commendations, recommendations and conditions contained in the reports of over 40 reviews which were conducted by panels of experts from over 20 countries, representing a wealth of experience in such fields as governance, quality efficiency and effective practice.

The primary objective of this analysis was to examine in detail the findings of legacy reviews and highlight, for higher education institutions and other stakeholders, the key themes that cross all reviews of higher education institutions. Many of these findings accord with the current system reform agenda, giving added significance and relevance. Additional objectives were to identify the more salient themes that are relevant to a number of institutions within particular sectors and to investigate patterns of findings over time. The key themes identified are:

- 1 Governance and management
- 2 Collaborations and multi-campus arrangements
- 3 Transnational collaborative provision
- 4 Communication towards the outside world
- 5 Benchmarking and the use of key performance indicators
- 6 Research
- 7 Quality of staff
- 8 Commitment to equitable access
- 9 Consistent assessment of students
- 10 Internal (intra-institutional) communications

This report emphasises the quality enhancement dimension of quality assurance in higher education. The intended audiences for this report are individual institutions, related stakeholders, national stakeholders and QQI itself in setting an agenda for the enhancement of quality assurance in higher education. These findings will be of interest as overarching system-level benchmarks for institutions and as a reminder for individual institutions of priority areas, of which they will already have been apprised through consideration of their own individual review findings. They will also be of interest to all stakeholders concerned with higher education and the regulatory framework within which it operates, in so far as they highlight good practice and areas requiring improvement across the higher education system as a whole.

Whilst the development of a common review policy and model remains an objective for QQI, the various legacy agency review models shared many common features and practices. Notwithstanding that the Review of Reviews Report emphasised key differences between the review approaches of the legacy agencies, all were united by common utilisation of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (commonly known as the 'ESG')² and broadly similar approaches to methodology and reporting.

The repeated occurrence of the same themes across various institutions and legacy review systems would seem to indicate that many of the challenges and strengths for institutions are not unique to any particular sector in higher education and that it should be possible for QQI to pursue a common enhancement agenda with all institutions. Some further work will be required with the institutions in determining the continuing relevance of some of these themes for higher education however the themes identified in this document make a good starting point. We will be consulting with institutions to prioritise approaches and themes for enhancement activities.

These findings will be used by QQI as we develop our Quality Assurance Guidelines for higher education providers and will help to identify areas where the institutions collectively were in need of improvement at the time of their reviews. Of course, institutions will have been taking remedial or enhancement actions following the finalisation of their own individual review findings. Nevertheless it is likely to be in these prevalent and priority areas, some of them difficult to manage, that the Guidelines will also help to shape and guide development. It is intended that this report will identify for institutions key themes for the improvement of their own quality assurance systems either individually or collaboratively. For QQI, these themes will provide a shared agenda for enhancement with institutions and a focus of purpose for the next cycle of reviews. Other key developments for QQI include the reconfigured higher education landscape and emerging new partners such as the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.

We look forward to working with our stakeholders to ensure that we continue to play our role in the quality assurance and quality enhancement of higher education in Ireland.

² See http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/ESG_3edition-2.pdf

Introduction

Higher education institutions are primarily responsible for their own quality assurance. They develop, implement, monitor and continuously improve their own systems for the quality assurance of provision. The objectives of the review of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures by external agencies are to ensure that higher education institutional quality assurance systems are accountable to stakeholders, that these continue to be compliant with national and European standards and guidelines and that there is independent external input to the review of these systems. This is a report of an analysis of the findings (commendations, recommendations, conditions) of the external institutional quality assurance reviews of the QQI legacy agencies.

Until late 2012, when the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 established QQI, responsibility for the external review of the quality and standards of Irish higher education institutions and awards rested with three agencies, set up as a result of various pieces of earlier legislation:

- The Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB)
- The Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC)
- The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI)

In 2013, QQI commissioned a team of independent experts to conduct a review to evaluate the effectiveness of the legacy quality and institutional review models that had transferred to QQI and to consider the findings resulting from the outcomes of those reviews. The Review of Reviews Report was published in May 2014.

It was anticipated that, amongst other objectives, the Review of Reviews would provide a higher education system-wide analysis of the outcomes and findings of the institutional/ quality assurance reviews, i.e. commendations, recommendations and conditions. This included consideration of trends and themes across higher education institutions. In the course of its examination, the Review of Reviews Team found itself with restricted time to undertake an in-depth analysis of the trends and themes. As a result the Team decided to provide a brief overview signalling the themes that were common to the reports of the legacy review systems, focusing on recommendations covering areas requiring improvement. Accordingly, the Team recommended in their report that QQI would be well-advised to undertake a detailed analysis of those review reports in order to ensure that its future developments could be fully informed by the findings contained in them, even though the relevance of some of them may have diminished with the passage of time.

On the basis of this recommendation, QQI commissioned Mr. Leon Cremonini to carry out a more detailed analysis of the findings of the legacy reviews. This report is the outcome of this analysis. This report should be read as a companion piece to the Review of Reviews Report.

Scope

This is a report about the findings (commendations, recommendations and conditions) of the institutional reviews carried out by the IUQB, HETAC and the NQAI, the legacy agencies previously responsible for the external review of the quality and standards of Irish higher education institutions and awards³. In the 2008-2012 period the legacy agencies reviewed a total of 41 providers; they produced over 1,350 findings⁴, most of which were recommendations or conditions.

This report also takes into consideration the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Also of relevance are the principles agreed upon by the Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN), to complement formal policies and procedures already in place in the legacy agencies and to follow-through on findings arising from quality reviews⁵.

Whilst common principles were adopted by the IHEQN, it would seem that each legacy agency took a unique approach to address them. HETAC, for example, took a very structured approach, explicitly aligning its reviews to the ESG Part 1. This was also HETAC's way to meet the statutory requirement for the review of quality assurance procedures within institutions. Whilst the approaches of the IUQB and the NQAI were not as explicit as HETAC's, they also reviewed institutions' quality assurance (QA) against the 'seven elements' of the ESG Part 1. Furthermore, a mid-cycle analysis of IUQB's commendations and recommendations elicited first findings on the consistency of the university institutional review findings with the 'seven elements'.

The 'seven elements' (ESG, pp. 16-19) are:

- 1) Policy and procedures for quality assurance
- 2) Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards
- 3) Assessment of students
- 4) Quality assurance of teaching staff
- 5) Learning resources and student support
- 6) Information systems
- 7) Public information

The list of institutions evaluated, the dates of review and the agency responsible are presented in Table 1.

3 Part 1 of the Review of Reviews (pp. 7-22), available on the QQI website, provides detailed descriptions of the legacy agencies' histories, processes and tasks.

