2025

Irish College of Humanities and

**Applied Sciences** 

2025 Annual Quality Report (Institution) CASE STUDIES RELATED to Academic Year September 2023 – August 2024

# **CASE STUDIES**

## **Case Studies Guidelines**

#### Guide:

This section provides the institution with the opportunity to provide details of key themes or specific topics arising during the reporting period, as well as more detail on related cross-institutional quality enhancement initiatives that occurred during the reporting period.

In a specific reporting period, QQI may request updates on specific national thematic areas/topics or may invite the institution to submit a case study from a list of topics linked to national policy developments. Themes or topics may also be identified by the institution which arise from specific local initiatives or activities, and/or from national policy initiatives. They should be developmental, reflect on and highlight areas that may be of interest to other institutions, relate to quality, QA and QE and would benefit from wider dissemination. Selected case studies should not have been submitted previously as part of the institution's AQR.

#### **Guidance for Drafting Case Studies**

QQI recommends that written case studies should:

- Be between half a page and two pages in length (c. 500 to 1,000 words);
- Have a reasonably short title,
- include the theme, keywords, and an optional short abstract;
- Relate to a specific time- and subject-bound issue;
- Avoid long descriptions of processes, but rather focus on the any challenges encountered (and how these were overcome) and impacts (intended and unintended) achieved;
- Include an introduction that sets out a brief overview of contextual matters;
- Include any relevant supporting data and data analysis;
- Include links to any sources cited;
- Include a clear concluding paragraph with overview of key outcomes/learning.

Although case studies will generally be in written form, institutions may also provide links to audiovisual/multimedia case studies. QQI does not prescribe a format for case studies.

#### Please delete guide text before submission

## CASE STUDY 2

Title: The development of policies and procedures to adequately address the application of AI technology resuscitates long known conceptual debates about Quality Assurance. Theme: Do QAE structures have the agility to respond to rapid real time change that requires timely response rates Keywords (2-3 words): QAE Agility Responsivity

### Insert Case Study 2 below

#### Description

It is now over three decades since Harvey and Green (1993) highlighted rigidity and inflexibility as key drawbacks of Quality Assurance. They were primarily concerned with the potential for suppression of innovation, creativity and experimentation. However, rigidity and inflexibility can also reduce capacity for agility and adaptability, particularly in circumstances where the pace of change is rapid and continuous and requires high levels of institutional agility. Similarly, the fulfillment of consistency as a defining principle of equitable Quality Assurance, also gave rise to criticisms associated with one-size-fits-all modelling (Harvey & Newton, 2004). The breadth of impact on third level provision combined with the emergent affordances of AI are such that it defies singular responsivity. While this breadth can be accounted for at policy level, it has proven a little more difficult procedurally. In sporting parlance, it has been a case of scramble defence rather high functioning line-out.

#### Analysis

Nowhere is this more evident than within the assurance of academic integrity. Al usage defies neat integration into preexistent definitions of breach and while we might now agree with the emerging consensus that it is pedagogically inappropriate to take a purely punitive approach (Dabis & Csáki, 2024, Ryder, 2022), the fact remains that punitive approach was, in any case, impossible once it became clear that traditional detection could not offer the same level of incontrovertibility. While "front-line" skepticism of quality assurance has been well documented (Harvey, 2024), in this instance, urgent direction and clarity from lecturers and assessors was sought. Students have also sought more timely responses and guidance from third level institutions on Al usage (O'Donnell, Porter & Fitzgerald, 2025).

More recently, the durability of QA within complex systems has also been questioned (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). In complex and dynamic environments, such as those involving AI, stress points in traditional QA frameworks can be exposed. QA Frameworks may not be able to capture the nuance and complexity within such systems, leading to policy and procedural gaps. Another identified drawback of QA relates to resource intensity, where it was assumed that smaller organisations in developed economies may

struggle to meet the substantial investment required for viable QA structures (Stensaker, 2008). It might be countered that smaller organisations are more agile and adaptable to change and be best placed to respond to disruptive technology while maintaining a principled approach to quality assurance. The problem remains however that the formulation of an optimum response requires access to high level resourcing or, at the very least, timely generation of best practice guidelines at sectoral level.

As noted by Scott (2018), while most policy process models vary in detail rather than substance. Most models applied in third level institutions are influenced by rationalist models, that are generally stagist, involving policy identification, policy formulation, policy implementation and policy evaluation which reflects the College's process (consisting of Initial Policy Conception Stage; Policy Development Stage; Approval Stage, Monitoring & Review Stage). As has been noted, technocratic descriptions of process fail to capture the reality of "turbulence, even chaos, that are characteristic of real-time policy making" (Scott, 2018, p. 2278) but also obscure actual timeframes in that the apparent fluidity of the process rarely translates to timeliness.

## **Outcome and Implications**

A review of QAE was therefore performed within the college to ascertain responsivity rate to rapid change or sudden shock. The pivot to online only learning provision during the COVID 19 pandemic was instructive also where a more agile process would have been useful. Not surprisingly, it was found that the period from when a policy champion initiates the process to the policy implementation stage is prolonged by necessity. In reviewing the process, it was clear that due diligence is the defining feature of the policy generation cycle which encapsulates a spectrum of complex elements from good governance to stakeholder receptivity. The scope for greater agility was found to be quite limited because each step carried critical screening functions unique to that step culminating in final sanction by Academic Council. While there was some duplication (e.g. involvement of the Registrar in conception stage, development stages and the Quality & Standards Committee) changes would not result in significant efficiencies and might be counterproductive (e.g. reduced expert oversight at conception stage).

There was some scope however to expedite wait times between stages and greater employment of extraordinary meetings for cyclical structures such as the Academic Council. This raised the possibility of developing a fast-tracked process in clearly defined circumstances based on exigency, with the Quality & Standards Committee acting as an initiating body. More specifically the Quality & Standards Committee would decide on the level of exigency and only initiate a fast-tracked approach where stages would be more tightly time-lined in instances where urgency was imperative.

#### References

Dabis, A. & Csáki, C. (2024). Al and ethics: Investigating the first policyresponses of higher education institutions to the challenge of generative AI. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications 11*(1), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03526-z

Harvey, L. (2024). What have we learned from 30 years of *Quality in Higher Education:* academics' views of quality assurance. *Quality in Higher Education*, 30(3), 360– 375. <u>https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2024.2385793</u>

O' Donnell, F., Porter, M. & Fitzgerald S. (2025). The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education: Higher Education Students use of AI in Academic Assignments. (2025). *Irish Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning*, 8(1). <u>https://doi.org/10.22554/szwjfy54</u>

Ryder, D. (2022). AI is here – If we fight it, we'll lose and so will our students! *A Review of Inclusive Education & Employment Practices 12*. <u>https://www.ahead.ie/journal/index</u>

Scott, P. (2018). Policy Process in Higher Education. In: *Encyclopedia of International Higher Education Systems and Institutions*. Springer. <u>https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9553-1\_151-1</u>