

Institutional Review Report 2023

National University of Ireland



CINNTE 



Dearbhú Cáilíochta
agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and
Qualifications Ireland

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Foreword | 5 |
| The Review Team | 6 |
| Section 1: Introduction and Context | 10 |
| 1.1 Introduction | 10 |
| 1.2 Governance: NUI Senate Structure and Composition..... | 10 |
| 1.3 NUI's Approach to Quality Assurance and Enhancement..... | 10 |
| 1.4 Contextual Factors..... | 11 |
| Section 2: Self-Evaluation Methodology | 14 |
| 2.1 Information on the Membership of the ISER Team..... | 14 |
| 2.2 Key Features of the ISER Development Process and the Development Team | 14 |
| 2.3. Methods Employed by NUI for Securing Widespread Ownership of the ISER by Internal Stakeholders..... | 15 |
| 2.4. A Commentary on the ISER and on Engagement with the Institutional Review Process | 15 |
| Section 3: Quality Assurance & Enhancement | 18 |
| 3. General Introduction to Objectives 1 and 2 | 18 |
| 3.1 Objective 2: Quality Assurance | 18 |
| 3.1.1. Governance | 18 |
| 3.1.2. Procedures for Quality Assurance..... | 20 |
| 3.1.3. Analysis and Conclusion..... | 21 |
| 3.1.4. The Student Voice..... | 23 |
| 3.1.5. Joint Awarding Arrangements | 23 |
| 3.2 Objective 2: Quality Enhancement | 24 |
| 3.2.1. Role of Policymaking and Guidance Documents..... | 26 |
| 3.2.2. Examples of Quality Enhancement..... | 27 |
| 3.2.3. NUI Awards | 28 |
| 3.2.4. Analysis and Conclusion..... | 28 |
| 3.3. Objective 3: Access, Transfer and Progression | 29 |
| 3.3.1. Linked Provider Access, Transfer and Progression | 29 |
| 3.3.2. NUI Matriculation Requirements and Exemptions..... | 30 |
| 3.4 Objective 4: Provision of Programmes to International Learners..... | 32 |
| Section 4: Conclusions | 36 |
| 4.1 Commendations | 36 |
| 4.2 Recommendations..... | 37 |
| 4.3 Top 5 Commendations and Recommendations | 38 |
| 4.3.1. Top 5 Commendations | 38 |
| 4.3.2. Top 5 Recommendations..... | 39 |
| 4.4 Statements on Quality Assurance | 39 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Institutional Response | 42 |
| Appendices | 44 |
| Appendix A: Review Terms of Reference..... | 46 |
| Appendix B: Main Review Visit Schedule | 56 |
| Appendix C: NUI Regulations, Policies, Procedures and Guidelines Index..... | 60 |
| Glossary..... | 64 |

THE PHELAN ROOM



Foreword

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is responsible for the external quality assurance of further and higher education and training in Ireland. One of QQI's most important functions is to ensure that the quality assurance (QA) procedures that institutions have in place are effective. To this end, QQI carries out external reviews of higher education (HE) institutions on a cyclical basis. This current QQI cycle of reviews is called the CINNTE cycle.

CINNTE reviews are an element of the broader quality framework for institutions composed of Quality Assurance Guidelines, each institution's QA Procedures, Annual Quality Reports (AQR) and Dialogue Meetings. The CINNTE review cycle runs from 2017–2023. During this period, QQI will organise and oversee independent reviews of each of the universities and the institutes of technology.

Each CINNTE review evaluates the effectiveness of the QA procedures of each institution. The review measures each institution's compliance with European standards for QA, with regard to the expectations set out in the [QQI quality assurance guidelines](#) or their equivalent and adherence to other relevant QQI policies and procedures. CINNTE reviews also explore how institutions have enhanced their teaching, learning and research and their QA systems and how well institutions have aligned their approach to their own mission, quality indicators and benchmarks.

The CINNTE review process is in keeping with Parts 2 and 3 of the [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area](#) (ESG 2015) and based on the internationally accepted and recognised approach to reviews, including:

- the publication of Terms of Reference,
- a process of self-evaluation and an Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER),
- an external assessment and site visit by a team of reviewers,
- the publication of a Review Report including findings and recommendations and
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken.

This QQI CINNTE review of the National University of Ireland was conducted by an independent review team in line with the Terms of Reference in Appendix A. This is the report of the findings of the review team.

The Review Team

Each CINNTE review is carried out by a team of independent experts and peers. The 2023 inaugural review of the National University of Ireland was conducted by a team of five reviewers selected by QQI. The review team attended an online briefing and training session with QQI on 13 January 2023. The planning visit between the Chair and the Administrative Reviewer and QQI took place online on 8 February 2023. The main review visit was conducted by the full team between Sunday 26 March and Wednesday 29 March 2023.

CHAIR

Dr Achim Hopbach

COORDINATING REVIEWER

Professor Bairbre Redmond

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

Cerys MacAllister

INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE

Fiona Crozier

CIVIC REPRESENTATIVE

Professor John O'Brien

CHAIR

Dr Achim Hopbach has over 25 years of experience in HE, having served as research assistant, in university administration, HE policy and QA. He recently set up his own consultancy business after having retired from leading QA agencies in Austria and Germany for 15 years.

Dr Hopbach has extensive experience in the development and implementation of QA legislation, systems and processes in Europe, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. He has served and serves as panel member and chair of evaluation panels in Europe and beyond. His consultancy activities focus on the areas of cross-border HE and branch campuses, design of QA systems and setting up HE institutions.

He has held, and continues to hold, various positions in QA agencies and associations, such as President of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) from 2009 to 2013, member of the board of national agencies in Hong Kong, Dubai, the Holy See, and on international advisory boards of various agencies. Dr Hopbach holds a PhD in History.

COORDINATING REVIEWER

Professor Bairbre Redmond is Full Emeritus Professor at University College Dublin. She is also an international HE consultant. She was Provost of Universitas 21 (U21), from 2016–2021. U21 is a leading global network of twenty-eight top, worldwide, research-intensive universities, across eighteen countries, which collectively enrol over one million students. As Provost, Bairbre was the international network's lead academic. She has worked closely with U21's Presidents and Vice Chancellors, advising and implementing the network's overall strategic direction in order to maximise its benefits for students, researchers, academics and professional staff.

Bairbre was previously Dean of Undergraduate Studies and Deputy Registrar, Teaching and Learning at University College Dublin (2008–2016). In this role she provided senior university academic leadership in developing and supporting excellence in teaching and academic development to deliver the most effective student learning opportunities. Bairbre retains a research interest

in the advancement of reflective approaches to HE, particularly in how effective approaches to reflective learning and critical thought can be incorporated into curriculum design.

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

Cerys MacAllister is a 2nd year master's degree student of vocal performance at The Royal Academy of Music in London, where she earned a scholarship to study. She graduated from The Royal Irish Academy of Music (RIAM) and Trinity College Dublin with a first-class honours Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Music Performance.

At the RIAM, Cerys worked as Welfare Officer with the Students' Union (SU) and as Student Union President in her final year. She was instrumental in reforming the Students' Union in the RIAM and writing the first constitution for the institution. Cerys has worked on the Board of Studies and with the Director of the Conservatoire to analyse and review courses in the institution. Cerys currently works as Student Representative at The Royal Academy of Music in London for postgraduate studies in vocal performance.

INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE

Fiona Crozier has worked in HE for 30 years and in QA nationally and internationally.

She is experienced in the development, implementation and operationalisation of institutional and national QA systems and has participated in reviews of QA agencies and HE institutions as chair, secretary and panel member nationally and internationally.

Her most recent post was Head of International at The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) UK. She is now an independent consultant. Recent projects include involvement in the evaluation of QA processes and standards during the COVID-19 crisis in Georgia and Indonesia, development of internal QA systems at several institutions, involvement in capacity building projects globally and the development and articulation of regional QA frameworks in Europe and the Association of Southeast Asian

Nations (ASEAN) to facilitate international trust and partnerships.

She is a former Vice-President of the Board of the European Association for Quality Assurance.

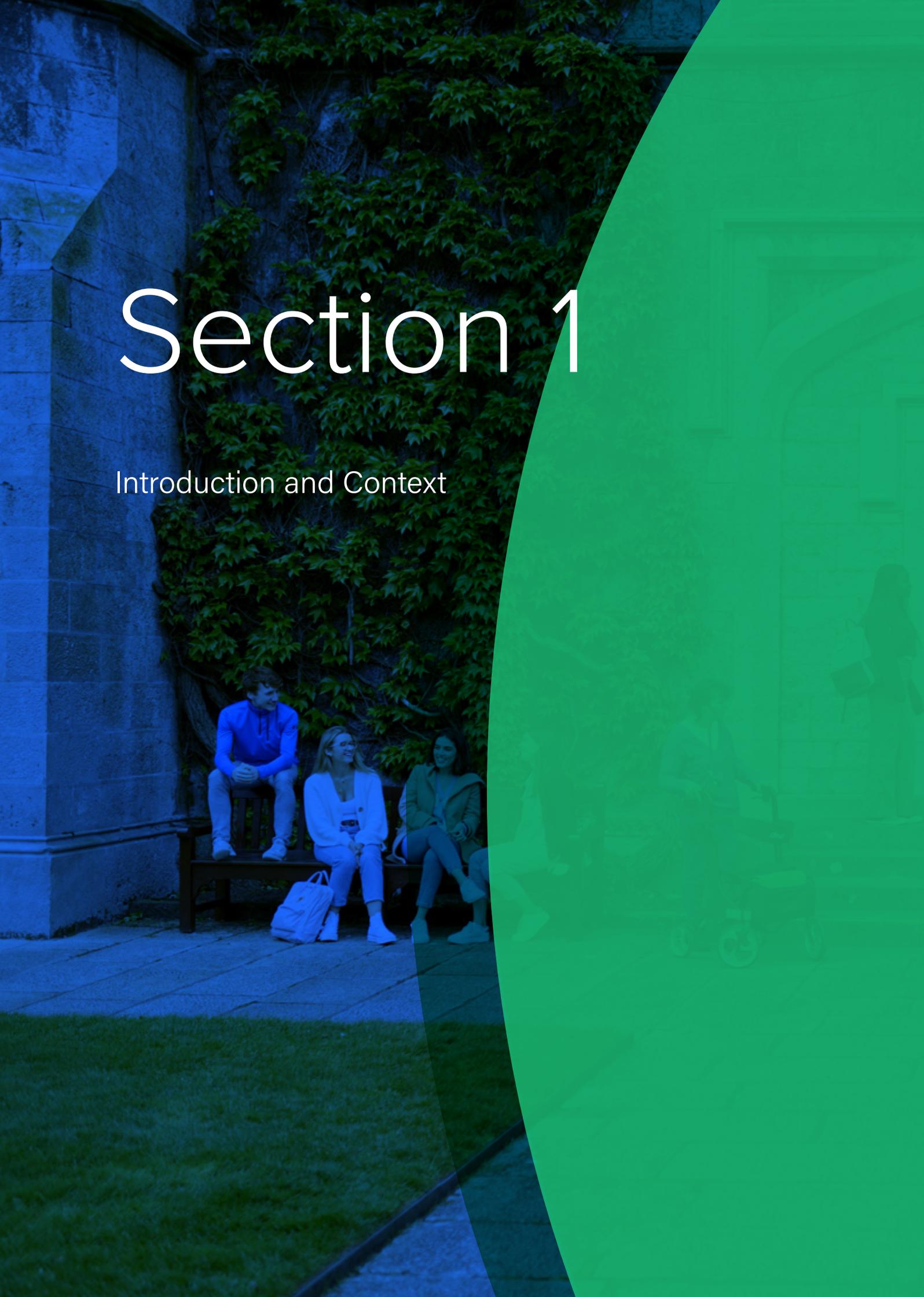
CIVIC REPRESENTATIVE

Professor John O'Brien is Founder and Director of The Food Observatory, UK. He is a former CEO of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and former Deputy Head of the Nestlé Research Centre (staff 650) where he led the Food Safety and Integrity Research Programme. His experience spans the international food industry from senior leadership positions in Groupe Danone (France) and Nestlé (Switzerland) to various consultancy and advisory projects in Ireland, Europe, Japan and USA. He has held lectureships at University College Cork and the University of Surrey.

Professor O'Brien holds/has held non-executive directorships of several scientific and technical organisations including the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI) (Washington), Institute for Food Safety & Health at Illinois Institute of Technology (Chicago), ILSI Europe (Brussels, as Chair), and Campden BRI (UK), Feeding Tomorrow (USA) and the Institute of Food Science & Technology (UK). He is currently a member of the Science Council of the Food Standards Agency (UK), where he recently chaired a Working Group on Global Food System Risks and is a Visiting Professor and Chair of the Advisory Board at the Nutrition Innovation Centre for Food & Health (NICHE) at Ulster University. He has served on academic external review boards/course validation panels at Wageningen University, Maastricht University, Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University.

Section 1

Introduction and Context





Introduction and Context

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The National University of Ireland (NUI) is a federal university comprising a membership of six institutions in the Irish university system. As a unique and historical institution in Irish HE, one of the university's primary aims is to serve the interests of its member institutions ('The Federation') by providing services to them and to their graduates. Related to this, NUI seeks to promote the national and international standing of the National University of Ireland 'brand' as a whole, by undertaking activities related to scholarship, the advancement of HE and the cultural and intellectual life of Ireland.

1.2 GOVERNANCE: NUI SENATE STRUCTURE AND COMPOSITION

The NUI currently comprises four constituent universities (CUs), two recognised colleges (RCs) and three colleges attached to constituent universities. The Institute of Public Administration (IPA), an RC, is the sole linked provider (LP) of the NUI. Each institution in the NUI Federation has its own governing authority, and under the [Universities Act, 1997](#) the overall governing authority of the university is the NUI Senate with a membership of thirty-eight, headed by the Chancellor.

Under the *Universities Act, 1997*, the Senate of the National University of Ireland sets out its functions and responsibilities in relation to the following:

- determining basic matriculation requirements,
- reviewing the content and teaching of courses,
- appointing external examiners and
- awarding degrees and other qualifications.

