

May 2025

Institutional Review Report 2025

National College of Ireland



CINNTE 



Dearbhú Cáilíochta
agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and
Qualifications Ireland

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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 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 Quality Assurance Procedures; Annual Quality Reports (AQR); and Dialogue Meetings. The CINNTE review cycle has been extended by one year i.e. from 2017-2024 to include the larger and mature independent/private higher education institutions (HEIs) operating in the Irish higher education sector. These HEIs have been prioritised on the basis that they have indicated their intention to seek the delegation of authority (DA) from QQI when it becomes available.¹ During this period, QQI will organise and oversee independent reviews of these HEIs.

Each CINNTE review evaluates the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures and processes in the institution. It also measures the institution's compliance with European standards for quality assurance, having regard for the expectations set out in QQI's quality assurance guidelines, as well as adherence to other relevant QQI policies and procedures.

For independent/private providers, CINNTE reviews also explore how these institutions have enhanced their teaching, learning and assessment strategies and their quality assurance 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 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
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken.

This institutional review of National College 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.

¹ The process for DA requires a statutory instrument detailing the ministerial regulations of the conditions to be met by institutions seeking DA.

The Review Team

Each CINNTE review is carried out by an international team of independent experts and peers. The 2024 institutional review of National College of Ireland was conducted by a team of six reviewers selected by QQI. The review team was trained by QQI on 26 September 2024 and a planning visit, attended by the chair and coordinating reviewer, was held with the institution on 16 October 2024. Shortly afterwards, the chair had to withdraw from the review on health grounds and was replaced by Rowena Pelik. Additional briefings and review team meetings were scheduled over a three-week period and a second planning visit took place with the institution on 19 November 2024. The main review visit was conducted by the full team from 2 to 5 December 2024 as originally scheduled.

CHAIR

Rowena Pelik

Rowena Pelik has been working as an independent higher education consultant since stepping back from her role at the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) UK in 2020. She has conducted reviews for the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and for the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), as well as for Studijų Kokybės Vertinimo Centras (SKVC) in Lithuania.

Her most recent ENQA review was the targeted review of QQI in 2024 giving Rowena detailed insights into the higher education system in Ireland as well as an up-to-date understanding of the work of QQI. Alongside external review activity, she has continued to work on projects with QAA, especially on internal quality assurance and transnational education. Most recently Rowena has led the initial development of an innovative online university in Europe for a private provider based in England.

From 2014 to 2020 Rowena was a Director of QAA where she was Director of Nations and International and, latterly, Director of Strategic Projects. She has

had a long career in higher education – first as an academic, teaching design history and cultural studies, then as an academic leader, as Head of the School of Art and Design at the University of Salford, before moving into a central leadership role as Director of Academic Quality and Standards. In 2008 she moved to Edinburgh Napier University as Director of Academic Development and Academic Strategy.

She has extensive experience in external quality assurance as an expert academic reviewer and quality assurance specialist at discipline, institutional and national levels within the four nations of the UK, and internationally, across Europe and in the Middle and Far East.

COORDINATING REVIEWER/ INTERNATIONAL QA REPRESENTATIVE

Majella Thomas

Majella Thomas is an international independent quality assurance expert with over 20 years' experience in the tertiary education sector. Her experience is primarily in the university sector and includes conducting internal and external reviews, developing systems and processes to manage institutional compliance with statutory quality assurance requirements, and policy development, design and implementation. She has also managed work-integrated learning programmes and taught in higher and vocational education contexts. She began working in quality management in 2005.

She currently works with higher education providers to develop and enhance quality assurance and regulatory compliance processes and systems and has conducted independent reviews of corporate and academic governance, quality assurance processes, and programme quality. Majella also works as an external quality assurance expert for Ecctis's evaluation and benchmarking scheme. Prior to that she worked for RMIT University as a Senior Compliance Manager with responsibility for leading a multi-year project

to assess institutional compliance with statutory quality requirements and develop and implement a programme of assurance and enhancement. This built on her work at Australia's Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), where she conducted regulatory assessments of the compliance of providers with the Higher Education Standards Framework, contributed to the development of new regulatory processes and engaged with regulatory and quality assurance agencies across the Asia-Pacific region.

INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVE

Michael Bulman

Michael Bulman is Strategic Alliances Director with Kyndryl Ireland, working across the ecosystem of alliances and partnerships to maximise the value delivered to enterprise clients in Ireland and the UK. He is responsible for developing and managing relationships with key technology partners, aligning offerings and capabilities, and driving joint sales opportunities. With over 20 years in the IT Services industry, Michael is a senior leader with a proven track record of delivering value to clients and partners. He has led large services organisations and managed multi-million euro business portfolios, consistently achieving results and exceeding expectations.

Michael graduated from Dublin City University with a first-class honours Executive MBA in 2018, enhancing his strategic thinking and business acumen. He has served on the board of the MBA Association of Ireland (MBAAI) since 2018, including four years as Association President. The mission of the MBAAI is to extend the value of the MBA qualification for students and graduates, providing opportunities for ongoing learning and networking across the island of Ireland.

HIGHER EDUCATION SECTORAL REPRESENTATIVE/QA EXPERT

Dr Brendan Murphy

Dr Brendan Murphy is currently Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement in Technological University of the Shannon (TUS) with cross-organisational responsibility for the TUS Quality

Assurance and Enhancement Framework. Brendan has over 25 years' experience in higher education, serving as a lecturer in the then Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) for a 20-year period prior to appointment as Head of Quality, Teaching and Learning in LIT in 2017. As a Lecturer in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Brendan was heavily involved in programme development and programme leadership roles during this period.

As Head of Quality, Teaching and Learning in LIT, Brendan held management responsibility for Quality, Teaching and Learning and Student Retention. He led a significant programme of policy review and development and the rollout of a comprehensive programme of staff CPD, including a successful MA in Academic Practice. Since designation as a TU, Brendan has held management responsibility for the development of the university's quality assurance and enhancement framework and its implementation across all its constituent campuses and faculties. In addition to management responsibilities, Brendan is an active participant in TUS governance through membership of academic council and a broad range of committees and working groups. He is also the TUS representative on the QQI Irish Quality and Qualifications Forum (IQQF). During 2023 – 2024, Brendan acted as institutional coordinator for the successful CINTE Review of TUS. Brendan is a graduate of the University of Limerick, holding a BSc (Ed) in General and Rural Science and a PhD in Molecular Biology.

LEARNER REPRESENTATIVE

Matthew Kitching

Matthew Kitching is Deputy Chief Executive Officer in the Students' Union at Buckinghamshire New University, where he is responsible for a wide range of membership services. Matthew is a PhD student in higher education at Lancaster University and his work focusses on international quality assurance and student organisations. Matthew has worked for more than 15 quality assurance agencies in Europe, Africa, South America and Asia. He is currently serving on the boards of EQ-Arts and the European Council for Business Education. In addition, he is a member of the Accreditation Council at the Centre

for Quality Assurance in Aerospace, Defence and Security education and training and part of the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee at the European Council on Chiropractic Education. Matthew holds degrees in Police Studies and Political Science. He has previously worked for the European Students' Union, where he led their quality assurance work.

HIGHER EDUCATION SECTORAL REPRESENTATIVE/TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT EXPERT

Dr Jennifer Bruton

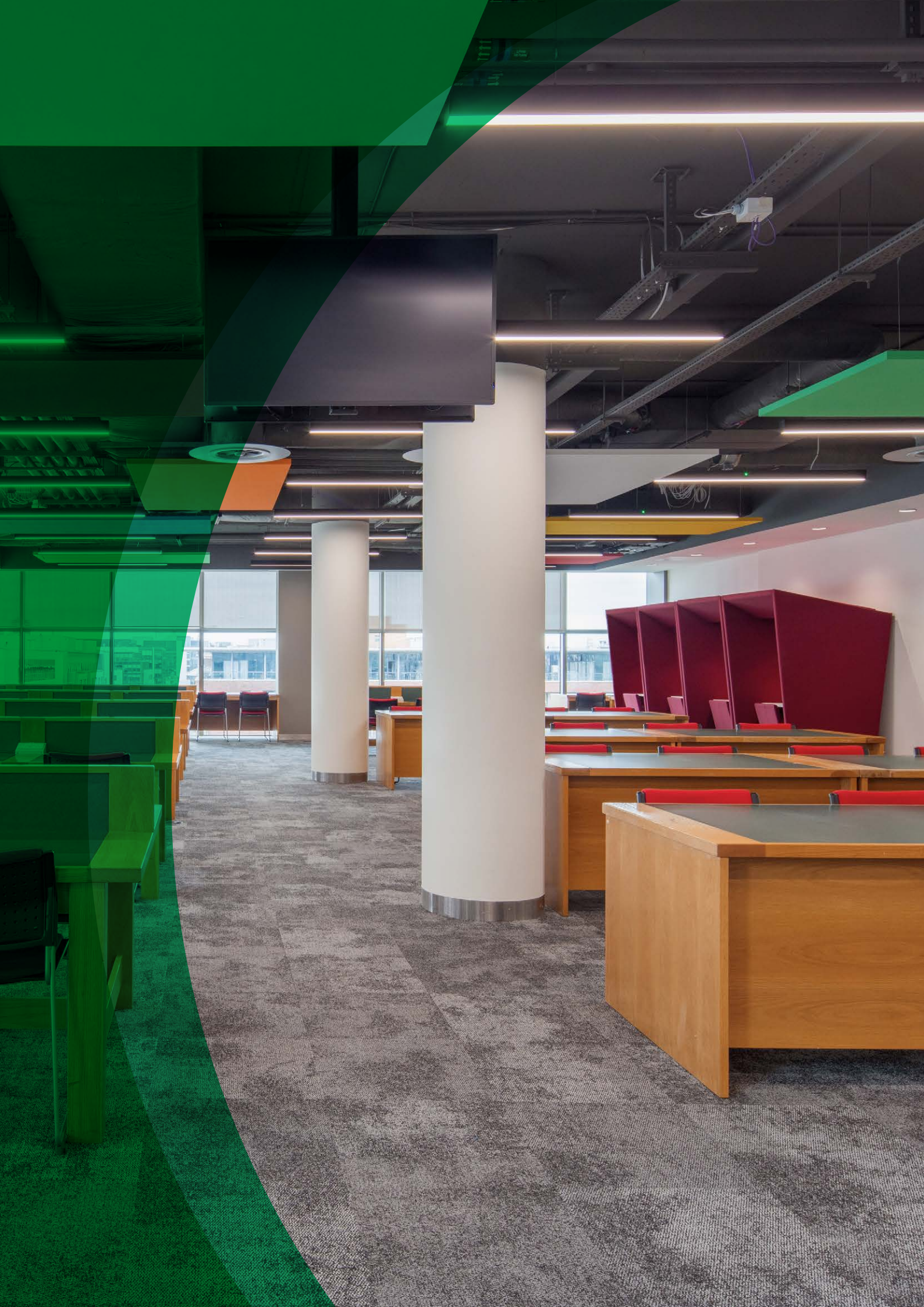
Dr Jennifer Bruton is Executive Dean of the Faculty of Engineering and Computing and a member of the Senior Management Group of Dublin City University (DCU). Her disciplinary background is in both electronic, mechatronic, software engineering and in higher education quality and leadership. Throughout her academic career, Jennifer has been involved in many innovative programme developments, with particular strength in technology-enhanced teaching, and is passionate about quality in teaching and learning.

Jennifer was Associate Dean for Education from 2007 to 2011, has been both a member, and chair, of the University Disciplinary Committee, has been a committee member of the DCU Quality Promotion Committee and an active participant on DCU's Education Committee. Jennifer has represented DCU as an Associate on the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and is also an experienced member of Engineers Ireland's Accreditation Board which is tasked with ensuring the quality of engineering programmes across Ireland. Her higher education research focuses on the quality of the student experience and engineering education. In 2021, Jennifer stepped down from a 3-year appointment as Head of School of Electronic Engineering to take up the role of Executive Dean of Faculty. In this role, she has executive responsibility for the quality of all the activities in the Faculty of Engineering and Computing, with oversight of all academic offerings and the student experience, more generally.



Section 1

Introduction and Context



Section 1: Introduction and Context

The National College of Ireland (NCI) is an independent, not-for-profit higher education institution located in Dublin's north inner city that was founded by the Jesuit Order in 1951. It has evolved through the decades from its original inception as the Catholic Worker's College, with a focus on industrial relations, to its establishment as NCI in 2000.

NCI's mission statement is "to change lives through education" and this is exemplified by a long-term commitment to broadening access to and participation in higher education. NCI's diverse and flexible modes of delivery, its partnership pathways with further education and second-level providers, and its successful apprenticeship programmes along with the internationally recognised Early Learning Initiative (ELI) make the institution a national leader in access to higher education. ELI models and delivers best practice for the education and wellbeing of children and families with a particular focus on addressing educational disadvantage in marginalised communities.

NCI articulates its core values as:

- **Inclusive** – aiming to break down barriers in third-level education, valuing diversity and inclusion and providing the support people need to participate fully in life at NCI
- **Integrity** – taking responsibility both individually and collectively for actions and demonstrating respect and mutual regard for each other
- **Learner Centred** – placing the learner at the heart of everything we do and focusing on their individual and collective needs, both now and into the future
- **Community** – an interdependent learning community sharing a common set of principles

- **Dynamic** – responsive to the needs of students, colleagues and partners in an ever-changing society and acting in an innovative and flexible manner
- **Excellence** – aspiring to professional excellence as an institution and fostering excellence in learners through their learning experiences

NCI's *Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027* sets out key priorities and strategic goals which include aiming to be a distinctive and independent Higher Education Authority (HEA)-designated institution with delegated awarding authority, delivering successful graduates and a world class model of community engagement and increasing to a student population of 8,500 in a state-of-the-art campus. To support these aims, the strategic plan articulates key objectives against six priorities – Students, Staff, Teaching, Research, Access, and Positioning.

From a governance and organisational structure perspective, the governing body is the board of directors of the institution and its trustees as a charity. It has responsibility for the overall direction of the institution and its compliance with company and charity law. It consists of members drawn from several nominating bodies including the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the Jesuit community and institution staff and students, along with independent directors including the chairperson.

The governing body approves and monitors strategic direction and policy, compliance with best practice and the institution's financial planning.



The day-to-day management of the institution sits with the Senior Management Team (SMT), chaired by the president. In November 2024, following the completion of NCI's institutional self-evaluation report for this CINNTE review, the review team were told that the Deans of the Schools of Business and Computing were made members of SMT to strengthen communication between SMT and the broader academic community; a change yet to be recorded in the formal documentation of the institution.

In the 2022 – 23 academic period NCI offered 95 full-time and part-time QQI-accredited programmes in computing, business, education and psychology at Levels 6 – 9 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), as well as delivering Level 10 research degrees in collaboration with Maynooth University. The School of Business offered 47 programmes, the School of Computing 33 and the Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning (CELL) a further 15 programmes. The School of Business had the largest proportion of enrolments in 2022 – 23 at a little over 50% of total enrolments, with the School of Computing steadily increasing year on year to just below 41%, while CELL accounted for the remaining 8.8% of total enrolments.

NCI has a highly diverse student population of just over six thousand students, with 121 nationalities represented. The proportion of international students has grown from 17.4% in 2018 – 19 to 28.2% of the student body in 2022 – 23. It also has a considerably higher proportion of enrolments in taught postgraduate studies (42.4%) than the HEA average. Completion rates are at 85% for full-time programmes and 87% for part-time programmes, an improvement of 7% and 6% respectively over the last five years. These students are supported by a total of 431 staff, comprising 15.3% permanent full-time academic staff, 29.5% associate faculty who work part time on either fixed term or permanent contracts, 36% professional and support staff and 19.3% ELI staff.

Sixty-two point seven per cent of NCI's workforce are women, which is partly due to the predominance of female employees in ELI (approx. 90%). NCI is also one of the first HEIs in Ireland to have a female president, Professor Gina Quin, and

before her, Professor Joyce O'Connor. Seventy per cent of academic faculty hold a PhD (71% of full-time and 24% of part-time), and 22% possess a master's degree as their highest qualification. NCI's full-time equivalent (FTE) staff-student ratio in 2023 was 1:24, which is broadly in line with the ratio of 1:23 for the tertiary sector in Ireland, but NCI has nonetheless identified this as an area of focus and is working to further reduce this.

NCI has a growing research profile through its schools and CELL. The *Research Strategy 2023 – 2027* is intended to drive further doctoral-level research opportunities and support NCI faculty to increase research output and collaborations both domestically and with overseas partners. The research strategy is an integral part of the overall institutional strategy and seeks to position NCI as a key player in driving research excellence in Ireland.

NCI is an institution with a keen sense of its own distinctiveness and a deep connection with its roots and the local community, while evolving rapidly to also serve a national and international student population. The development of ambitious growth plans is underway, however, plans for HEA designation and DA as an awarding body, which represent key planned milestones for NCI, are not fully within the control of the institution and are dependent on other legislative and external regulatory factors. It is, nevertheless, evident that these are being actively pursued with vigour by the institution. The CINNTE review process is positioned by the institution as a key step in helping the institution to drive ongoing continuous improvement across the institution at a critical point in its evolution.





Section 2

Institutional Self-Evaluation
Report (ISER)



Section 2: Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER)

The review team found that the ISER and its accompanying documentation, including the Institutional Profile (IP), reflected the mission and distinctiveness of NCI well. They provided an effective insight into the development of NCI as a sizable provider of flexible and innovative pathways to higher education in the north-east inner City of Dublin, with a unique position within the higher education landscape in Ireland. The IP was informative and provided relevant high-level data sets, presented in an accessible format.

The overall governance and management arrangements for the ISER process are well detailed and appropriate (ISER, p15 and Appendix B3). NCI commenced its self-evaluation process in summer 2022, with a workshop with the executive group to identify a range of themes for the process. This was followed by the establishment of a CINNTE Advisory Group and development of appropriate terms of reference. The CINNTE Advisory Group, reporting to the executive group, oversaw the self-evaluation process and associated consultations leading the development of the ISER. Membership included representatives from several areas of the institution, and from academic and support services and the Student Union.

Primary research included a series of consultation activities to involve staff directly in the CINNTE self-evaluation process: an all-staff survey, eight focus groups, a survey of class representatives, an online student survey and an industry and employers survey. A total of 22% of NCI staff responded to the survey and a total of 259 participants attended the focus groups, conducted during a 'CINNTE Consultation Fortnight'. Student consultation involved triangulating feedback from the 'business

as usual' student feedback mechanisms and a bespoke survey issued to class representatives, which achieved a 22.5% response rate. This was followed up with an in-depth focus group with class representatives. The Teaching Enhancement Unit (TEU) collaborated on a survey issued to students registered on online modules, achieving a 26% response rate. There was further student input via the findings of student focus groups as part of research conducted during the Streamlining Student Success Initiative (ISER p84) in 2022. Business and industry consultation involved a survey issued to external employers who had been members of programme validation and revalidation panels organised by NCI, achieving a response rate of 43.1%. As outlined in the ISER, regular reports on progress throughout the self-evaluation process were provided to the executive group, academic council and governing body. Formal updates were also provided in presentations to staff townhall meetings, twice a year.

The review team acknowledges the significant efforts by NCI in conducting a considerable body of research and consultation as part of their bespoke CINNTE self-evaluation activities. During the main review visit, the review team heard of the enthusiasm and appetite of staff to take part in the process, which was described as "indicative of their passion for the students and desire to do the best for them". While acknowledging the range of self-evaluation activities undertaken, the review team notes that the main consultation activities occurred in a relatively condensed timeframe, nevertheless further external engagement, such as with collaborative providers, external examiners, placement provider and employers would have been beneficial.



The ISER was written by the CINNTE Advisory Group chair (Registrar) and CINNTE Project Director (Quality and Institutional Effectiveness Director) between June and August 2024 (ISER, p17). The ISER is well organised and presented and its structure aligns usefully with the CINNTE review objectives and sub-objectives, as specified in the *QQI Handbook* and *Terms of Reference*. There are many examples of commendable quality assurance and enhancement activities and approaches evident throughout the ISER. The review team appreciates the extensive range of case studies from across NCI which illustrate the many initiatives and developmental activities underway across schools and professional service areas of the institution. The innovation and leadership demonstrated through the ELI and broad range of external relationships and programme partnerships are also particularly noteworthy in this regard.

The review team notes that there is a continuity of writing style and consistency throughout the ISER. However, there are some inconsistencies in selected data sets in the ISER and accompanying documentation. There is a balance between the descriptive and evaluative elements, with each chapter beginning in descriptive mode, and an appropriate emphasis on evaluation as each chapter develops and ends with an 'evaluation' and 'conclusion and next steps' section. However, the outputs of the primary research and how the associated evidence supported the assertions made in the evaluation sections of the individual chapters were not always apparent and much greater use of the findings from activities such as the focus groups could have been threaded throughout. Notwithstanding this observation, there is evidence of reflection and evaluation leading to meaningful and potentially impactful recommendations for enhancements across the thematic areas of the ISER.

The review team notes that the 'conclusion and next steps' sections often contain general statements of intent and would have benefited substantially from a more concise articulation of self-identified recommendations expressed as measurable actions. There could also have been greater continuity between the 'conclusions and next steps' sections in the individual chapters and

the synthesis provided in the conclusions chapter, particularly in relation to identifying and prioritising resultant actions.

COMMENDATION

- The review team commends the work of the CINNTE Advisory Group in designing and implementing a broad range of inclusive bespoke self-evaluation and consultation activities as part of the CINNTE process.