4 The count of findings cannot be exact as different review teams presented their commendations and recommendations/ conditions in different ways. For example, at times a team opted for presenting an overarching recommendation followed by several sub-recommendations, whilst other teams counted each separately. In latter cases, each sub-finding was not counted separately. Therefore, the number of findings is, in fact, rounded down.

5 See: http://www.iheqn.ie/_fileupload/File/IHEQN_Common_Principles_for_follow_through_45831925.pdf

Table 1. Review Schedules of Irish Higher Education Providers (ordered by year)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Provider</i>	<i>Legacy Agency</i>
2008	Institute of Technology, Sligo	HETAC
2009	National University of Ireland, Maynooth	IUQB
	Letterkenny Institute of Technology	HETAC
	Institute of Technology Tallaght	HETAC
	Open Training College	HETAC
	Hibernia College	HETAC
	Dundalk Institute of Technology	HETAC
	St Patrick's College, Thurles	HETAC
	HSI Limerick Business School	HETAC
	Tipperary Institute	HETAC
	Griffith College Dublin	HETAC
	Institute of Technology Tralee	HETAC
	American College Dublin	HETAC
2010	Dublin City University	IUQB
	National University of Ireland, Galway	IUQB
	Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	NQAI
	Kimmage Development Studies Centre	HETAC
	National College of Ireland	HETAC
	Waterford Institute of Technology	HETAC
	Limerick Institute of Technology	HETAC
	Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology	HETAC
	Dublin Business School	HETAC
	Institute of Technology Carlow	HETAC
	Cork Institute of Technology	HETAC
	St Nicholas Montessori College	HETAC
2011	University College Dublin	IUQB
	University of Limerick	IUQB
	Dublin Institute of Technology	NQAI
	Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology	HETAC
	Institute of Technology Blanchardstown	HETAC
	Athlone Institute of Technology	HETAC
	The Institute of Physical Therapy and Applied Science (IPTAS)	HETAC
	Irish College of Humanities and Applied Sciences (ICHAS)	HETAC
	Newpark Music Centre	HETAC
2012	Trinity College Dublin	IUQB
	University College Cork	IUQB (completed by QQI)
	Carlow College	HETAC
	IBAT College Dublin	HETAC
	SQT Training Ltd.	HETAC (completed by QQI)
	Setanta College	HETAC (completed by QQI)
	Clanwilliam Institute	HETAC (completed by QQI)

Approach to Analysis

Commendations, recommendations and conditions set out by the three legacy agencies in their reports on reviews of higher education institutions during the period 2008-2012 were examined in this analysis. The list was analysed using the content analysis software MaxQDA and coded against the four questions that form the backbone of institutional evaluations⁶, which are:

1. What is the institution trying to do?
2. How is the institution trying to do it?
3. How does the institution know it works?
4. How does the institution change in order to improve?

This report used the ESG as the common basis for analysis as the ESG had been embedded as a common element in all legacy reviews. The analysis coded the findings of reviews against the seven elements of the ESG to seek commonalities and differences across the legacy reviews. For the most part, the seven elements fell under the core question 3 ('How does the institution know it works?'). Therefore, ESG-related commendations, recommendations and conditions were, in general, coded at this level. However, as external peer review findings are not an exact science but relate to individual institutions and their needs, there were instances of 'spill-overs' of an ESG standard to one of the other key questions.

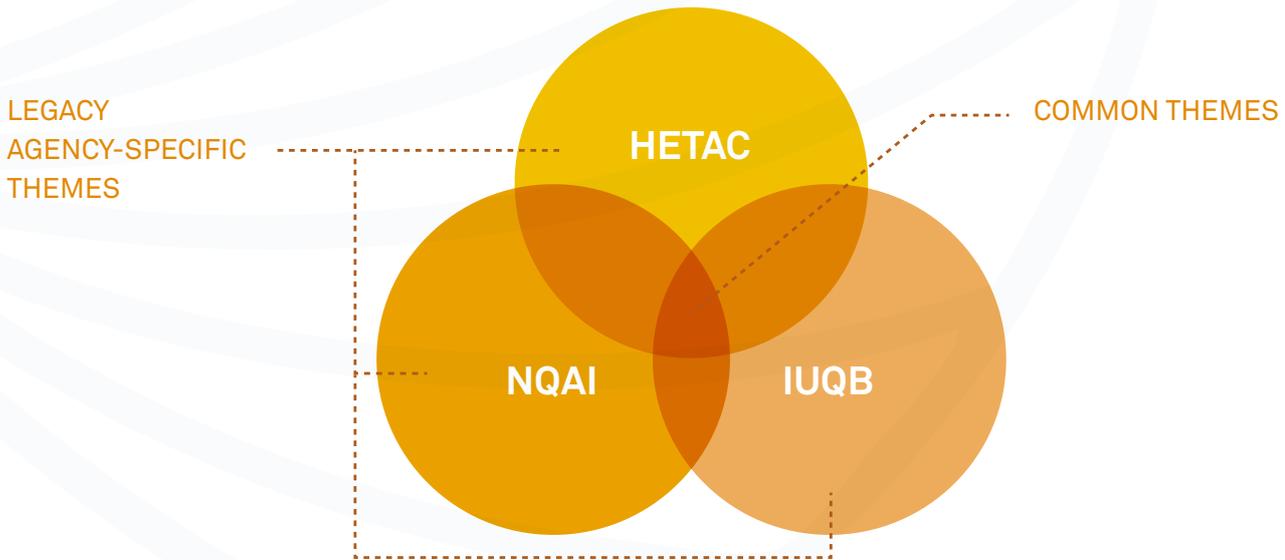
The purpose of this analysis was not only to highlight common findings amongst the different legacy agencies, but also to pinpoint common findings across institutions within the remit of one or other agency only. This will support QQI's endeavours in formulating policies and guidelines which, to be effective and consistent, should keep in mind the rationale, traditions and approaches of the legacy agencies. Hence, the content analysis indicates recurring themes as mapped (i) across legacy reviews, and (ii) within specific legacy reviews.

The framework presented in Chart 1 is a schematic representation of the approach taken to categorise and analyse the findings of legacy reviews.

6 This part of the analysis approach was inspired by the 2005 study of the Institutional Evaluation Programme's findings by Dr. Stefanie Hofmann '10 Years On: Lessons Learned from the Institutional Evaluation Programme', available at http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/Stefanie_Hofmann_final_EN.1129216136676.pdf

Chart 1. Framework for the Analysis of the IUQB, HETAC and NQAI Institutional Review Findings

FINDINGS	CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS									
	What is HEI trying to do?	How is the HEI trying to do it?	How does the institution know it works?							How does HEI change to improve?
			QA policy and procedures	Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards	Student assessment	QA of teaching staff	Learning resources and student support	Info systems	Public info	
Commendations										
Recommendations										
Conditions										



Analysis

This section is divided into three parts. Firstly, it identifies clusters of key themes which appear across the reviews and across agencies. Some of these themes were more prevalent in the findings of one or other legacy agency but, fundamentally, they were present to some significant extent in all legacy agency review findings. Secondly, certain areas that seem particularly prevalent in the findings of only one agency are highlighted. Finally, some quantitative information is provided to give the reader a sense of the extent to which different agencies covered specific ESG Part 1 elements. This section also plots the changing pattern in findings on research over the period of the review cycle.