1.3 NUI'S APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT

The [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012](#), defines the NUI as a designated awarding body (DAB). As such, the Act requires NUI to establish QA arrangements in respect of LPs – institutions that deliver educational programmes leading to awards of NUI. The Act also provides for periodic review of the NUI's QA procedures by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the Authority established under the Act to oversee QA of further and higher education and training in Ireland. NUI describes its approach to QA and quality enhancement in its *Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement*. This outlines the specific context of NUI as a DAB that is not a provider and linked to this the different responsibilities vis-à-vis CUs and RCs, and its commitment to quality.

NUI's approach to QA has as its starting point NUI's responsibility, as a DAB, for academic standards. To ensure that the quality of the learning experience and of the qualifications offered in RCs is comparable to that offered in the CUs, NUI's approach is to "guarantee that the appropriate mechanisms are in place within the University to ensure the standards of its degrees and other qualifications are maintained and to support, where possible, its member institutions."¹

Core features of the approach are regular reviews of programmes (all RCs) and of institutions (only LP) which focus on internal capacities and QA procedures, and NUI's direct involvement in external examining. It is to be noted that the reviews include a strong enhancement component.

The review team concludes that the documented QA procedures constitute an effective system in relation to the RCs, in particular the LP. The system focuses on the assurance of a good quality learning

¹ [NUI's \(2017\) Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement](#), p. 2, [Accessed 21 June 2023]

experience for students, which is complemented by setting principles for external examining and providing guidance in other areas across the Federation.

The procedures have regard to part 1 of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) and to [QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines](#) as far as applies to a HE institution that is not a provider itself.

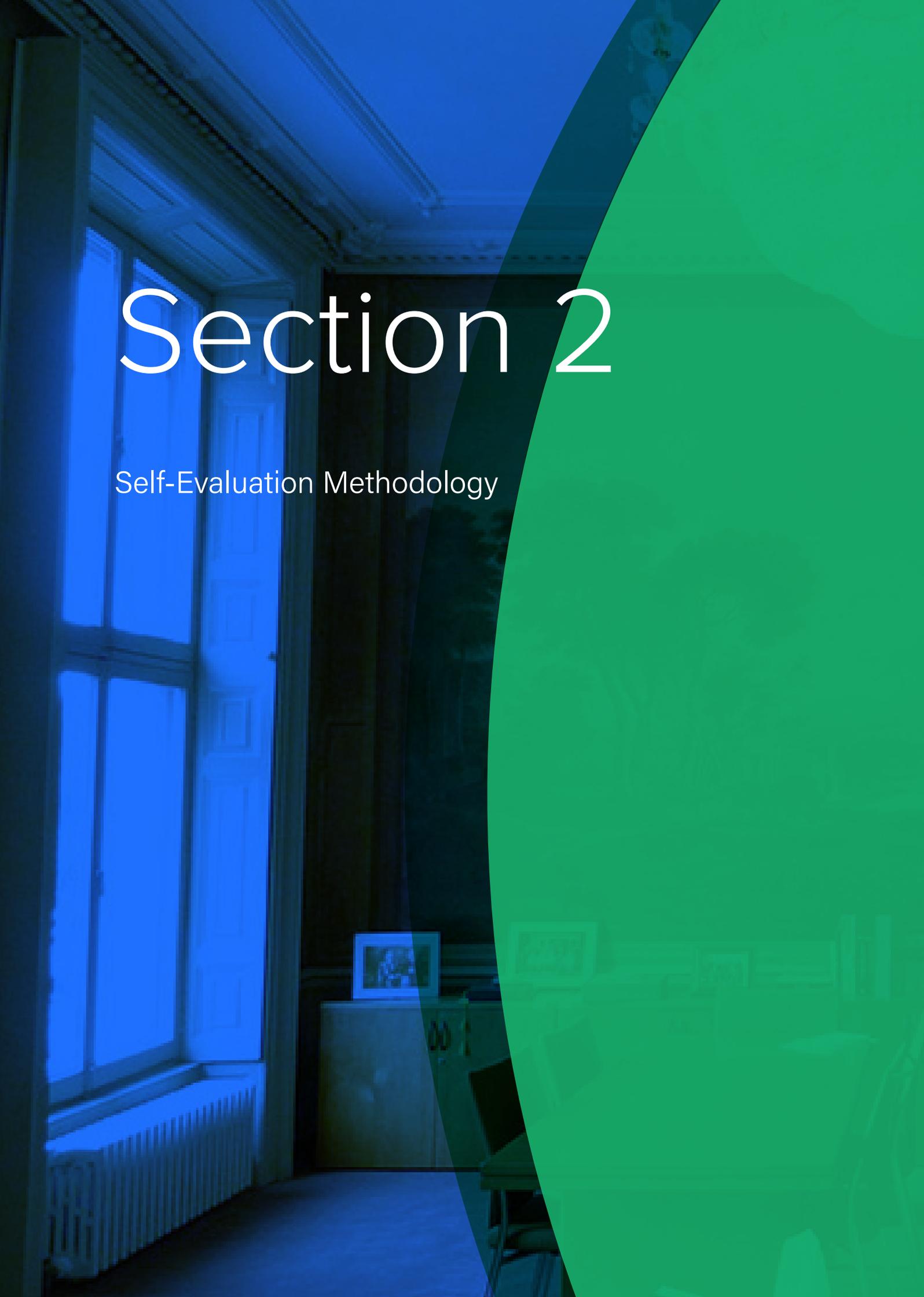
1.4 CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

The review team recognised that the timing of the CINNTE review created some significant issues for a small and very new NUI team. The NUI Registrar, Dr Patrick O'Leary, took up office in January 2022, replacing the previous Registrar who had held the office for seventeen years. Other significant staff changes in the organisation have occurred since October 2021 and the organisation currently has a staff complement of fewer than twenty. At the time of the preparation of the ISER there were still unfilled posts on the NUI team, and most staff working in the institution had only been with NUI for a relatively short period (many under one year).

The ISER team faced other significant challenges in preparing their ISER. It was the first time that NUI had come within the scope of a CINNTE Review, and, as an institution, NUI does not fit the model of a traditional university for which the CINNTE process is primarily designed. The unique and legacy-rich structure of NUI left the small, new CINNTE Self-Evaluation Team (SET) challenged by the fact that, apart from students in the IPA, its single LP, NUI does not offer any HE programmes, nor does it have any students.

Finally, the appointment of a new NUI Senate, due to be finalised by November 2022, remained incomplete at the time of the review visit in April 2023, due to factors beyond the NUI's control. The final draft of a new *Strategic Plan for NUI (2023 – 2027)* had been completed at the time of the team's visit, and was made available to the team, although it was not due to be published until May 2023. Being able to have access to the 2023 – 2027 strategy prior to its publication was most helpful to the team and allowed them to discuss aspects of this new strategic vision with the NUI team and external stakeholders.



The background is a photograph of a room with a large window on the left and a desk with a chair on the right. The image is overlaid with a blue-to-green gradient that curves from the top left towards the bottom right. The text is white and centered in the upper half of the image.

Section 2

Self-Evaluation Methodology



Section 2: Self-Evaluation Methodology

2.1 INFORMATION ON THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE ISER TEAM

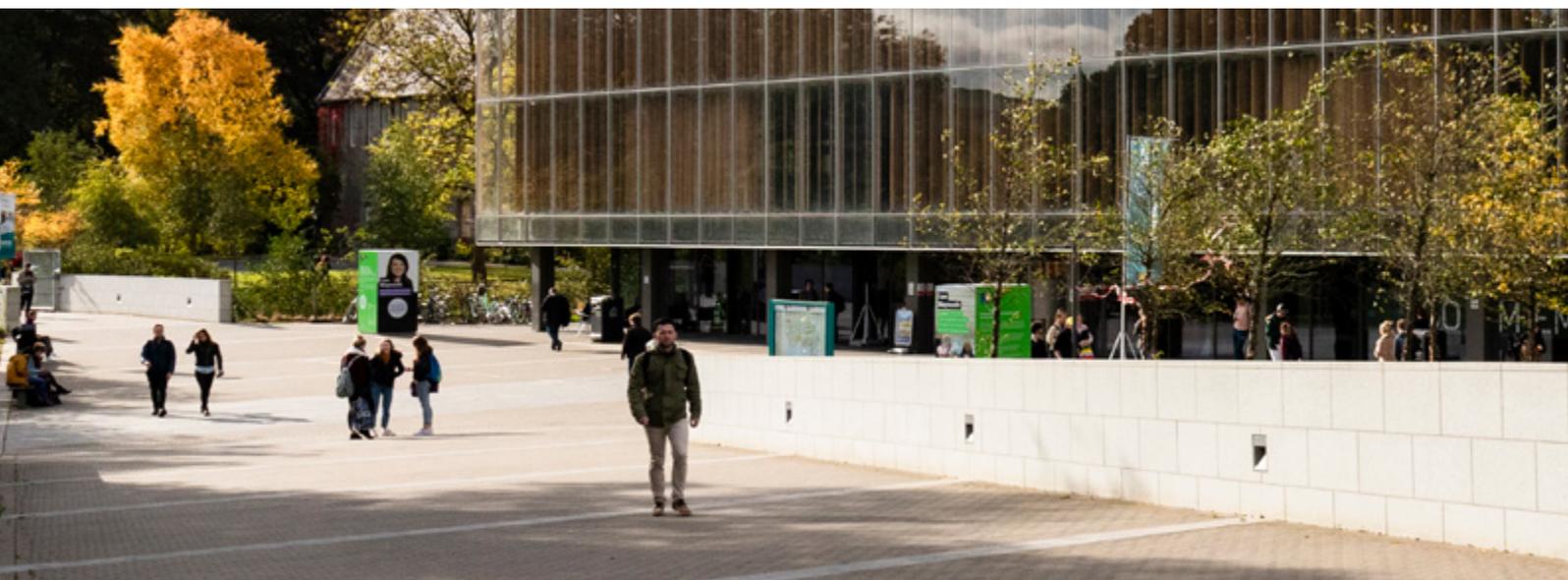
As noted in Section 1.4 of this report, the ISER was carried out by a very small team, the majority of whom were quite recently appointed to their posts in NUI. Due to staff shortages at the time, the Registrar and the Manager of Academic Affairs (MAA)/Institutional Review Coordinator (IRC) undertook most of the preparatory work. As staffing issues eased, the incoming Head of Academic Services and Registry (HASR) joined the core ISER team, assisted by other staff in NUI, with specific experience and knowledge to assist with the report's completion.

2.2 KEY FEATURES OF THE ISER DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND THE DEVELOPMENT TEAM

The small NUI Self-Evaluation Team (SET) note in the ISER (pg. 18) that they were aware that the significant staff changes had left them with limited access to institutional knowledge, particularly regarding activities in the Registrar's Office and the Academic Services Unit. To address this issue, and to ensure that all relevant stakeholders would be included in the review, the ISER team initially consulted both with all existing NUI staff and with

those who had recently retired. The SET also convened and consulted with an experienced NUI Advisory Panel and with the Senate throughout the process of preparing, producing and finalising the ISER. This initial phase included a mapping exercise of both statutory QQI QA guidelines and the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. The second, data-gathering stage, involved building a digital repository of relevant QA documents and the design, distribution and analysis of surveys to different stakeholder groups. The final stages of the ISER involved the compilation of the report, in consultation with internal staff and Senate members. The final drafts of the report were shared with a range of stakeholders for comment and with the full NUI Senate.

As noted in the previous section, the team acknowledges that the SET faced several challenges in preparing the ISER. These challenges have been noted and recognised by the panel as well the unique composition of NUI, which makes it difficult to compare it with any other national or international institution for benchmarking purposes.



2.3. METHODS EMPLOYED BY NUI FOR SECURING WIDESPREAD OWNERSHIP OF THE ISER BY INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

The SET embarked on a very thorough process of seeking to include the opinions of stakeholders in preparing the report. As part of the ISER they designed and carried out seventeen stakeholder surveys, taking care that the subsequent analysis of the data gathered was carried out by individuals not immediately involved in the relevant area of activity being surveyed. While the response rate to most of the surveys was not high, this is not unusual in surveys of this nature more generally, and NUI's reflections on the survey results in the ISER have been candid about identifying room for improvement. The team welcomes such identification but would also have liked to see more concrete examples of how some stakeholder concerns might be addressed in the future.