RECOMMENDATION

- The review team recommends that the self-identified 'next steps' developed in the ISER chapters be developed as more tangible sets of actions and prioritised, with implementation timescales and assigned responsible parties, to support their implementation.



Section 3

Quality Assurance and Enhancement





Section 3: Quality Assurance/Accountability

INTRODUCTION TO SECTION THREE

In reaching its overall assessment of QA procedures at NCI, the review team assessed a variety of evidential sources including the IP, ISER, a series of AQRs from 2022 to 2024, the *Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES)*, *Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027* and a broad range of additional documentation and information requested by the review team in advance of, and during, the main review visit. This documentation was complemented by a comprehensive series of interviews during the main review visit, involving 139 participants encompassing a broad range of management representatives, academic and professional services staff, students and external stakeholders.

The ISER sets out the clear mission of NCI and its distinctive position within the Irish higher education landscape and details the evolution of governance and quality assurance infrastructure, particularly since the re-engagement review conducted by QQI in 2019. The ISER also evidences the respect and standing of NCI in the community it serves and the success of its students and graduates. This was further demonstrated in meetings with staff, students and the external stakeholders during the main review visit. The *QAES* states that “NCI recognises its responsibility for its internal quality assurance and provision of services and programmes of learning” and notes that “Effective quality assurance is an institution-wide responsibility”. (*QAES*, Ch. 2, p4). Through its CINNTE documentation, and in meetings during the main review visit, the review team found that NCI staff demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement with a commendable student-centred ethos permeating their work. The review team confirmed, as identified in the ISER, that there is further work to do, particularly in the areas of academic governance and the alignment of the

quality assurance and enhancement policies and procedures with current practice, to meet the aspirations outlined in the *QAES* and articulated by its staff; however the review team believes that, with the necessary prioritisation, NCI is well-positioned to complete this work and consolidate its progress thus far. This work will bring NCI’s QA procedures back into full compliance with the ESG 2015 and QQIs statutory QA guidelines.

This report identifies areas where the early implementation of associated recommendations will be particularly important in the context of compliance with European and national expectations, consistency, transparency and effective practice, including pertaining to Policy for Quality Assurance, Academic Governance, Teaching Staff, and Information Management. The ISER cited examples where quality management and processes have deviated or evolved from what is in the published *QAES*. This was reinforced in several interviews during the main review visit, during which the review team heard of examples evidencing the migration of current practice from these approved and published policies and procedures. The specific examples and associated risks are detailed in this report and the review team is strongly of the view that NCI should urgently review its practice in light of these findings to give renewed meaning to the statement in the *QAES*, that “In documenting and publishing the (*QAES*) system, users are guided through the agreed policy and the authorised processes to be used” (Ch 1, p3).

There are many examples of commendable quality enhancement activities evident in the ISER and its associated case studies and these were amplified by further examples heard by the review team during meetings with staff and students. Policies, procedures and approaches are reviewed with



12. Every collection of 5 large departments that share a road is first surveyed, and then provided for advancement. The data for the 100 largest departments are summarized in the following table.

Year	The value for advancement		Road
	From 2010 to 2011	From 2011 to 2012	
2010	10	20	100
2011	20	30	100
2012	30	40	100

What is the probability that a department's road will be used for advancement for advancement given that the department's road will be used?

A. 0.1
B. 0.2
C. 0.3
D. 0.4
E. 0.5

$100 = 100 \times 100$
 $100 = 100 \times 100$
 $100 = 100 \times 100$

changes made that enhance quality; however, the approach to quality enhancement is not systematic and embedded.

NCI has a commendable commitment to Access with a particular emphasis on the development of progression pathways. Its procedures are in keeping with the *QQI Policy Restatement for Access, Transfer and Progression*.

The review team recommends that NCI take due cognisance of the findings of this report to implement actions in a timely manner to address the recommendations pertaining to the academic governance and management of quality assurance and quality enhancement. This is a necessary pre-requisite to support sustainable growth and the realisation of the ambitions articulated by NCI, including the strategic plan aims of attainment of HEA Designation and DA status.

OBJECTIVE 1 – GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

INSTITUTION MISSION AND STRATEGY

NCI has a clear and stable mission that overtly informs its *Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027*. The plan was developed through a reflective and considered process, which included consultation with internal and external stakeholders and which tested and re-confirmed the continuing relevance and value of NCI's mission "to change lives through education". It is clear that this mission shapes and drives the work of the institution.

The shared, strong and deep commitment to the institutional mission was evident throughout the review visit. There was a real sense of belonging to the organisation and belief in its mission by those staff met by the review team. The mission was equally evident in the work of the institution in the community and with employer organisations.

The institution sees itself as distinctive within the Irish higher education landscape. The process of strategy development also confirmed, for NCI, features that it considers continue to make it distinctive. In summary, NCI remains committed to: delivering education in its established fields

of study and intends to connect its research to these areas; enabling access to education; being rooted in the communities it serves and in which it is located; and providing teaching, learning, delivery and assessment built around the nature of its learners. NCI added sustainability and alignment with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as a theme cutting across each of its strategic priority areas and as a significant dimension of its work to 2027. The strategy was launched to all staff by NCI's president in July 2022.

The delivery of the strategy is actively supported, and progress tracked, through annual implementation plans, developed and overseen by the executive group and approved by the governing body. Progress reports are shared with staff twice a year and there is a live tracking dashboard. The review of achievement against the plan informs the planning and budgeting process for the following year. The review team consider that clear prioritisation is necessary to ensure that significant pieces of work are not overlooked amidst the activity of pursuing and tracking an extensive number of action lines and would highlight repeated failures to make the updates to the QAES stated as intended in AQRs and the prioritisation of other work over that on the management information system (MIS) as examples of where this has occurred (both are discussed in more depth later in this report).

The governing body is active in its oversight. It receives regular, scheduled updates and reports on progress against the strategy and requests ad hoc reports where it wishes to understand more about a matter. For instance, it requested a horizon-scanning exercise to understand the extent and complexity of wider sectoral change and considered the resulting report in May 2024. The governing body will undertake a mid-cycle assessment of the strategy in 2025 "to ensure the strategic priorities are aligned with institutional and stakeholder needs and expectations" (ISER, p. 22).

The strategy refers to a "connected plan – from mission to outcome" (p. 7) but many objectives that support the strategy are not readily measurable, fully defined or supported by key performance

indicators (KPIs). No milestones are given, and the only numerical target is that for student numbers. The baselines in 2022, when the strategy was launched, are not detailed, making it hard for the extent of progress or achievement to be measured. Thus, where the institution wants to be, what it is aiming to achieve in concrete terms and what will look different by 2027, are all hard to ascertain for a number of the strategic objectives. To illustrate this with one of the objectives: “To work in partnership with our student body to ensure that the student voice is integral to our planning, resourcing, innovations and sustainability” (p. 9). This objective could mean that this was not the case when the strategy was written, or it could indicate the intention to deepen the extent to which the student voice informs planning etc. Thus, from the strategy, it is unclear if this objective is something to be achieved from a low starting point, something to be maintained, to be improved, or to be transformed. Without clear milestones and measurements it is hard to see how NCI will know the objective – and any strategic change – has been achieved. The same, or similar, questions could be asked about most of the strategic objectives. Even a hard objective, that to grow to 8,500 students, is not backed within the strategy, by an indication of intended planned changes to the student profile or portfolio of provision or year by year steps towards the objective. The strategic plan may make greater sense to those within NCI or familiar with it who are able to situate and contextualise its statements; however, it communicates the strategic map far less clearly to external audiences and those less familiar with the institution.

The section on what success would look like in five years (p. 16) only helps in the few areas where the difference between 2022 and 2027 is clear (such as to be an independent, HEA-designated institution or increase the student population to 8,500 students). While the review team were told how actions were tracked, staff struggled to provide examples of firm, measurable KPIs or the use of clear targets. A number of descriptors of success would have been true of the nature of NCI when the strategy was written – such as to be “recognised as a model of community engagement, and a national leader in early education intervention for both early learning and student

access” (p. 16) thus it is unclear how they can be used to measure change or the degree of success. To support the achievement of strategic goals, and the assessment of the impact and effectiveness of planned actions, the review team considered it vital that NCI ensure that all strategic objectives are SMART with clear milestones.

The *Academic Strategy 2019 – 2024* covers education, research, and access and engagement. Neither the ISER nor the IP provided a summary of achievements against this strategy or reflected how NCI’s thinking has evolved over the period of the strategy. While it is at the end of its life and refers back to earlier institutional strategic goals, it does confirm considerable continuity in values and objectives. The strategy also lacks defined figures. For instance, it refers to graduation rates and proportions but not the starting point or the goal. In some instances, the desired goal is not clear, for example, it is stated that success may be measured through the “proportion of teaching hours delivered by full-time academics” (p. 25) but there is no indication of whether this means increasing or decreasing that proportion. Assuming the intention is to increase the proportion of teaching hours delivered by full-time academics, there is an implied view of the benefit to the quality of the student learning experience of full-time faculty, which has significant implications given the continuing high proportion of associate faculty.

Since the publication of the *Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027*, a separate research strategy has been developed, covering 2023 – 2027. The institutional strategic plan has six strategic priorities, one of which is research, and the research strategy outlines how research will be promoted and driven. Importantly, it asks how research (at NCI) can “best contribute to changing lives through education” (p. 2) and alignment with NCI’s mission is evident throughout. The research strategy sets out five goals and details aspirations and commitments; it could be described as a roadmap towards research as an embedded part of NCI’s culture. While it too neglects to set out milestones or targets, it integrates the character of NCI and the cross-cutting strategic theme of the UN SDGs within the proposed research clusters.

The review team were repeatedly told that NCI is small and able to rely on the close working relationships, informal processes and knowledge of staff that a small organisation is able to draw on. There was less acknowledgement of how achieving the strategic goals, particularly those for growth and for HEA designation and DA, could impact on the institution's sense of self and will necessarily change working practices. Indeed, its ambitions to grow research and change its positioning could impact on the nature of applicants and its access profile. The team would encourage NCI to consider, in detail, how it may need to adapt and change, what aspects of its governance will need to be revised, and which aspects of its work will need to move to formalised, more fully defined and more transparent approaches as it grows and enhances its reputation and standing.

COMMENDATION

- NCI is commended for its shared, strong and deep commitment to the institutional mission, how this is made manifest across the work of the institution, strategically, operationally and at all levels and the real sense of belonging to the organisation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- NCI should review the totality of action lines related to the strategic plan that are currently being progressed and monitored and consider how actions are prioritised and factored into the action plan in an appropriate and timely manner.
- NCI should ensure that each of its strategic objectives is SMART, with clear indicators of performance, agreed milestones and targets to allow better tracking of progress and performance.

STRUCTURES FOR GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QA

The overall structures for the governance and management of quality assurance are set out in the QAES. This is published on the institution website and is accessible both internally and externally. The QAES was published in November 2018, having been developed for the QQI re-engagement process which assessed and confirmed compliance

with ESG and QQI guidelines as part of that process. Chapter 12 Apprenticeship Programmes and Chapter 13 Technology Mediated Learning, have been updated, as has an annex covering procedures linked to devolved responsibility (chapter 3). However, the ISER details changes to the academic committee structure, which, although approved by the governing body over four years ago (May 2020), have not been reflected in the QAES. This means that the published system is not accurate as it has not been kept up to date and that there is no reliable single point of information for staff, students or wider stakeholders to refer to should they need to check any details of the academic governance system. This has the potential to constitute a significant risk should there be challenge to, or dispute about, the status of any decisions taken by the committees which have changed their terms of reference or constitutions, are no longer operating or have been established since the QAES was published.

The academic governance structure detailed in the QAES – and therefore on the institution website – differs substantially from that presented in the ISER and IP. According to the ISER (p. 28), the terms of reference and membership of academic council were changed in 2020, as were those of the research committee and the learning, teaching and assessment committee (LTAC). Since then, LTAC has established three subcommittees that are not included in the QAES and thus do not have published terms of reference and memberships recorded there. These terms of reference were supplied to the review team on request; however, there was no approval date or indication of how they were approved or where they are housed so as to be accessible to staff, students or wider stakeholders. It is not, therefore, surprising that feedback from staff in preparation for CINNTE suggested “that some decision-making processes are not fully transparent, and that there is some ambiguity about the roles and responsibilities of committees and decision-making groups across NCI” (ISER, p. 31). The team would encourage the institution to accelerate the work it has identified to help address trust, confidence and participation (ISER, p. 31) in decision-making and extend it to cover how committee members are selected.

The ISER goes on to record that the academic policy and standards committee (APSC) had not met in the last academic year and notes that its work was “likely to continue through” the Programme Lifecycle Management Executive sub-group (PLM ESG) “to enhance, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness” (ISER, p. 29). The functions, membership and reporting line of the APSC remain detailed in the QAES, but the PLM ESG is not included in the QAES. PLM ESG has, as the second item in its terms of reference, “To maintain the quality, currency and effectiveness of academic policies, procedures, support services and programmes”. These changes demonstrate a hollowing out of the responsibilities that should rest with academic council for the oversight of academic standards, academic policies, quality assurance and quality enhancement. Further, the changes appeared to have moved the core elements of that oversight away from the deliberative committee line, under academic council, and into that of management and the executive. This would reduce both due scrutiny by the wider academic body of the institution and transparency, undermining the authority delegated to academic council for academic matters. Whilst the committee organigram in the ISER (p. 26) includes a dotted reporting line from PLM ESG to academic council, it was evident from meetings during the review visit that the structure has sidelined the due functions and responsibilities of Council. Resource decisions lie correctly in the executive/management line, but decisions concerning academic quality and standards or the monitoring and oversight of academic quality and standards in programme monitoring, validation and re-validation should lie elsewhere. It was also noted that the appendix to the QAES, approved following the granting of devolved responsibility for the arrangement of independent evaluation reports, has not been updated to reflect changes in operational practice and does not make reference to PLM ESG.

The ISER (p. 29) also records, as confirmed by staff at the review visit, that the academic operations committee (in the executive line) had not met in the last academic year, and its functions have been absorbed into the academic operations team. The ISER also indicates that the academic operations

committee was scheduled to be redesigned and relaunched for the current 2024 – 25 academic year but does not detail its intended redesigned purpose. This relaunch had not occurred by the time of the review visit.

NCI indicated that it anticipated that governance and reporting structures would need to be reviewed in 2024 – 25 following the transfer of its core grant to the HEA and refers to governance changes potentially being imposed by the HEA (ISER p. 30); it expected to be able to “transition effectively” given its “knowledge and experience benchmarked against sectoral good practices”. However, this review had not been actioned by the time of the CINTE review visit. NCI is encouraged to review aspects of its approach to the governance of academic quality and standards in line with best practice and wider sectoral norms, and to engage in appropriate benchmarking in this regard. It is imperative that the distinction between the executive decision-making line and that which is the province of academic governance committees be fully understood and integrated, both for good governance and for demonstrating readiness for DA.

Despite the ISER consultations reinforcing the “need for greater clarity and communications in the work and decisions made across the entire NCI committee structure” (ISER p. 29), the only action completed is a refresh of two executive committees (executive group and the SMT). The ISER also notes (p. 32) that the terms of reference and memberships of each of the institution’s academic governance and management committees is being reviewed. The team would strongly encourage NCI to carefully consider the locus of responsibility for academic quality and standards and the balance of memberships to ensure that academic committees reflect the wider academic community, include elected members, students and the student interest and enable constructive challenge. The review team strongly supports the institution in its intention to complete this by the end of the second quarter in 2025 and have the new structure operational for the 2025 – 26 academic year.

The terms of reference in the QAES do not include standard details such as the quorum,

the use of reserved business, voting and other operational matters. The terms of reference for the subcommittees of the LTAC are insufficiently detailed and not fully clear. For instance, the quorum is indicated thus: “Representation for Schools/CELL, College departments/functions in the area of remit, senior leadership and students are essential for the proper functioning of the sub-committee and meetings shall have representation in these areas for a quorum” (supplementary information provided to the review team – no source or page ref). Membership is only described in general terms without an indication of how the membership is made open to all staff: “Membership of sub-committees shall be open to all staff (not just members of the LTA Committee)... Membership of each sub-committee will be as follows (note the same people may be members of LTA and a sub-committee) School of Business (up to 2 members), School of Computing (up to 2 members), Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning (1 member), Students Union (1 member), in addition, all relevant departments and functions in the area of remit of the sub-committee shall have representation. The chair may co-opt additional members if deemed necessary” (supplementary information provided to the review team – no source or page ref). The information states that “Ideally, sub-committee chairs shall be the business owners of College systems in their area of remit and can recommend on the configuration and deployment of existing infrastructure”; while a rationale is presented, it is not one that builds in internal challenge and scrutiny as the common practice of a disinterested chair would do.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- NCI must complete the vital review and revision and publication of its academic governance structures within the 2024 – 25 academic session, as planned, to ensure that all academic decision-making that should be the responsibility of an academic council and an appropriate set of committees and sub-committees is principally considered by or through that governance forum.
- NCI should develop full Terms of Reference that clearly state the remit, constitution and operational practices of its academic council

and each committee and subcommittee.

- NCI should ensure that the constitutions of academic council and each of its committees and subcommittees provide appropriate and balanced representation across internal stakeholder interests to enable appropriate challenge and academic scrutiny.
- NCI should ensure that the details of all academic committees are, and remain, up to date, accurate and complete, that they are published and accessible and that they are housed in a location that acts as a ‘single source of truth.’

DOCUMENTATION OF QA POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

NCI’s QA procedures are set out in the QAES, which was developed and published in November 2018 in preparation for QQI re-engagement. Following that, NCI developed a Quality Improvement and Effectiveness Plan (QIEP) to articulate how the new quality team and QAES would support achievement of the goals of the *Academic Strategy 2019 – 2024* and overall quality and effectiveness; progress was monitored by academic council. In 2022 – 23, following the launch of the executive strategic implementation plan, and with progress in implementing the QIEP slow, the remaining actions were incorporated into the priorities of the new Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (QIE) Director.

The QAES is comprehensive and aligned to both QQI QA guidelines and the ESG. Its structure closely follows QQI’s core guidelines for QA with 13 chapters covering areas such as NCI’s approach to quality assurance and enhancement, programme validation and review, assessment, the learning and teaching environment, admission, support services for learners, staff recruitment and development, information governance, public information, research, apprenticeship programmes, and technology-mediated learning. The chapter sequencing is intuitive and appropriate and cumulatively provides a comprehensive QA manual. The emphasis on assurance and enhancement in the title is commendable.

Since 2022 the institution has been incrementally reviewing its policies and procedures and developing new policies in line with its strategic priorities and emerging sector risks. For example, in the 2022 – 23 period a revised Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) process was rolled out, and 2023 and 2024 saw the approval of the *Hybrid Working Policy*, the *Academic Integrity Policy* and two learner support policies. The review team is greatly encouraged by NCI's commitment to reviewing and refreshing its QA procedures; however, the revised policies and procedures are yet to be incorporated into the QAES. Indeed, since publication only three chapters have been updated: in 2020 Chapter 12 Apprenticeship Programmes was rewritten, in 2021 an appendix setting out NCI's procedures for devolved responsibility was added to chapter 3 and in 2022 Chapter 13 Technology-Mediated Learning was refreshed. The changes have not been recorded in standard document control fields (e.g. approval and review dates and a history of amendments) in the QAES, and this, together with the delay in incorporating new and changed policies into the QAES, has made it difficult for the review team to reconcile the developments documented in the ISER and AQRs with the QAES and to gain a clear picture of the evolution of the QA system. At the review visit staff indicated that new policies have instead been published on a separate online policy hub that is accessible to staff and students (the review team were not provided with access to the hub during the review visit). The existence of two separate sources of QA policies and procedures and a range of updated information that is not recorded in the QAES raises a potential significant risk that students or staff might rely on inaccurate information to inform their decisions and therefore leave the institution open to complaints or legal challenges. It also has the potential to give rise to confusion and inconsistency in implementation. NCI's website states that the "necessary updates to committee structures and academic policies and procedures will be completed during 2024 – 25 academic year" (QAES home page, accessed Dec 2024), an intention confirmed in the ISER.

Given a comprehensive refresh of the QAES is planned for 2024 – 25 this provides an opportunity for NCI to address the location of information to

establish an easily accessible, single source of truth for its QA procedures with standard document control fields (and would ensure that it complies with ESG 1.1 and 1.8 as well as section 2.1 of QQI's statutory QA guidelines). This would evidence NCI's evolving QA system, provide a public record of changes and developments, and support policy governance, consistency, and integrity. The refresh also provides an opportunity for NCI to consider how it might further streamline and prioritise policy development and review work to ensure that its policy governance remains current given that progress is slow with the AQR recording the carrying over of planned refreshes and reviews from one AQR reporting period to another, and implementation at times occurring in advance of published policy changes. For example, a planned review and refresh of the APM process and concomitant updating of the QAES is first mentioned in the AQR for the 2020 – 21 period. The action is carried over to the AQRs for the 2021 – 2022 and 2022 – 2023 reporting periods. The AQR for the latter period confirms that a refreshed APM process had been re-introduced, but states that "Formal updates to Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of the QAES, to reflect these updates processes, will be completed in 2024" (AQR 2024, p. 14). At the time of the review visit in December 2024, it was confirmed that this (and other updates to the QAES) had not been completed and was planned for update in Q2 2025. The review team would urge the NCI to address this gap urgently to update all QA documentation and to implement processes and procedures that ensure that documentation is consistently updated in a timely manner in the future.