Key themes that cross all legacy agencies

This analysis was based on findings of the IUQB, HETAC and NQAI reviews. Annex 1 synthesises the main common themes across all three and specifies whether they are commendations or recommendations/conditions. These predominant themes are mapped by legacy agency, and specific examples are cited from the review reports⁷. Given the overall number of findings, this is not a comprehensive list of all recommendations/conditions or commendations relating to a particular theme, but a selection of typical citations⁸.

In general, some overarching themes were discerned. There was a general trend towards a greater number of recommendations than commendations for all themes. Several themes occurred as both recommendations and commendations and this pattern crossed all institutions (i.e. institutes of technology, independent providers and universities). In other words, the key themes were not specific to a particular type of institution and there appear to be examples of both good practices and challenges for most themes. This is a strong argument for promoting peer learning and information sharing among different institutions.

Common themes were clustered into ten groups. Some apply more strongly to the findings in the reports of a particular agency, but all of these themes appear across the findings of all agencies⁹.

1. Governance and management: particularly issues such as (a) the integration of strategic planning and QA, (b) effectiveness of leadership, (c) student representation in decision-making functions, (d) the complexity/size of governance structures and committees, and (e) the involvement of stakeholders (e.g. learners and external stakeholders) in decision making and QA processes generally¹⁰.
2. Collaborations and multi-campus arrangements (both national and international): particularly with regards to consistency in the quality of student services, communication, and public information. The most common issue emerging is the need to ensure comparable support for learners across different campuses.
3. Collaborative provision between Irish providers and providers abroad: QA, management and compliance with statutory requirements.

⁷ All citations are anonymised to ensure no association can be made between any finding and individual institutions.

⁸ All coded commendations, recommendations and conditions are contained in an excel file, available from QQI.

⁹ See table in Annex 1 showing Key Themes Mapped Against Findings of the Legacy Agencies, with example citations (anonymised) from the reviews.

¹⁰ What is of interest is that not only are there a number of recommendations on these matters, but governance (and particularly the issue of leadership) also features conspicuously in commendations and (less frequently) in conditions (HETAC reviews only). This suggests that, while institutions should strengthen their expertise in this area, there is scope for mutually advantageous knowledge/practice sharing among different institutions.

4. Communication towards the outside world (including, inter alia, institutional branding and marketing, and the difference between 'validation' and professional certification/ licence to practice, if applicable).
5. Benchmarking against similar providers, nationally and internationally, and the production and use of key performance indicators (KPIs) for internal improvement.
6. Research strategy and research-informed teaching.
7. Quality of staff and staff development and appraisal.
8. Commitment to equitable access and opportunities for transfer and progression.
9. Consistent assessment of students based on learning outcomes and alignment between institutional assessment policies and requirements set by the accrediting agencies.
10. Internal (intra-institutional) communications.

Legacy agency-specific themes

The analysis also demonstrates that some specific findings were prevalent in particular legacy review processes (i.e. IUQB, HETAC or NQAI) but not across all legacy review processes. Examples of such themes include, inter alia:

- Commendations (mostly) on the relationship with regional stakeholders (HETAC),
- Commendations and recommendations with regards to access for non-traditional learners, including the practice of Recognition of Prior Learning (HETAC),
- The recommendation to issue the Diploma Supplement (HETAC),
- Recommendations for a more formalised staff appraisal system (IUQB).

Table 2 provides a summary of the agency-specific themes and classifies them by their nature (commendations and recommendations/conditions) and by legacy agency. Two notes of caution are necessary when interpreting this table:

1. The intention is to give an overview of where the main emphases lie but this remains a simplification of a very complex and numerous set of findings. Hence, it provides a cursory mapping of some of the specific areas of particular interest per agency. Annex 1, which focuses on the more general ten common themes listed above, is a more thorough overview.
2. The 'main nature' of a finding does not necessarily imply the 'only nature'. For example, where a theme is classified in Table 2 as a 'recommendation', this means that it was primarily found to have this nature (either in quantity or strength of the finding). It does not mean that there are no commendations of any kind under the same theme.

Table 2. Key Themes, Classified by Legacy Agency and Key Institutional Evaluations Questions

THEME	HETAC	IUQB	NQAI	What is the institution trying to do?	How is the institution trying to do it?	ESG							
						1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Adherence to processes and institutional culture	C	C	C			√							
Assessment (particularly external examiners)	R							√					
Brand/reputation	C		C										√
Consistency of QA arrangements across campuses/ internationally	R	R				√							
Executive leadership in fostering QA process	C	C				√							
Feedback from learners and stakeholders	R			√			√						
Information collection system (adequacy and its support for QA)		C	C/R										√
Institutional policies /decisions based on a good Management Information System	R												√
Involvement of learners in QA process	C	R	C			√							
Involvement of other stakeholders in QA process	C	R	C/R		√	√							
Learning model (e.g. learning outcomes, blended learning, RPL)	R	C	C					√					
Provision of accurate information	R	R	C		√								√
Relationship with region	C					√							
Research policy/research focus	R	C	R	√	√	√			√	√			
Resource allocation for QA		R				√							
Simplification in internal governance	R					√							
Strategic planning/ enhancement/policies for effective QA	R					√							

Notes:

- C: commendations (includes special commendations)
- R: recommendations and conditions
- C/R: the theme appears with approximately equal emphasis as a commendation and recommendation
- The 'How is the institution trying to change?' category has not been included in the table as many of the recommendations/commendations would also fall under that, and were not separately coded for this purpose.
- Blank cells mean that the theme does not appear particularly strong in any capacity.

Two of the themes presented above¹¹ were particularly 'agency-specific', namely:

1. The findings of the IUQB reviews focused significantly on research. This is perhaps not surprising given universities' generally stronger research focus.
2. The findings of HETAC reviews recurrently included recommendations about the role of external examiners in student assessment. The fundamental issues reported relate to (inter alia):
 - the appointment and induction of external examiners,
 - the formality of reporting processes,
 - the integration of external examiners in the QA procedures and their presence on examination boards,
 - the integrity and reliability of the external examiners, for example in relation to their period in office, their institutional affiliations and the consistency of their approaches across different campuses or schools,
 - the use the institution makes of the information provided by external examiners reports.