2.4. A COMMENTARY ON THE ISER AND ON ENGAGEMENT WITH THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW PROCESS

Overall, the review team found that the ISER was well-written and well-structured. The ISER was supplemented by a short list of appendices and numerous hyperlinks to relevant material. This made it easy for the team to work with the main document and navigate through the supplementary material. The ISER gave a comprehensive overview of NUI's structure, governance and QA and enhancement policies and procedures. It is worth noting that the main chapters of the ISER benefited from the use of a variety of sources to complement the description of governance,

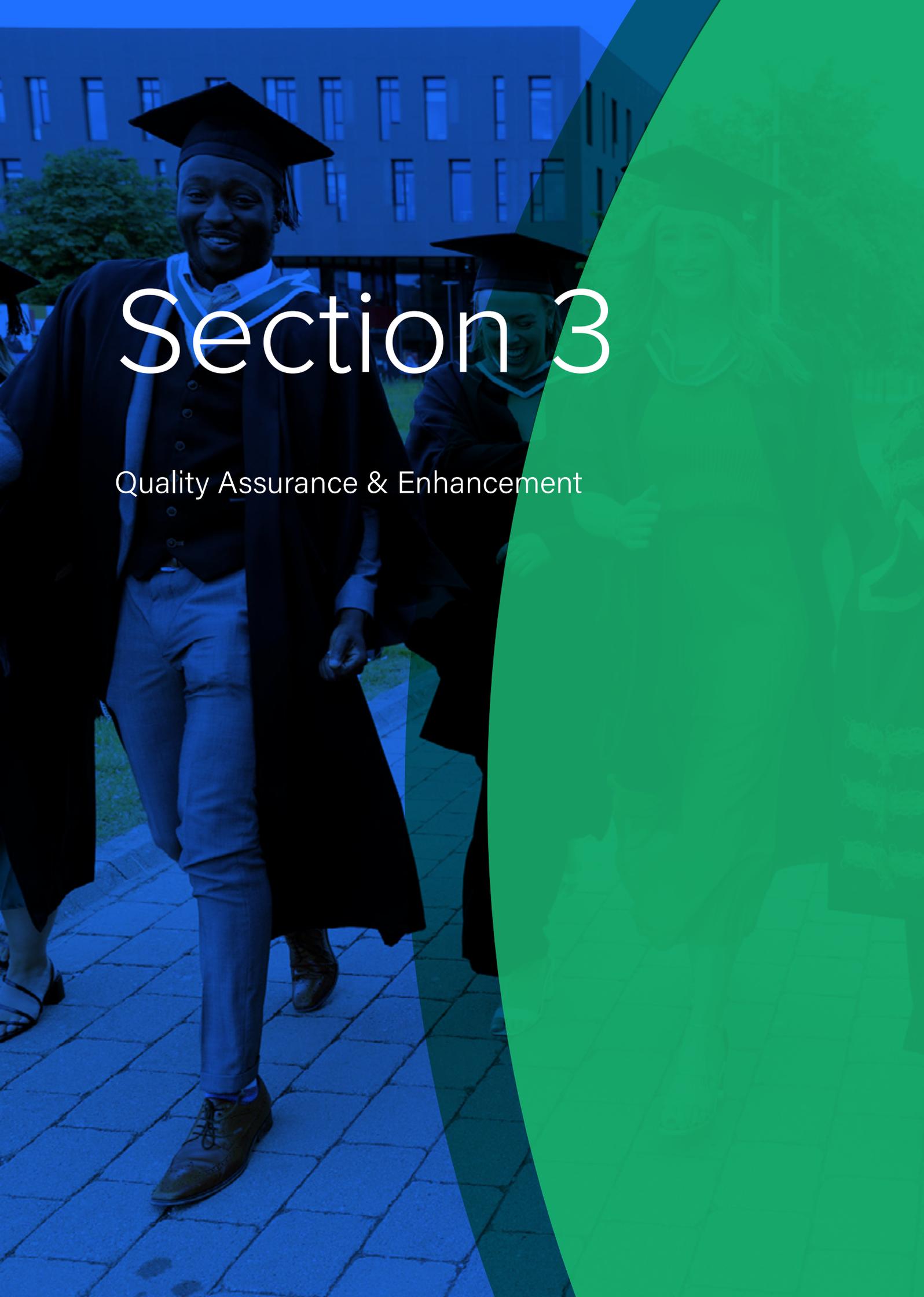
policies and procedures. Including the outcomes of the stakeholder surveys and case studies was particularly effective in supporting the self-critical and developmental approach used by NUI. The team commends NUI for adding concluding paragraphs with self-critical evaluations and follow-up activities. This is consistent with the overall self-critical approach NUI applied not only in the ISER but also during the main review visit. One relevant outcome of the self-evaluation noted in the ISER was: "In gathering data for the ISER, it became clear that there were QA processes taking place across the organisation by a small but dedicated staff, but these were often informal and not logged or reported centrally" (ISER p. 18).

The team commends NUI for the quality of the ISER and for adding concluding paragraphs with self-critical evaluations and follow-up activities. This is consistent with the overall self-critical approach NUI applied not only in the ISER but also during the main review visit.

At the same time the team found the ISER to be less informative in terms of providing examples of implementation of policies and the case studies would also have benefitted from some more references to evidence.

The team noted that NUI did not use the opportunity to put forward topics in the ISER that it wished the team to focus on during the review. However, it did use the opportunity of the main review to discuss topics of relevance for future development in an open, self-critical and analytical way.



A photograph of graduates in black gowns and caps, walking on a paved path. The image is overlaid with a blue tint. A large green abstract shape is on the right side of the page.

Section 3

Quality Assurance & Enhancement



Section 3: Quality Assurance & Enhancement

3. GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO OBJECTIVES 1 AND 2

As NUI is an awarding body but not a provider of higher education, the team approached the review of the governance of its QA, its policies and procedures and their contributions to quality enhancement in a more limited context than is normal in a CINNTE review. The QA and enhancement of NUI's programmes and provision, cannot, for the most part, be reviewed directly in the same way as is possible at HE institutions that are also providers. This applies particularly to the student learning experience, to the quality of a research and development environment and to third mission impact. Therefore, it is important to consider the team's report in relation to Objectives 1 and 2 in this context. Arguably, given its matriculation and, to an extent, its parchment functions, NUI is responsible for assuring the quality of aspects of the entire student journey from application to conferring. This section of the report deals with the key QA processes in relation to the two RCs, i.e., the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland – University of Medicine and Health Sciences (RCSI) and the Institute of Public Administration (IPA), which is also a linked provider (LP). It also deals with NUI's oversight of the use of its name on degree parchments for all members of the Federation including the four CUs.

The NUI matriculation regulations, which are relevant to all members of the Federation, will be discussed under Objective 3, dealing with access, transfer and progression.

3.1 OBJECTIVE 2: QUALITY ASSURANCE

3.1.1. Governance

Within a context where individual institutions have the main responsibility for the quality of their provision and the assurance of its quality, NUI's role is to establish a robust governance system for quality and its main aim is to ensure high quality standards of education in the RCs which are aligned with those of the CUs and with the relevant statutory provisions and national and international standards, i.e. QQI's *Quality Assurance Guidelines* (QAG) and the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). In its *Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement*, NUI presents the objective "to ensure that appropriate and transparent governance and management structures are in place both within NUI and in the recognised colleges to support the implementation of quality assurance and improvement procedures."² Through its institutional approval and review of the IPA, the Senate ensures that the IPA, as an LP, puts its own governance arrangements in place to support quality enhancement and review its effectiveness.

The Registrar has ultimate responsibility for QA and enhancement and, together with the Manager of Academic Affairs (MAA) and support from the Head of Academic Services and Registry (HASR), is a member of the NUI Quality Team.

The key body for the governance of QA is the Senate. This is the governing body of NUI which is responsible for decisions on strategy, policies and

² [NUI's \(2017\) Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement](#), p. 4, [Accessed 21 June 2023]

guidelines, and for appointing external examiners. The role of the Senate differs according to the status of members of the Federation. The Senate governs NUI’s activities as set out in the table below:

| Activity | Member Institution | Comment |
|--|------------------------|--|
| External Examiner (EE) appointments and administration | 4 x CUs RCSI IPA | <p>4 x CUs: formal approval by the Senate of appointment. Responsibility for issuing the letter of appointment, regulations, report form and expense claim form to the EE lies with individual CUs and reports are sent directly to CUs.</p> <p>RCSI and the IPA: formal approval by the Senate of appointment. Responsibility for issuing the letter of appointment, regulations, report form and expense claim form to the EE (including payment) lies with NUI; reports are sent to NUI and from there to the RCs/LP.</p> |
| Programme approval | RCSI IPA | <p>NUI nominates an external member for programme approval events at both RCSI and the IPA; a second external member is appointed by the RC.</p> <p>Recommendations for approval of new programmes and major changes to existing programmes in both RCs are submitted to the Senate, on the basis of extern assessor reports. These reports are available to any member of the Senate, on request.</p> |
| Programme review | RCSI IPA | <p>NUI receives the reports of RCSI programme reviews; these are noted by the Senate. NUI is responsible for the external review of IPA programmes, the reports of which are approved by the Senate.</p> |
| Institutional review of QA effectiveness | IPA | <p>NUI is responsible for the external institutional review of QA effectiveness, the reports of which are approved by the Senate.</p> |

The slightly more comprehensive responsibility vis-à-vis the IPA results from NUI’s role as a DAB for the RCs/LP. Whilst RCSI is an RC, it is not an LP due to its status as a designated awarding body in its own right.

The Senate meets three times per year. Operational business between NUI and its RCs is conducted through individual steering committees, one for the IPA and one for RCSI. In the case of the IPA, this committee is the key forum for deliberation and decision-making on QA matters and leads to formal approval and decision-making by the Senate. Notes of both steering committee meetings are reported at the Senate.

The autonomous status of the CUs means that the role of the Senate is significantly less important in relation to their QA. Nonetheless, because of NUI's role as (co-)awarding body, the appointment of external examiners by the Senate applies in the same way to CUs as to the RCs/LP.

The Senate consists currently of 38 members; in addition to the NUI Chancellor and Registrar the CUs are represented ex-officio by their presidents, four members are nominated by government, and 24 members are elected either by the governing authorities of the CUs (four each) or by convocation. NUI traditionally exercises its right to co-opt four members which are currently the Registrars of CUs and the Registrar of RCSI. Therefore, the presence of the Registrars at Senate meetings depends on the use of co-option; the *Universities Act* (1997) does not guarantee the presence of those officers at Senate meetings. Given the central role university Registrars play in QA and enhancement, it is not satisfactory that their presence at Senate meetings relies on co-option.

The review team recommends that NUI explore ways in which the permanent participation of the CU Registrars in Senate meetings can be assured.

The Senate is supported by seven committees, two of which (the Finance and Registrars' Committees) have sub-committees. Most committees meet between two and four times per year. The Honorary Degrees Committee meets once annually and the Committee of Registrars and the Admissions Officers sub-committee, both meet on an *ad hoc* basis.

3.1.2. Procedures for Quality Assurance

NUI has 16 regulations, policies, procedures and guidelines that govern (directly or indirectly) its QA activities. In accordance with the different status of the members of the Federation, some of the policies concern all member institutions but the majority concern only the RCs.

The overarching *NUI Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement* sets out the policies for the RCs, and gives guidance regarding the following:

- The approval of QA in the RCs,
- The institutional review of RCs that are LPs,
- The periodic review of programmes in RCs,
- The approval of taught programmes,
- Collaborative and transnational provision and
- The approval of research degrees.

Since the enactment of the 2012 Act, NUI no longer has statutory responsibility for the approval of RCSI's QA policies and procedures nor is it responsible for carrying out external institutional reviews of the effectiveness of RCSI's QA policies and procedures. Consequently, the document *The Quality Assurance Relationship between the National University of Ireland and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland – University of Medicine and Health Sciences* (2020) is a description of the special relationship between both institutions and does not contain guidance or directives for RCSI.

NUI's responsibility towards the Federation, including the CUs, in the field of external examination is also governed by separate guidelines for CUs and RCs depending on whether NUI appoints or appoints and administers the external examiners (see table above). However, both sets of guidelines are based on the same principles. Furthermore, the *Regulations for Higher Doctorate Degrees* govern NUI's single separate degree-awarding function.

More recently, since 2021, NUI has focused on research degrees by approving the *NUI Policy, Regulations and Procedures for the Approval of NUI Research Degrees in the Recognised Colleges* and the *NUI Policy on External Examiners for Research Degrees in the Recognised Colleges*. The policies are based on the general principles for taught degrees but highlight the challenges faced by RCs when they want to implement research degree programmes in new areas. The policies follow international best practice and QQI guidelines. The policies focus on updating existing internal QA approaches to address the specifics of research degrees, on support for research activities and students and the supervision of students, on research infrastructure and on ensuring academic standards are consistent with national

standards and requirements and with comparable programmes offered in the CUs.

In addition to these policies and guidelines, NUI has developed and approved further policies to guide activities of members of the Federation such as the *Human Rights Principles and Code of Conduct* and the *Policy on Usage of Titles of Degrees and Other Qualifications*.

The ISER states that NUI's policies and procedures are guided by the relevant statutory and international guidelines, in particular QQI's [QAG1](#) (Core Statutory), [guideline 2.1](#) (governance and management of quality), [QAG2](#) (Sector-Specific), [guideline 5.2](#) (approving the QA procedures of LPs) and ESG 1.1 (internal QA). The policies and procedures are published on its website, as are the team report for the institutional review of the IPA and the institutional response to that report.

All QA processes are developed in consultation with the relevant stakeholders. They are coordinated and implemented by the MAA, and the NUI Quality Team produces documents (e.g. QA policies) for review and approval by the NUI Senate with the intention that this oversight by the Senate adds to the role that the CUs play in determining the quality standards of the Federation.

Procedures established by NUI for the assurance of the quality of collaborations, partnerships and overseas provision, joint awarding arrangements, joint provision, and other collaborative arrangements, would normally refer to arrangements for joint awards and collaboration offered as cross-border opportunities. However, as explained in the introduction to Objectives One and Two, a more limited focus was applied by this team since NUI is not a provider and, as such, does not have overseas partners or provision. RCSI has its own internal arrangements for the QA of its overseas and collaborative provision. Also, the LP for which NUI is responsible (IPA) does not have overseas partners or provision and does not recruit international students.

The team focused, therefore, on NUI's role as a joint awarding body with the CUs. In this regard, the ISER states that, "As the central organisation,

NUI recognises that every graduate of its member institutions receives a parchment from NUI and it is with this document that graduates seek further education or employment opportunities, nationally and internationally. An NUI degree is a marker of a quality education, no matter the institution where the learning occurred" (ISER p. 22). The team understands the somewhat unique position of NUI in this regard since it is named as an awarding body on the degree parchments of the CUs but has no role in any part of the provision of education to or assessment of the student. The team also understands the autonomy of the CUs and, for that reason, wishes to be very clear that its focus is the means by which NUI assures *itself* of the standards of the awards offered jointly in its name. The team does not wish to suggest any intrusion by NUI into a CU's individual areas of responsibility. However, there are no specific policy or guidelines that focus on NUI's assurance of the standards of awards that are made (jointly) under its name.

3.1.3. Analysis and Conclusion

The membership of the Senate ensures that NUI avails of expertise and advice from the CUs in relation to QA and enhancement that allows it to meet its aim of ensuring and maintaining the same standard across all HE institutions in the Federation. The team agrees with NUI that, as such, it has an important role in ensuring that the national standard of Irish HE is maintained. The team discussed this specific Senate role with various members of that body, and with the senior management of NUI. It was obvious to the team that the aim of ensuring and maintaining the same standard of education and the role of the Senate in this regard is clear to all those involved. However, despite several focused questions, the team did not receive a satisfactory response as to *how* the Senate carries out this particular responsibility.