The *Policy on Policies* in chapter 2 sets out sound development, review and approval processes. It states that policies are reviewed every three years, and regular review of the QAES by QQI and a range of external professional accrediting and regulatory bodies provides external confidence of alignment with national European, international and statutory benchmarks and requirements. However, this intended internal schedule of policy reviews has not been implemented. Administrative service reviews provide a further opportunity for review of the fitness for purpose of policies and procedures and their alignment with sectoral norms.

Staff can contribute directly to policy development and review through consultation and committee structures, and student voices are heard via NCISU. This was confirmed by staff at the review visit who stated that policies are usually presented to school committees once ready for approval. Notwithstanding that, there may be benefit in embedding more detailed requirements in the *Policy on Policies* to ensure that consultation is broad and iterative and provides multiple opportunities for stakeholders and staff and students at all levels to engage with new and revised policies. This would strengthen familiarity with policies and embed a sense of ownership to support consistency of implementation as NCI grows.

Academic council is the academic policy approval authority; however, as noted in the previous section (structures for governance and management of QA) in the previous 12 – 18 months responsibility for maintaining the quality, currency and effectiveness of academic policy has shifted, according to the terms of reference, from the APSC, a subcommittee of academic council, to PLM ESG, a management/ executive committee. Oversight of academic policy and its effectiveness is properly the remit of academic governance bodies and its position in the governance eco-system should reflect this. An APSC or similar plays a crucial function in critically scrutinising policy and QA on behalf of the peak academic governance body and NCI should revise current academic governance structures and wider operational practices to ensure that there is a clear and appropriate home for the due scrutiny of academic policy and quality; as part of this, the terms of reference and work of PLM ESG should be reviewed to ensure that it is not advising academic council on quality matters.

The QAES is available on the NCI website and can be relatively easily accessed from the NCI homepage. That said, the *Policy on Policies* would benefit from a revision to include explicit requirements for policies to be aligned with international accessibility standards and inclusive by design; doing so would embed and improve accessibility for all. Staff commented that implicit in this is linguistic accessibility and readability; that is, the need for policies to be written in plain English.

The review team supports the inclusion of this in the ISER's conclusions and next steps.

It is the view of the review team that the AQRs and the ISER demonstrate only to a limited extent the embeddedness of quality processes. Part B of the AQR, for example, is largely descriptive and would benefit from further evaluation of impact and effectiveness. This might in part be because a number of core QA processes have only been recently refreshed (e.g. APM). Mechanisms such as the regular 'temperature check' are positive, as they enable administrative teams to reflect on their policies and procedures. Measures to assess quality and effectiveness of policies and procedures in each policy in the QAES are also a positive. However, NCI may wish to further tighten these measures to clearly focus on how effective they are in enhancing teaching and learning and explore mechanisms to strengthen policy embeddedness. For example, a 12 – 18 month post-implementation review that considers how the policy and procedure is operating in practice and whether it is delivering the intended impacts or having unintended negative or positive impacts would support consistency of implementation.

RECOMMENDATION

- NCI should, as an immediate priority and before the start of the 2025 – 26 academic session, in line with its planned intentions, ensure that all of the policies, procedures and other information in the QAES that falls within ESG Part 1 and/or QQI's statutory QA guidelines is accurate, complete, accessible and functions effectively as a single source of truth.

STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

The *NCI Strategic Plan 2022 – 27* lists staff as the second of the six key strategic priorities for the institution, stating that NCI "will support and train all of [their] staff to be agile and responsive" resulting in "a skilled and motivated staff that are supported to have a clear understanding of mission and strategy" (p. 10). The employment policies and

procedures for staff recruitment and development are presented in chapter 8 of the QAES, and all HR policies are approved by SMT or the executive group. The review team notes that this chapter has not been updated since 2018 and some newer and additional policies are now in effect.

The recruitment policy as presented in the QAES is brief and focusses on ensuring that recruitment and selection processes are open, competitive, performance-based, free from discrimination, and GDPR-compliant. The *Appointment Criteria for Faculty* (QAES, Ch. 8) provides clear guidelines on the criteria against which academic applicants may be assessed. The review team welcomed that the ISER indicates that the policy has been strengthened to reflect the institution's commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and their Athena Swan Charter, and that managers and executive directors undertake recruitment and selection training every two years. NCI provides an induction programme delivered over a 6-week period for all recently recruited staff, with evening sessions available for associate faculty. Staff reported that they felt very supported by the induction programme and that it gave them the information they needed to start their employment at NCI. The review team were also impressed that the effort to recruit excellent academic talent has resulted in an increased number of academic staff with Level 10 qualifications: at the time of the visit, 71% of the full-time academic staff and 24% of the part-time associate faculty held a Level 10 award.

The ISER reports that NCI has approximately 431 staff in terms of total headcount. These are categorised as full-time permanent academic staff (15.3%), non-academic staff (36.0%), associate faculty who may be drawn from related industries (29.5%), and those community workers who support the ELI (19.3%) (ISER, Figure 20). This approach to staffing certainly supports the enterprise focus of NCI's vision and its commitment to providing education services specific to its local catchment area. Examining the academic staff profile further, updated information provided to the review team during the visit indicated that there are 66 full-time permanent academic staff and 123 part-time associate faculty of whom 50 are on permanent contracts with the remainder on fixed-

term contracts. The FTE of the associate faculty was not available but, even from a headcount perspective, the associate faculty group represents a considerable portion of the institution's staff complement.

The deliberate and strategic use of associate faculty, especially those from relevant industries and communities, allows the embedding of real-world expertise within the educational offerings, and students and graduates were highly complimentary of this aspect of their programmes in the ISER and during the review visit. However, as highlighted in the ISER (p. 42), there are risks inherent in having such a reliance on associate faculty. For example, in the past five years 39% of recruited associate faculty have left, with the School of Computing seeing the greatest turnover due to excellent industry opportunities. In contrast, some associate faculty have been with the institution for well over five years, have established their employment at NCI as permanent, indicating that careful management of the recruitment and long-term retention of associate faculty must be a priority. It became clear during the review visit sessions that the teaching load for some associate faculty was greater than for some full-time staff, which prompts the question of how much full-time, academically experienced, research-led teaching students are receiving and whether the balance of academic and industrial expertise is appropriate. Noting that the Academic Strategy 2019-2024 stated that success may be measured through the "proportion of teaching hours delivered by full-time academics", the review team shares the view with NCI that an "optimum balance" (ISER, p. 39) between full-time faculty and associate faculty is important. The team acknowledges that the strategic plan (p. 10) includes an objective 'to optimise the permanent/associate faculty model' and the team is concerned that no specific target ratio for full-time to part-time academic staff has been identified so that a sustainable, credible, quality-driven academic staff cohort can be established to support research and to provide effective learning on programmes. A concomitant plan to achieve this target will be crucially important for NCI to achieve its ambitions and the review team would encourage this work to be completed in 2025.

One of the core values of NCI is “excellence” and the institution aspires to “professional excellence in everything [they] do” (strategic plan, p. 3) with “academic excellence” highlighted through the strategic plan. Indeed, the review team found many examples of excellence that are reflected in the commendations. There is a clear focus on excellence when recruiting staff and a probation period in place to monitor early performance. The use of president’s awards for distinguished teaching, assessment innovation, contribution to research and student experience serves to recognise achievement across all aspects of the institution’s activities. This positive approach to acknowledge criteria-based excellence across all categories of staff is a successful means to celebrate staff performance. NCI is strategically pursuing academic excellence and is focused on developing and retaining their best staff, but further work is needed to assure the quality of the contribution of all their staff as a priority. The Career and Employment Development Plan described in chapter 8 of the QAES is intended *inter alia* to review performance over the previous year; however, it is not referenced in the ISER and there is no existing HR policy regarding this plan. The recognition of the need and the intention to introduce a Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) for non-academic staff and associate faculty is referred to in the ISER (pp. 42-43), but despite clear promotion policies, there is no documentation of a PMDS for full-time academic staff. The review team would encourage NCI to expand the planned administrative Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) to full-time academic staff also. Deans referred to meetings with academic staff to discuss their progression and development and the newly introduced module learner evaluation survey provides feedback on modules but is not designed to be an evaluation of the lecturer’s performance. The review team is concerned that these instruments do not fully and systematically review the quality of full-time and associate faculty on an ongoing and regular basis.

NCI clearly values its staff and has introduced several policies and initiatives to emphasise the importance of staff wellbeing. Such policies

include a *Career Break Policy*, *Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy*, *Flexible and Remote Working Policy*, and the *Right to Disconnect Policy*. Since 2021 to date, the institution has been included in IBEC’s Top 100 index companies Leading in Wellbeing. The diversity of staff is also strongly supported through NCI’s commitment to Athena Swan, its successful application to renew its Bronze Award, and its 2024 – 2028 action plan. Examples of where NCI has embedded EDI principles include its recruitment policy (QAES, Ch. 8), its endorsement of the six [Principles of Anti-Racism for Irish Higher Education Institutions](#), the development and delivery of a wide range of EDI-related training, inclusive leadership training by the [Irish Centre for Diversity](#) for senior staff (Strategic Implementation Plan Q3 2023), the creation of a sensory room for students and staff, the introduction of a menopause workplace guide, and the development of the NCI Framework for Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment (ISER, App. A3, p. 118). The institution also attained Age-Friendly Campus status, an *As/Am* designation as an Autism Friendly HEI, and received an Investors in Diversity Bronze award (NCI Institutional Profile, p. 37). The institution is to be commended on its dedication to championing EDI and the embedding of EDI principles in staff recruitment, wellbeing and development, championing EDI and the embedding of EDI principles in staff recruitment, wellbeing and development.

NCI has identified strategic priorities in the areas of research and reputation, its ambition to increase staff and student numbers, and the challenges of recruiting and retaining excellent staff. The wellbeing and development of academic staff can be strongly influenced by the workload allocated. Although there are specified hours allocated to full-time staff with some remission for teaching and maximum hours stipulated for associate faculty, it was clear to the review team that when human and financial resources are scarce, the optimal teaching workload was not always achieved; for instance, associate faculty do work more than the maximum hours specified. The review team is encouraged to note that in the ISER (p. 39) and in the institution’s response to queries from the review team, the institution recognises that there is

a need for a formal institutional academic workload management model for both full-time and associate faculty, and has initiated a full economic costing modelling of its programmes. The review team considers that the establishment of a transparent, balanced, and sustainable workload model with some designed flexibility will be critical for ensuring that full-time and associate faculty thrive, develop, and remain at NCI.

The *Educational Assistance Policy* is outlined in chapter 8 of the *QAES* and is a worthy testament to the commitment of the institution to further develop and upskill its staff; all eligible staff, including non-academic and associate faculty, can access any NCI programme of study free of charge or at a reduced cost. Staff can also apply for funding support to pursue a Level 10 award in NCI or another HEI; for example, there were six PhDs funded in 2024, and two doctoral programmes supported for executive group members over the past five years. In addition to formal awards, the TEU, based within the CELL and the Digital Learning Design Unit (DLDU), provides education and training for academic staff involved in technology-enhanced learning, the promotion of universal design for learning (UDL), and the provision and design of hybrid and fully online modules and programmes. Staff met by the review team commented very positively on the quality and the nature of the training and support that they receive from the TEU and DLDU and felt that their competence to deliver an excellent student learning experience was enhanced. However, in general terms and not specifically relating to TEU and DLDU training, in the CINTE staff survey, approximately a third of staff did not feel that there was adequate information on staff training and development opportunities and a third did not participate in opportunities in the previous 12 months.

NCI acknowledges that the investment in the development of staff is most effective only if members of staff are retained by the institution. The continued growth in employment in Ireland means that the challenges of retaining associate faculty mentioned above are no less for non-academic and full-time academic staff and the institution has seen an increase in staff turnover. Retaining the best

employees often requires that they are promoted in line with their development. A new *Promotion and Progression Policy* was approved in 2022, and guidelines for the promotion for academic staff were published in June 2024. These guidelines are comprehensive and robust and designed to ensure as far as possible that promotion competitions for academic staff are competitive and fair. However, such promotion opportunities are dependent on finances and despite significant progress having been made to promote staff since 2023, it was evident that the schools were not confident that the number of promotions or the level of pay associated with them would help secure their best staff. For non-academic staff, a promotions process does operate. The ISER (p. 40) provides examples of promotion opportunities within the registry and academic operations team. However, during the review visit it was acknowledged that staff did not feel that this process was as transparent and fair as it should be, and the Director of HR indicated that this feedback has prompted a more urgent consideration of a specific promotion policy for non-academic staff.

COMMENDATIONS

- The review team commends the use of associate faculty where they are able to embed relevant, current professional and industrial expertise in the learning activities for students.
- The review team commends the institution on its continued and dedicated engagement with the Athena Swan Charter and the embedding of EDI principles in its core activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The review team recommends that NCI prioritise and expedite its work to determine the optimum balance of full-time faculty and associate faculty to support the overall NCI strategy and for effective learning on each programme, to initiate a plan to achieve this balance, and to monitor the contract regularisation and currency of expertise of associate faculty.
- The review team recommends that a Performance Management and Development

System be established for all institution staff so that formal performance quality assurance is conducted and that development needs are recorded and addressed in a systematic, transparent and timely way.

- The review team recommends that NCI continue its work on developing a workload management model and expanding and improving its full economic costing model to ensure that the wellbeing and development of its staff is sustainable and assured.
- The review team recommends that the communication of learning and development opportunities for all staff be improved and that staff participation in these opportunities be systematically monitored and analysed.
- The review team recommends that an updated and transparent promotion policy and framework for non-academic staff be introduced, comparable with that for academic staff.

PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT, APPROVAL AND SUBMISSION FOR VALIDATION

As outlined in the NCI IP, NCI delivers over 95 accredited programmes to over 6,000 registered students through its School of Business, School of Computing and the CELL (Institutional Profile, p6 and p16). The NCI strategic plan outlines a key objective to grow the learner body to 8,500 students by 2027 and the schools and CELL play a pivotal role with respect to this key performance indicator. The institution has been actively developing innovative new programmes, and it is noteworthy that in the past five years NCI has successfully validated 38 new programmes across a variety of NFQ levels (ISER, p45). The NCI programme portfolio includes taught programme pathways from NFQ Level 6 to NFQ Level 9, full-time and part-time. It is also noteworthy that NCI has created a significant range of opportunities for life-long learning through the development of a range of special purpose awards. During the review visit the review team heard of commendable examples of the progression of students from these special purpose awards into major awards offered by the institution.

The review team saw evidence that NCI has commendable engagement with industry and the community and government agencies to enhance the programme portfolio, including in programme design and development, and provision of work placements and range of partnership programmes. For example, the review team was impressed with the suite of special purpose awards offered with the Department of Social Protection, and during the main review visit heard of ongoing plans to strengthen a pathway approach to this provision. The ISER notes that accredited work placements are currently offered across seven programmes and facilitate collaboration between employers, students and NCI to benefit all involved (ISER, p89). While the review team appreciates the work to date on developing placements, it recommends that NCI seek to expand the range of programmes which have accredited placement and/or work integrated learning, particularly for its level 8 undergraduate major award programme portfolio. The ISER also notes that NCI has six collaborative partners, including new partnerships with Dublin City Education and Training Board (CDETb) (ISER, p70). The review team acknowledges the very positive efforts made by NCI with respect to developing the programme portfolio, including the emphasis on applied learning and contemporary relevance, employability, student engagement, and embedding and leveraging its deep and ongoing external links to community, government agencies and industry.

During the main review visit, the review team heard from NCI about the management of programme portfolio growth and its programme lifecycle management approach. It was noted that while the idea for a new programme can come from a number of sources, the schools play a pivotal role and are continuously thinking about new and innovative growth areas into which the portfolio can be expanded to deliver the ambitious growth that is envisaged in the NCI strategic plan. The review team heard from NCI representatives that further enhancing the process of 'incubation' and engagement with faculty on new programme ideas would be beneficial, as it is a journey in itself prior to the commencement of the governance and management assessment lifecycle of any proposal. It was also noted that,

in the context of the disciplinary areas of the two schools (Computing and Business), contemporary trends can sometimes set the agenda, including developments in generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), data and data analytics. The first stage is always to complete a new programme proposal which is reviewed and discussed by the PLM ESG committee. NCI noted that due care is taken with new programme proposals to see if there is overlap with existing provision, and that resource and requirements and viability considerations are a key part of the assessment. The review team heard that viability analysis now includes a full economic costing model to fully understand the financial and business case. It was noted that this approach is applied across the totality of the portfolio, including hybrid and online provision. The review team notes and endorses the self-identified recommendation in the ISER of “Ensuring resource commitments identified within programme validations are reflected in our annual budgeting process and throughout the programme validation lifecycle” (ISER, p49).

Chapter 3 of the QAES outlines NCI’s commitments, policies and procedures for programme development, validation and evaluation. The chapter was produced in 2018 with a new appendix developed in 2021 which sets out NCI’s procedures for devolved responsibility granted following the successful QQI re-engagement process. The ISER notes that the devolved responsibility involves NCI arranging the independent evaluation panels (often referred to as QQI Panels) to assess applications to validate new programmes and ensuring that the panel produces an independent evaluation report in line with QQI’s requirements. The reports are then submitted to QQI for consideration and approval at the QQI Programme and Awards Executive Committee which issues QQI Certificates of Validation.

Chapter 3 of the QAES provides an appropriate framework for the development of new programmes and has detailed and well-structured procedures, including a range of templates and forms to assist programme teams. New programme proposal and approval procedures are in alignment with the ESG, including ESG1.3, and are consistent with the statutory requirements of QQI. As

outlined in QAES, the process includes several ‘checkpoints’, and the review team appreciates the reflective approach that is implicit in this process. The ISER indicates that a significant element of the quality assurance for the development of new programmes lies within the remit of the PLM ESG with accountability and final decision making lying with academic council. This approach was confirmed in meetings during the main review visit. Consistent with the findings outlined in the previous section of this report (structures for governance and management), the review team recommends that this approach be expeditiously reviewed and amended. The ISER appropriately notes that “Where academic governance requires evidence of the quality of our validated programmes and the learner experience; executive management prioritises delivery, strategy, the allocation of resources and the management of risk” (ISER, p26). While the review team appreciates NCI’s programme lifecycle approach to portfolio management, it strongly recommends that NCI take due cognisance of this delineation and that responsibility for academic governance and the quality and standards of programme development and validation be placed under an appropriate subcommittee of academic council.

The ISER notes that in line with the NCI strategic plan commitment to embed sustainability into programmes, faculty have been proactive in embedding UN SDGs throughout the curriculum and/or learning outcomes, with several new programmes described that respond to specific UN SDGs (ISER, p46). The review team appreciates the considerable work of NCI to date in developing its sustainability strategy and incorporating sustainability into the programme portfolio. The review team recommends that, as NCI implements its sustainability strategy, it give ongoing consideration to integrating sustainability as a perspective on relevant learning outcomes throughout the curriculum, in addition to developing bespoke modules and programmes, thereby building a tiered approach throughout the programme portfolio.

COMMENDATION

- The review team commends NCI for adopting a holistic programme portfolio lifecycle management approach and for the considered, detailed and evidence-based approach it takes to portfolio management.

RECOMMENDATION

- The review team recommends that NCI seek to expand the range of programmes which have accredited placement and/or work integrated learning.

ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION

Access is implicitly embedded in the institution's mission to "change lives through education", and in NCI's values centred on inclusivity and community. The *NCI Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027* includes Access as an explicit priority, and objectives centred on this include work to enhance NCI's leadership in access to education, broadening participation, educational pathways and diverse delivery modes (p. 13). They also include a focus on embedding access in programme design, delivery, assessment and student services, as well as continuing to provide "cradle to college" education services through schemes such as ELI and Pathways to Technology (P-TECH). As discussed elsewhere in the report, the review team found clear evidence of commitment to the NCI mission and to strategic objectives linked to access across the entire institution community.

The ELI in particular, exemplifies NCI's focus on lifelong learning, beginning with early years education. The initiative provides targeted interventions to preschool children in the local north-east inner City of Dublin and nationally in areas of social and economic disadvantage. The ELI delivers an integrated programme of educational support from antenatal/birth up to third level. ELI's multi-level interventions with various stakeholders are designed around four themes: home visiting and parent support, literacies, educational guidance and capacity building (ISER, p. 51). The institution consider that ELI's strong integration with the communities around

NCI ensures that their work continues to support at-risk children and young people, helping them achieve their full potential. The review team found that ELI enables opportunity for those who might not have seen education as a route that was possible for them, and it considers that the initiative is effectively supported through research and continual learning.

The institution's P-TECH programme is delivered through the CELL in collaboration with local secondary schools, offering an adapted version of P-TECH. NCI provides a higher education award (NFQ Level 6 Certificate) for secondary students, beginning in transition year which normally takes place prior to the commencement of their Senior Cycle at school. The CELL P-TECH team has also worked in partnership with the City of Dublin ETB, to design a degree-level progression pathway for these Leaving Certificate students.

The institution's other pathway arrangements include agreements to provide advanced standing to undergraduate programmes in the Schools of Business and Computing. These allow students from participating further education colleges to enter year two of the BA (Hons) Business and BSc Computing. NCI also provide apprenticeship programmes, including the Higher Certificate in International Financial Services (NFQ Level 6), a Higher Certificate and Higher Diploma in Financial Services Analytics (NFQ Level 8) and a BA (Hons) Recruitment Practice programme. The review team found that these programmes had effective employer involvement and heard evidence that they produce meaningful graduate outcomes for alumni.