ESG coverage by legacy agency and trends over time

Earlier sub-sections describe key common themes across agencies and highlight some of the more prevalent 'agency-specific' themes across the entire duration of the legacy review cycles. This covers a period of some five years. As quality assurance systems are continuously evolving, it is reasonable to expect that there may have been changes over this five-year period. This section provides (a) brief quantitative information on the legacy agencies' coverage of the 'seven elements' of ESG Part 1, and (b) a snapshot of changes over time (during the period 2008-2012) across two of the agencies (HETAC and IUQB), focussing on a specific theme, namely research. The research theme was chosen for two reasons¹²:

1. It is of particular interest with regards not only to research productivity, but also to research-led teaching, which is relevant for most providers.
2. It highlights the different approaches and findings in reviews across legacy agencies, with a greater focus on research in IUQB reviews compared to HETAC reviews.

Chart 2 shows HETAC's, IUQB's and NQAI's commendations, recommendations and conditions mapped against the 'seven elements'¹³. This chart shows the findings as a proportion of the total number of findings produced by each agency to enable a more meaningful comparison of which elements were particularly salient in the 2008-2012 reviews across the three agencies, as well as for each agency individually. As can be seen, all reviews appear broadly consistent in the issues addressed, especially in their focus on institutional QA policies and institutional management (ESG 1). Some points of departure are also notable.

ESG- Element 1- Policy and procedures for quality assurance

The IUQB reviews addressed ESG-1 issues relatively more often than the other legacy agencies and the proportion of IUQB commendations and recommendations for this element was roughly the same. Moreover, the ESG-1 element was also the most commended across all agencies. This information suggests that all legacy reviews (and institutions reviewed) took QA policies and procedures, including their alignment with governance and committee structures, very seriously.

¹¹ Without the pretence of exhaustiveness.

¹² In addition to the impracticality of attempting to cover all themes.

¹³ The Chart is based on all commendations, recommendations and conditions. Those that do not fit neatly within one of the 'seven elements' have been put under category 'other'. See Annex 2, in possession of QQI.

ESG- Element 3 - Assessment of students

The assessment of students (ESG-3) was more prevalent in the HETAC reviews (in the form of recommendations/conditions) than those of the other agencies, though it was commended in the NQAI reviews.

ESG- Element 4- Quality assurance of teaching staff

IUQB reviews appeared to make relatively more recommendations than HETAC and NQAI on the ESG-4 (quality of teaching staff). While it is not possible to determine a cause-effect relationship, it may be reasonable to speculate that this may have been due to the more teaching-intensive missions of the HETAC providers and the more research-oriented missions of the universities.

ESG- Element 5 - Learning resources and student support

All agencies provided more commendations than recommendations on learning resources and student support (ESG-5). All also provided, in proportion, fewer commendations for this element than for policies and procedures for quality assurance (ESG-1).

ESG- Element 6 - Information systems

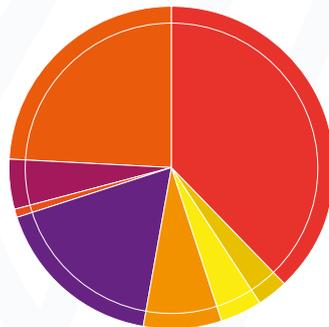
An element that was particularly prevalent in HETAC and NQAI findings was the collection of information and institutional self-knowledge (ESG-6).

Chart 2. Relative importance given to different elements in the legacy reviews*

HETAC

Commendations (%)

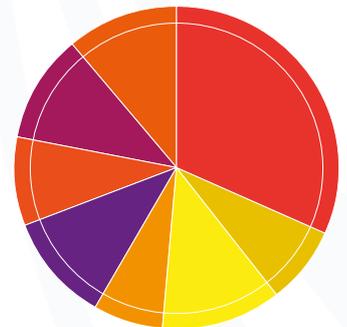
OTHER	24%
ESG 7	5%
ESG 6	1%
ESG 5	17%
ESG 4	8%
ESG 3	4%
ESG 2	3%
ESG 1	38%



HETAC

Rec/Conditions (%)

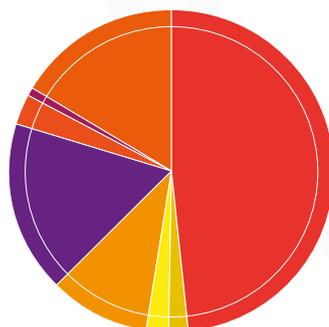
OTHER	11%
ESG 7	10%
ESG 6	9%
ESG 5	11%
ESG 4	7%
ESG 3	12%
ESG 2	8%
ESG 1	32%



IUQB

Commendations (%)

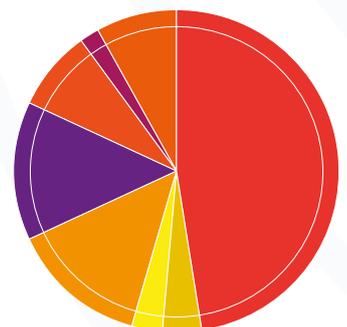
OTHER	17%
ESG 7	1%
ESG 6	3%
ESG 5	17%
ESG 4	10%
ESG 3	2%
ESG 2	2%
ESG 1	48%



IUQB

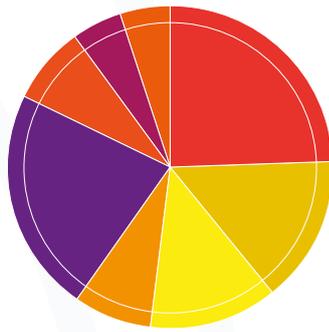
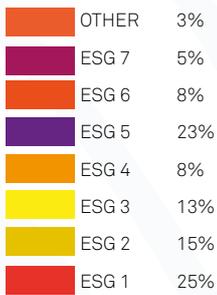
Rec/Conditions (%)

OTHER	8%
ESG 7	2%
ESG 6	8%
ESG 5	14%
ESG 4	14%
ESG 3	2%
ESG 2	4%
ESG 1	48%



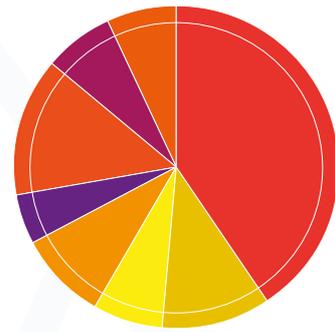
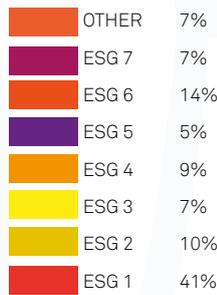
NQAI

Commendations (%)



NQAI

Rec/Conditions (%)



* The category 'other' includes commendations and recommendations/conditions that could not be classified specifically under one of the ESG categories.