Furthermore, the team was informed that there is no body or discussion forum within the Federation where questions about the quality standards of NUI can be addressed. Instead, working groups or discussion fora of the Irish Universities Association, at which NUI participates as a guest, serve as the main opportunity to engage with each other about new policies or similar. Considering the role of NUI in ensuring and maintaining the

same standard across all HE institutions in the Federation, the team was surprised that members of the Federation depended on external fora to discuss such topics and is of the view that this is not sufficient. It is desirable that NUI leads discussions of QA and enhancement matters in the Federation. Consequently, the review team wishes to emphasise the potential value of NUI's plan to "explore, with Senate, the possibility of establishing a forum or working group for joint quality activities in discrete areas of common interest" (ISER, p. 106) which would be an additional way to strengthen NUI's contribution to supporting enhancement of quality in the members of the Federation.

The team recommends the establishment by NUI of an official forum for the discussion of standards and quality assurance and enhancement in the Federation accompanied by appropriate documentation and monitoring.

The two joint committees (the IPA Steering Committee and the NUI-RCSI Working Group Executive [WGE]), are the key instruments by which MAA and the Quality Team manage the relationship with the RCs, including all QA questions, and each is equal to the Senate in terms of impact.

Finally, the NUI Registrar plays a role through membership of the IPA Board and of the examination boards of both institutions; this is an important opportunity to directly support enhancement based on the outcomes of external examining.

The review team noted that the steering committees and involvement in examination boards results QA topics being kept to the fore of internal discussions at the RCs.

It is worth noting that representatives of all members of the Federation emphasised the importance of the effective, collegiate and informal day-to-day working relationship with NUI staff. The team commends the fact that, for an institution with relatively few staff, NUI has achieved a very effective impact through informal collaborations with other key institutions.

The team concludes that NUI uses its governance in an appropriate and effective way to assure quality at the RCs.

The team also concludes that NUI has a comprehensive list of policies and procedures to execute its QA responsibilities; it read NUI's QA procedures for the RCs and LP and can confirm that, overall, they are in line with QQI and other relevant international guidelines, and are comprehensive, implemented properly and effective. This also applies to NUI's guidelines for external examining at CUs. This was evidenced by all NUI policies and processes that the team read, including consideration of their alignment with the relevant QQI policies and Guidelines. In particular, *NUI's Guidelines for the Institutional Review of Quality Assurance Effectiveness at Recognised Colleges which are Linked Providers of NUI* and the resulting report on the IPA provided a clear case study of the application of policy and process in practice.

It was evident from discussions with stakeholders at various meetings that QQI's regard for the ESG and NUI's regard for the relevant QQI policies and procedures are linked; this was reinforced by the team's reading of all documentation provided in this regard which was easily accessed through both the ISER and the NUI website.

NUI's ISER is transparent in its discussion of its completion of AQRs to date; whilst these are completed and reported to QQI, there is recognition that, as a non-provider, some information is limited. It is also recognised that the AQRs highlight the limited nature of internal monitoring and review. The team encourages NUI's plan to develop a mechanism such as a rolling log that will form part of the organisation's records of future internal and external reviews and that will allow for continuity. The development of the ISER also highlighted the fact that AQRs have not been regularly published to date on the NUI website. To remedy this, NUI has developed a new page on its website to which AQR documents will be added in future, along with the CINNTE Review Report. The team found the ISER to be comprehensive, clear and analytical.

However, the team would like to comment on QA procedures under two headings:

- the student voice and
- joint awarding arrangements.

3.1.4. The Student Voice

The review team acknowledges NUI's enthusiasm to include the role of students in its governance in general, not just regarding QA. However, it was clear to the team, through discussion at various interviews, that NUI and members of the Federation perceive a series of challenges and limitations in relation to the involvement of students. The team is of the view that, as NUI is the degree-awarding body for the IPA and as its name appears on all other parchments of Federation members, the importance of student involvement in NUI's governance is critical. It is not convinced that the challenges and limitations reported during the interviews are valid, and believes that a strong student voice, as primary stakeholders, could bring a new perspective and enhancements to NUI.

The team recommends that NUI strongly consider the appointment of a student council, using the established pool of student leader resources, i.e., SU sabbatical officers and part-time officers from RCSI. The team also suggests that NUI use its association with the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) which already has established partnerships with University College Cork (UCC), University of Galway and Maynooth University (MU).

The team also considers that, despite the obstacles raised with the team, IPA students represent a valid student group who are involved in lifelong learning. Such students have important experiences to share in assuring the quality of their educational provision. The team noted that the external team who carried out the *Institutional Review of Quality Assurance Effectiveness* at the IPA in 2021 also referred to the student voice and representation in its report ("While it is noted in the ISER that there has been a general lack of interest amongst students to act as representatives, it is important that where at all possible, the students who engage in this process are elected by their peers to represent them, rather

than being appointed by staff. Indeed, this is also important when it comes to student representation on boards and committees" pg. 18). This review team notes that the IPA's response to the report did not refer to this recommendation.

The team recommends that, in its follow-up process with IPA, NUI ensure that the recommendation made by the IPA's institutional review team about inclusion of the student voice be considered and it encourages NUI to support the IPA in this regard.

3.1.5. Joint Awarding Arrangements

In the limited context in which the team considered the matter of joint awards, it reached several conclusions in relation to NUI's oversight of the academic standards of those degrees where its logo appears on the degree parchment, and considers it appropriate to include those comments under this heading.

NUI's oversight of the awards offered by RCSI (as an RC), and the IPA (as a RC and LP) is discussed earlier in this section of the report. This heading, therefore, focuses solely on NUI's role as a joint awarding body with the CUs.

The ISER states that, following nomination by CUs, NUI's Senate is responsible for approving the appointment of their external examiners. However, unlike in RCs, administration (i.e. appointment, payment and reporting) here is devolved to the CUs. Although all external examiner reports received by the CUs should be sent to NUI, the team heard during the site visit that only a proportion of these are ever received. Various reasons were cited for this; however, it was the view of the team that external examiner reports are the key means by which NUI can assure itself of the standard of the awards offered in its name. They also provide a rich source of information on which NUI could draw to provide thematic analysis reports that would be of value to the Irish HE sector (see Objective 2).

Overall, the team believes that the lack of any policy or guidelines on the assurance of standards

in relation to the joint awarding function with the CUs is a gap in an otherwise comprehensive suite of documentation.

The team heard from the CUs and Senate during the site visit that NUI adds credibility, consistency and international value to the Irish HE brand. In the view of the team, the fact that degree parchments for the CUs contain both the name of the CU *and* NUI means that there is a reciprocal need for assurance of this brand – it is in the interests of both the CUs and NUI to maintain the standard of the brand and, as an awarding body in its own right, NUI will want to ensure that it meets its responsibilities in this regard.

The team recommends that NUI put in place the appropriate means to ensure that it meets its responsibilities as an awarding body by assuring its oversight of those awards for which it is jointly responsible.

3.2 OBJECTIVE 2: QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

With regard to NUI's contribution to quality enhancement, it is important to consider the different relationships between NUI and various members of the Federation in the context of responsibilities for academic standards and QA. Currently, evidence of the potential for NUI to contribute to quality enhancement is strongest in relation to the IPA, which is its only LP. In its *Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement*, NUI states its objective: "to ensure that appropriate and transparent governance and management structures are in place both within NUI and in the recognised colleges to support the implementation of quality assurance and improvement procedures."³ In relation to its own governance, it is the Senate as governing body, supported by a suite of seven Senate committees, which is also the key decision-making body, responsible for approval of the strategic plan and all policies and guidelines, appointing external examiners and receiving reports.

Regarding RCs, the contribution to quality enhancement through governance and

management starts with the Senate as governing body and its responsibilities for:

- approving policies and procedures, namely the reviews at programme level (both RCSI and IPA) and institutional level (the IPA, only),
- institutional (the IPA, only) and programme reviews (for both) and receiving the respective reports and
- appointing external examiners and discussing responses from the IPA to the synthesis reports and noting the responses of RCSI.

Through its institutional approval and review, NUI Senate ensures that its LP (the IPA) has its own governance arrangements in place to support quality enhancement and reviews of their effectiveness. As will be explained below, the institutional and programme reviews, especially, make important contributions to quality enhancement.

The two joint committees with the IPA (IPA Steering Committee) and RCSI (NUI-RCSI Working Group Executive [WGE]) are the key instruments by which MAA and the Quality team manage the relationship with the RCs, and are equal in terms of impact. The IPA Steering Committee emphasises quality enhancement; not only are the external examining synthesis reports and follow-ups discussed, but enhancement activities by the IPA are a standing item on its agenda.

Finally, the NUI Registrar, as a member of the IPA Board and of the examination boards of both institutions, has an important opportunity to provide direct support for quality enhancement based on the outcomes of external examining. The presence of the NUI Registrar on the IPA Board helps keep quality topics to the fore of leadership discussions at the IPA.

Representatives from all members of the Federation emphasised the importance of the effective and collegiate and informal day-to-day working relationship between themselves and NUI staff. For an institution with limited resources informal collaboration should not be underestimated.

³ [NUI's \(2017\) Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement](#), p. 4, [Accessed 21 June 2023]

The review team concludes that NUI uses its governance in an appropriate and effective way to support quality enhancement at the RCs.

Regarding CUs, the role of NUI is significantly less important, which results from the autonomous responsibility of the constituent universities for QA. There is little direct evidence available of the impact of the publication of policies on quality enhancement in CUs. However, NUI plays an important role in the formal approval of external examiners in the Federation by the Senate (including CUs). Once an appointment is made, NUI has no further role in the external examination process at CUs. It receives some, but not all, external examiners' reports. There is currently no formal mechanism that would provide NUI with opportunities to support quality enhancement at the CUs similar to those in the RCs.

The obvious difference between NUI's potential and actual support for quality enhancement among the three groups of members of the Federation raises the question of the relevance and potential impact of a common body or forum that would comprise all members of the Federation and which could focus on enhancement topics of common interest and relevance. The fact that all degrees awarded by members of the Federation are also NUI awards, may call for a higher level of integrated cross-institutional analysis and discussion about academic standards. As became clear during the site visit, the Senate, at least, does not currently play such an integrative role beyond appointment and approval decisions. The review team reiterates the recommendation made under objective 1 to establish an official forum for the discussion of standards and QA and enhancement in the Federation.



3.2.1. Role of Policymaking and Guidance Documents

Through its *Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement*, NUI guides its quality enhancement activities vis-à-vis the RCs. One objective emphasised by NUI is “to facilitate quality enhancement in teaching, learning and research based on recommendations arising from reviews and other initiatives, and by highlighting effective practices to be shared with the recognised colleges.”⁴

NUI expresses this objective through the design of its 16 relevant regulations, policies and guidelines, among which the following are critical for the two RCs:

- *Guidelines for the Institutional Review of Quality Assurance Effectiveness at Recognised Colleges which are Linked Providers (2020)*

and the

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

NUI’s institutional reviews of LPs follow an explicit quality enhancement-led approach which is contained in the *Statutory Guidelines for the National University of Ireland (NUI) for the Review of its Linked Providers* and governed by it. This review has an explicit enhancement-oriented component because its second objective: to “review how the College enhances quality through governance, policies, and procedures, with regard to its stated mission and quality targets”⁵ and has a direct impact on the approach to QA and enhancement taken by the IPA internally. In this context, the review team notes that in the *Policy and Procedures for the Approval of QA in the Recognised Colleges* document, the expectation regarding internal enhancement-led approaches could be made more explicit.

It is to be noted, though, that at the time of this CINNTE review, this policy applies only to the IPA. Since the enactment of the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*, NUI no longer has statutory responsibility for the approval of RCSI’s QA policies and procedures, nor is it responsible for carrying out external institutional review of the effectiveness of RCSI’s QA policies and procedures. The document *The Quality Assurance Relationship between the National University of Ireland and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland – University of Medicine and Health Sciences (2020)* is a description of the special relationship between both institutions and does not contain guidance let alone directives for RCSI.

It is fair to say that because NUI has only one LP, evidence is limited to only one instance of an *Institutional Review of Quality Assurance Effectiveness Institute of Public Administration* (conducted in September 2021). Nonetheless, by making 23 recommendations alongside 15 commendations the report gives the institution many suggestions to improve its governance, QA arrangements, teaching and learning environment and processes; the recommendations are geared towards enhancement more than compliance. Equally important is the follow-up. IPA had to submit a quality improvement plan. The review team learned that the plan was discussed at the IPA Steering Committee and with the NUI Registrar sitting on the IPA Board and its implementation has had a significant impact and some actions are ongoing.

The review team learned, in its interview with IPA representatives, that the IPA valued the review and the report as supportive for its development. The same applies to the programme review of the BA (Honours) degree, which also took place in September 2020.

The NUI activity with potentially the most direct impact on quality enhancement of teaching and learning is its responsibility for and involvement

⁴ [NUI’s \(2017\) Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement](#), p. 5, [Accessed 21 June 2023]

⁵ [Guidelines for the Institutional Review of Quality Assurance Effectiveness at Recognized Colleges which are Linked Providers of NUI](#), p. 9, [Accessed 21 June 2023]

in external examining. NUI approved the policy *NUI Extern Examiners Primary Degree and Taught Postgraduate Courses in NUI Recognised Colleges in December 2019*, which includes principles and regulations for conduct of the process. NUI appoints the external examiners and handles their administration.

A truly enhancement-led component of external examining are the synthesis reports of the external examiners reports that are provided to the IPA and RCSI separately. NUI receives responses from the two colleges; however, due to its different relationship with NUI, RCSI's report is noted by the Senate whereas the IPA's report requires action. Although impact on quality enhancement was reported during the site visit the review team wishes to emphasise that NUI does not utilise the full potential of external examining for quality enhancement. The reports presented some recurrent themes that do not appear to have been addressed. The idea aired during the site visit of adding a section to the reports referring to the previous report showing trends seems an obvious requirement.

The review team is of the opinion that cross-institutional analyses and learning have huge potential for strengthening quality-enhancing effects of external examining. The contribution of NUI to quality enhancement at the CUs through policies and procedures is generally limited by the autonomous responsibility of CUs for their own QA.