NCI has a strong history in programme flexibility and part-time enrolments. In 2022 – 23, 41.8% of NCI enrolments were part-time, compared to 22.5% across the sector (Institutional Profile, p. 25). The review team recognises the institution's innovation in this area, where it has created compressed undergraduate programmes in Business and Human Resource Strategy and Human Resource Management. NCI are also one of only two providers in the country to offer a BA (Hons) Psychology on a part-time basis (ISER, p. 53).

Academic and English language entry requirements to NCI programmes are clearly stated on its website and the review team determined they were both transparent and fit for purpose. Notwithstanding the need to review and update the *QAES*, which was acknowledged by the institution and is discussed elsewhere in this report, the *Admission and Registration Policies* outlined in chapter 6 of the *QAES* are appropriate, compliant with the ESG and adhere to QQI's statutory QA guidelines. This includes the policies and procedures for the recognition of prior and experiential learning and admissions under advanced standing.

With respect to data collection and monitoring of learner progression and completion, the institution provides data from its student information system (Quercus+) to its programme teams for use in annual and cyclical programme reviews. The IP (p. 21) highlights an 85% completion rate for full-time programmes in 2022 – 23, an increase of 7% over a 5-year period. The part-time completion rate in 2022 – 23 was 87%, a 6% increase over the same 5-year period. However, to support early intervention, and a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of interventions, the institution has identified a need to strengthen reporting on learner progression and completion, especially in relation to the availability of data to staff through the dashboard. This is work the review team also deems important, including in relation to inter-sectionality, to complement the existing more limited data on the effectiveness of particular access strategies and interventions for the full diversity of the student body profile.

COMMENDATION

- The review team commends the strategic approach and extensive range of initiatives designed to support access and progression, in particular ELI and P-TECH and the significant contribution they make to expanding pathways into higher education.

RECOMMENDATION

- The review team recommends that NCI expedite its work to ensure monitoring and review of its access and progression work is supported by timely and readily accessible

data that enable staff to better understand impact, including as it relates to inter-sectionality within the student body.

GOVERNANCE AND OVERSIGHT PROCESSES FOR LEARNER ASSESSMENT AND RESULTS DATA

The integrity of assessment is a priority for the institution as “ultimately, public confidence rests on its belief that graduates have been objectively judged to have reached the standard that is certified by their qualification” (*QAES*, Ch. 4). Chapter 4 of the *QAES* details the quality assurance processes for assessment, and the *Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027* includes an objective to “develop the processes and data sets that drive the relevance and effectiveness of NCI's programme design, assessments, and graduate outcomes” (*Strategic Plan* p. 11, Objective 3.4).

NCI operates a “two lines of defence model” (*ISER*, p. 55) based on internal and external moderation and verification of assessment. When substantial assessments are designed, they are subject to internal approval by the peer-based subject group (*QAES*, Fig. 4-1). Internal moderation of results involves blind double marking for dissertations and other large credit-bearing assessments and seen double marking retrospective sampling. This approach adds a reliability, robustness and validity to the appropriateness of the learner results. The institution relies heavily on the external examiner process to provide objective quality assurance of the assessment and grading processes. Once “all examination papers and individual assessment that contribute to 40% or more of summative assessment for a module” (*QAES*, pp. 4-9) have been approved internally, they are subject to review and authentication by the external examiner(s) who also provide assurance that the assessments have been conducted fairly and that learners have attained the appropriate standard. NCI's twice-yearly briefing of both internal staff and external examiners serves to ensure that this dual approach to assessment validation is consistent and robust. NCI have incorporated several suggestions emerging from related workshops to further enhance the quality of the external examiner

process. The *External Examiners Policy* sets out the selection, role and duties of external examiners and largely echoes the content of the *QAES*, although the review team was not able to be sure of the date, nature of the approval of this policy due to the absence of a document change request (DCR) and how it is made widely accessible. During the review visit, it was communicated to the review team that while the selection criteria for external examiners were documented, the process to appoint an external examiner had only recently been “solidified”. Such a statement to the review team indicates that there was some unfamiliarity amongst some academic and administrative staff of the process followed. The review team was also concerned that there was a lack of awareness in the academic operations team of elements of the External Examiner Policy. The Deans of School are responsible for nominating potential External Examiners to the Registrar and for ensuring that the selection criteria are met (External Examiners Policy, p. 2). The Assessment Subcommittee, which is a subcommittee of a subcommittee of academic council, ensures that an appropriate mix of institutions are represented by the body of external examiners before a recommendation is put to academic council. The review team considers that the distributed nature of the quality assurance of appointment of external examiners as articulated in the policy may not be as robust as it could be.

Learner results are reviewed and finalised in a two-step process involving internal exam boards and formal QQI exam boards; both sets of boards are chaired by the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research and the final broadsheets of results are ratified by academic council and/or the relevant validating authority. The treatment of borderline cases at award stage based on the body of evidence rather than any one internal or external examiner is appropriate and supports equity of treatment of learners regardless of programme and exam board. There are processes in place for providing feedback to learners and for allowing learners to appeal the outcome of the exam board. While the assessment verification processes are robust, the ISER does highlight that, as part of the CINNTE self-evaluation process, both academic and administrative staff have reported that there is a significant associated workload related to

grading, reviewing, exam board preparation, and exam board meetings. This substantial workload has been identified in the ISER as being directly related to the size of modules and is even more acute for faculty with multiple large modules; it has also been determined that timelines and deadlines for exam boards have contributed to the workload issue. The review team endorses the institution’s intention to further explore the causes of unreasonable workload demands arising from the learner verification and validation processes, to examine the timelines, and to refresh the assessment and examination guidelines where possible for efficiencies without diluting the robustness and effectiveness of the underlying quality assurance.

Substantial evidence was presented in the ISER (pp. 56-57, Appendix A8) and during the review visit that NCI is absolutely committed to assuring the authenticity and academic integrity of its learner results. The institution’s participation in the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN), amongst others, and the alignment of its new policy to NAIN guidelines strongly positions the institution to address established and emerging challenges to academic integrity. The recent development of a new *Academic Integrity Policy* (2024) and an *Academic Integrity Policy on Assessments and use of AI Generated Materials such as ChatGPT* (2023) accompanied by supporting guides and documentation for staff and students emphasises the institution’s awareness of the changing academic integrity landscape due to the pervasive use of large language models (LLM). Given that the [NAIN Generative Artificial Intelligence: Guidelines for Educators](#) missive was only published in July 2023, and NCI’s first documentation on AI for staff including a new policy, learner guide and staff advisory guidelines was issued in September 2023 (ISER, p. 130), the institution is to be commended on its timely and focused addressing of such threats to the authenticity of the learner outcomes. Although these policies can be accessed on a student-facing page, they have not been incorporated into the *QAES*. As discussed earlier, NCI is encouraged to maintain the currency of the *QAES*.

For cases of academic misconduct, that are deemed to be potentially serious or severe, a disciplinary committee appointed by academic council determines the outcome for the learner and a recommendation is made to the relevant exam board. The existing description of the disciplinary committee in the QAES which states that “all breaches of the Code will be dealt with by the Disciplinary Committee” (QAES, p. 4-60) suggests a breach of academic integrity has already been established; the review team suggests that the institution reevaluate this wording when updating this section of the QAES.

COMMENDATION

- The review team commends the proactive involvement of NCI in national and international networks focused on academic integrity and its timely response to the threat that LLMs may pose to the authenticity of learner outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The review team recommends that NCI review the selection and appointment process for external examiners so that the eligibility of potential external examiners is considered and approved for recommendation by a subcommittee of academic council and that all those involved in the process are familiar with its details.
- The review team recommends that NCI further investigate the causes of workload issues associated with learner results validation and verification and, where appropriate, review and refresh the assessment and examination guidelines, taking care to maintain the robustness of their current processes.

INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

Information and Data Management is a key platform upon which many of the institution’s strategic priorities are built. The *Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027* calls out the need to “develop the processes and data sets that drive the relevance and effectiveness of NCI’s programme design, assessments and graduate outcomes” (NCI Strategic Plan, p. 11, Objective 3.4) The ISER underlines the importance of having “information systems that support

teaching and learning, the implementation of quality assurance policies and procedures, and effective and efficient decision making” (ISER, p. 60).

The primary system that stores learner data in NCI is the student information system (Quercus+), and this has been integrated with other key systems, for example the virtual learning environment (Moodle), the central timetabling system (Technology One), and the library management system, to allow data flows as needed. The high-level implementation framework for the *Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027* states that to realise strategic priorities and objectives, “KPIs will be tracked and monitored over the life of the strategic plan” (NCI Strategic Plan, p. 15) and the QAES includes a breakdown of the KPIs used as measures or as proxy measures for the performance of learners, programmes and the institution (QAES-9. Information Governance, Appendix 9-1, pp. 9-26). The team were unable to verify the currency of all KPIs detailed in the QAES given the fact that the institution acknowledged sections had not been subject to review recently and needed to be amended. Therefore, during the review team’s engagement with staff and students, it was not always clear that this set of KPIs was being used systemically across the organisation to drive decisions and priorities but there were certainly good anecdotal examples brought forward such as data usage for programme monitoring and review. As noted earlier in this report, what was not always clear was the historical context for a particular KPI to enable the review team to understand relative performance against a historical baseline, or indeed relative to a target that was set for a particular KPI for a given period.

Ensuring the quality and accessibility of the data that underpins these institution KPIs is crucial, and the Management Information Systems (MIS) project highlighted in the ISER was established specifically with a view to data cleaning and building a range of reporting dashboards to inform data-driven decision making. During meetings with NCI staff, the review team were impressed by the passion, enthusiasm and expertise of the team responsible for the project and believe that the improvements in the quality of data to support programme monitoring and 5-yearly reviews as well as the analysis of the impact of COVID

arrangements clearly demonstrate the strategic value of the team's work and its absolute relevance to NCI's strategic intent. The review team also noted the work that had been done at the design stage to ensure access to data was carefully considered. However, progress had been slower than anticipated due to the inability to dedicate resources to the project in the way that had been originally envisaged. The ISER acknowledges the need to "increase NCI capacity and capability to gather and analyse internal and external data to inform effective decision making"; however, it did not explain why other demands had been put ahead of the project and it had, effectively, been de-prioritised and allowed to slip. The project team themselves called out the need for this work to be prioritised and resourced appropriately over the coming period to allow the full possible benefits to be realised. The review team strongly recommend that this prioritisation occurs to enable NCI to build upon the good work and outcomes already achieved.

The ISER is very clear about the institution's responsibility for information and data security and details the significant progress made in recent years to ensure that these obligations are met following a cyberattack in 2021. Following a comprehensive review of the measures in place to protect the NCI's critical IT systems and data, the review team was encouraged to read about the introduction of an information security management system, change management and IT risk management policies, third party services for security information and event management, incident response and endpoint detection and response services and implementation of multifactor authentication capabilities as well as new backup and recovery capabilities. The institution has also implemented a "cloud first" strategy to leverage the benefits of public cloud technology, including the added resilience and availability offered by these platforms. IT security awareness training is delivered to staff throughout the year and the institution has made available national cybersecurity training delivered by HEANet (Ireland's National Research and Education Network <https://www.heanet.ie/>), with strong staff participation rates. The review team acknowledges

the progress that has been made in this area and encourages the institution to continue to invest in these measures and strengthen these controls via a continuous improvement cycle. The ISER also highlights a comprehensive approach to data protection compliance and the structures, responsibilities and processes that underpin this on a day-to-day basis are clearly outlined in the QAES and came through in discussions with staff during the main review visit.

COMMENDATION

- The review team commends the work done by the IT team on security and resilience over recent years and the progress made.

RECOMMENDATION

- The review team recommends that NCI prioritise the further work of the MIS project team to fully support the institution's goal of making better data-driven decisions.

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

The provision of accurate and accessible information about NCI, its quality system and programmes of delivery is governed by chapter 10 of the QAES, with accountability for the accuracy and completeness of information lying with the Director of Marketing and International Development. As noted earlier in this report, the chapter is overdue for a refresh, having not been updated since it was written in 2018.

The primary vehicle for communications with students, staff and external stakeholders is the NCI website. It provides comprehensive information on NCI, education and training programmes, research, student services and includes a digital support hub for current students. It has easily accessible sections for alumni, enterprise and the community and can be accessed on a range of devices. The site includes all the information required by QQI's core statutory QA guidelines. In addition to the

website, NCI provides information on a number of social media platforms (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and X) and conducts promotional events. The *Policy on Media and Social Media* includes clear guidelines for appropriate use of social media and staff confirmed that social media usage is tracked. The policy would benefit from the inclusion of requirements to moderate social media and monitor for effectiveness and impact.

Access is a key pillar of NCI's strategic plan and implicit in this is the provision of clear and transparent information for the diverse range of NCI's students, staff and stakeholders. To support this NCI has tools to improve website accessibility (for example, Site Improve), and in the past year conducted an accessibility audit that resulted in changes to the website. It also conducts regular user testing with third-year students. As part of its revision of chapter 10 of the QAES NCI is encouraged to include requirements to ensure all written communications align with international accessibility standards and to consider expanding current mechanisms for evaluating user accessibility to encompass a wider range of stakeholders and student cohorts, including commencing and prospective students. This would provide insights into the effectiveness of current approaches to information provision at a cohort-level and drive continuous improvement.

All student groups spoke positively about the online and physical student hubs as valuable sources of information on supports and teaching and learning related processes (exams, timetabling, etc). Students confirmed that information about programmes and modules was clearly laid out both on the website and Moodle, and that at the start of each module they were mostly given sufficient information on teaching, learning and assessment by their lecturers. That said, students stated that in their first year they found navigating module information online was more challenging. This is an area on which NCI may wish to focus (for example, via periodic user testing, collation of survey data, and webpages analytics) to ensure commencing students are equipped with the information to successfully begin their learning journey.

There is a robust process to ensure that programme information and updates that are published on the website and in brochures are accurate. QQI certificates of validation and programme validation documents are maintained by QIE on a SharePoint site. The content of the certificates and module information extracted from the final post-panel validation documents are uploaded to the curriculum management system, Coursebuilder, which generates the information on the programmes and modules presented in the course-finder section of the website. It provides content for programme brochures. The ISER process, and work completed over the past two years highlighted the importance of NCI continuing to scale their processes and document process flows to support robust controls and structures as they grow. The review team supports NCI's planned actions to further improve the quality of information published about programmes.

Internal and external communication is a key facet of NCI's strategic plan, with related objectives and actions under the 'Student', 'Staff' and 'Access' pillars. These include the delivery of an alumni and communications strategy, a marketing strategy to support the alignment of domestic and international student recruitment, a staff communications calendar and an annual marketing plan to promote NCI's diverse entry pathways. Given NCI's growth aspirations, it is critical that KPIs for these actions be reviewed to ensure that they are measurable and enable NCI to determine whether they have successfully met these objectives.

The importance of internal communication emerged as a key theme in the ISER development process, and this is reflected in the actions to support staff familiarity with programme information and policies and procedures. NCI has continued to improve its approach in this area with a dedicated staff communications calendar and the inclusion of Deans on SMT to strengthen information flows to staff. The review team believes that as NCI grows, communication approaches will need to further develop to facilitate direct communication between senior management and staff that will be mutually beneficial.



RECOMMENDATION

- NCI should strengthen its approach to information and communication, particularly in light of its ambitions for growth. This should include developing a range of mechanisms to regularly test the effectiveness and impact of approaches to information and communication across all areas to support continuous improvement.

OTHER PARTIES INVOLVED IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

NCI's *Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027* includes an ambition to “continue to develop partnerships with employers, community, students and the further education sector, in programme design, pathways, work placements and learner employability” and sets a target to grow to 8,500 students. At the review visit staff confirmed that domestic partnerships, including those with FE Colleges and P-TECH, will be critical to meeting these growth aspirations. It is encouraging to see that strategic plan actions under the ‘Positioning’ and ‘Access’ pillars support these, and that a number have clear measures of success (GB paper March 2023 Executive strategic implementation plan). NCI is encouraged to ensure that all actions are measurable, and to consider the effectiveness of KPIs when they are next reviewed and how they may be further refined as NCI grows. The ISER is aligned with this approach with an action to explore “short and long-term growth opportunities with existing and new collaborative partners, most notably through expansions with FE partners, apprenticeships, the Department of Social Protection, the P-TECH initiative, and the Kircher Network, with a view to contributing to our strategic plan KPI of growth by an additional 2,000 students by 2027”. Policies and procedures for collaborative provision also identify partnership growth as a critical aspect of achieving NCI's strategic goals. The review team considers that quality assurance of delivery with other parties is essential to NCI achieving its future aims and this should be reflected in NCI's priorities.

Collaborative delivery is governed by chapter 3 of the *QAES*, which has sound underpinning principles and is aligned with QQI policy and IHEQN guidelines. The chapter was produced in 2018; however, current practice has shifted away from the processes outlined. For example, the *QAES* requires that the chair of academic council and the institution president sign all agreements and memorandums of understanding (MOU), and that any risks identified in the agreements are reflected in the risk register. In practice, a number of agreements are signed by the Registrar, and the risk register records that a member of SMT undertakes a final quality check before signing each agreement. Similarly, collaborative agreements do not appear to be reviewed by academic council prior to signing, as required by policy. Given that the policy functions as a key control for partnerships risks and is core to NCI's ambitions, the review team recommends it be prioritised for refresh, measures embedded to evaluate its effectiveness and impact and that its implementation be closely monitored. This would also provide an opportunity to include the new Erasmus+ framework within the policy framework.

Oversight of compliance with contractual requirements and the quality of delivery of partnerships and collaborations is the responsibility of the PLM ESG with accountability sitting with academic council. The committee is cognisant of managing risks, for example, the significant financial risks relating to partnerships, and the need to ensure partnerships are proactively managed; however, as discussed earlier in this report, oversight of the QA of partnerships should be the responsibility of a subcommittee of academic council and those responsibilities should be clearly set out in the terms of reference of the relevant academic committees.

In 2022, in recognition of the need for more administrative oversight to support current and future partnerships, NCI established the Academic Partnerships Manager role. The role is responsible for contract compliance and establishing the partnerships register as a single source of truth. It also has the capacity to strengthen monitoring of partnerships and escalation of risks as they arise. The review team reviewed the partnership

register and found that the information in the register is inconsistent with the information in the AQR and ISER with respect to both the number of collaborative partnerships and articulation agreements and to the partners to whom they apply. The AQR and ISER state that NCI has: six collaborative partnerships, seven arrangements with PSRBs, 14 articulation arrangements with partners in China and Ireland, the ERASMUS+ charter for mobility programmes, an arrangement with Maynooth University for co-delivery and joint supervision of PhD candidates, and a partnership with TU Wien and Politehnica Bucuresti for delivery of programmes in Open Data Science. The register by contrast records 13 articulation agreements and 12 collaborative programmes and includes partners not listed in the AQR or ISER. This should be fairly easy to rectify and would ensure a reliable, single source of truth for published information about partnerships.

The review team met with a range of partners, including PSRBs, collaborative delivery and articulation partners. They were extremely positive about their relationships with NCI and the ability of NCI to address any risks or issues in a timely and positive manner. Many commented on the frequency of contact which supports effective management and long-term viability of the partnerships. The review team did not have the opportunity to meet any international partners.

All delivery with partners is subject to QA procedures and, as appropriate, NCI retains responsibility for quality and standards, maintaining programme quality through programme committees, APM and 5-yearly programme reviews. Responsibility for managing the relationship lies with the Dean of the School, while the Programme Director, as chair of the programme committee, ensures that the programme is delivered as approved. While programme quality is assured through NCI's normal programme QA processes, there is no comparable process for assuring that partnerships and partners remain fit for purpose, have appropriate standing and viability, and are able to maintain comparable academic standards. NCI does not repeat due diligence prior to contract renewal and does not conduct cyclical partnership reviews. Neither do current monitoring and review

processes include rigorous quality management and reporting as envisaged in the QAES. This is discussed further under Objective 3.

COMMENDATION

- The review team commends the establishment of an Academic Partnerships Manager role to support administrative work associated with current partnerships and NCI's growth aspirations.

RECOMMENDATION

- NCI should revise its governance structures for oversight of the quality of delivery with other partners to ensure that academic matters relating to collaborative delivery, including academic risks, are considered by a subcommittee of academic council prior to being reported to that committee.

RESEARCH, ENTERPRISE AND INNOVATION

The *NCI Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027* positions research as a key strategic priority with the stated aim to “invest in a step-change in research and innovation capability, in a manner that is closely connected to our distinctive offering”. This priority is underpinned by the *NCI Research Strategy 2023 – 2027* which sets out the key goals to achieve the step change that is required and articulates key focus areas for research, which are very clearly aligned to NCI's strategic priorities and distinctive identity within the local community. This is particularly well demonstrated by ELI's community action research and research by the Stigma and Mental Health Ireland Research Lab, which investigates all aspects of stigma surrounding mental health (ISER, Appendix A12, p. 138).

Chapter 11 of the QAES outlines the structures and quality assurance systems for research, and as noted earlier in this report the information does not align to the current research strategy as the QAES has not been kept up to date. For example, the QAES sets out information from the *NCI Research Strategy 2007 – 2014* (which was no longer current when the QAES was produced in 2018) and does not reflect the research clusters in the 2023 – 2027 strategy document. This inconsistency is straightforward to fix. Notwithstanding this, the

structures and committees outlined in the QAES are in place; the research committee is a subcommittee of academic council and has “general responsibility for the development and monitoring of the institution’s policy, regulations and procedures for research and advising academic council on matters related to research” (QAES, p. 11-5). It is supported by the ethics subcommittee and the intellectual property advisory committee. The committee structure is operational and functioning effectively, for example, discussions with staff at the review visit centred on the research ethics subcommittee and its involvement in guiding and overseeing decisions about secondary data being used as part of a research project and the ethical considerations related to this situation.