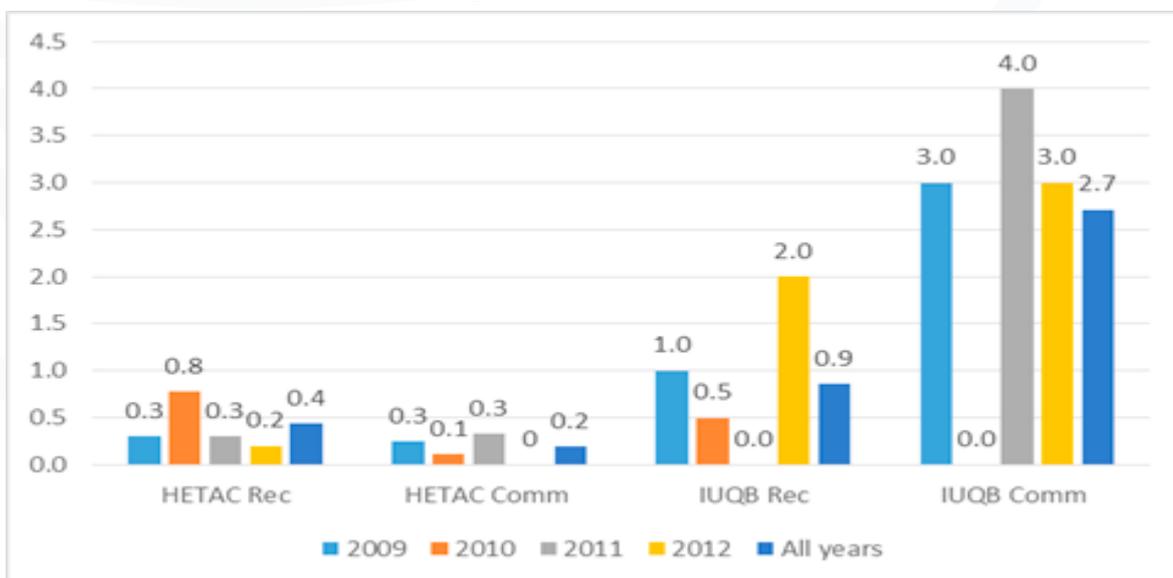
The *Review of Reviews* Team speculated that the relevance of some review findings may have altered with the passage of time. In order to test this, the theme of research was chosen and a snapshot of changes over time (during the period 2008-2012) across two agencies (HETAC and IUQB) focussing on research was produced. Table 3 and Chart 3 below focus on the question of research, and how recommendations/conditions and commendations evolved over time across IUQB and HETAC reviews. The numbers are small and should not be taken as statistically significant. However, they are revealing in that they confirm the following:

- That research was particularly salient for the IUQB process, as suggested by the relatively greater proportion of findings compared to HETAC reviews.
- That the IUQB process produced more commendations than recommendations about research whilst HETAC reviews appear to have been more balanced, providing similar numbers of recommendations and commendations (with the exception of year 2010). In 2011, IUQB produced no recommendations (but eight commendations) on research.

Table 3. Research Theme: Changes in Findings over Time – HETAC and IUQB

Year	HETAC							IUQB						
	Research Theme				All themes		Reviews conducted	Research Theme				All Themes		Reviews conducted
	Rec	%	Com	%	Rec	Com		Rec	%	Com	%	Rec	Com	
2008/09	4	2	3	2	236	133	12	1	6	3	27	16	11	1
2010	7	3	1	1	267	110	9	1	6	2	11	17	18	2
2011	2	1	2	4	165	53	6	0	0	8	24	34	34	2
2012	1	1	0	0	87	41	5	4	9	6	35	45	17	2
Totals	14	2	6	2	755	337	32	6	5	19	24	112	80	7

Chart 3. Proportion of Research Findings over time- HETAC and IUQB



Concluding Remarks

This report was commissioned to analyse key findings of the institutional review reports of the legacy agencies (the IUQB, HETAC and the NQAI) from 2008 to 2012. It is a sibling document to the recently released *Review of Reviews* Report and should, ideally, be read in conjunction with it. The preceding sections have highlighted the common themes (commendations, recommendations and conditions) across the three legacy agencies and have provided a very cursory look into the agencies' specificities and the developments over time in relation to the research theme.

The purpose of this report was to provide QQI with an analysis of the relationships between the findings of different legacy agencies. It is important to consider that this document is the outcome of a limited appraisal of the findings. In future analyses of this nature a broader examination will be necessary. A broader study should go beyond comparing the findings (i.e. the main objective of this report), to framing them within a set of contextual variables that could not be covered here. For example, the nature of the Irish higher education system, changes and impacts on the system over time and the effects of QQI's own developing institutional culture could be examined.

Moreover, this report is based on the outcomes of reviews only. There has been no consideration of the prevailing review models and forms adopted by the legacy agencies. In other words, each legacy agency had its own inherent institutional approach which inevitably influenced important aspects of the process such as panel composition, expectations by all parties involved (institutions, reviewers, the agency, etc.) and the way the process was conducted. Though there is evidence of much commonality across agencies, the findings suggest that each legacy agency had its own focus, which influenced the way it worked, the types of commendations and recommendations that were produced, and the way it was perceived and approached by the institutions under review. This is further explored in the *Review of Reviews* Report.

QQI, through its inheritance of legacy agencies and procedures, has acquired a range of review models and forms. This is both a risk and an opportunity. It is beyond the scope of this report to explore this, but it is a key consideration as we move forward in developing our policies, forming panels, and maintaining relationships with people and organisations that, until recently, interacted with other agencies. In keeping with the *Review of Reviews*, this report suggests that current developments provide momentum to develop a degree of 'cultural embeddedness' in the reviews. However, as the *Review of Reviews* also rightly concludes (p. 37), QQI will have to carefully consider '[...] *the political imperatives of Government policy, the need to respect institutions' autonomy (and a clear understanding of what that autonomy comprises), and the relationships among different parts of the higher education sector*'.