The review team sees huge potential for supporting quality enhancement for all members of the Federation through cross-institutional analyses and learning from the external examining process. Thematic reports for disciplines as already prepared for Medicine and Health Sciences could make a significant contribution. The review team was informed that although these analyses were presented to Senate, they were not formally distributed to CUs.

In conclusion, the contribution to quality enhancement at CUs through policies and procedures is limited, partly explained by their uncontested autonomy in matters of QA. As far as academic standards of awards are concerned, the

review team is of the view that NUI should play a more active role by preparing cross-institutional thematic analyses of external examining.

The team commends NUI's initiative in beginning to extract valuable additional information from external examiner reports in the form of synthesis and thematic reports, uncovering trends which might not be otherwise available to constituent universities or recognised colleges.

The review team recommends that NUI produce further synthesis reports of external examiner reports including analysis of developments over time of all members of the Federation and formally shares these with members.

3.2.2. Examples of Quality Enhancement

The quality of the ISER provided by NUI was commendable but had few examples of quality enhancement. While not necessarily documented, it was clear during the main review visit that NUI has delivered many successful quality enhancement initiatives that may not have been formally recognised as such. Examples considered by the review team include:

Internal Administration

- Cross-functional staff training to help cover staff absences.
- Handover procedures when staff leave the organisation.
- Induction programmes for new members of the Senate and of staff.

External Examiner Appointments

- Improved timing for Senate approval of external examiner appointments.
- Move from paper-based external examiner appointments to an electronic system.

Assessment

- Revision of assessment approaches at the IPA based on synthesis reports on external examination (e.g. changes in weighting of continuous assessment).

In established organisations, such examples would not normally be classified as quality enhancements.

However, in the case of NUI they signify the efforts staff have made to introduce more effective and efficient processes and procedures.

The review team commends the NUI leadership team for supporting staff development and training and for its programme to improve internal administrative practices.

The external examiner appointments process has in the past been exclusively paper-based and consequently very labour intensive. NUI has already moved this to an electronic system although the administration of formal approval is still lengthy. While members submit nominations for external examiners in May, formal approval by the Senate does not take place until November. This requires careful explanation of the timeline to prospective candidates by the RCs.

The pressure to find willing and suitable external examiners is not likely to get easier. NUI acknowledges the importance of regarding the current email-based approach as an evolutionary step rather than a final solution. Technology will offer improved and more efficient approaches for the matriculation processes, external examining, and processing of parchments. The capacity of NUI to upgrade processes is currently very limited, and NUI should be supported in introducing the necessary prioritisation and external expertise to improve their systems. The parchments project would be priority number one.

3.2.3. NUI Awards

The ISER (p. 51) notes that NUI typically offers around 50 distinct awards per year. A number of these are one-off monetary prizes that recognise academic achievement by students across the Federation; other awards support doctoral and post-doctoral research through more sustained funding.

NUI recently surveyed both applicants and assessors for previous short- and longer-term NUI awards and while the survey feedback was largely positive, two issues emerged. The first related to the need to improve communication in terms of both adherence to deadlines and the provision of

pertinent and reasonable feedback. (ISER p. 52).

The second issue concerned the application process for many of the awards, which was judged to be overly burdensome and bureaucratic. In undergraduate awards, the workload involved in the process appeared disproportionate to the value of the award. Patently talented nominees for undergraduate awards, already successful in their own university, were required to go through another layer of assessment in the NUI process (on top of busy university schedules). NUI subsequently decided that these undergraduate prizes will now be open to top students in specific disciplines at their own university; the NUI examination element of the application process will be replaced by a nomination approach. Awards of a higher value, related to doctoral and post-doctoral research, will still require a more substantive application process.

Given the value of these awards for the recipients, and for the reputation of NUI, regular short review and enhancement cycles with award applicants, awardees and assessors would be advisable to ensure relevance and value. Some longitudinal research into the longer-term impact of the awards on the careers of awardees should also be considered.

3.2.4. Analysis and Conclusion

The review team is of the opinion that there is unused potential for NUI to strengthen its role in supporting quality enhancement. While NUI has traditionally sought to avoid being seen to direct how CUs should respond to evidence, it is clear that some discussions can only be led by NUI. This is because the CUs are also competing with each other, and NUI is in a position to take a more objective, independent view.

Regarding the CUs, there is clearly, in the view of the review team, an opportunity to avail of the evidence available via the NUI external examiner synthesis reports. Appropriate further analysis of the key themes and trends in such reports by the CUs should generate responses leading to important quality enhancements. To date, such reports have been tabled for noting by the NUI Senate. While such an approach can place the

information in the hands of those in need of it, a more proactive and formal approach would likely generate a greater impact. NUI has considered using the Registrars to circulate the synthesis reports within their individual institutions perhaps by placing them on the agenda of their Academic Councils. However, the reports are seen as having sufficient value as to warrant a stronger leadership approach entailing more visibility for the findings and the expectation that they will be acted upon.

As NUI has access to data not available to individual CUs or RCs, there are unexploited opportunities for evidence-based quality enhancement in several areas. NUI can leverage its status as the national university and its reputation (nationally and internationally) to convene meetings of key leaders in Irish HE to address important topics warranted by available evidence.

The review team recommends that NUI conduct more thematic analyses among the members of the Federation where a deeper analysis would be deemed useful.

The NUI Strategic Plan (2018 – 2022), cited in the ISER as a key source, states “NUI’s mission is to support the Irish higher education sector at home and abroad, by serving the interests of its member institutions and their students and graduates. NUI actively promotes, recognises, and rewards academic distinction and scholarship at university level, and we assure comparable, high academic standards for degrees and qualifications awarded by NUI. We proudly undertake activities to advance higher education, and to contribute to the civic, cultural, and intellectual life of Ireland. We have a particular commitment to supporting the Irish language and the rich and diverse culture of our nation.”⁶

The findings under Objective 1, and in the previous paragraphs, demonstrate a clear congruency between the above mission and NUI’s role as a champion of QA and enhancement. Nonetheless, the team reiterates its recommendation that NUI play a more active role in cross-institutional analysis and learning. There are five strategic goals in the

NUI Strategic Plan (2018 – 2022):

1. Add demonstrable value to NUI’s CUs, RCs and associated institutions.
2. Support Irish HE and advocate for its advancement at home and abroad.
3. Develop and capitalise on the NUI brand nationally and internationally, for the benefit of members and the wider sector.
4. Make a meaningful contribution to Irish civic society.
5. Enhance NUI’s staff skills base and its enabling support structures. (pg. 5)

The above goals are high-level and aspirational. While not all of the goals are directly related to QA and enhancement, there is alignment between Goals 1 and 2 and Objective 1 and 2. NUI has set major objectives for each of the above goals. QA and enhancement were not prominent in the previous strategic plan. The review team notes that the current proposed *NUI Strategic Plan (2023 – 2027)* contains several objectives that will impact on QA and enhancement. A number of proposed milestones and KPIs are contained in the updated strategy.

In the light of other recommendations made in this review, the team recommends the inclusion of appropriate objectives to give prominence and visibility to recommendations made herein and to allow for the measurement of progress.

3.3. OBJECTIVE 3: ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION

3.3.1. Linked Provider Access, Transfer and Progression

Under the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*, NUI is a designated awarding body, required to establish QA arrangements in respect of its LP, the IPA, and to ensure that that QA and enhancement standards are maintained. The IPA underwent an Institutional Review of Quality Assurance Effectiveness by NUI in 2021. In terms of access, transfer and progression, the IPA were commended during that review for their provision of flexible learning

⁶ [National University of Ireland Strategic Plan 2018-2022](#), p. 4, [Accessed 21 June 2023]

opportunities that enhance access and academic progression for professionals in the Irish public sector and beyond.

The review also highlighted the impact of more recent, fundamental shifts in the nature and context of the Irish public sector, stating that the management of academic standards in the IPA “demands a radical rethink of its raison d’être”⁷. The review continues: “The Review panel recommends the IPA complete a strategic review of its current mission taking into account the changing public sector context in which it is operating. The Review panel do not wish to pre-empt such a review but from the ISER and interviews with key stakeholders it would appear that the IPA should focus more towards a professional development and skills training organisation.”⁸

Should such a strategic review take place, this review team wants to emphasise the role that NUI will need to play in supporting the quality of the analysis, decision-making and possible re-organisation of their LP’s educational direction and provision. Fundamental to this process should be enhancing and expanding access, transfer and progression opportunities for a new generation of learners in the Irish public service.

The team recommends that NUI adopt a stronger advisory and quality oversight role in any IPA review and reassessment of the direction, delivery, and quality of its educational scope, in line with the changing educational demands of learners in the Irish public service, including those learners’ access, transfer and progression needs.

3.3.2. NUI Matriculation Requirements and Exemptions

Section 471 of the Universities Act, 1997 provides as follows: “The Senate of the National University of Ireland shall determine the basic matriculation requirements for the constituent universities, but each university may prescribe additional requirements generally or in respect of particular faculties of the university”. NUI Senate

communicates the NUI matriculation regulations to the Irish Central Applications Office (CAO), in respect of applicants for any of the four NUI CUs and two RCs. The CAO embeds the NUI regulations into their online application and allocation system, which automatically allows any student offered a place in the NUI Federation to matriculate to that institution, so long as they fulfil the NUI matriculation requirements.

NUI processes a large number of requests (over 3,000 most years) from university applicants for exemption from some aspects of the NUI matriculation regulations. The [QQI Policy Restatement Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training \(2015\)](#) articulates as one of its key principles “that learners can avail of fair, consistent entry arrangements” (p. 4). Under Objective 3 the team wishes to comment on the quality of the NUI Matriculation regulations and their exemption processes. In this regard the team confines its observations to the basic matriculation processes developed and managed by NUI, which service the CUs and RCs, via the CAO. It does not seek to comment on any additional matriculation requirements of the CUs or extend its remit beyond the LP, consistent with the terms of references of this review.

The review team notes that stakeholders interviewed (including representatives from the CUs, the CAO, and school guidance counsellors) unanimously agreed that, in their experience, the basic NUI matriculation requirements were the most complicated in the Irish HE sector for student applicants, for support staff in secondary schools and for university admission staff in the Federation. Complexities in the NUI matriculation processes include confusion about basic language requirements for some students and a duplication of proof needed by both the Irish Department of Education and NUI from some students seeking exemptions from studying the Irish language. The team noted a dearth of clear matriculation information on the NUI website and that the NUI

⁷ [Institutional Review of Quality Assurance Effectiveness Institute of Public Administration \(IPA\)](#), p. 15, [Accessed 21 June 2023]

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 15-16, [Accessed 21 June 2023]

matriculation exemption processes are still paper based. The NUI staff are hopeful that a new online matriculation form (in development) will simplify the system.

In contrast, the team also recognised the willingness of the small NUI matriculation team to offer a valuable, responsive and often personalised service for those students seeking more complex exemptions in order to matriculate to NUI universities. It was acknowledged that some students, their families and guidance support staff in their schools, are proactive at navigating the different and often complicated aspects of the NUI matriculation requirements. However, less prepared and less-supported students may discover, after the first round of CAO university offers, that they do not have the subject requirements for admission to any NUI university.

The team acknowledges that the NUI matriculation team offer help and support to distressed students who are often caught in difficult individual situations. However, such situations may be better addressed at an earlier stage in the process via a possible simplification and harmonisation of the current, basic NUI matriculation with other national university matriculation guidelines. This is important bearing in mind the increasing diversity in the backgrounds of students now applying to universities in Ireland, and also significant ongoing changes in the Irish HE landscape itself.

The team also observes that valuable data is gathered annually by NUI on large numbers of students seeking exemption from aspects of the NUI matriculation regulations. However, no follow-up longitudinal research has been carried out on the further progression and levels of success of those students who enter the Federation universities without some of the basic NUI subject requirements.

The review team notes that, at the request of the NUI Registrars, NUI is currently undertaking a reassessment and enhancement of its matriculation processes; this is the first such analysis of the NUI matriculation system for quite some time. Given stakeholder feedback gathered on this topic during the review, the team welcomes this initiative.

The team commends the NUI matriculation team on its responsiveness to the needs of large numbers of university applicants who are attempting to navigate the often-complex NUI matriculation regulations at a particularly stressful time in their educational journey. They note the quality of the help and support that it consistently provides to students, their families and the broader school system.

The review team recommends that NUI explore whether more consistency in its matriculation regulations can be achieved in the basic cross-institutional matriculation requirements at national level. The team considers that such a harmonisation will be valuable in simplifying and enhancing access opportunities for students.

Given NUI's unique oversight of the NUI matriculation process in its CUs and RCs, the team recommends that NUI consider collecting longitudinal data on the impact of the NUI matriculation exemptions on the longer-term progression and academic success of students. This would contribute new evidence to inform national best practice regarding the impact of pre-requisite subjects on access and progression.

Until more fundamental enhancements can be delivered, the team recommends, as a matter of priority, that the NUI website should be developed to include the simplest and clearest explanation possible of the NUI matriculation process, with links to relevant individual matriculation pages on the websites of the different constituent universities.

3.4 OBJECTIVE 4: PROVISION OF PROGRAMMES TO INTERNATIONAL LEARNERS

The *Institutional Review of Quality Assurance Effectiveness, IPA, (2021)*, states “The IPA do not cater for international learners or deal with exchange or Erasmus students”⁹ In speaking with IPA senior management, they confirmed that their current accredited courses are not made available to international students. However, they also revealed that the IPA has a longstanding reputation for international collaboration in emerging economies and that the continuation of this activity is part of their new 5-year strategy. They mentioned that, as part of their international-focused activities, they currently run a non-award-bearing programme for staff of international embassies in Ireland.

The team recommends that, as with access, transfer and progression (section 3.3.1), NUI’s oversight of and responsibility for any possible future review and revision of the IPA’s education offerings should be extended to encompass their work with all learners, including those coming from, or recently arrived from, outside Ireland. Such learners should come under the [Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners](#).

The review team is also aware that NUI intends to review and revise its *Collaborative and Transnational Provision Guidelines* and that, in doing so, it will be cognisant of QQI’s Code of Practice in relation to its International Education Mark (IEM)¹⁰ The review team supports this approach.