The QAES also defines KPIs for Research (Appendix 9-1) and individually these are sensible and appropriate measures (albeit a limited number), but the review team struggled to find evidence of their implementation or specific targets to provide context and meaning for the numbers presented

in terms of achievement in the ISER, or indeed historical comparisons or trending information to provide some quantum of the level of progress against strategic goals. The NCI *Research Strategy 2023-2027* document does not articulate any specific KPIs for Research in the document itself, and while governing body minutes (May 2024) show that 10 KPIs had been defined against the five strategic goals related to research, the review team found no evidence of these measurements in any of the provided documentation. As such, the vision and approach outlined in the research strategy lacks any evidence of real, measurable milestones against which the institution can measure progress. This is unfortunate as there does seem to be evidence of tangible outputs and success in this area for the organisation. The IP and the ISER (ISER, pp. 74-75) highlighted 292 publications from 160 authors across the 2018 – 2022 period as well as 4,820 citations in the same period. ELI had 143 publications on the NCI’s internal eResearch system. From a research grant funding perspective, NCI has attracted almost €6 million in direct



funding since 2018, with the Cloud Competency Centre leading the way with multiple well-funded research and training grants. The ELI's community action research agenda has also attracted significant competitive funding and in February 2024 the STEM Family Learning in the Community Project, facilitated by a partnership between ELI and the School of Computing, was selected to receive funding as a part of an Irish Government-funded initiative.

Despite many indications of positive progress, there were multiple indicators during interactions with staff and through examination of documents and plans that financial pressures have been, and continue to be, a constraint that has impacted upon progressing the research strategy within NCI. For example, staff alluded to financial realities impacting upon the level of funding for some research objectives and activities as well as financial pressures limiting the level of remission of teaching hours and thereby limiting the time and space for faculty members to focus on research. This was mentioned as a factor in potentially influencing staff turnover amongst faculty, specifically in the School of Computing. Research is clearly articulated as central to both building NCI's reputation nationally and internationally and as a key factor in supporting the recruitment and retention of good academic faculty, hence it is important to ensure the appropriate level of investment into the future. Some good examples of investment in this area include the establishment of the research office with one member of staff, expected to grow to three staff in the coming years, as well as a dedicated resource in the finance team to support faculty gain access to, and report on, research grants.

NCI offers all postgraduate research programmes in collaboration with Maynooth University, as the institution does not currently have QA scope of provision to offer research degrees at master's (NFQ Level 9) or doctoral-level (NFQ Level 10). Maynooth University is the awarding body, and all programmes are subject to their policies and procedures. NCI reported a good working relationship with Maynooth University, and faculty from the university sit on the NCI research committee. NCI has also been working to

strengthen this agreement and offer joint doctoral opportunities whereby NCI students wishing to pursue doctoral study can avail of a co-supervisory arrangement and attain the award of PhD from both Maynooth University and NCI. While there is a very small number of PhD students, largely supervision in NCI is for master's-level students and is provided by a combination of full-time and part-time associate faculty.

A major focus has been to build support for research as a key pillar of the institution's strategy across the organisation as a whole and particularly amongst faculty. The ISER highlights the inclusion of promotion pathways to assistant professor and professor grades through the categories of teaching, research and impact (*Academic Promotions Policy 2024*), introduced in 2024, as a key form of recognition for the importance of research activity and to encourage new faculty to pursue research in the future. Interestingly, the ISER also highlights that, when asked as part of a staff survey about their level of familiarity with NCI's research policies and procedures, only 26.1% of staff rated themselves as either familiar or very familiar (ISER, p. 75). The institution acknowledges that there is more to be done to increase the understanding and appreciation of research activity across the organisation to further promote research activity across faculty and this is a focus area in the short to medium term.

COMMENDATION

- The progress across ELI and the schools in building an impactful base of research activity is commendable and provides an excellent platform for further growth and development. The alignment of the work of the ELI in this space with the social aspects of the NCI mission is noteworthy.

RECOMMENDATION

- A specific, measurable plan with a well-defined set of targets should be put in place to enable progress to be tracked to support the achievement of NCI's research strategy, build awareness of its importance within NCI, and its potential impact both internally and externally.

OBJECTIVE 2 – TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Chapter 5 of the QAES outlines the institution's strategies, policies and procedures related to the learning and teaching environment. The chapter was published in November 2018 and, as with the rest of the QAES, is due for a major review in 2024 – 25. While the majority of the chapter's provisions are fit for purpose, the review team consider this is necessary as some aspects, such as the *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2018 – 2022*, have lapsed and are yet to be updated (QAES, p. 5-1).

The institution opened an additional building at Spencer Dock in 2023 – 24 to relieve pressure on its services and facilities following a growth in student numbers. This has increased the institution estate by 5,600 square metres. The Spencer Dock premises is located close (300 metres) to the Mayor Street Campus. Expansion has enabled the institution to transform the former library at its initial site into a comprehensive Student Support Hub, which students confirm has improved the learning environment and enhanced access to support. The new building now houses a larger library and increased number of classrooms, meeting, study and social spaces.

NCI received approval from QQI in 2019 to extend its QA scope of provision to include blended learning. The ISER (p. 78) states that the resulting investment in expertise and infrastructure, particularly in its Cloud First Strategy, assisted the institution during the COVID pandemic and continues to enable it to enhance the institution's digital campus. As noted earlier in this report, Chapter 13 Technology-Mediated Learning was re-written in 2022 owing to the pandemic and to take account of changes in policy and practice. NCI informed the review team that it will seek formal extension of its QA scope of provision from QQI in 2025, to offer fully online, transnational programmes.

The institution has a dedicated TEU that operates as part of CELL. NCI informed the team that it had

invested in staff resources as part of its intended strategy to grow blended and online learning (ISER, p. 79). The TEU has also developed a resource hub for staff that is accessible through Moodle. Further to this, the unit provides continuing professional development in areas such as teaching effectiveness, reflective practice, student-centredness and academic integrity. CELL also operate "New to Teaching" and "Accomplished Teacher" seminars and workshops for new and experienced colleagues. This is further to a certified digital badge in UDL that has been completed by 54 staff.

The institution deploys a number of mechanisms to monitor the quality of the learner experience and student satisfaction, including appointing class representatives, collecting and analysing feedback at module, programme and institutional level and participating in the National Student Survey. Data and results from the national survey for 2022 – 23 highlight increasing levels of satisfaction showing that 76% of NCI students rate their overall experience as good or excellent and 80% would choose NCI if they were to start their studies again (Institutional Profile, p. 13). The review team found this reflected the views of students met during the visit, who were broadly very satisfied with the quality of their learning experience.

The review team found that the class representative scheme had been impacted by administrative challenges that had affected timely training and support and attendance at meetings. The NCISU Vice-President had addressed a number of these problems in 2024 – 25; however, the review team determined that the institution should establish a robust systematic approach to administering the student representation system, that would not be reliant on the effectiveness of individual student officers in order to be successful. This should include an emphasis on training and support of representatives, as well as their initial appointment.

During 2022 – 23, QIE led a Student Module Survey Working Group to design a refreshed, shorter, standardised module learner evaluation survey for all registered learners. This was

approved by academic council in February 2024 and implemented across 270 modules in a pilot phase. The full roll out of the new survey took place in autumn 2023 (AQR 2024, p. 32). In addition to module evaluation, teaching staff complete module reflection forms to identify strengths and weaknesses in the learner experience. The review team found these forms effective in highlighting areas for improvement (APM MSc PG Dip Cyber Security). Module information is considered as part of the revised APM process that was launched in June 2023 with a pilot group of programmes across Business, Computing and Education. The APM maintains an overview of the learner experience at programme level by drawing on this modular data, as well as the minutes of programme committee and class representative meetings, assessment results and external examiner reports.

COMMENDATION

- The review team commends the enhancement of the physical environment through the acquisition of an additional campus and the decisions on the use of the expanded space to improve the supports for students.

RECOMMENDATION

- NCI should establish a robust and systematic approach to the appointment, training and ongoing support of class representatives to maintain the excellent practice introduced in 2024 – 25.

ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS

The integrity and approval of learner results has been discussed in Objective 1 above. Further policies and procedures pertaining to assessment are contained in chapter 4 of the QAES and are in line with QQI standards. NCI recognises the importance of designing and adopting appropriate assessment strategies and methods that allow students to demonstrate their achievement of programme outcomes. Indeed, the provision of academic excellence and enterprise experience through innovative assessment forms part of one of the *Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027* success measures (Strategic Plan, p. 14, Figure 5).

Assessment outcomes are considered at a number of levels including exam boards, academic council, governing body, the PLM ESG, annual and cyclical programme reviews and the assessment subcommittee of the LTAC. The ISER reported that the most recent institutional analysis of pass rates and grade classifications considered by academic council and the governing body were broadly in line with sectoral averages. The review team is concerned that while results monitoring is taking place and some high-level benchmarking analysis is being undertaken, meaningful analysis of results across all years and across different student profiles, or against more nuanced external subject profiles, is not evident. For example, the presentation of completion rates in the NCI IP (p. 21) shows that completion rates have increased for both full- and part-time modes of study but do not suggest why this might be the case and whether this might be a good (higher quality) or bad (drop in standards) thing. During discussions with the LTAC, it was acknowledged by the committee that the *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2018 – 2022*, derived from the institutional strategy, is due to be renewed in 2025 and that the committee's main concerns to date have been around blended and online delivery, assessment strategies and assessment integrity (via the assessment subcommittee), while some work has been initiated around student retention and engagement. The LTAC strongly believes that the higher pass rates are attributable to better teaching, better technology-supported teaching and learning, and better feedback mechanisms to students. The LTAC described itself to the review team as a great learning forum for members that allows for discussion across a wide range of topics. The review team agrees and believes that the LTAC, as a subcommittee of academic council but strongly connected to the programmes and schools, may be the ideal forum for in-depth learner results and outcomes analysis, benchmarking, and potential follow-up.

The design of assessments is viewed by NCI as fundamental to the delivery of programme and module learning outcomes. There is evidence that a wide range of assessment strategies are employed in appropriate ways. In recognition that "...modules can have different styles of

assessment that consequently lend themselves to different styles of correcting” (QAES, 4.10.3), the institution uses grading rubrics for work-based learning (QAES, 4.23.7) and marking guidelines for correction of assessments (QAES, 4.16.1-4.16.3). This approach represents excellent practice for maintaining standards and ensuring consistency and their use was praised by the students. According to chapter 4 of the QAES, “faculty are... required to adhere to the[se] guidelines” and this is subsequently checked during the internal and external moderation processes. Fundamental to the design of these assessment strategies and instruments is the training of staff and dissemination of best pedagogical practices. The TEU and DLDU based within CELL provide structured education and training in assessment practices. Both full-time and associate faculty expressed that they felt equipped and supported to design and carry out assessments. The Deans reinforced the role that the TEU has played over the past two years to increase staff competencies around GenAI. For

example, additional videos and materials have been developed to guide and assist academic staff regarding the inclusion or exclusion of GenAI tools in student assessments, and workshops have been held on the challenges and opportunities associated with GenAI. Despite these positives, the review team was concerned that assessment design featured in a significant percentage (20.97%) of conditions from QQI panels (ISER, p. 102), with one of the focus areas being the overreliance on class tests and terminal exams at the award stage. As the institution continues to upskill and embed the new *Academic Integrity Policy*, there may be opportunities to move away from such a dependence on exam-type assessments. NCI values “assessments that are rooted in authentic contexts and reflect the complexity of working life” (ISER, p. 94), and the students who talked to the review team were highly appreciative of the real-world case studies and scenarios that were used as part of their assessments. However, a number of students taking postgraduate computing studies



criticised the lack of facilities to carry out authentic cybersecurity assignments due to the lack of labs and sandboxed networks.

Other conditions related to assessment that were received from QQI panels concerned the provision of an assessment schedule and the clear communication of assessment methods within the module descriptors (ISER, p. 102). The institution provides the assessment strategy for each module in student handbooks, on Moodle pages, on module and programme web pages, and on the curriculum repository platform (Coursebuilder) (ISER, p. 96). The review team discussed the issue of assessment information with undergraduate, postgraduate and international students. The postgraduate cohort endorsed the institution's position that all information was clearly laid out in Moodle, that requirements for assessments were provided 60 days in advance, and that rubrics made the standards and requirements easy to understand. The undergraduate and international students reported a more mixed experience claiming that the handbooks are so detailed that information is hard to find, that information is not always uploaded to Moodle, that assessment wordings can be difficult to interpret, that conflicting information can be given for an assessment in different locations, and that guidance on the expectation for the assessment is dependent on the individual lecturer. Across all cohorts, there was an acknowledgement that a lot of information around assessment is provided but that the information should be easier to find and should be consistent. It was clear that most difficulties finding and understanding assessment information generally occurred when students were beginning their studies at NCI.

Feedback from learners on their experiences can help the institution to gauge whether it is achieving its goals with respect to learner experiences. Students that the review team spoke to noted that they had opportunities to complete the module learner evaluation survey, that they could provide direct feedback to the lecturers, and that they could channel concerns and feedback through the class representative system. Although most students remarked that their lecturers were very approachable, there were an isolated number of

lecturers who were not receptive to feedback. Two examples were given of how direct feedback to the lecturer had resulted in action and the students were very impressed with this reaction and the timeliness of the response, but there was no sense of what would happen with the module survey feedback. NCI is encouraged to review and improve the way assessment feedback policy and processes are communicated to students when it updates chapter 4 of the *QAES*.

Feedback to learners on their assessment performance is a critical step in the learning process. There are two approaches to assessment feedback outlined in chapter 4 of the *QAES* – feedback on coursework and feedback on terminal examinations. In general, the students were satisfied with the feedback that they received on coursework but some issues around the feedback on examinations were raised. It emerged that there had been cases where students had looked for feedback but were turned down because they had not failed, and it was felt that this was unfair when students are looking to know how to improve. This might be the consequence of providing a single day for individual feedback in the calendar. There was also a frustration with the examination recheck/review mechanisms in that there is an administrative fee involved; however, it emerged that none of the students in that session were aware that the fee is refunded if the request/review is successful. The students were also unaware that they are entitled to a copy of their in-class test and examination scripts which could potentially be used in lieu of verbal feedback.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The LTAC should carry out thorough and ongoing monitoring, benchmarking, and analysis of learner results and outcomes and should do so at a level of detail that enables differential performance to be identified and explored; it should formulate follow-up actions based on this analysis.
- The provision of assessment information should be checked for consistency and accessibility.

SUPPORTS FOR LEARNERS

The *NCI Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027* outlines ‘Students’ as one of its six priorities, stating that it will foster a distinctive NCI graduate and a well-balanced graduate body that aligns to its mission in terms of distinctive and flexible modes of learning (access) and internationalisation. In order to do this the institution has established a series of objectives, including to drive excellence and accessibility in its student supports across physical and digital campuses (Strategic Plan, p. 9). To deliver on its strategic plan objectives, the institution has recently approved its *Learner Success Strategy 2023 – 2024*. The strategy commits the institution, supported by its Registry, QIE and other support services, to prioritising resources and effort on evidence-based interventions to promote learner success.

NCI operates a wide range of student services including a physical and a virtual Student Support Hub, a Library Academic Support Centre, Learning and Disability Support Service, Career Development and Employability Service and support services for international students. The work of these wide-ranging services has been influenced by a strategic review that took place in 2022 as part of the institution’s *Streamlining Student Success* Initiative, which, NCI informed the team, adopted a holistic learner-centred approach to reviewing NCI policies, procedures and practices across the entire learner journey, from applicant to alumni (ISER, p. 83). The initiative produced a series of recommendations that the institution should: 1) adopt a more holistic approach to services across the learner journey, 2) enhance the ability for students to grow skills that will differentiate them in the marketplace, 3) reinforce ‘learner voice’ mechanisms, particularly between students and faculty 4) enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of communications through the existing IT infrastructure 5) undertake further work to refine and communicate assessment and examinations processes and 6) support students to leverage the power of networking as a distinct part of the NCI experience.

During the pandemic the institution made use of a digital support hub (Zendesk) and has continued to make use of this approach. Zendesk allows

NCI to issue and monitor tickets and over the last three years more than 107,000 have been issued and responded to, including 36,000 in 2023 – 24. This digital approach has been complemented by the launch of a physical student support hub in September 2024 that has been well received by students for making support services more accessible.

The library, in addition to providing learning resources, is the primary service supporting academic integrity and academic writing as well as the delivery of taught content within the curriculum. The library has seen a significant increase in learner appointments in 2023, especially from international students who represented 56% of appointments in the same period (ISER, p. 86). Students reported demonstrable satisfaction with the support and services available through the library, in particular with the assistance with academic referencing.

NCI also operates a Learning and Disability Support Service that provides students with bookable and drop-in sessions. In 2023 – 24, 182 students were registered with the service and available support included learning support, occupational therapy, assistive technology, access to educational support workers, Irish sign language interpreters, exam supports, and transport solutions for students with difficulty accessing or navigating public or private transport independently. Following a growth in the number of neurodivergent learners, the institution is also expanding its work on neurodiversity.

The Career Development and Employability Service offers bookable one-to-one support sessions with a careers advisor and a wide range of organised networking events with invited employer representatives. The service is also responsible for monitoring graduate destinations, based on the First Destinations Survey. Outcomes for NCI graduates were comparable with the sector, with 75.2% of business graduates employed, 11% of business graduates in further study and 85% of computing graduates in employment. The services offered by the Career Development and Employability Service complement work placements that are currently available on seven NCI programmes. Assistance is provided in

preparing for placements, including participating in a variety of career classes and events such as career planning, CV reviews, mock interviews and networking sessions. Students reported that they felt adequately prepared for placements and employers confirmed high levels of satisfaction, with multiple examples of placement students being hired on a permanent basis by the employer. As noted in the section on programme development, approval and submission, the review team recommends that the institution consider the number of programmes that benefit from a placement to further support graduate outcomes.

International students receive tailored support from the International Office, including separate pre-arrival and welcome programmes, airport pick-up service, visa, accommodation and funding assistance and cultural advice. They are also appointed a peer mentor who provides campus and city tours. In addition, mentors lead ice breaker activities, social activities and interact with international students using the NCI Unibuddy chat. International students reported high levels of satisfaction with the wide-ranging and effective support available.

While the team found that a wide range of appropriate and effective services exist to support students, it determined that information regarding support services could be enhanced. Students reported that necessary information could be difficult to locate in handbooks and that they were not particularly intuitive. The team concluded that it would be advisable for the institution to review these, and other information about support services, in partnership with students.

As part of its work to monitor the effectiveness of its student support services, the institution has identified a series of qualitative and quantitative data it intends to use. This includes retention, completion, withdrawal and deferral data, as well as data on academic appeals, student complaints and counselling waiting lists. The institution will also consider graduate employability rates, participation in clubs and societies and student feedback as part of its approach (ISER, p. 85). The review team determined that the institution's planned interventionist approach to targeting student

support through the intelligent use of data will be strengthened following completion of NCI's work to provide more accessible data to staff.

COMMENDATION

- The review team commends the comprehensive and effective support arrangements in place for international students.

RECOMMENDATION

- The institution should enhance the clarity and accessibility of information on student services in student handbooks.

OBJECTIVE 3 – SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

The internal academic quality assurance procedures for self-evaluation, monitoring and review are detailed across chapters 2 and 3 (*Policy on Programme Development, Validation and Evaluation*) of the QAES. The procedures described have sound underpinnings and are aligned to the ESG 1.9 and relevant QQI statutory QA guidelines and requirements.

Self-evaluation, monitoring and review involve a multifaceted suite of activities that align with both internal quality assurance and reporting and with the external quality assurance cycle. They include programme validation/revalidation by QQI, AQR to QQI and this CINNTE cyclical review process. In addition to academic quality assurance involving programme monitoring and review and oversight, and monitoring and review of relationships with external/third parties and other collaborative partners, NCI has established an administrative/service self-evaluation and review process. In addition to the range of internal mechanisms to gather student feedback, NCI also participates in the [National Student Survey](#).

The governing body also leads an important and ongoing aspect of self-evaluation, monitoring and review at an institutional level. As outlined in

chapter 2 of the QAES, oversight of institutional risks rests with the governing body and its risk subcommittee. The NCI risk register is prepared annually by the executive group and is formally approved by the risk committee and governing body, with progress monitored and reported at each governing body meeting by the risk committee chair. There is also an established finance, audit and organisation committee which, together with the risk committee, reports directly to governing body, and oversees risk management, internal control and internal audit.

The student voice is a key input to quality assurance, and it was clear from the ISER and from discussions with students and staff that NCI values student feedback and uses it to inform its enhancement activities. The review team heard many positive aspects to the student experience at NCI during the site visit, and students referenced that NCI staff, including management and individual lecturers, 'go above and beyond' to engage in

dialogue with students and help resolve issues and action feedback when provided. Notably, a partnership agreement between NCI and the NCISU was signed in 2022 and as outlined in an ISER case study (ISER, p. 113), has had a significant and beneficial impact on student experience at NCI. The initiative was also reflected on very positively by both the NCISU and NCI staff during the review visit. The QAES outlines the Terms of Reference and membership of a range of governance fora. The review team notes that student representation/membership is not consistently documented in these Terms of Reference (and that not all current governance fora are recorded in the QAES). The lack of consistency was further evidenced in meetings during the site visit where it was noted that students would not routinely be a part of academic council subcommittees. It is also evident that while there is a range of student consultation and feedback mechanisms, students are currently not members of programme committees. These are crucial decision-making bodies from programme/student lifecycle and student experience



perspectives. While the review team acknowledges significant progress and good practice (such as the development of the partnership agreement), NCI would benefit from external national and international benchmarking in relation to further developing its 'students as partners' approach to quality assurance and enhancement and ensure consistency in the representation of students in quality assurance and governance fora, including their crucial inclusion in programme committees as standard. On a very positive note, the review team is impressed by the findings of the National Student Survey in response to the key non-indicator question about the "Overall Educational Experience", where NCI's score shows an increase from 68% to 76% over the 5-year period, during the 2017 – 18 to 2022 – 23 academic years.