Annexes

Annex 1: Table: Key Themes Mapped against Findings of the Legacy Agencies

Available upon request from QQI:

Annex 2: Coded Segments (Excel file)

Annex 3: Charts (Excel file)

Annex 1 Key Themes Mapped against Findings of the Legacy Agencies

* Recommendation

** Commendation

Theme	Examples from the Legacy Reviews		
	HETAC	IUQB	NQAI
Governance and management / committees	<p><i>[...] should review its governance and management structure with a view to simplifying its committee system*</i></p> <p><i>[...] evidence of the good relationships that exist between staff and students and the involvement of students in a representative capacity on various bodies at Institute, School and Department levels. The panel recommends that the Institute should build on its strengths in this area and that its processes and procedures ensure that good practice is applied universally throughout the Institute*</i></p> <p><i>[...] should proceed with its decision to appoint a Vice President for Academic Affairs*</i></p> <p><i>[...] carry out a review of the working of the Academic Council to ensure it becomes the forum for leadership, academic debate and robust discussion as envisaged in the Strategic Plan 2006-2011*</i></p> <p><i>[...] review its decision making structures and processes to ensure there is a separation of governance, operational management and academic decision-making*</i></p>	<p><i>[ensure] that the governance structures of the decision-making and deliberative bodies promote a more strategic focus and include a wider spectrum of external stakeholders*</i></p> <p><i>Review the effectiveness and membership of the Governing Authority with a view to a possible size reduction of the Governing Authority and of its sub-committees*</i></p> <p><i>[recommendation for] introduction of a programme of leadership, management and governance training for academic leaders*</i></p> <p><i>[...] sharpen the University's top-level governance processes: the Governing Authority should be a smaller body with an appropriate mix of internal and external members*</i></p> <p><i>[...] ensures a link between QA/QI and the strategic process by improving the quality governance structure*</i></p>	<p><i>[...] should engage in public consultation as part of the process of amending its governance structures*</i></p> <p><i>[...]requires a governance model that, in structure and process, encourages and facilitates positive and proactive institutional development, along with relationship-building strategies focused on stakeholders (including staff and students)*</i></p>

Theme	Examples from the Legacy Reviews		
	HETAC	IUQB	NQAI
	<p><i>[...] a more clearly defined Academic Council [should] be constituted, with clearly articulated Terms of Reference. The Council should have a constitution which includes a clear demarcation of its role and functions*</i></p> <p><i>[...] should put structures in place to ensure that there is clarity between the governance, management and academic management and that all associated roles are clearly defined*</i></p> <p><i>[...] separation between the governance and management of the Institute should be re-established as soon as possible*</i></p> <p><i>[...] a clear separation of functions between the legal and fiduciary role of the Board of Directors, and a clear academic governance/ advisory role for the Board of Overseers, would expedite strategic planning and decision-making[...]*</i></p> <p><i>Take specific measures to help learners to become full and active partners in governance*</i></p> <p><i>Involve external stakeholders formally in developing the College's future strategic direction and in its governance arrangements*</i></p> <p><i>[...] strong adherence to processes such as those for strategic planning and governance**</i></p> <p><i>Strong executive leadership team**</i></p> <p><i>[...] plan for the long-term by broadening the non-executive membership of the Board of Management to persons with expertise that may be able to assist with strategic planning**</i></p> <p><i>Attention which has been given to governance issues at Governing Body level and the higher priority that has been given in recent years to academic affairs in the deliberations of the Governing Body**</i></p> <p><i>Contribution to the governance and insight into the development of the College demonstrated by the Chair and members of the Governing Authority**</i></p>	<p><i>[...] more fully engaging external stakeholders in the governance and management*</i></p> <p><i>Ensures that students are systematically and uniformly involved in all aspects of the governance and operation of Faculties and Departments*</i></p> <p><i>Ensure that students are equipped and expected to be systematically and uniformly involved in all aspects of the governance of the University at all levels; guarantee that student issues are continuously present in the Executive Committee [...]*</i></p> <p><i>[...] clearly organised management structure with a good separation of responsibilities**</i></p>	

Theme	Examples from the Legacy Reviews		
	HETAC	IUQB	NQAI
Collaborations and multi-campus arrangements (both national and international): particularly with regards to consistency in the quality of student services, communication, and public information	<p><i>Ensures that its support services are accessible for learners on all its campuses*</i></p> <p><i>The panel considers that the student experience at the [...] should not be substantially different from that of students on the parent campus and recommends that the Institute look at other appropriate and successful models of out-campuses at home and abroad*</i></p> <p><i>Review the provision of learner support services in the light of the planned increase in learner numbers*</i></p> <p><i>[...] a deficit in the resourcing of out-centres. The panel recommends that a ring-fenced budget be put in place to ensure that at least the minimum level of learning resources is maintained at each out-centre where the College offers its programmes*</i></p> <p><i>Resources should be reviewed as a matter of some urgency. The library support should be strengthened to ensure that students have access to books and journals that are considered to be key requirements of their programme, notably in off-campus centres*</i></p> <p><i>There is a need to ensure that the Centre has more input into, and oversight and monitoring of, any public information disseminated by any partner organisation on its programmes*</i></p> <p><i>[...] research the challenges of operating multi-campus sites with other Institutes that have successfully overcome these challenges*</i></p> <p><i>Ensure that staff members away from the main campus are accorded the facilities and expertise available to staff members on the main campus*</i></p> <p><i>[...] reflect on the consistency of approach taken by different schools towards external examiner processes in place*</i></p>	<p><i>Addresses the discrepancies in student support across the colleges and the study cycles*</i></p> <p><i>Integration of the various student services*</i></p> <p><i>Improve support for international students*</i></p> <p><i>Perspectives and needs of international students to be made more prominent in University discussions*</i></p>	<p><i>Harnessed information technology very effectively and uses it to keep in ongoing communication with learners across schools and sites**</i></p>

Theme	Examples from the Legacy Reviews		
	HETAC	IUQB	NQAI
Collaborative provisions between Irish providers and providers abroad: QA, management and compliance with statutory requirement	<p><i>The Governing Body should play a more prominent role in providing strategic oversight of all collaborative provision*</i></p> <p><i>[...] should rapidly and rigorously implement the requirements for collaborative provision set out in the HETAC Policy for collaborative programmes, transnational programmes and joint awards, 2008*</i></p> <p><i>[The Institute] must agree its quality assurance procedures for collaborative provision with HETAC*</i></p> <p><i>The Governing Body should play a more prominent role in providing strategic oversight of all collaborative provision*</i></p> <p><i>The QA Policy and Procedures should be revised to reflect the additional challenges for collaborative provision and consistency of the award standards*</i></p>	<p><i>Quality of the collaboration with the linked colleges**</i></p> <p><i>[...] ensure that all development and operational aspects of its collaborations outside [...], including those overseas, are subject to formal quality assurance procedures and governance*</i></p> <p><i>[...] ensure greater efficiency and transparency and take further steps to enable the Academic Council to give more focused attention to priority areas such as quality assurance (including the quality assurance of international collaborations) *</i></p> <p><i>Ensure that the Quality Promotion Unit is kept informed of new collaborations and especially new overseas collaborations*</i></p>	<p><i>The extent of collaboration in which the College has engaged to date is noteworthy**</i></p> <p><i>[...] the College should seek to broaden its activity in international collaboration*</i></p>