9 [Institutional Review of Quality Assurance Effectiveness Institute of Public Administration \(IPA\) 2021](#), p. 6 [Accessed 21 June 2023]

10 QQI Code of Practice for the International Education Mark is currently under development and will be published in due course.



Section 4

Conclusions



RCSI

Section 4: Conclusions

The review team would like to thank NUI for its efforts in facilitating the review process and acknowledge NUI's significant efforts to prepare for the review in times of very substantial change of personnel. The review team acknowledges the quality of the ISER and especially NUI's open and self-critical approach to the ISER and the whole review process; the self-critical attitude applied during the review and especially during the main review visit where open and fruitful discussions with staff and stakeholders enabled the review team to conduct a constructive review. The review team believes that it also constitutes a good basis for developing NUI and addressing the challenges lying ahead.

This report contains the review team's evaluations and conclusions and resulting from these, commendations and recommendations. The review team wants to emphasise that many of the recommendations support deliberations about, or plans for, future developments revealed during the main review visit. As such they are to be understood as encouragement to strengthen current plans to strengthen the objectives as noted in the new Strategic Plan and the plans of the new management and staff for NUI as it enters its next stage of development.

Two findings in particular are to be highlighted:

1. Firstly, the review team wishes to emphasise that two recommendations, namely recommendations 5 and 6 (see 4.4), refer to NUI's unique position as an awarding body which has only very limited responsibilities as far as the CUs, with their autonomous responsibility for QA, are concerned. The NUI name and crest appears on the degree parchment of practically every graduating student of the CUs, although NUI has no role in any part of the provision of the education or assessment of these students.

In acknowledging this, the team does not wish to suggest any intrusion by NUI into the business of the CUs. Instead, the review team has focused its evaluations and its recommendations on the question of how NUI assures itself of the standards of the joint awards to which it lends its name, along with that of each individual CU and RC.

The team notes that there is no specific policy or guidelines that focuses on NUI's assurance of the standards of awards that are made (jointly) in its name. It is the team's view that NUI's role in external examining represents a good opportunity to execute this responsibility by strengthening synthesis reports and thematic analyses across the Federation with potential benefits for the entire Irish HE system.

2. Secondly, although not a provider itself, NUI's responsibility for academic standards requires a more significant role for students as partners in NUI's governance than is currently the case. The review team wishes to strongly support any deliberations for implementing formal structures for the representation of students as a matter requiring immediate action.

The review team concludes its report by emphasising the momentum resulting from significant change in personnel in general, the change in management and also of the membership of the Senate, all of which NUI may use to take a significant step forward in its development.

4.1 COMMENDATIONS

1. The team commends NUI for the quality of the ISER and for adding concluding paragraphs with self-critical evaluations and follow-up activities. This is consistent with the overall self-critical approach NUI applied not only in the ISER but also during the main review visit.
2. It is worth noting that representatives from all members of the Federation emphasised the importance of the effective, collegiate

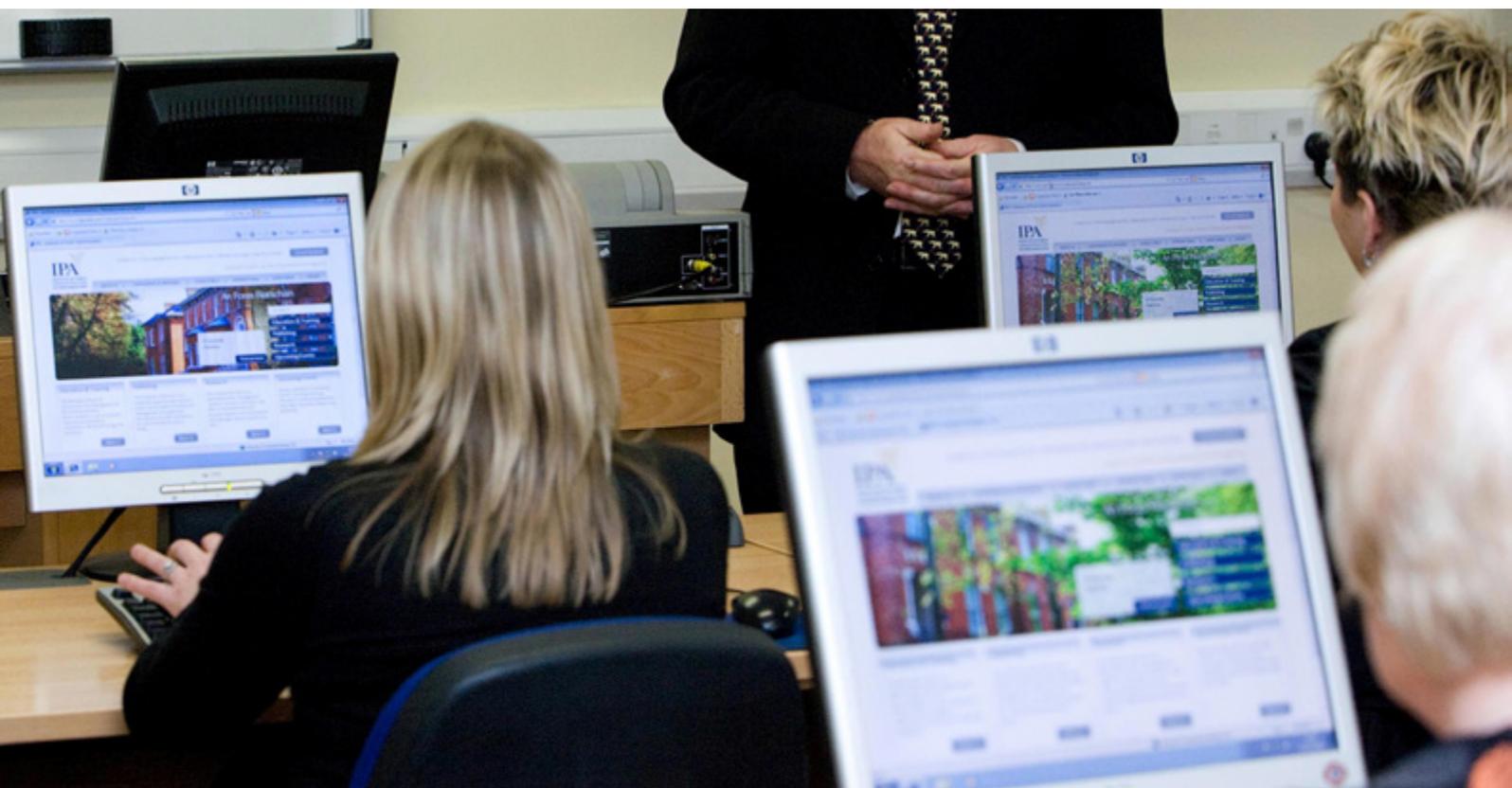
and informal day-to-day working approaches of NUI staff. The team commends the fact that, for an institution with relatively few staff, NUI has achieved a very effective impact through informal collaborations with other key institutions.

3. The review team commends NUI leadership team for supporting staff development and training and for its programme to improve internal administrative practices.
4. The team commends the NUI's matriculation team on their responsiveness to the needs of large numbers of university applicants who are attempting to navigate the often-complex NUI matriculation regulations at a particularly stressful time in their educational journey. They note the quality of the help and support that they consistently provide to students, their families and the broader school system.
5. The team commends NUI's initiative in beginning to extract valuable additional information from external examiner reports in the form of synthesis and thematic reports, uncovering trends which might not be available to CUs or RCs.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Objective 1 – Effectiveness and Implementation of QA Procedures

1. The review team recommends that NUI explore ways in which the permanent participation of the CU Registrars in Senate meetings can be assured.
2. The team recommends the establishment by NUI of an official forum for the discussion of standards and QA and enhancement in the Federation accompanied by appropriate documentation and monitoring. (3.1.3.)
3. The team recommends that NUI strongly consider the appointment of a student council, using the established pool of student leader resources, i.e., SU sabbatical officers and part time officers from RCSI. The team also suggests that NUI uses its association with NTStEP which already has established partnerships with UCC, University of Galway and MU. (3.1.4.)
4. The team recommends that, in its follow-up process with IPA, NUI ensure that the recommendation made by the IPA institutional review team about inclusion of the student voice is considered and encourages NUI to support the IPA in this regard. (3.1.4.)



5. The team recommends that NUI put in place the appropriate means to ensure that it meets its responsibilities as an awarding body by assuring its oversight of those awards for which it is jointly responsible. (3.1.5)

Objective 2 – Enhancement of Quality

6. The review team recommends that NUI produce further synthesis reports of external examiner reports including analysis of developments over time of all members of the Federation and formally shares these with members. (3.2.2.)
7. The review team recommends that NUI conduct more thematic analyses across the members of the Federation where a deeper analysis is deemed useful. (3.2.5.)
8. In the light of other recommendations made in this review, the team recommends the inclusion of appropriate objectives to give prominence and visibility to recommendations made herein and to allow for the measurement of progress. (3.2.5.)

Objective 3 – Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression

9. The team recommends that NUI adopt a stronger advisory and quality oversight role in any IPA review and reassessment of the direction, delivery, and quality of their educational scope, in line with the changing educational demands of learners in the Irish public service, including those learners' access, transfer and progression needs. (3.3.1.)
10. The review team recommends that NUI explore whether more consistency in their matriculation regulations can be achieved in the basic cross-institutional matriculation requirements at national level. The team considers that such a harmonisation will be valuable in simplifying and enhancing access opportunities for students. (3.3.2.)
11. Given NUI's unique oversight of the NUI matriculation process over their CUs and RCs, the team recommends that NUI consider collecting longitudinal data on the impact of NUI matriculation exemptions on the longer-term progression and academic success of

students. This would contribute new evidence to inform national best practice regarding the impact of pre-requisite subjects on access and progression. (3.3.2)

12. Until more fundamental enhancements can be delivered, the team recommends, as a matter of priority, that the NUI website should be developed to include the simplest and clearest explanation possible of the NUI matriculation process, with links to relevant individual matriculation pages on the websites of the different CUs. (3.3.2.)

Objective 4 – Supports for International Learners

13. The team recommends that, as with access, transfer and progression (section 3.3.1), NUI's oversight of and responsibility for any possible future review and revision of the IPA's education offerings should be extended to encompass their work with all learners, including those coming from outside Ireland, and that such learners should come under the *Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners*. (3.4.1.)

4.3 TOP 5 COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.3.1. Top 5 Commendations

1. The team commends NUI for the quality of the ISER and for adding concluding paragraphs with self-critical evaluations and follow-up activities. This is consistent with the overall self-critical approach NUI applied not only in the ISER but also during the main review visit.
2. It is worth noting that representatives from all members of the Federation emphasised the importance of the effective, collegiate and informal day-to-day working approaches of NUI staff. The team commends the fact that, for an institution with relatively few staff, NUI has achieved a very effective impact through informal collaborations with other key institutions.
3. The review team commends NUI leadership team for supporting staff development and

training and for its programme to improve internal administrative practices.

4. The team commends the NUI matriculation team on their responsiveness to the needs of large numbers of university applicants who are attempting to navigate the often-complex NUI matriculation regulations at a particularly stressful time in their educational journey. They note the quality of the help and support that they consistently provide to students, their families and the broader school system.
5. The team commends NUI's initiative in beginning to extract valuable additional information from External Examiner reports in the form of synthesis and thematic reports, uncovering trends which might not be available to constituent universities or recognised colleges.

4.3.2. Top 5 Recommendations

1. The team recommends that NUI put in place the appropriate means to ensure that it meets its responsibilities as an awarding body by assuring its oversight of those awards for which it is jointly responsible.
2. The review team recommends that NUI produce further synthesis reports of external examiner reports including analysis of developments over time of all members of the Federation and formally shares these with members.
3. The team recommends that NUI strongly consider the appointment of a student council, using the established pool of student leader resources, i.e., SU sabbatical officers and part time officers from RCSI. The team also suggests that NUI uses its association with NStEP which already has established partnerships with UCC, University of Galway and MU.
4. The team recommends the establishment by NUI of an official forum for the discussion of standards and QA and enhancement in the Federation accompanied by appropriate documentation and monitoring.
5. Given the NUI's unique oversight of the NUI matriculation process over their CUs and RCs, the team recommends that NUI consider

collecting longitudinal data on the impact of NUI matriculation exemptions on the longer-term progression and academic success of students. This would contribute new evidence to inform national best practice regarding the impact of pre-requisite subjects on access and progression.

4.4 STATEMENTS ON QUALITY ASSURANCE

The review team considers NUI's QA procedures in relation to RCs and especially in relation to IPA, as the only LP, to be effective. The relevant policies are implemented consistently, where applicable. The review team is of the opinion that the two steering committees for the RCs are an effective means to address QA and enhancement topics on a regular basis. However, the implementation of the policies on external examining is lacking activities to assure NUI of the standards of the joint awards made in its name. Linked to this, the review team recommends the implementation of a committee or discussion forum, comprising representatives of all members of the Federation, where questions of common interest of academic standards and QA and enhancement can be discussed.

The review team confirms that the existing QA procedures adhere to QQI's QA Guidelines and policies, namely the general *QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines* and more specifically the [QQI Statutory Guidelines for the Review of Linked Providers by the National University of Ireland \(NUI\)](#) and the relevant guidelines, [QQI's Policy Restatement and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training](#)

The review team wishes to emphasise the strong enhancement orientation of the institutional review of its LP as effective in supporting quality enhancement in the institution, and also the important role of the steering committees for addressing questions of quality enhancement. The review team noted the engagement of the new management in revising some of the services to members of the Federation and in implementing a regular policy review scheme which will help to enhance NUI's own operations.







Institutional Response

The National University of Ireland (NUI) welcomed the opportunity to engage with external review of the arrangements for quality assurance and enhancement for the first time in its 115-year history. As a federal university with distinguished member institutions, NUI is unique in the Irish higher education landscape, particularly as a non-provider designated awarding body.

We are grateful that the Review Team worked to understand the particular nature of NUI, resulting in meaningful engagement, appropriate commendations and constructive recommendations. The recognition of NUI's 'effective, collegiate and informal day-to-day working relationship which NUI staff brings' to its interactions with member institutions is an important endorsement for NUI given the central strategic commitment to serving institutions within the federation.