The administrative/service unit reviews were first piloted by the QIE team in 2020. As outlined in the ISER, these are designed as a self-assessment process that enables staff in non-academic units to critically review the fitness for purpose, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of their services, policies, procedures and processes (ISER p105). It involves the production of a self-assessment report as a self-reflective and critical evaluation completed by the unit/centre responsible for the policy/procedure/process under review, followed by a peer review and panel report. Two reviews have been completed to date; including the International Office and Central Timetabling Office, with the library scheduled for the 2024 – 25 academic year (ISER p.105 and 108). During the site visit, staff participating in the reviews articulated the benefits of the process, with valuable quality enhancement initiatives emerging as a result. The review team appreciates the leadership shown by the QIE team in developing this review process and recommends that a process be put in place to identify a full schedule of such reviews across the organisation on a cyclical basis.

The review team notes that an important element of self-evaluation is the monitoring of effective implementation of academic policies under a robust academic governance structure. Related issues have been discussed in this report (see Structures for Governance and Management of QA and Documentation of QA Policies and Procedures)

and in this context of monitoring and review, the review team reinforces these recommendations and notes the importance of the MIS Project to support data-driven decision making and its relevance to ongoing self-evaluation, monitoring and review. This is also explicitly recognised by NCI in the self-identified recommendation to improve self-evaluation, monitoring and review processes by "Ensuring robust qualitative and quantitative data underpins all formal self-assessment and review processes by our programme and administrative teams". Accordingly, the review team endorses this recommendation and encourages NCI to more systematically incorporate data and evidenced-based approaches as integral elements of self-evaluation monitoring and review.

COMMENDATIONS

- The review team commends the Partnership Agreement between NCI and NCISU and considers this approach to be an example of good practice.
- The review team commends the demonstrable commitment to reflection and enhancement demonstrated through the administrative/service self-evaluation review process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The review team recommends that NCI consider how it can further develop and enhance a Students as Partners approach in self-evaluation, monitoring and review activities. This should involve the inclusion of students in all governance fora including academic council committees and programme committees.
- The review team recommends that NCI incorporate data and evidence-based approaches more systematically as integral elements of self-evaluation, monitoring and review.

PROGRAMME MONITORING AND REVIEW

Critical self-evaluation of NCI programmes and the re-appraisal of all aspects of existing programmes is highlighted in chapters 2 and 3 of the QAES. This self-evaluation should include ensuring that programmes "are being delivered according to their original validation, that minor

amendments informed by learners and faculty can be incorporated and that their minimum intended programme learning outcomes are being met. Feedback will be sought from learners on their programme and/or modules studied using techniques such as anonymous survey, focus groups and national student engagement initiatives.” (QAES p. 3-2) As noted earlier in this report (see documentation of QA policies and procedures), NCI is urged to update the policies and procedures in the QAES related to APM to ensure the currency of the QA system.

The ISER outlines the refresh and relaunch of the NCI APM process in 2022 – 23 with a view to maximising its value and impact on programme management and quality, while minimising the associated burden on key internal stakeholders. Twelve programmes were initially included in the pilot, primarily from two categories, namely: programmes that had completed QQI revalidation in 2021 – 22 and programmes that were scheduled for review and revalidation in 2024 – 2025. The relevant programme committees were provided with pre-populated datasets to inform the reflective discussions amongst the programme teams and the outputs of this review were summarised in an APM summary report for each programme. Ultimately the results of the pilot and key learnings were also summarised and presented to academic council in December 2023. Upon reviewing several of the APM summary reports for this period and the summary provided to academic council, the review team were able to confirm that an appropriate level of review and consideration had been given to quantitative and qualitative factors such as student engagement, retention, progression, course content and so on. A module assessment report form designed for lecturers to provide their feedback on the delivery of the module was used, and major and minor changes suggested by the programme teams can be brought forward on the back of the reviews. The ISER highlights the refreshed module learner evaluation survey that was implemented as a pilot in April 2023 across some 270 modules in 15 pilot programmes to capture the student voice as part of the review process (ISER, p. 100) and confirms that the feedback provided via this survey was considered

valuable as inputs to programme reviews by programme teams.

Ultimately, the final stage of programme review is the 5-yearly review and the decision on retaining the programme and submitting it to QQI for revalidation or retirement. The ISER confirms that in the last four academic years NCI has completed in-depth reviews of 55 programmes and during the period 2019 – 20 to 2023 – 24 the NCI achieved a 100% programme revalidation success rate.

The review team also notes the work of the MIS project to conduct a significant piece of work to cleanse datasets and build the data used for programme monitoring sessions and for programme validation. The ISER also highlights the work done by this team to analyse the impacts on pass rates by changes to programme delivery during the COVID period, which is a strong example of pro-active monitoring of programmes during an exceptional period.

The feedback from staff during the review visit was that this refreshed process was building confidence amongst staff, improving the availability and sharing of information across the schools and providing a key baseline of information, feedback and continuous improvement activity to support programme re-validation. Staff felt the programme reviews provided an excellent forum for diverse viewpoints to come together and debate and consider issues related to the lived experience of current programmes.

Building upon the inputs to programme evaluations, the ISER outlines that in 2023 the governing body requested a thematic analysis of recurring quality themes and feedback be completed, and that this analysis was updated in 2024 as part of the ISER self-assessment process. This process has produced valuable insights both in terms of areas for commendation and potential for improvements which demonstrates a reflective approach to quality enhancement in this area. Building upon this thematic analysis with targeted actions to reinforce strengths and address weaknesses is an opportunity for NCI to further improve both programmes and how they are delivered. The

ISER notes that “Academic council has proposed targeted workshops and strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing programme quality and supporting learner success” (ISER, p. 104) and this is a positive response to these emerging themes. It is also notable that this practice of generating quality-related thematic analysis on a more regular basis has been agreed by academic council to further inform decision-making.

Overall, the review team believes that, based on the evidence presented and the feedback of staff, faculty and both present and former students, the practices of programme monitoring and review are mature and functioning. Indeed, as already outlined, there is considerable evidence of continuous improvement, and this is commendable.

COMMENDATION

- The refreshed Annual Programme Monitoring Review process, which demonstrates ongoing improvement and enhancement of the quality processes surrounding programme monitoring and review, is to be commended.

OVERSIGHT, MONITORING AND REVIEW OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH EXTERNAL/THIRD PARTIES AND OTHER COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

The QAES confirms that any programme developed or delivered with a collaborative partner is subject to its quality assurance policies and procedures. There is extensive detail in the QAES regarding collaborative arrangements; however, as noted under objective 1, practice has shifted away from the policies and processes outlined there.

The ISER incorporates the consideration of third party and other collaborative arrangements within the discussion of programme monitoring and review under objective 3 (pp. 99-105); however, no specific details are provided of the oversight, monitoring or review of relationships with external/third party or other collaborative partners. There is no separate and distinct periodic review of partnerships. The team was told that NCI does not repeat due diligence prior to contract renewal and standard monitoring processes did not appear

to seek to analyse any differential performance to help identify effective practice or highlight any potential issues.

Due diligence is described in detail in the QAES; however, staff met by the team were not clear whether the approach considered reputational and academic due diligence alongside financial due diligence and were uncertain about the procedure. Although the team was told that due diligence was not necessary for contacts with government departments and equivalents, this would not apply to, for instance, the articulation agreements in China. Should the institution consider that due diligence is not necessary whether at initiation, as part of the review of a partnership or on contract renewal, it is important that the decision be clearly recorded as part of NCI’s partnership register. A particular concern was that the responsible officer told the team that due diligence had not been undertaken in the last three to four years, a period that would cover a range of new and continuing partnership types.

Despite the QAES recording that “the contents of all material relating to collaborative provision is brought together and analysed annually in an overview report... [as] an opportunity to highlight good practice and identify any problems or issues that might have wider relevance beyond the individual programme” (QAES 3-30) there is no discussion of this annual report in the ISER or of its value for NCI. The team would encourage NCI to make full use of the mechanism of an annual overview report as part of its active monitoring and oversight of collaborative activity, given, as it notes itself, the increased risks involved.

AQRs record details of arrangements with third parties, which note arrangements with PSRBs, articulation arrangements and collaborative programmes. There is no specific commentary on the effectiveness of the quality assurance and enhancement monitoring or review of this provision despite the QAES noting the additional challenges and risks involved in collaborative arrangements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- NCI should ensure that matters arising from the oversight, monitoring and review of collaborative arrangements are specifically highlighted as part of its routine annual and periodic review process and reported to academic council to ensure that any good practice can be readily shared and any lessons to be drawn from any challenges or issues are identified and addressed.
- NCI should ensure that the conduct of due diligence reflects the approach and processes set out in its QAES and should record the dates of due diligence as part of its register of collaborative provision. Should due diligence not be undertaken, that fact and the reason for it should be formally recorded.





Section 4

Conclusions



Section 4: Conclusions

COMMENDATIONS

1. The review team commends the work of the CINNTE Advisory Group in designing and implementing a broad range of inclusive bespoke self-evaluation and consultation activities as part of the CINNTE process.
2. The review team commends the work of the CINNTE Advisory Group in designing and implementing a broad range of inclusive bespoke self-evaluation and consultation activities as part of the CINNTE process.
3. NCI is commended for its shared, strong and deep commitment to the institutional mission, how this is made manifest across the work of the institution, strategically, operationally and at all levels and the real sense of belonging to the organisation.
4. The review team commends the use of associate faculty where they are able to embed relevant, current professional and industrial expertise in the learning activities for students.
5. The review team commends the institution on its continued and dedicated engagement with the Athena Swan Charter and the embedding of EDI principles in its core activities.
6. The review team commends NCI for adopting a holistic programme portfolio lifecycle management approach and for the considered, detailed and evidence-based approach it takes to portfolio management.
7. The review team commends the strategic approach and extensive range of initiatives designed to support access and progression, in particular ELI and P-TECH and the significant contribution they make to expanding pathways into higher education.
8. The review team commends the proactive involvement of NCI in national and international networks focused on academic integrity and its timely response to the threat that LLMs may pose to the authenticity of learner outcomes.
9. The review team commends the work done by the IT team on security and resilience over recent years and the progress made.
10. The review team commends the establishment of an Academic Partnerships Manager role to support administrative work associated with current partnerships and NCI's growth aspirations.
11. The progress across ELI and the schools in building an impactful base of research activity is commendable and provides an excellent platform for further growth and development. The alignment of the work of the ELI in this space with the social aspects of the NCI mission is noteworthy.
12. The review team commends the enhancement of the physical environment through the acquisition of an additional campus and the decisions on the use of the expanded space to improve the supports for students.
13. The review team commends the comprehensive and effective support arrangements in place for international students.
14. The review team commends the Partnership Agreement between NCI and NCISU and considers this approach to be an example of good practice.
15. The review team commends the demonstrable commitment to reflection and enhancement demonstrated through the administrative/ service self-evaluation review process.
16. The refreshed Annual Programme Monitoring Review process, which demonstrates ongoing improvement and enhancement of the quality processes surrounding programme monitoring and review, is to be commended

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The review team recommends that the self-identified 'next steps' developed in the ISER chapters be developed as more tangible sets of actions and prioritised with implementation timescales and assigned responsible parties to support their implementation.
2. NCI should review the totality of action lines related to the strategic plan that are currently being progressed and monitored and consider how actions are prioritised and factored into the action plan in an appropriate and timely manner.
3. NCI should ensure that each of its strategic objectives is SMART, with clear indicators of performance, agreed milestones and targets to allow better tracking of progress and performance.
4. NCI must complete the vital review and revision and publication of its academic governance structures within the 2024 – 25 academic session as planned to ensure that all academic decision-making that should be the responsibility of an academic council and an appropriate set of committees and subcommittees is principally considered by or through that governance forum.
5. NCI should develop full Terms of Reference that clearly state the remit, constitution and operational practices of its academic council and each committee and subcommittee.
6. NCI should ensure that the constitutions of academic council and each of its committees and subcommittees provide appropriate and balanced representation across internal stakeholder interests to enable appropriate challenge and academic scrutiny.
7. NCI should ensure that the details of all academic committees are, and remain, up to date, accurate and complete, that they are published and accessible and that they are housed in a location that acts as a 'single source of truth.'
8. NCI should, as an immediate priority and before the start of the 2025 – 26 academic session, in line with its planned intentions, ensure that all of the policies, procedures and other information in the QAES that falls within ESG Part 1 and/or QQI's statutory QA guidelines is accurate, complete, accessible and functions effectively as a single source of truth.
9. The review team recommends that NCI prioritise and expedite its work to determine the optimum balance of full-time faculty and associate faculty to support the overall NCI strategy and for effective learning on each programme, to initiate a plan to achieve this balance, and to monitor the contract regularisation and currency of expertise of associate faculty.
10. The review team recommends that a Performance Management and Development System be established for all institution staff so that formal performance quality assurance is conducted and that development needs are recorded and addressed in a systematic, transparent and timely way.
11. The review team recommends that NCI continue its work on developing a workload management model and expanding and improving its full economic costing model to ensure that the wellbeing and development of its staff is sustainable and assured.
12. The review team recommends that the communication of learning and development opportunities for all staff be improved and that staff participation in these opportunities be systematically monitored and analysed.
13. The review team recommends that an updated and transparent promotion policy and framework for non-academic staff be introduced, comparable with that for academic staff.
14. The review team recommends that NCI seek to expand the range of programmes which have accredited placement and/or work integrated learning.
15. The review team recommends that NCI expedite its work to ensure monitoring and

review of its access and progression work is supported by timely and readily accessible data that enable staff to better understand impact, including as it relates to inter-sectionality within the student body.

16. The review team recommends that NCI review the selection and appointment process for external examiners so that the eligibility of potential external examiners is considered and approved for recommendation by a subcommittee of academic council and that all those involved in the process are familiar with its details.
17. The review team recommends that NCI further investigate the causes of workload issues associated with learner results validation and verification and, where appropriate, review and refresh the assessment and examination guidelines, taking care to maintain the robustness of their current processes.
18. The review team recommends that NCI prioritise the further work of the MIS project team to fully support the institution's goal of making better data-driven decisions.
19. NCI should strengthen its approach to information and communication, particularly in light of its ambitions for growth. This should include developing a range of mechanisms to regularly test the effectiveness and impact of approaches to information and communication across all areas to support continuous improvement.
20. NCI should revise its governance structures for oversight of the quality of delivery with other partners to ensure that academic matters relating to collaborative delivery, including academic risks, are considered by a subcommittee of academic council prior to being reported to that committee.
21. A specific, measurable plan with a well-defined set of targets should be put in place to enable progress to be tracked to support the achievement of NCI's research strategy, build awareness of its importance within NCI, and its potential impact both internally and externally.
22. NCI should establish a robust and systematic approach to the appointment, training and ongoing support of class representatives to maintain the excellent practice introduced in 2024 – 25.
23. The LTAC should carry out thorough and ongoing monitoring, benchmarking, and analysis of learner results and outcomes and should do so at a level of detail that enables differential performance to be identified and explored; it should formulate follow-up actions based on this analysis.
24. The provision of assessment information should be checked for consistency and accessibility.
25. The institution should enhance the clarity and accessibility of information on student services in student handbooks.
26. The review team recommends that NCI consider how it can further develop and enhance a Students as Partners approach in self-evaluation, monitoring and review activities. This should involve the inclusion of students in all governance fora including academic council committees and programme committees.
27. The review team recommends that NCI incorporates data and evidenced based approaches more systematically as integral elements of self-evaluation monitoring and review.
28. NCI should ensure that matters arising from the oversight, monitoring and review of collaborative arrangements are specifically highlighted as part of its routine annual and periodic review process and reported to academic council to ensure that any good practice can be readily shared and any lessons to be drawn from any challenges or issues are identified and addressed.
29. NCI should ensure that the conduct of due diligence reflects the approach and processes set out in its QAES and should record the dates of due diligence as part of its register of collaborative provision. Should due diligence not be undertaken, that fact and the reason for it, should be formally recorded.

OVERARCHING STATEMENTS ON EACH OBJECTIVE

OBJECTIVE 1: GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

NCI's quality assurance procedures are effective overall. However, there is a significant shortcoming in the operation of basic processes in that the consideration and approval of changes in policies, procedures and operational practices are not followed through in the routine updating of the relevant documentation. This has meant that the formal published QAES is out of date and not a reliable and complete source of information. Some updated policies and procedures are located in either student- or staff-facing parts of NCI's website. This means it is not possible to know what the full list of policies and processes is, and to be certain that information is accurate and current.

While NCI has a policy for quality assurance that is public, in line with ESG 1.1, it is not accurate or reliable as public information and, in that the management of that policy has not included its maintenance and routine updating, it cannot be said to be an effective part of its strategic management of quality assurance, nor can it be said to be "effective and fit for purpose", "fully documented and available publicly" in line with 2.1 of QQI's statutory QA guidelines (p. 9). The policy for quality assurance as part of public information is not reliably "clear, accurate, objective, up to date and readily accessible" (ESG 1.8).

While it would appear that quality assurance procedures are implemented effectively, the approach at NCI relies too heavily on the knowledge of established staff familiar with processes and involved in developing and approving changes. This reliance on informal approaches and institutional knowledge has worked well enough for NCI as a smaller institution; however, it plans to grow its student body by 40%, and the former approach needs to be replaced by a working culture that will serve the future ambitions, size and scale of the institution and ensure the reliable accuracy of published information.

While policies, procedures and approaches are reviewed with changes made that enhance quality, the review team did not find sufficient evidence to conclude that quality enhancement is embedded in a systematic manner that is guided through governance, policy and procedures, or that there was evidence of the systematic sharing of effective practices. A continuous improvement cycle, guided more systematically and intentionally through strategy and policy, would build capacity and promote effective practices across service provision. Such an approach would have particular benefit for the consistency of the student experience.

The routine updating and consistent publication of policies and procedures in a clear, single, defined location would support quality enhancement as well as being a necessary prerequisite for effective assurance of quality. The analysis of information, making use of data on trends, of benchmarks and indicators of differential performance, would improve the ability of the institution to prioritise and target interventions to enhance quality, as would the systematic identification and planned dissemination of positive practice.

OBJECTIVE 2: TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

NCI's procedures are in keeping with QQI's *Policy for Access, Transfer and Progression* and consistent in the documentation seen by the review team. Progression pathways are a particularly important part of NCI's mission. The approach of the institution to access includes significant and innovative initiatives, especially the nationally recognised ELI and P-TECH programmes. However, further than this, the commitment to access, transfer, progression and opportunities to return to learning are an active, embedded part of its practice alongside these flagship initiatives. Thus, NCI offers programmes with multiple exit points (and builds relationships to enable return), it has developed apprenticeship programmes, special purpose awards, makes use of recognition of prior learning and has developed articulation agreements enabling advanced entry to specified programmes.

The review team were, overall, confident that the arrangements for quality assurance and enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment within NCI ensure a high-quality learning experience for all learners, with sufficient mechanisms to pick up and address any issues that may arise for a particular cohort or individual. The review team noted the relatively low proportion of full-time faculty and the heavy reliance on associate faculty. NCI had included a planned action on the proportion of teaching delivered by full-time faculty a number of years ago, but the review team noted that this has not been developed into a systematic plan, target ratios, etc. Further, it heard that associate staff have to be sourced rapidly at times, that some are new graduates and that some teach above the maximum permitted hours. The processes to ensure the quality and competence of associate faculty and to support their development is less thorough and well developed than that for full-time faculty. Associate faculty can bring up-to-date industry experience and benefit learning and learners; however, there are risks to the quality of learning when only one third of faculty are permanent (especially as permanent staff includes those on fractional as well as those on full-time contracts).

The review team considered that the arrangements for quality assurance and enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment could be implemented and monitored more effectively as part of a more fully established continuous improvement cycle to support sustainable growth.

OBJECTIVE 3: SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

There is variability in the extent to which the arrangements for the monitoring, review and reporting on education, training and related services within the institution are used to complete the quality cycle, promote effective practice and identify areas for improvement.

The approach to the self-evaluation and periodic review of support functions and services is excellent, considered, and looks likely to promote effective practice. Two such reviews have taken place; both were seen by the services as beneficial

and led to useful recommendations with the resulting actions reported on regularly. However, it was not possible at this stage to assess the extent to which this will become part of a systemised quality cycle.

Across its monitoring and review activities NCI has developed and improved its data and data sets to support the effective analysis of relevant information, including over time. The benefits of the work to date are evident in the monitoring of academic activity and institutional services. Work on data and management information is ongoing; however, progress has been delayed due to the de-prioritisation of a major project.