Theme	Examples from the Legacy Reviews		
	HETAC	IUQB	NQAI
<p>Communication towards the outside world (including, inter alia, institutional branding and marketing, the difference between 'validation' and professional certification/licence to practice, if applicable)</p>	<p><i>The panel recommends that [the Institute] reviews the comprehensiveness, impartiality and objectivity of its public information*</i></p> <p><i>In its publicity information, makes clear the distinction between receiving a HETAC certificate and being professionally certified and point out to potential learners how they can gain both academic credentials and professional certification*</i></p> <p><i>Communicate more effectively, to key external policy makers and the academic community more widely, the distinctive nature of the Institute and its work*</i></p> <p><i>The panel is of the view that there is an over-reliance on having a HETAC accredited Degree to provide public confidence in the profession of [...]</i></p> <p><i>publicity material and information to stakeholders, the Institute must make explicit the Named Award, its Title and its Level in accordance with the requirements of the NFQ*</i></p> <p><i>Undertakes, as a matter of urgency, a comprehensive forensic analysis of its catalogue, prospectus and website*</i></p> <p><i>Marketing information and the accessibility of Institute staff to external stakeholders**</i></p> <p><i>Availability and accuracy of information on the Institute for external stakeholders**</i></p> <p><i>More formal method of communication with external stakeholders*</i></p>	<p><i>Ensure the accuracy of the information that it publishes about its programmes and modules*</i></p> <p><i>Reports are more visible on the Quality Office web pages*</i></p>	<p><i>Information on programme learning outcomes is not regularly included as part of programme information. Summaries of external programme accreditations would also be a useful addition*</i></p> <p><i>Should ensure that it regularly publishes up-to-date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about all the programmes and awards offered by the College*</i></p>

Theme	Examples from the Legacy Reviews		
	HETAC	IUQB	NQAI
Benchmarking against similar providers, nationally and internationally, and the production and use of key performance indicators (KPIs) for internal improvement	<p><i>Benchmarking exercise with comparable higher education institutions internationally*</i></p> <p><i>Institute should place an increased emphasis on benchmarking against national and international standards and practices*</i></p> <p><i>The forthcoming review of the Strategic Plan of the College should address [...] the need to establish arrangements for benchmarking the College against other higher education institutions*</i></p> <p><i>Attempt at benchmarking the College's activities with comparable Institutions*</i></p> <p><i>Benchmark itself and its programmes against providers of high quality transnational online higher education and training programmes*</i></p> <p><i>Informally benchmark its activities against other similar organisations*</i></p> <p><i>Programmatic review has been of considerable value to the Institute with strong external panels allowing well-considered benchmarking**</i></p> <p><i>Benchmarking its activities against best practice national and international standards*</i></p> <p><i>Benchmark its existing and any new programme against analogues*</i></p> <p><i>Develop systems for evaluating the impact of provision and initiatives across the College, benchmarking them against relevant external reference points*</i></p>	<p><i>Draw on the experiences of other higher education institutions in Ireland, and further afield in Australia and the UK, to improve response rates to its own institution-wide student surveys*</i></p> <p><i>Should consider exploring benchmarking at the levels of disciplines, which in many cases may even be more fruitful and result in more concrete benefits*</i></p> <p><i>Enhancing the professionalisation of executive management in the light of international best practice*</i></p>	<p><i>[...] to put in place additional metrics and benchmarks against which to assess the research capabilities and outputs of [...] against best practice nationally and internationally*</i></p>
Research strategy and research-informed teaching	<p><i>The forthcoming review of the management structures should take into account: [...] implementing a research strategy appropriate to the College*</i></p>	<p><i>forward-looking approach to education and research**</i></p>	<p><i>puts in place a comprehensive research strategy across all campuses and faculties*</i></p>

Theme	Examples from the Legacy Reviews		
	HETAC	IUQB	NQAI
	<p><i>The review of the Research Strategy of the College should seek to build on its existing research strengths and take account of the limited availability of resources for research, particularly staff capacity to carry out and supervise research*</i></p> <p><i>Specify [the Institute's] strategies on internationalisation and research*</i></p> <p><i>Interdisciplinary approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and research**</i></p> <p><i>The research initiatives of the Institute which are imaginative, well founded in the strengths of the staff and well supported. They are significant in motivating, attracting and retaining staff**</i></p> <p><i>The college encourages staff to develop their teaching, assessment, programme development and research skills through the college's INSET (In-Service Education and Training) programme**</i></p> <p><i>The panel noted [the institution's] intention that 50% of its staff would be research active by 2012. This is an ambitious aspiration. The panel recommends that [the institution], given the constraints imposed by the part-time contracts available to most of the faculty, devises a clear and pragmatic strategy to achieve this aim*</i></p> <p><i>Role of and capacity for institutional research (the systematic and reflective self-study by an institution) within the College should be strengthened so as to support the College's pedagogy, quality assurance and public presence*</i></p> <p><i>Commitment to motivate and engage staff and students in research activity**</i></p> <p><i>The panel commends the Institute on its various initiatives in research**</i></p> <p><i>The panel recommends that the College develops and promotes a research strategy. This is a characteristic of higher education institutions, where the link between research and teaching is vital*</i></p>	<p><i>The strategic approach in prioritising five themes and associated research programmes**</i></p> <p><i>Quality assurance processes employed for managing research**</i></p> <p><i>Vision for the quality enhancement of research**</i></p> <p><i>Research activity which permeates and informs its approach to teaching and learning**</i></p> <p><i>establishing research-led teaching as a normal expectation**</i></p> <p><i>Mandatory training for those new to teaching and research supervision*</i></p> <p><i>Include questions in its next Student Satisfaction Survey that will enable it to establish the extent and location of research-led teaching in the Departments and Schools*</i></p> <p><i>[institution] has done well in competing for research funding**</i></p> <p><i>Increase in research productivity**</i></p> <p><i>Development and the integrity of research**</i></p> <p><i>The clear vision for the quality enhancement of research**</i></p>	<p><i>Panel recommends that the strategy put in place for [...] Research Institute should be closely aligned with the strategy for research activity throughout [...]*</i></p> <p><i>Programmes of education and training appear to have significantly benefited from the [...]s research activities and experience**</i></p> <p><i>[...] the research activity at the [...] should be concentrated in areas of specific expertise*</i></p> <p><i>All or the majority of academic staff relate actively to relevant scholarship and/or research that must inform their teaching. While the current contractual obligations are not the [...]s responsibility, the Panel urges that they be modified by the relevant authorities to allow the Institution to strengthen its research capacity. The Panel encourages the [...], meanwhile, to continue to work to find smart solutions to this challenge: for example, the rotation of academic tasks, smaller course-related development work, 'meta-research' on relevant research by staff in their own disciplines - and to encourage and support faculty with strong research potential to engage in research*</i></p>