We are particularly pleased that the Review Team recognised the open and self-reflective approach taken by NUI in the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) and in the engagement with the Review Team during the review visit. NUI has embraced the combination of recent changes in personnel, the institutional review process and a new strategic planning cycle as an opportunity for both deep and wide reflection on where the University is and where it wants to be.

The report's commendations acknowledge the strengths of a small and agile team covering a breadth of strategic and operational activities. The key finding for NUI is that 'the documented quality assurance procedures constitute an effective system in relation to the recognised colleges, in particular the linked provider'. The panel also recognised the value of the broader perspective NUI's work can bring to the ongoing quality assurance and enhancement work of the member institutions, particularly in the area of external examining.

The substance of many of the recommendations in the CINNTE review report are addressed in NUI's Strategic Plan for 2023-2027. NUI is keen to establish a forum to engage directly with the NUI student community, for example.

We fully accept the spirit of the Review Team's recommendation concerning the role and relationship with the IPA, but we must acknowledge that there are aspects and functions of the IPA that do not come properly within the scope of that relationship. NUI is committed to supportive and inclusive ATP provision. Any changes to the IPA's direction, delivery and educational scope that results in changes to programmes that lead to qualifications on the NFAQ will be considered carefully. NUI will be involved, in an appropriate advisory capacity, in any plans that lead to such changes. Additionally, the NUI Registrar contributes to broader discussions of the IPA's future as a member of the IPA Board.

We welcome the Review Team's recommendation to harmonise matriculation requirements and enhance the process for applicants. NUI is leading a sectoral review of matriculation and aims to make significant improvements in the near future. The further recommendation to consider the collection of longitudinal data on applicants for matriculation exemptions raises significant data protection and GDPR compliance issues and will require careful consideration and consultation with a number of external partner institutions, such as CAO, and all relevant federation member institutions.

We acknowledge the complexities of NUI as an awarding body that does not provide educational programmes but awards degrees and other qualifications for a linked provider (IPA) and in partnership with member institutions that are also designated awarding bodies (the four constituent universities and RCSI). The issue raised by the review team regarding NUI degrees awarded jointly with constituent universities is something that we will address in the improvement action plan after appropriate consultation with the constituent universities regarding a workable and sustainable process. The strategic commitment to establish a quality forum for the NUI federation will support this and actions related to quality assurance more broadly.

In conclusion, the review report recommendations are largely in line with what we are planning for NUI in the next year and the recently initiated strategic cycle. All other recommendations will be incorporated into our strategic and operational plans, as appropriate.

We would like to express our thanks to the many stakeholders who participated in the ISER process and the site visit for their generosity and support of our enhancement processes. We thank the members of the Review Team for the care, curiosity and rigour they brought to the process. We are also grateful to the staff of QQI for their professional and consistent support throughout the process.

We look forward to reporting on our progress in a year's time and more expansively in the next iteration of cyclical reviews.

Dr Patrick O'Leary
NUI Registrar

31 July 2023

Appendices





BAILIE UCD

UCD VILLAGE



Appendix A: Review Terms of Reference

APPENDIX A: TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND (NUI)

Section 1 Background and Context for the NUI Review

1.1 CONTEXT AND LEGISLATIVE UNDERPINNING

These are the Terms of Reference for a review of the National University of Ireland under *Section 40 of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*.

NUI is a federal university comprising four Constituent Universities¹¹ and, currently, two Recognised Colleges¹². NUI is empowered by charter and statute to recognise other institutions of higher education. Recognised Colleges are required to meet NUI quality standards in the academic programmes and student experience that they offer. Through the implementation of quality assurance policies, procedures and guidelines, NUI seeks to assure that quality standards are comparable to those in the NUI Constituent Universities, and on this basis, Recognised Colleges are permitted to award degrees and other qualifications of the National University.

NUI as a designated awarding body¹³ has authority to make awards that are included within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). NUI is unique as a designated awarding body in that it is not a provider of education and training programmes that lead to the degrees and qualifications that it awards. Accordingly, the scope of quality assurance procedures applicable to NUI as a designated awarding body are more confined, focusing primarily on NUI's responsibilities for the external quality assurance of Recognised Colleges which are linked providers of NUI.

Statutory Basis for Review of NUI

Under *Section 32 of the 2012 Act*, NUI has established procedures for reviewing the implementation and effectiveness of quality assurance procedures of Recognised Colleges which are linked providers¹⁴ of NUI. A review of NUI, under *Section 40 of the 2012 Act*, prioritises the implementation by NUI of the forgoing procedures and their effectiveness.

These guidelines and procedures may be considered as statutory procedures for an NUI review¹⁵.

¹¹ University College Dublin; University College Cork; University of Galway; Maynooth University.

¹² RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences; Institute of Public Administration.

¹³ Such designation under the 2012 Act applies to a previously established university; the National University of Ireland; an educational institution established as a university under section 9 of the Act of 1997; a technological university; an institute of technology and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

¹⁴ A linked provider is a provider that is not a designated awarding body but enters into an arrangement with a designated awarding body under which arrangement the provider provides a programme of education and training that satisfies all or part of the prerequisites for an award of the designated awarding body.

¹⁵ Section 40 of the 2012 Act establishes the statutory basis for an external quality review of NUI. Section 32 specifies the purpose of such a review and Section 27 provides for the issuing of guidelines and procedures to facilitate such a review.

The matters within scope of a review of NUI are:

- the statutory obligation to facilitate an independent assessment of how effectively NUI quality assures its linked providers.
- the quality assurance relationship between NUI and the RCSI; the level of scrutiny and assessment of this relationship will be signalled by NUI in the preparation of their self-evaluation report.
- the role of Constituent Universities in influencing and advising on academic standards and in contributing to the quality assurance functions of NUI.

1.2 PURPOSES OF NUI REVIEW

The aim of institutional review is to provide an independent external review of the effectiveness and implementation of NUI’s own internal quality assurance procedures. The four key purposes for the institutional review of NUI are set out in the table below:

| Purpose | Achieved and Measured Through |
|---|--|
| 1. To encourage a QA culture and the enhancement of the student learning environment and experience as overseen by NUI. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring quality as well as quality assurance within NUI and its linked providers. • Emphasising the student and the student learning experience in reviews. • Providing a source of evidence of areas for improvement and areas for revision of policy and change and basing follow-up upon them. • Exploring innovative and effective practices and procedures. |
| 2. To provide feedback to NUI about institution-wide quality and the impact of its mission, strategy, governance and management on quality and the overall effectiveness of quality assurance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasising the ownership of quality and quality assurance at the appropriate level within NUI. • Pitching the review at a comprehensive institution-wide level. • Evaluating compliance with legislation, policy and standards. • Evaluating how NUI has identified and measured itself against its own benchmarks and metrics to support quality assurance governance and procedures. • Emphasising the improvement of quality assurance procedures. |
| 3. To contribute to public confidence in the quality of qualifications awarded by NUI by promoting transparency and public awareness. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adhering to purposes, criteria and outcomes that are clear and transparent. • Publishing the reports and outcomes of reviews in accessible locations and formats for different audiences. • Evaluating, as part of the review, NUI reporting on quality and quality assurance, to ensure that it is transparent and accessible. |
| 4. To encourage quality by using evidence-based, objective methods and advice. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the expertise of international, national and student peer reviewers who are independent of NUI. • Ensuring that findings are based on stated evidence. • Facilitating NUI to identify measurement, comparison and analytic techniques, based on quantitative data relevant to their own mission and context, to support quality assurance. • Promoting the identification and dissemination of examples of good practice and innovation. |

System-Level Purpose

An additional specific purpose for institutional review is to support system-level enhancement of the quality of higher education – achieved and measured by:

- The publication of periodic synoptic reports,
- Ensuring that there is sufficient consistency in approach between similar institutions to allow for comparability and shared learning and
- The publication of an NUI quality profile.

Section 2 Objectives and Criteria

2.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE REVIEW AND CRITERIA FOR THEIR EVALUATION

The NUI Institutional Self-Evaluation Report and the review report must analyse whether NUI has achieved these and the extent to which they have been achieved.

Objective 1

To review the effectiveness and implementation of the QA procedures of NUI through consideration of the procedures set out, primarily, in the AQR. Where necessary, the information provided by the AQR is supplemented by additional information provided through documentation requests and interviews. The scope of this includes the procedures for reporting, governance and publication. This also incorporates an analysis of the ways in which NUI applies evidence-based approaches to support quality assurance processes, including quantitative analysis, evidence gathering and comparison. Consideration will also be given to the effectiveness of the AQR and ISER procedures within NUI.

The scope of this objective also extends to the overarching procedures of NUI for assuring itself of the quality of research degree programmes under its approval.

In addition to the procedures for the approval and review of linked providers, this objective also encompasses the effectiveness of the procedures established by NUI for the assurance of the quality of collaborations, partnerships and overseas provision, joint awarding arrangements, joint provision and other collaborative arrangements.

Criteria for its measurement:

The criteria to be used by the Review Team in reaching conclusions for this objective are:

- [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area](#);
- [QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines](#),
- QQI Statutory Guidelines for the Review of Linked Providers by the National University of Ireland (NUI),
- [Guidelines for the Institutional Review of Quality Assurance Effectiveness at Recognised Colleges which are Linked Providers of NUI](#),
- Section 27, 32 and 40 of the 2012 Act, and
- NUI's own objectives and goals for quality assurance.
- Where appropriate and actioned by NUI, additional QQI Guidelines such as those for research degree programmes will be incorporated.

Objective 2

To review the enhancement of quality by NUI through governance, policy and procedures.

To review the congruency of quality assurance procedures and enhancements with NUI's own mission and goals or targets for quality.

To identify innovative and effective practices for quality enhancement.

Criteria for its measurement:

The criteria to be used by the Team in reaching conclusions for this objective are:

- NUI's own mission and vision,
- The goals or targets for quality identified by NUI and
- Additional sources of reference identified by NUI.

Objective 3

To review the effectiveness and implementation of procedures for access, transfer and progression, established and maintained by linked providers of NUI

NUI to ensure that linked providers establish procedure for access, transfer and progression of learners in accordance with QQI policy. NUI to review the effectiveness and implementation of a linked provider's procedures for learner access, transfer and progression.

Criterion for its measurement:

The criterion to be used by the Team in reaching conclusions for this objective is the QQI Policy Restatement: *Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training* (2015).

Objective 4

Following the introduction of the statutory international education quality assurance scheme and, where relevant, to determine the compliance of a linked provider of NUI with the Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners.

Criteria for its measurement:

The criterion to be used by the Team in reaching conclusions for this objective is the Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners.

2.1.1 Additional Questions

The Terms of Reference set out a range of additional questions for the Review Team. The purpose of these questions is to support the Team in reaching their findings and, in particular, in reaching a specific overarching statement in respect of each objective, considering their evidence and findings as a whole.

These questions are:

- How have quality assurance procedures and reviews been implemented by NUI?
- How effective are the internal quality assurance procedures and reviews of NUI?
- Are the quality assurance procedures in keeping with European Standards and Guidelines?
- Are the quality assurance procedures in keeping with QQI policy and guidelines, or their equivalent?
- Who takes responsibility for quality and quality assurance across NUI?
- How transparent, accessible and comprehensive is reporting on quality assurance and quality?
- How is quality promoted and enhanced?
- Are there effective innovations in quality enhancement and assurance?
- Is the student experience in keeping with NUI's own stated mission and strategy?
- Are achievements in quality and quality assurance in keeping with NUI's own stated mission and strategy?
- How do achievements in quality and quality assurance compare to NUI's own goals or targets for quality?

Section 3 The Review Process

3.1 PROCESS

The primary basis for the review process is this set of guidelines and procedures.

3.2 REVIEW TEAM PROFILE

QQI will appoint a Review Team to conduct the institutional review. Review Teams comprise of peer reviewers who are senior institutional leaders from comparable institutions, learner representatives as well as external representatives. The Team will consist of carefully selected and trained and briefed reviewers who have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their tasks. The Team will operate under the leadership of the Review Chairperson. Reviewers are not QQI employees, but rather peers of NUI. NUI will have an opportunity to comment on the proposed composition of their Review Team to ensure there are no conflicts of interest. QQI will ensure an appropriate team of reviewers is selected for NUI, all of whom will be entirely independent of NUI. QQI has final approval over the composition of each Review Team.

The team will be comprised of four to six individuals, and it is likely that the main review visit will take three days, with a possible fourth day to facilitate the Review Team to commence the drafting of the review report. NUI's Review Team will include a Chairperson and Coordinating Reviewer, and may be supported by a Rapporteur, who is not a member of the Team, to take and collate notes of meetings. Although it is intended that the main review visit will be conducted on site, it may need to be facilitated virtually in extenuating circumstances.

There will be appropriate gender representation on the Review Team.

The Review Team will be appointed in keeping with the following profile:

1. A Review Chairperson

The role of the Chairperson is to act as leader of the Review Team. This is an international reviewer who is a (serving or recently former) senior third-level institution leader – usually a head of institution or deputy head of institution or a senior policy advisor who:

- Possesses a wide range of higher education experience,
- Demonstrates a deep understanding of the complexities of the higher education system,
- Understands often unique QA governance arrangements and
- Has proven experience in the management of innovation and change.

2. A Coordinating Reviewer

The role of the Coordinating Reviewer is to act as secretary to the Team as well as to be a full Review Team member. This is usually a person with expertise in the higher education system and prior experience in participating in external reviews. As the Coordinating Reviewer is responsible for drafting the report, they will possess proven excellent writing abilities.

3. A Student Reviewer

The role of the Student Reviewer is to represent the student voice in the Review Team. The Student Reviewer will have significant experience of higher education or have completed a specific programme preparing them for the role of Student Reviewer or will previously have had a key role in other relevant institutional reviews.

4. An External Representative

The role of the External Representative is to bring a ‘third mission’ perspective or a perspective on the unique role of NUI in Irish higher education, to the Review Team.

In addition to the specific roles above, the full Team complement will include a range of experts with the following knowledge and experience:

- International reviewer experience,
- EQF and Bologna expertise,
- Experience of higher education quality assurance processes,
- Experience in governance and
- Experience and proven ability in the advancement of teaching and learning.