The approach to the annual monitoring, review and re-validation of programmes reflects the expectations of QQI for an institution with devolved responsibility. The review of the outcomes of validations and revalidations commissioned by the governing body, with the series of recurrent significant groupings of matters it identified, suggests that up until then, the process was not working effectively or systematically in a way which would enable staff to learn from it and address matters raised. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that it took the governing body to initiate action and to ask the pertinent questions about trends and learnings from standard processes. Overall, in a range of ways, processes have had a closed, more local focus or information has been over-aggregated. This has meant that much whole-of-institution learning has been lacking: the learning that results from systematic oversight by an academic council through the consideration of the information that enables generic or cross-cutting matters to be identified, addressed and areas for enhancement to be disseminated. Institution-wide oversight of the outcomes of the monitoring and review of academic activity needs to be led through the effective oversight of a properly functioning academic council demonstrating institutional responsibility for the effective oversight of academic standards, academic quality and academic quality enhancement.



A modern office interior with desks, chairs, and large windows, overlaid with a blue and green geometric design. The blue overlay covers the left and top portions of the image, while the green overlay covers the right and bottom portions. The office scene is visible through the transparent areas of the overlays.

Section 5

Commendations and Recommendations



Section 5: Top 5 Commendations and Recommendations

COMMENDATIONS

1. NCI is commended for its shared, strong and deep commitment to the institutional mission, how this is made manifest across the work of the institution, strategically, operationally and at all levels and the real sense of belonging to the organisation.
2. The review team commends the strategic approach and extensive range of initiatives designed to support access and progression, in particular ELI and P-TECH and the significant contribution they make to expanding pathways into higher education.
3. The progress across ELI and the schools in building an impactful base of research activity is commendable and provides an excellent platform for further growth and development. The alignment of the work of the ELI in this space with the social aspects of the NCI mission is noteworthy.
4. The review team commends the enhancement of the physical environment through the acquisition of an additional campus and the decisions on the use of the expanded space to improve the supports for students.
5. The review team commends the institution on its continued and dedicated engagement with the Athena Swan Charter and the embedding of EDI principles in its core activities.

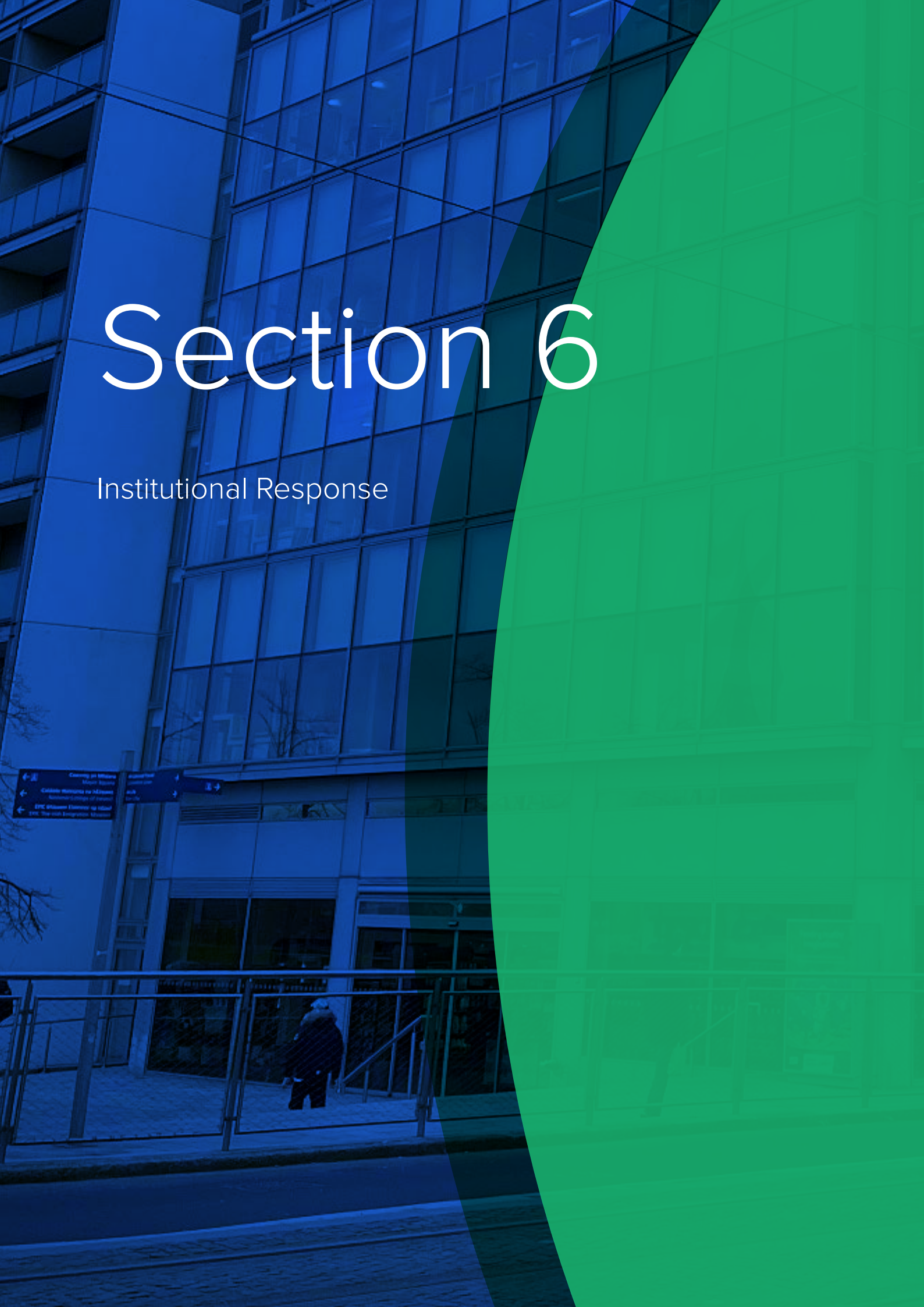
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. NCI must complete the vital review and revision and publication of its academic governance structures within the 2024 – 25 academic session as planned to ensure that all academic decision-making that should be the responsibility of an academic council and an appropriate set of committees and subcommittees is principally considered by or through that governance forum.
2. NCI should, as an immediate priority and before the start of the 2025 – 26 academic session, in line with its planned intentions, ensure that all of the policies, procedures and other information in the QAES that falls within ESG Part 1 and/or QQI's statutory QA guidelines is accurate, complete, accessible and functions effectively as a single source of truth.
3. NCI should ensure that each of its strategic objectives is SMART, with clear indicators of performance, agreed milestones and targets to allow better tracking of progress and performance.
4. The review team recommends that NCI prioritise and expedite its work to determine the optimum balance of full-time faculty and associate faculty to support the overall NCI strategy and for effective learning on each programme, to initiate a plan to achieve this balance, and to monitor the contract regularisation and currency of expertise of associate faculty.
5. The review team recommends that a Performance Management and Development System be established for all institution staff so that formal performance quality assurance is conducted and that development needs are recorded and addressed in a systematic, transparent and timely way.



Section 6

Institutional Response





Section 6: Institutional Response



NCI welcomes the CINNTE Review report and thanks the independent Review Team members for their thorough approach. The report comes at a significant time for NCI as we pass the mid-point of our 2022-27 Strategic Plan and approach our 75th anniversary in 2026.

We were delighted to see that the report commends NCI in several key areas, particularly the ***‘shared, strong and deep commitment to the institutional mission, how this is made manifest across the work of the College, strategically, operationally and at all levels and the real sense of belonging to the organisation’***.

NCI is very committed to our mission to Change Lives Through Education and are pleased with the CINNTE Review Team’s spotlight on our unwavering student-centred ethos and how well we support our staff; our dedication to our local community and the national work of our Early Learning Initiative (ELI) team; to EDI principles; to our Athena Swan commitments and much more. These core principles are part of what makes NCI a distinctive, independent, not-for-profit institution focused on accessible higher education.

Our Institutional Strategic Plan 2022-27 states our intention to secure Delegated Authority from QQI and designation as a Higher Education Provider, under the HEA Act (2022). These strategic priorities reflect our maturity as an academic

institution, our track record of innovation, quality and impact in programme design and delivery, our growing research outputs, and our longstanding relationship with and oversight by QQI as our awarding body.

NCI welcomes the benchmarking of our academic quality governance and management structures against HEA-funded higher education institutions, as we move towards Delegated Authority. The Review Team has given NCI clear recommendations to finalise the work we had already started to achieve delegated authority; we look forward to completing the refresh of our programme quality policies and our academic governance committee structures this year, to achieve this outcome. As outlined in our Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) and in our discussions with the Review Team, we are well advanced in this work, building on the strong commitment to our mission that has been the hallmark of NCI’s evolution as a higher education institute. As a small and growing not-for-profit institution funded by the HEA, we continue to seek equitable funding for our students and staff, as provided to other HEA institutions, to enable us to scale and sustain our academic governance, student support and management structures. The detailed findings and recommendations provided by the Review Team will be invaluable to us in this process. As part of our mid-strategic plan review in February 2025, the NCI Governing Body endorsed a focus on four high level strategic priorities: new programme development; further enhancement of our Management Information System (MIS); focus on the enhancement of the Student Experience; and the achievement of equitable funding and Delegated Authority. This work will be supported by a continued commitment to deliver our institutional Research Strategy, and a Leadership

and Culture programme for our staff. These priorities provide a robust strategic framework for the delivery of our CINTE action plan.

I would like to conclude by once again thanking the members of the Review Team for their professional engagement with the wider NCI team during the site visit in December 2024, and for their work in providing this thorough and most useful quality enhancement report. I also want to thank and acknowledge the contributions of NCI staff, students, alumni, the Students' Union, our Governing Body members, and key external stakeholders who proactively engaged in this important quality review process. I thank them all for their continued contributions and commitments to NCI and our mission, enabling us to continue to evolve and scale our delivery of access to higher education, to continue to provide highly skilled graduates to the Irish economy and to enhance the tertiary and higher-level sector in Ireland.



Professor Gina Quin

President

National College of Ireland

Appendices



Appendices

Appendix A: Terms of Reference

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT FOR THE REVIEW

These are the terms of reference for the review of independent and private providers, including those that intend to request the delegation of authority² (DA) when it becomes available.

[QQI's Core Quality Assurance Guidelines](#) have been established for all providers and collectively address the quality assurance responsibilities of those providers. The scope of the guidelines incorporates all education and training leading to QQI awards, other awards recognised in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), or awards of other awarding, regulatory or statutory bodies. The guidelines outline that quality, and its assurance, are the primary responsibility of the provider and review and self-evaluation of quality is a fundamental element of the provider's quality assurance system. [Sector-specific QA guidelines](#) have also been published and address the more specific requirements of independent and private providers. Reengagement³ by those providers confirmed that quality assurance procedures were approved by QQI in accordance with the [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012](#).

A provider's external quality assurance obligations include a statutory review of quality assurance by QQI. The reviews relate to QQI's obligation under Section 27(b) of the 2012 Act (to establish procedures for the review by QQI of the effectiveness and implementation of a provider's quality assurance procedures) and to section 34 of the 2012 Act (the external review by QQI of a provider's quality assurance procedures).

QQI established its [Policy for Cyclical Review of Higher Education Institutions](#) in 2016 which sets out the scope, purposes, criteria and model for cyclical review.

For independent and private providers, the diversity, range and size of organisations varies significantly, and some have been subject to rigorous oversight by QQI regarding their internal quality assurance systems for a lengthy and sustained period. The outcomes of the review will inform the future development of quality assurance and enhancement activities within independent and private institutions and across the sector.

For those institutions that are planning to seek DA, the external institutional review will constitute a first step towards an assessment by QQI.

² The delegation of authority (DA) to make awards is the legal mechanism to recognise a provider's growing autonomy and capacity to take on responsibility for academic quality. DA enables a provider to establish its own award brand and affords it autonomy to establish programmes, or classes of programmes of education and training, which lead to awards that are awards in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). DA is a recognition by QQI that a provider has the rigour, independence and consistency in its programme approval processes and can be entrusted with the responsibility to make reliable decisions regarding the standards of programmes subject to validation and revalidation.

³ Re-engagement was a one-off process for legacy providers to establish: (i) Quality assurance procedures approved by QQI in accordance with either Section 29 or Section 30 of the 2012 Act as relevant; and (ii) The provider's scope of provision i.e. the range of programmes for which quality assurance procedures and organisational capacity are deemed appropriate and within which future programme applications for validation can be made.

PURPOSES

QQI's Policy for the Cyclical Review of Higher Education Institutions highlights five purposes for individual institutional reviews. These are set out in the table below.

Purpose		Achieved and measured through
1.	To encourage a quality culture and the enhancement of the learning environment and experience within institutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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; • exploring quality as well as quality assurance within the institution; • piloting a new thematic review methodology.
2.	To provide feedback to institutions about institution-wide quality and the impact of mission, strategy, governance and management on quality and the overall effectiveness of their quality assurance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emphasising the ownership of quality and quality assurance at the level of the institution; • pitching the review at a comprehensive institution-wide level; • evaluating compliance with legislation, policy and standards; • evaluating relative equivalence with institution-identified benchmarks and metrics; • emphasising the improvement of quality assurance procedures.
3.	To improve public confidence in the quality of independent and private providers by promoting transparency and public awareness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adhering to purposes, criteria and outcomes that are clear and transparent; • publishing a periodic review cycle; • publishing terms of reference; • publishing the reports and outcomes of reviews in accessible locations and formats for different audiences; • publishing brief, easy to read institutional quality profiles; • evaluating, as part of the review, institutional reporting on quality and quality assurance, to ensure that it is transparent and accessible.
4.	To support systems-level improvement of the quality of higher education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • publication of periodic synoptic reports; • ensuring that there is sufficient consistency in approach between similar institutions to allow for comparability and shared learning; • publishing institutional quality profiles.
5.	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 the institution; • ensuring that findings are based on stated evidence; • facilitating institutions to identify metrics and benchmarks for quality relevant to their own mission and context; • promoting the identification and dissemination of examples of good practice and innovation.

Review Objectives, Outputs and Criteria

SUMMARY OF OBJECTIVES

The key objectives of the review are summarised under the following headings as follows:

1. Governance and Management – to review the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of the governance and management of quality throughout the organisation.
2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment – to evaluate the arrangements to ensure the quality of teaching, learning and assessment within the provider and a high-quality learning experience for all learners.
3. Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review – to evaluate the arrangements for the monitoring, review and evaluation of, and reporting on, the provider's education, training and related services (including through third-party arrangements) and the quality assurance system and procedures underpinning them.

OBJECTIVES (INCLUDING INDICATIVE MATTERS⁴ TO BE EXPLORED)

OBJECTIVE 1 – GOVERNANCE AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT

To review the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of the governance and management of quality throughout the organisation.

This will include a review of:

- the oversight arrangements and transparent decision-making structures for the implementation of the QA procedures of the provider as set out in the annual quality report (AQR).
- the enhancement of quality by the provider through governance, policy, and procedures.
- the flexibility and adaptability of quality assurance procedures and quality enhancement with the provider's own mission and goals or targets for quality. To identify innovative and effective practices for quality enhancement.
- the effectiveness and implementation of procedures for access, transfer and progression.

The scope of this objective includes the procedures for reporting, governance and publication. It also incorporates an analysis of the ways in which the provider 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 the institution.

The scope of this objective will also extend to the overarching procedures of the provider for assuring itself of the quality of its research activities, where applicable.

The governance and quality management systems would be expected to address:

⁴ The indicative matters highlighted for each objective do not comprise the full range of areas that could be explored during the review. The review team has the capacity to expand this within the scope of QCI's Statutory Core QA Guidelines and sector specific guidelines as appropriate.

Indicative matters to be explored	
The provider's mission and strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the provider's quality assurance arrangements contribute to the fulfilment of the mission and strategy? How? • Is the learner experience consistent with this mission?
Structures and terms of reference for the governance and management of quality assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the arrangements sufficiently comprehensive and robust to ensure management and governance structures are proportionate and appropriate to support both the education and training activities and the general operations of the institution (e.g. separation of responsibilities, externality, stakeholder input)? • Is governance visible and transparent? • Has the provider ensured there are robust structures in place to identify, assess and manage risk? How effective are these arrangements? • How does the provider ensure the system of governance protects the integrity of academic processes and has institutional wide oversight of its QA standards? • Do the processes in place demonstrate the provider's confidence in its capacity for critical self-evaluation and remediation?
The documentation of quality assurance policy and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effective are the arrangements for the development and approval of policies and procedures? • Are policies and procedures coherent and comprehensive (i.e. do they incorporate all service types and awarding bodies?), robust and fit for purpose? • Are policies and procedures systematically evaluated? • Are there effective innovations in quality enhancement and assurance?
Staff recruitment, management and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effective are the QA procedures in maintaining and managing a resource base that sustainably supports (i) the quality assurance system and (ii) the programmes of education and training, research and related services offered by the provider? • How effective are the QA procedures for the recruitment, management and development of staff in the context of all education and training activities and related services⁵ offered by the provider? • How does the provider assure itself as to the competence of its staff? • How are professional standards maintained and enhanced across the organisation? • How are staff informed of developments impacting the organisation and how can they input to decision-making?

⁵ This includes those education and training activities leading to awards of awarding bodies other than QQI, such as professional bodies and local provider provision, so that the overall commitments of staff are taken into account by the provider.

Programme development, approval and submission for validation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What arrangements are in place to ensure alignment of programme development activity with the provider's mission and strategic goals, as well as learner needs? • Are the arrangements for the approval and management of programme development robust, objective and transparent? • What arrangements are in place to facilitate and oversee a comprehensive programme development process in advance of submission for validation (e.g. the conduct of research, inclusion of external expertise, writing learning outcomes, curricula etc., professional approval/accreditation)? • How does the QA system support the development of programmes requiring professional approval / accreditation? What additional measures are in place to support these programmes? • How effective are those arrangements in meeting and facilitating the standards required by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs), where relevant? • What impact has increased demand for (i) the use of online technology for programme delivery and assessment and (ii) the provision of short, standalone programmes had on the provider's resource base? How effective are the QA procedures in supporting these programmes' developments? • Are there effective structures in place to support and quality assure collaborative programme development with other providers, both national and transnational? • How does the institution assure itself that work-integrated learning⁶ is fully embedded within the structure and provision of educational programmes so that the taught and work-integrated elements constitute a coherent whole? • How effectively has the provider managed its responsibility of arranging independent evaluation reports under devolved responsibility (where applicable)? • What has the provider learned from its experience of devolved responsibility?
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⁶ Work-integrated learning (WIL) may take place in a variety of contexts, including but not limited to, practice placement, apprenticeship, applied learning and profession-oriented further and higher education where WIL elements are integral to an educational programme leading to a qualification in the NFQ.

Access, transfer and progression (ATP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the provider measure and monitor access, transfer and progression systematically across all programmes and services? • How effective are the processes and tools to collect, monitor and act on information on learner progression and completion rates? • Are there flexible learning pathways, respecting and attending to the diversity of learners? • Are admissions criteria and processes clear, transparent and fit for purpose? • Are progression and recognition policies and processes in line with (i) the national policies and criteria for ATP and (ii) the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and (iii) any appropriate European recognition principles, conventions and guidelines including the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)? Are these implemented on a consistent basis?
Integrity and approval of learner results, including the operation and outcome of internal verification and external authentication processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What governance and oversight processes are in place to ensure the integrity of learner assessment and results data, which provide the basis for making and certifying QQI awards? • Have the provider's QA procedures evolved to combat emergent threats to academic integrity? How adaptable are they to continued threats and/or change? • How does the provider ensure that the processes in place provide for consistent decision-making and oversight across all services, centres, campuses?
Information and data management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What arrangements are in place to ensure that data are reliable and secure? • How are data utilised as part of the quality assurance system? • What arrangements are in place to ensure the integrity of learner records? • How is compliance with data legislation ensured?
Public information and communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is information on the quality assurance system, procedures and activities publicly available and regularly updated? • What arrangements are in place to ensure that published information in relation to all provision (including by centres) is clear, accurate, up to date and easily accessible?
Other Parties involved in Education and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effective is the provider's integrated system of quality assurance to support collaborative arrangements and partnerships with third parties? • What arrangements are in place to ensure that the provider's QA policies and procedures are consistent with European commitments as appropriate?
Research, Enterprise and Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What arrangements are in place to ensure that the provider has an integrated system of quality assurance in place to underpin and support its research and enterprise activities? • How effectively does research education and training engage with peer review mechanisms used for research funding and publication?

OBJECTIVE 2 – TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

Evaluate the arrangements to ensure the quality of teaching, learning and assessment within the provider and a high-quality learning experience for all learners. These will include:

Indicative matters to be explored	
a) The learning environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the quality of the learning experience monitored? How? • Are modes of delivery and pedagogical methods evaluated to ensure that they meet the needs of learners? How? • How is the quality of the learning experience of learners engaged in work-integrated activities assured? • Is there evidence of enhancement in teaching and learning?
b) Assessment of learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the integrity, consistency and security of assessment instruments, methodologies, procedures and records ensured – including in respect of recognition of prior learning? • How does the provider assure that the standards regarding the assessment of learners engaged in work-integrated learning are maintained? • Do learners in all settings have a clear understanding of how and why they are assessed and are they given feedback on assessment? • How is the feedback analysis used to further enhance assessment methodologies? • Can the QA procedures in place support the management, integrity and retention of learner results data which provide the basis for making and certifying QQI awards?
c) Supports for learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are support services planned and monitored to ensure that they meet the needs of learners? • How does the provider ensure consistency in the availability of appropriate supports to all learners across different settings, including work-integrated learning? • Are learners aware of the existence of supports?