Theme	Examples from the Legacy Reviews		
	HETAC	IUQB	NQAI
Quality of staff and staff development and appraisal	<i>Firmer relationship between personal staff objectives and the mission and strategic development of the Institute*</i>	<i>The decision to extend the peer mentoring system**</i>	<i>Mandatory requirement that all new members of teaching staff acquire the Postgraduate Diploma in Third-level Learning and Teaching**</i>
	<i>Newly appointed Institute staff should undergo a formal induction programme*</i>	<i>Encouraging and rewarding staff that support the student learning experience**</i>	
	<i>Staff development opportunities be further extended to include an assessment of the impact of such provision on enhancing teaching and learning*</i>	<i>The creative ways in which it has sought to show its appreciation for good performance**</i>	<i>The [...] should proceed with the introduction of the proposed 'License to Supervise'*</i>
	<i>Introduce required training for all new staff*</i>	<i>Develop and implement a robust performance appraisal system for staff*</i>	
	<i>Development of a comprehensive teaching, learning and assessment strategy*</i>	<i>Mandatory training for those new to teaching and research supervision*</i>	
	<i>Continuing professional development of staff in a more structured and formalised way*</i>	<i>Review of the systems and criteria for recognising and rewarding teaching achievements*</i>	
	<i>Staff appraisal system could be aligned with Continuous Professional Development*</i>	<i>Introduce mandatory training for all students who participate in teaching*</i>	
	<i>Arrangements in place for gathering feedback from learners should be reviewed to ensure that teaching quality is informed by such feedback*</i>	<i>Guarantee in practice the use of the PDR (performance and development review) for all employees*</i>	
	<i>Ensure that all academic staff members are required to undertake the postgraduate Special Purpose Award in Teaching and Learning*</i>		
	<i>Regular review of academic staff performance*</i>		
	<i>Induction procedures and training requirements for newly appointed staff*</i>		
<i>Training to all academic staff on the assessment of learning outcomes based on best practice*</i>			

Theme	Examples from the Legacy Reviews		
	HETAC	IUQB	NQAI
	<p><i>Professional development as an integrated part of strategic planning*</i></p> <p><i>Implement the planned staff performance review*</i></p>		
Commitment to equitable access and opportunities for transfer and progression	<p><i>Sensitivity to national access priorities and the integration of planning for access with the Institute's overall strategic planning**</i></p> <p><i>The designation of Access and Lifelong Learning as a priority area in the Strategic Plan**</i></p> <p><i>Institutional commitment to its existing mission of access and relevance**</i></p> <p><i>The importance of the Access Office throughout the Institute, the panel recommends that consideration be given to including a representative from the Access office on the Academic Council and other appropriate committees of the Institute*</i></p> <p><i>Overall approach to access. This includes RPL access to its programmes created for mature students**</i></p> <p><i>The increased opportunities the Institute has provided for access, transfer and progression by expanding its range of programmes and the methods used for their delivery**</i></p>	<p><i>Commends the University for the work it is doing with access students**</i></p> <p><i>Commitment to widening access**</i></p>	
Consistent assessment of students based on learning outcomes and alignment between institutional assessment policies and requirements set by the accrediting agencies	<p><i>Managed the transition to the definition and use of learning outcomes**</i></p> <p><i>Information provided to learners on the relationship between assessment and learning outcomes**</i></p> <p><i>Clarity of information provided to learners in relation to assessment expectations, and the close attention paid to issues of learner loading**</i></p>	<p><i>Reviews the effectiveness of its current procedures for evaluation of student work*</i></p> <p><i>Review the procedures and requirements for feedback to student work and for evaluation and grading*</i></p>	<p><i>Learning outcomes approach**</i></p> <p><i>Improve the quality and consistency of information on assessment in Student Handbooks and on CourseWise*</i></p> <p><i>Alignment of assessment practice with learning outcomes*</i></p>

Theme	Examples from the Legacy Reviews		
	HETAC	IUQB	NQAI
	<p><i>Continuous feedback loops between the tutors and the in-company supervisors on how the learner is doing in the project work and his/her satisfaction with the programme**</i></p> <p><i>Reduce the number of stated learning outcomes for all modules to a more realistic number and realign the individual module learning outcomes with the programme learning outcomes*</i></p> <p><i>Explore the use of a greater variety of assessment instruments*</i></p> <p><i>Produces a detailed assessment strategy for the Higher certificate in Business at programme level and for each individual module*</i></p> <p><i>Align institutional policies and procedures on assessment with the requirements set out in the HETAC Policy*</i></p> <p><i>[...] should take further steps to make the criteria clearer to students, including a specific dialogue with student representatives on this matter, and to publish relevant documentation on the College's website*</i></p> <p><i>Assessment of students, the central overview of standards should be strengthened so as to ensure consistency, compatibility with levels of awards and adherence to approved policies and regulations*</i></p> <p><i>Consider implementing the HETAC assessment protocols on continuous assessment*</i></p> <p><i>Ensures that guidance for learners on assessment is consistent no matter the source of that guidance*</i></p> <p><i>Publishes a complete and detailed Recheck and Review policy and procedures document in line with the HETAC policy on Assessment*</i></p>		

Theme	Examples from the Legacy Reviews		
	HETAC	IUQB	NQAI
	<i>The Institute should reflect on the consistency of approach taken by different schools towards external examiner processes in place*</i>		
Internal (intra-institutional) communication	<p><i>Communications had begun to improve, particularly in the past year, and that communication channels were now opening up across the college. The panel commends this and was pleased to note that [the Institution] was continuing its efforts in this regard**</i></p> <p><i>Positive relationships and open communications it has fostered between staff and learners**</i></p> <p><i>That the Institute undertakes an audit/ evaluation of the effectiveness of its internal communications*</i></p> <p><i>Should ensure that its mission and vision statements are consistent and understood by all staff*</i></p> <p><i>Further investigation of the apparent lack of staff confidence in [the institution]’s degrees and in the effectiveness of internal communications*</i></p> <p><i>More effective communication, especially those off-campus*</i></p> <p><i>Should harmonise and stabilise the names of its internal bodies across its documents for clarity of communication*</i></p> <p><i>Investigate why, in spite of wide student communication mechanisms, students do not feel engaged with the Institute. Following this, it should initiate remedial action*</i></p> <p><i>Greater publicity for and communication about arrangements for Institute-level learner support services*</i></p>	<p><i>Review of the effectiveness of communication processes around knowledge and information management*</i></p> <p><i>Considers carefully the relationship and communication arrangements between the academic Deans and the University Management*</i></p>	<p><i>Harnessed information technology very effectively and uses it to keep in ongoing communication with learners across schools and sites**</i></p>





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