Details of review team roles and responsibilities can be found in Appendix B.

5. Rapporteur

The Review Team may be supported by a Rapporteur, who is not a member of the Team, to take and collate notes of meetings and support the drafting of the report.

3.3 PROCEDURE AND TIMELINES

The outline set out below will be elaborated further and timelines will be set out to accompany it, through discussion and consultation.

| Step | Action | Dates | Outcome |
|---------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Terms of Reference (ToR) | Collation of an institutional information profile by QQI. Confirmation of ToR with NUI and HEA. | 9 months before the main review visit | Published Terms of Reference |
| Preparation | Appointment of an expert Review Team. Consultation with the institution on any possible conflicts of interest. | 6-9 months before the main review visit | Review Team appointed |
| Self-evaluation | Forwarding to QQI of the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER). | 12 weeks before the main review visit | Published ISER (optional) |
| Desk Review | Desk review of the ISER by the Team. | Before the Initial Meeting | ISER initial response provided |
| Initial Virtual Meeting | An initial meeting of the Review Team, including reviewer training and briefing. This will be a virtual meeting. | 5 weeks after the ISER, 7 weeks before the main review visit | Team training and briefing is complete. Team identify key themes and additional documents required. |
| Planning Virtual Visit | A virtual visit of NUI by the Chair and Coordinating Reviewer to receive information about the ISER process, discuss the schedule for the main review visit and discuss additional documentation requests. This visit will be conducted virtually. | 5 weeks after the ISER, 7 weeks before the main review visit | An agreed note of the planning visit |
| Main Review Visit | To receive and consider evidence on the ways in which the institution has performed in respect of the objectives and criteria set out in the Terms of Reference. While it is intended that this review will be conducted on site, it may be conducted virtually in extenuating circumstances. | 12 weeks after the receipt of ISER | A short preliminary oral report to the institution |

Table cont. overleaf

| Step | Action | Dates | Outcome |
|---|---|---|---|
| Report | Preparation of a draft report by the Team. An additional meeting of the Review Team may be arranged to facilitate finalisation of the report. | Report submitted to QQI 6-8 weeks after the main review visit. | QQI Review Report Institutional response |
| | Draft report sent to NUI for a check of factual accuracy. | 12 weeks after the main review (virtual) visit | |
| | NUI responds with any factual accuracy corrections. | 2 weeks after receipt of draft report | |
| | Preparation of a final report. | 2 weeks after factual accuracy response | |
| | Preparation of an institutional response. | 2 weeks after final report | |
| Outcomes | Consideration of the review report and findings by QQI together with the institutional response and the plan for implementation. | Next available meeting of QQI committee | Formal decision about the effectiveness of QA procedures In some cases, directions to NUI and a schedule for their implementation. |
| | Preparation of QQI quality profile. | 2 weeks after decision | Quality profile published |
| The form of follow-up will be determined by whether ‘directions’ are issued to NUI. In general, where directions are issued, the follow-up period will be shorter and more specific actions may be required as part of the direction. | | | |
| Follow-up | Preparation of an institutional implementation plan. | 3 months after the publication of the review report | Publication of the implementation plan by NUI |
| | One-year follow-up report to QQI for noting. This and subsequent follow-up may be integrated into annual reports to QQI. | 1 year after the publication of the review report | Publication of the follow-up report by QQI and NUI |
| | Continuous reporting and dialogue on follow-up through the annual institutional reporting and dialogue process. | Continuous | Annual Institutional Quality Report Dialogue Meeting notes |

Note: The total period from start to finish is approximately 15 months but will depend on QQI committee meeting dates.

Appendix B: Main Review Visit Schedule

Appendix B: Main Review Visit Schedule

Day 1: Monday, 27 March 2023

| Time | Meeting with | Indicative Purpose |
|-------------|---|---|
| 10.00-10.30 | Private Review Team Meeting | |
| 10.30-11.15 | Chancellor & Registrar | Private Meeting with Chancellor and Registrar. To discuss institutional mission, strategic plan. Roles and responsibilities for QA and enhancement. |
| 11.15-12.00 | Senior Management Team (SMT) | Discuss institutional mission, strategic plan. Roles and responsibilities for QA and Enhancement and Central Service review Process. |
| 12.00-12.30 | Private Review Team Meeting | |
| 12.30-13.15 | Panel Lunch Break | |
| 13.15-14.00 | Representatives of Constituent Universities | To discuss the role the Constituent Universities play in advising/supporting the NUI in development and implementation of QA procedures and their role as an awarding body. |
| 14.00-14.15 | Panel Review Team Meeting | |
| 14.15-15.00 | Self-Evaluation Team (SET) | To discuss how the NUI monitors effectiveness of its Quality Management processes and structures. |
| 15.00-15.15 | Private Review Team Meeting | |
| 15.15-16.00 | Key Institute Initiatives | To discuss core elements of the new Strategic Plan and initiatives in the area of Quality. |
| 16.00-16.30 | HR, Staff Development | To discuss HR and Staff Development. |
| 16.30-17.00 | Private Review Team Meeting | |

Day 2: Tuesday, 28 March 2023

| Time | Meeting with | Indicative Purpose |
|-------------|---|--|
| 9:30-10:00 | Private Review Team Meeting | |
| 10:00-10:45 | NUI Senate (Governing Body) | To discuss the mechanisms employed by the governing body for monitoring QA and Enhancement and how it ensures its effectiveness. |
| 10:45-11:15 | Private Review Team Meeting | |
| 11:15-12:15 | External Stakeholders: IPA (LP-RC) | To discuss relationship with NUI, experience of QAE activities supported by NUI, institutional review |
| 12:15-12:45 | Private Review Team Meeting | |
| 12:45-13:30 | Panel Lunch Break | |
| 13:15-13:30 | Private Review Team Meeting | |
| 13:30-14:15 | External Stakeholders: Higher Doctorate Degrees | To discuss NUI quality assurance of higher doctorate degrees. |
| 14:15-14:45 | Private Review Team Meeting | |
| 14:45-15:30 | External Stakeholders: RCSI (DAB-RC) | Discuss relationship with NUI, distinction between linked provider RCs and DAB-RCs. |
| 15:30-16:00 | Private Review Team Meeting | |
| 16:00-16:15 | Panel Break | |
| 16:15-16:30 | Private Review Team Meeting | |
| 16:30-17:15 | Parallel Session 1: Graduate Services Stakeholders (internal and external) | To discuss processes involved in supporting member institution conferrings, graduates needing duplicates or verification and graduates needing a name change |
| | Parallel Session 2: Matriculation Exemption Service Stakeholders (internal and external) | To discuss processes involved in supporting potential students apply for (permitted) exemptions to the language requirements in NUI institutions |
| 17:15-17:45 | Private Review Team Meeting | |

Day 3: Wednesday, 29 March 2023

| Time | Meeting with | Indicative Purpose |
|-------------|--|--|
| 9:30-10:00 | Private Review Team Meeting | |
| 10.00-10.45 | Parallel Session 3: Extern Examiner Administration Stakeholders | To discuss process of administering extern examiners in the recognised colleges. |
| | Parallel Session 4: Awards Process Stakeholders | To discuss process of administering Awards. |
| 10:45-11:15 | Private Review Team Meeting | |
| 11.15-11.45 | Follow Up Meeting with Registrar | Additional queries arising from other meetings. |
| 11.45-12.15 | Private Review Team Meeting | Prep for verbal report. |
| 12.15-13.00 | Lunch | |
| 13.00-13.30 | Private Review Team Meeting | Prep for verbal report. |
| 13.30-14.00 | QQI and Institutional Coordinator | QQI gathers feedback on the review process. |
| 13.30-15.15 | Private Review Team Meeting | |
| 15.15-15.45 | Meeting with QQI | To discuss review team's key findings. |
| 15.45-16.15 | Meeting with Registrar | To discuss review team's key findings. |
| 16.15-16.45 | Oral Report | Oral Report of main findings. |

Appendix C: NUI Regulations, Policies, Procedures and Guidelines Index



QA: Overarching NUI Policy

2017. *Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement.*

http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/NUI_Quality_Assurance_Policy_2018.pdf



QA and RC Status: Applications to NUI

2018. *Guidelines for higher education institutions considering an application for NUI Recognised College status.*

http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/NUI_RC_ProspectiveApplicants.pdf



QA: NUI Approval of QA in Recognised Colleges

2017. *Policy and Procedures for the Approval of Quality Assurance Procedures in the Recognised Colleges.*

http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/Procedures_Approval_Quality_Assurance_Procedures_Recognised_Colleges_2018.pdf



QA: Institutional Reviews in RCs

2020. *Guidelines for the Institutional Review of Quality Assurance Effectiveness at Recognised Colleges that are Linked Providers of the NUI.*

http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/Guidelines_QA_Institutional_Review.pdf



QA Relationship: NUI and RCSI

2020. *The Quality Assurance Relationship between the National University of Ireland and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland – University of Medicine and Health Sciences.*

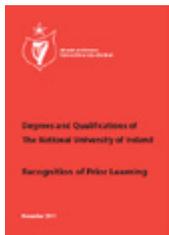
http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/QA_Relationship_NUI_RCSI.pdf



NUI POLICY: Human Rights Principles

2013. *Human Rights Principles and Code of Conduct for the National University of Ireland and its Member Institutions* [NOTE: scheduled for review]

http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/HumanRights.pdf



NUI POLICY: Recognition of Prior Learning

2013. *Recognition of Prior Learning* [NOTE: due for review]

http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/Recognition%20of%20Prior%20Learning.pdf



NUI POLICY: Titles of Degrees (Qualifications)

2020. *Policy in relation to the usage of Titles of Degrees and other Qualifications.*

http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/Policy_in_relation_to_the_usage_of_titles_of_degrees.pdf



PROGRAMMES: Approval of New Programmes in Recognised Colleges

2020. *Regulations, Procedures and Guidelines for the Approval of New Programmes and Changes to Existing Programmes in the Recognised Colleges.*

http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/Programme_Approval_Regs.pdf



PROGRAMMES: Policy for Research Degrees

2021. *Policy, Regulations and Procedures for the Approval of Research Degrees in the Recognised Colleges.*

http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/policy/NUI_Research_Degree_Policy.pdf.



PROGRAMMES: Revalidation of Programmes

2022. *Protocol on transitioning to permanent online delivery for the 2022-2023 session in the Recognised Colleges.*

http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/policy/NUI_Protocol_for_transitioning_to_Permanent_Online_Delivery_in_the_2022-23_Session_in_the_Recognised_Colleges.pdf.



PROGRAMMES: Collaborative and Transnational Provision

2013. *Quality Assurance for Collaborative and Transnational Provision of Academic Programmes Leading to NUI Qualifications*,
http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/Collaborative%20&%20Transnational.pdf



PROGRAMMES: Periodic Review of Programmes in Recognised Colleges

2019. *Guidelines, Criteria and Procedures for the Periodic Review of Programmes Leading to NUI Degrees and Other Qualifications in the Recognised Colleges*.
http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/NUI_Guidelines_External_Review.pdf



PROGRAMMES: Higher Degrees on Published Works

2021. *Higher Doctorate Degrees on Published Work awarded by the National University of Ireland: Criteria, Regulations, Application Procedures and Guidelines*.
http://www.nui.ie/college/docs/published_Work_Regs.pdf



Extern Examiners: Taught Programmes in RCs

2019. *NUI Extern Examiners: Primary Degree and Taught Postgraduate Courses in NUI Recognised Colleges*.
http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/NUI_Guidelines_External_Review.pdf



EXTERN EXAMINERS: Taught Programmes in CUs

2019. *NUI Extern Examiners: Primary Degree and Taught Postgraduate Courses in NUI Constituent Universities*.
http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/policy/NUI_Extern_Examiners_Universities.pdf



EXTERN EXAMINERS: Research Degrees in Recognised Colleges

2022. *NUI Policy on Extern Examiners for Research Degrees in the Recognised Colleges*.
<https://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/policy/EEResearchDegreesRCs.pdf>



National University of Ireland Strategic Plan 2023-2027
[NUIStrategicPlan2327.pdf](#)

Glossary

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| 2012 Act | Qualifications And Quality Assurance (Education And Training) Act 2012 |
| AQR | Annual Quality Reports (formerly the Annual Institutional Quality Report, AIQR) |
| BA | Bachelor of Arts |
| CAO | Central Applications Office |
| CINNTE | The name given to QQI's first higher education review cycle. |
| EE | External Examiner |
| CUs | Constituent Universities |
| DAB | Designated Awarding Body |
| DAB-RC | A recognised college that is also a designated awarding body. |
| ENQA | European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education |
| EQF | European Qualifications Framework |
| Erasmus | European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students |
| ESG (2015) | Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area |
| HASR | Head of Academic Services and Registry |
| HE | Higher Education |
| HEA | Higher Education Authority |
| HR | Human Resources |
| IEM | International Education Mark |
| ILSI | International Life Sciences Institute |
| IPA | Institute of Public Administration |
| IRC | Institutional Review Coordinator |
| ISER | Institutional Self-Evaluation Report |
| KPI(s) | Key Performance Indicator(s) |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| LP | Linked Provider |
| LP-RC | A recognised college that is also a linked provider. |
| MAA | Manager of Academic Affairs |
| MU | Maynooth University |
| NFQ | National Framework of Qualifications |
| NStEP | National Student Engagement Programme |
| NUI | National University of Ireland |
| PhD | Doctor of Philosophy (/Postgraduate Doctoral Research Degree) |
| QA | Quality Assurance |
| QAA | The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education |
| QAG | QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines |
| QAG1 | Quality Assurance Guidelines 1 (QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines) |
| QAG2 | Quality Assurance Guidelines 2 (QQI Sector-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines) |
| QQI | Quality and Qualifications Ireland |
| RC(s) | Recognised College(s) |
| RCSI | Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland – University of Medicine and Health Sciences |
| RIAM | Royal Irish Academy of Music |
| SET | Self-Evaluation Team |
| SMT | Senior Management Team |
| SU | Student(s)' Union |
| ToR | Terms of Reference |
| UCC | University College Cork |
| WGE | NUI-RSCI Working Group Executive |