OBJECTIVE 3 – SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING & REVIEW

Evaluate the arrangements for the monitoring, review and evaluation of, and reporting on, the provider's education, training and related services (including through third-party arrangements) and the quality assurance system and procedures underpinning them. It will also reflect on how these processes are utilised to complete the quality cycle through the identification and promotion of effective practice and by addressing areas for improvement. This will include:

Indicative matters to be explored	
a) Self-evaluation, monitoring and review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the processes for quality assurance planning, monitoring and reporting? • Are the processes for self-evaluation, monitoring and review (including the self-evaluation report undertaken for the institutional review comprehensive, inclusive and evidence-based? • Is there evidence of strategic analysis and follow-up of the outcome of internal quality assurance reviews and monitoring (e.g. review reports, external examiner reports, learner feedback reports etc.)? • How is quality promoted and enhanced?
b) Programme monitoring and review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are mechanisms for periodic review and revalidation of programmes comprehensive, inclusive and robust? • How are programme delivery and outcomes monitored across multiple campuses (including collection of feedback from learners/stakeholders)? • How are the activities and processes associated with work-integrated learning monitored? • Is there evidence that the outcome of programme monitoring and review informs programme modification and enhancement? • Are the outputs of programme monitoring and review considered on a strategic basis by the provider's governance bodies to inform decision-making?
c) Oversight, monitoring and review of relationships with external/ third parties and other collaborative partners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the provider ensure the suitability of the external parties with which it engages? • Is the nature of the arrangements with each external party published? • Is the effectiveness of these arrangements monitored and reviewed through provider governance?

Review Outputs

In respect of each dimension above, the review will:

- evaluate the effectiveness of the provider's quality assurance procedures for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of higher education, training, and related services;
- identify perceived gaps in the internal quality assurance procedures and the appropriateness, competence, prioritisation and timeliness of planned measures to address them in the context of the provider's current stage of development; and
- explore achievements and innovations in quality assurance and in the enhancement of teaching and learning.

Following consideration of the matters above, the review report will include specific and high-level qualitative statements on:

- the overall effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of the provider and the extent of their implementation and enhancement.
- the extent to which the quality assurance procedures can be considered compliant with the ESG.
- the extent to which existing quality assurance procedures adhere to QQI's Quality Assurance guidelines and policies (as listed in section 3.4).
- identified effective practice and recommendations for further improvement. (These may also be accompanied by a range of ancillary statements.)

The review report may also include recommendations for conditions in reference to each of the objectives.

CRITERIA

The implementation and effectiveness of the provider's quality assurance arrangements will be considered in the context of the following:

- The provider's own mission and vision, including objectives and goals for quality assurance.
- [QQI Core Quality Assurance Guidelines](#)
- [QQI Sector Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Independent and Private Providers](#)
- [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\) 2015](#)
- [Section 28, Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012](#)
- [QQI's Policy Restatement and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training](#)

Where appropriate and indicated by the provider, additional QQI guidelines may be incorporated:

- [QQI Topic Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Research Degree Programmes](#)
- [National Framework for Doctoral Education](#)
- [Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes](#)

The Review Process

The primary source for the review process is the Cyclical Review Handbook for Independent and Private Providers.

REVIEW TEAM PROFILE

QQI will appoint the review team to conduct the institutional review. Review teams are composed of peer reviewers who are learners; leaders and staff from comparable providers; and external representatives including employer and civic representatives.

The size of the team and the duration of their visit will depend on the size and complexity of the independent and private provider.

QQI will identify an appropriate team of reviewers for each review who are independent of the independent and private provider with the appropriate skills and experience required to perform their tasks. Collectively, the review team will have knowledge of and expertise in:

Higher education quality assurance processes;

- Governance;
- The advancement of teaching, learning and assessment methodologies;
- Managing research within or across institutions (where applicable);
- International reviews; and
- European standards in higher education and qualification frameworks, e.g. ESG, EQF and Bologna process; and

The team will include international representatives and QQI will seek to ensure diversity among the reviewers. The provider will have an opportunity to comment on the proposed composition of its review team to ensure there are no conflicts of interest. QQI has final approval over the composition of each review team. The roles and responsibilities⁷ of the review team members are as follows:

⁷ Further detail on the conduct of reviewers is outlined in [QQI's Roles, Responsibilities and Code of Conduct for Reviewers and Evaluators](#).

CHAIR:

The chair is a full member and leader of the review team. Their role is to provide tactical leadership and to ensure that the work of the team is conducted in a professional, impartial and fair manner, and in compliance with the Terms of Reference. The chair's functions include:

- Leading the conduct of the review and ensuring that proceedings remain focused.
- Organising the work of reviewers with the support of the coordinating reviewer.
- Fostering open and respectful exchanges of opinion and ensuring that the views of all participants are valued and considered.
- Facilitating the emergence of evidence-based team decisions (ideally based on consensus).
- Contributing to, and overseeing the production of, the review report within the timeline agreed with QQI, approving amendments or convening additional meetings if required.

COORDINATING REVIEWER:

The coordinating reviewer is a full member of the team and secretary of the review team. Their role is to capture the team's deliberations and decisions during the proceedings and express them clearly and accurately in the team report. It is vital that the coordinating reviewer ensures that sufficient evidence is provided in the report to support the team's recommendations. The role of the coordinating reviewer includes:

- Acting as the liaison between the review team and QQI; and, during the main review visit, between the review team and the institutional review co-ordinator.
- Maintaining records of discussions during the planning and main review visits.
- Coordinating the drafting of the review report in consultation with the team members and under the direction of the chair within the timeline agreed with QQI.

STUDENT REVIEWER:

The student reviewer is a full member of the review team and participates in all aspects of the review. The student reviewer represents the 'voice of the learner' and brings a valuable perspective which can inform and enrich discussions. They may have a particular focus on the learner experience and topics of interest might include, for example:

- Academic matters such as the curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning;
- Support services, such as library, IT, sports, societies, welfare and careers services etc.; and
- Learner input into decision-making and involvement in quality assurance.

EXTERNAL REVIEWER(S):

The external representative reviewer is an equal member of the team and takes part in all aspects of review. The external representative may bring knowledge and expertise of the Irish Higher Education sector more widely and/or contribute to the 'third mission' perspective (i.e., represents the economic and social mission of the institution) which can inform and enrich discussions.

By way of example, they may have specialist knowledge of some of the following areas:

- External expectations of graduate skills and competencies;
- Issues and trends in industry or the wider community;

- Responsibilities of independent and private providers of education and training in the Irish HE sector;
- The external perception of the institution and its activities;
- Pedagogy, programme architecture, skills development, teaching, learning and assessment and related quality assurance activities.
- Knowledge of the area identified in any specific enhancement themes for the review;
- Quality assurance practices in other sectors; and
- Good management practices in other sectors.

ALL REVIEW TEAM MEMBERS:

The role of all review team members includes:

- Preparing for the review by reading and critically evaluating all written material.
- Investigating and testing claims made in the institutional self-evaluation report (ISER) and other material during the main review visit by speaking to a range of staff, learners and stakeholders.
- Contributing to the production of the review report, ensuring that their particular perspective and voice (i.e. learner, industry, stakeholder, international etc.) forms an integral part of the review.

REVIEW PROCESS AND TIMELINES

The key steps in the review process with indicative timelines are outlined below. Specific dates for each provider review will be outlined by QQI in accordance with the published Review Schedule.

Step	Action	Timeframe	Outcome
Preparation – Terms of Reference (ToR)	Consultation and confirmation of ToR with providers	9 months before the main review visit (MRV)	Publish ToR
Preparation – Institutional Profile (IP)	Preparation of an institutional profile by each provider (e.g. outlining mission; strategic objectives; local context; data on staff profiles; recent developments; key challenges).	6 months before the MRV	Publish IP
Preparation – Review Team (RT)	Appointment of an expert review team Consultation with the provider on any possible conflicts of interest	6-9 months before the MRV	Publish RT Profile
Self-evaluation – Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER)	Forwarding to QQI of the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) and a repository of additional information (optional).	min. 12 weeks before the MRV	Published ISER (optional)
Desk review	Desk review of the ISER by the team	At least 1 week before the Initial Meeting	ISER initial response provided

RT Briefing (via MS Teams) – 2 sessions (half days)	<p>Session 1: An initial meeting of the review team, including introductions, reviewer training and briefing.</p> <p>Session 2: RT discussion of preliminary impressions and identification of any additional documentation required.</p>	c. 5 weeks after the ISER, c. 7 weeks before the MRV	RT training and briefing is complete. RT identify key themes and any additional documents required.
Planning visit (via MS Teams)	A visit to the institution 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.	c. 5 weeks after the ISER, c. 7 weeks before the MRV	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	12 weeks after the receipt of ISER	A short preliminary oral report to the institution
Report – drafting stages	<p>Preparation of a draft report by the team</p> <p>Draft report sent to the institution for a check of factual accuracy Institution responds with any factual accuracy corrections Preparation of a final report</p>	<p>6-8 weeks after the MRV</p> <p>12 weeks after the MRV</p> <p>2 weeks after receipt of draft report</p> <p>2 weeks after factual accuracy response</p>	QQI review report
Report – institutional response	Preparation of an institutional response	2 weeks after final report	Institutional response
Outcomes	<p>QQI considers findings of review report and the institutional response through governance processes.</p> <p>Review report is published with institutional response.</p>	Next available meeting of QQI Awards and Reviews Committee (ARC)	<p>Formal decision about the effectiveness of QA procedures</p> <p>In some cases, directions to the institution and a schedule for their implementation</p>
	Preparation of QQI quality profile	2 weeks after decision	Quality profile published

The form of the follow-up will be determined by whether ‘directions’ are issued to the institution. In general, where directions are issued the follow-up period will be sooner and more specific actions may be required as part of the direction.

Follow-Up	Preparation of an institutional implementation plan by provider	3 months after publication of report	Publication of the implementation plan by the institution
	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 MRV	Publication of the follow-up report by QQI and the institution
	Continuous reporting and dialogue on follow-up through the annual institutional reporting and dialogue process	Continuous	Annual quality report Dialogue meeting notes

Appendix B: Main Review Visit Schedule

DAY 1: MONDAY, 2 DECEMBER 2024

Time (GMT)	Group	Role	Purpose
09:00 - 09:20	QIE Director (Institutional Coordinator) and QIE team		Welcome and introductions. Preparatory meeting for Day 1
09:20 - 09:50	Private Review Team Meeting		
09:50 - 10:20	1. Senior Management Team	NCI President Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research Registrar Director of Marketing and International Director of HR Director of Finance	Discuss SMT's shared responsibility for all areas of institution business and assisting the president in reporting to the governing body
10:20 - 11:00	2. Senior Management Team and Executive Group	NCI President Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research Registrar Director of Marketing and International Director of HR Director of Finance Dean of School of Computing Director, Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning (CELL) and Interim Dean of the School of Business Director of Development and External Engagement Director of Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (QIE)	Discuss the wider management and leadership of the institution strategically, academically and operationally including responsibilities for QA and enhancement.
11:00 - 11:30	Private Review Team meeting		
11:30 - 12:10	3. Governing Body	Chairperson Member of the Governing Body (NCI Staff rep) Member of Governing Body (nominated by ICTU) Member of Governing Body (nominated by the Jesuit Community) Member of Governing Body - Independent (nominations committee)	Discuss the role of the governing body in strategic, financial, risk management and governance as they relate to arrangements for QA across the institution.

12:10 – 12:20	Comfort Break		
12:25 – 13:10	4. Academic Council	President (Co-Chair) Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Research (Co-Chair) Registrar (Secretary) Dean, School of Computing School of Business Representative Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning Representative School of Computing Representatives (2) Vice-President, NCI Student's Union President, NCI Student's Union	<i>Discuss mechanisms employed by academic council for monitoring QA & QE and how it ensures effectiveness.</i>
13:10 - 14:10	Lunch		
14:10 - 14.45	5. Undergraduate students (full-time, part-time, domestic students)	BSc (Hons) in Computing BA (Hons) in Psychology BA (Hons) in Early Childhood Education and Care. BA (Hons) Human Resource Management (Work Placement) BA (Hons) in Accounting and Finance BSc (Hons) in Computing (Evening)	<i>Discussion with NCI undergraduate students from across the institution, to include representation from different years, disciplines and service users.</i>
14.45 - 15.20	6. Postgraduate Students (full-time, part-time, domestic students)	Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Practice for Further Education Master of Science in Data Analytics (full time) Master of Science in FinTech Master of Science in Data Analytics (full time) Master of Science in Artificial Intelligence Master of Science in Marketing Master of Arts in Human Resource Management (2)	<i>Discussion with students from across the institution, to include representation from different years, disciplines and service users.</i>
15.25 - 15.55	Private Review Team meeting		

15.55 - 16.30	7. ISER Working Group	<p>Chairperson</p> <p>Vice Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research, School of Business</p> <p>Vice Dean of Academic Programmes and Research, School of Computing</p> <p>Vice Dean of Undergraduate Studies, School of Business.</p> <p>Director of Student Registry Services</p> <p>Head of Communications</p> <p>Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Training Manager</p> <p>Programme Lifecycle Manager, Quality and Institutional Effectiveness Office</p> <p>Academic Director, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPEL) and Associate Professor in the Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning (CELL)</p> <p>President of NCI Student's Union</p> <p>Secretary</p>	<i>Discussion on experience of implementing quality assurance throughout the institution.</i>
16. 35 - 17.10	8. Deans of Schools and Director of CELL	<p>Director of CELL & Interim Dean of School of Business</p> <p>Dean of School of Computing</p>	<i>Discuss the role of QA in leading and managing academic Schools, including staff, academic programmes and research activities</i>
17.10 - 17.40	Private Review Team Meeting		<i>Brief recap on the day and prep for Day 2.</i>

DAY 2: TUESDAY, 3 DECEMBER 2024

Time (GMT)	Group	Role	Purpose
09:00 - 09:15	QIE Director (Institutional Coordinator) and QIE team		Preparatory meeting for Day 2
9.15 - 9.40	Private Review Team Meeting		
9.40 - 10.20	9. Sub-Committee of Executive Group and Academic Council: Programme Lifecycle Management Committee	Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Research (Committee Chair) Registrar Director of CELL & Interim Dean of the School of Business Dean of School of Computing Director of Marketing & International Nominee of Director of Finance Director of Development Director of QIE Programme Lifecycle Manager Head of Teaching Enhancement and Digital Learning Design	<i>Discuss the role of the relevant subcommittee in the governance of QA procedures, including the evolving Programme Lifecycle Management (PLM) structure and processes and management of programme development, monitoring, review and revalidation.</i>
10:25 - 11:05	10. Subcommittee of academic council: Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee	Director of CELL & Interim Dean of the School of Business (Chair) Librarian Vice Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research, School of Business Vice Dean, School of Computing School of Computing faculty member Head of Assessment Head of Teaching Enhancement and Digital Learning Design Student Support and Welfare Manager	<i>Discuss the role of the relevant subcommittee in the governance of QA procedures, including academic and QA policies and procedures, development of including Teaching and Learning and Assessment (TLA) and recommendations to academic council</i>
11:05 - 11.35	Private Review Team Meeting		

11:35- 12:15	11. Subcommittee of Academic Council - Research Committee	<p>Chairperson (Head, Cloud Competency Centre)</p> <p>Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research</p> <p>Secretary</p> <p>Chair of NCI Research Ethics Subcommittee of the Research Committee</p> <p>Vice Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research, School of Business</p> <p>Head of the Library Academic Support Centre</p> <p>Research Grant Finance Officer</p> <p>Research Lead, Early Learning Initiative (ELI)</p> <p>Vice-Dean, School of Computing</p> <p>School of Business Representative</p>	<i>Discuss the role of the relevant subcommittee in the governance of QA procedures, including the QA of research at NCI, research strategy, evolving research infrastructure and successful research partnerships and funding at a European level and international level.</i>
12.15- 12:25	Comfort break		
12:25 - 13:05	12. Student's Union and elected Student Class Representatives.	<p>NCI Student's Union Student Union, President</p> <p>NCI Student's Union, Vice-President for Academic Affairs</p> <p>NCI Student's Union, Vice President for Welfare & Equality</p> <p>Class Rep, Master of Science in Accounting</p> <p>Class Rep, BA (Honours) in Business</p> <p>Class Rep, Master of Science in Artificial Intelligence</p> <p>Class Rep - BA (Honours) in Business Management</p> <p>Class rep, BA (Hons) in Early Childhood Education and Care</p>	<i>Discuss the NCI/NCI Students' Union Partnership and the Class Representative experience.</i>
13:05 - 14:05	Lunch		

14.05 - 14.45	13. (Academic) Programme Directors and permanent Faculty	<p>School of Business Representative</p> <p>Programme Director, BA (Hons) Human Resource Management</p> <p>Programme Director, MSc Management</p> <p>Programme Director, Certificate in Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) and TEL micro-credentials, CELL</p> <p>Programme Director, BA (Hons) Early Childhood Education and Care</p> <p>Programme Director, Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Practice for Further Education</p> <p>Programme Director, BSc (Hons) Computing</p> <p>Programme Director - Higher Diploma in Science in Computing (Online/ Directed E-Learning)</p> <p>Programme Director, MSc Data Analytics</p> <p>NCI Apprenticeships Manager, Programme Director of the BA (Hons) Recruitment Practice, Higher Certificate in International Financial Services, and Higher Diploma in Financial Services Analytics - apprenticeship programmes</p>	<p><i>Discuss the role of QA in relation to recent experiences of programme validation/revalidation, Annual Programme Monitoring, and the training and development supports available to faculty for teaching, research and assessment practices in NCI</i></p> <p><i>Discuss how the institution monitors the effectiveness of its QA/QE processes and structures and how it ensures the outcomes are enacted in an appropriate, consistent and timely manner.</i></p>
14.50 - 15.30	14. Associate Faculty (part-time)	<p>CELL Representative (2)</p> <p>School of Computing Representative (4)</p> <p>School of Business Representative (3)</p>	<p><i>Discuss the role of QA in relation to recent experiences of programme validation/revalidation, Annual Programme Monitoring, and the training and development supports available to faculty for teaching, and assessment practices in NCI.</i></p> <p><i>Discuss how the institution monitors the effectiveness of its QA/QE processes and structures and how it ensures the outcomes are enacted in an appropriate, consistent and timely manner.</i></p>
15:30 - 15:45	Comfort Break		
15:45 – 16:25	15. Staff Recruitment, Development and Welfare	<p>HR Representatives (4)</p> <p>Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Training Manager</p> <p>Teaching Enhancement & Digital Learning Design Representative (2)</p>	<i>Discuss the relevant policies and procedures that support QA & QE among all staff.</i>

16:30 – 17:15	16. NCI external partnerships and collaborations - Collaborative programmes; Professional, Statutory and Regulatory and Bodies (PSRBs); Further Education College partners; Early Learning Initiative (ELI) Partners	<p>Chair of the Advisory Board of the Early Learning Initiative</p> <p>Technology Ireland ICT Skillnet</p> <p>NCI Early Learning Initiative - TUSLA (National Child and Family Agency)</p> <p>Cathal Brugha College</p> <p>Rathmines College of Further Education</p> <p>Finglas Early Years Hub</p> <p>Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI)</p> <p>CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development)</p> <p>Department of Social Protection (DSP) (Partner with NCI on DSP certificate programmes)</p> <p>NEIC (North-East Inner City Council) Education Initiative, Social Inclusion Unit, Dept of Education (Partner on NCI's P-TECH initiative)</p>	<i>Discuss arrangement re QA with NCI's academic collaborative partnership arrangements</i>
17:15 - 17:45	Private Review Team Meeting		<i>Brief recap on the day and prep for Day 3.</i>

DAY 3: WEDNESDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2024

Time (GMT)	Group	Role	Purpose
9.15 - 9.30	QIE Director (Institutional Coordinator) and QIE team		Preparatory meeting for Day 3
09:30 -10:00	17. Early Learning Initiative (ELI)	Assistant Director, Dublin's Inner City Programmes, ELI Assistant Director, National, ELI National Home Visiting Manager Research Lead, ELI Restorative Practice Coordinator	<i>Discuss how the institution monitors the effectiveness of its QA/QE processes and structures in context of ELI.</i>
10:05 – 10:45	18. Student Registry Services and Student Welfare; Library and Academic Support Centre; Academic Operations, and International Office	Director of Registry & Student Services Senior Academic Operations Manager Head of Admissions and Student Records Head of Examinations Head of Student Supports and Welfare Deputy Librarian Deputy Librarian and Head of Academic Support Centre International Officer International Coordinator Senior Exams and Assessment Officer	<i>Discuss the role of student support services available to all NCI students throughout their NCI journey, both on-campus and online, in QA/QE.</i>
10:45 – 11:15	Private Review Team Meeting		
11:15 – 11:55	19. Student Career Development and Employability and NCI Apprenticeship provision	Head, Career Development & Employability Work Placement Supervisor, Careers and Employability Programme Director for Work Placement, School of Business Programme Director, MSc Cybersecurity, School of Computing Manager of NCI Apprenticeships Lecturer/Work Placement Coordinator, School of Computing Assistant Professor in Education & Programme Director, P-TECH Education Specialist, CELL	<i>Discuss the role of supports available for work placements, career development, and graduate employability in QA/QE. Discuss arrangement re QA/QE for work-integrated learning through NCI Apprenticeships provision.</i>

12:00 – 12:40	20. Graduates and Alumni	<p>Graduate of BA (Hons) in Business (full time)</p> <p>Graduate of Higher Diploma in Financial Services Analytics (Apprenticeship)</p> <p>Graduate of BA (Hons) in Business and Master of Science in Marketing</p> <p>Graduate of BA (Hons) in Human Resource Management with placement</p> <p>Graduate of Master of Business Administration (MBA)</p> <p>Graduate of NCI-Department of Social Protection Certificate programmes</p> <p>Graduate of NFQ Level 6 Apprenticeship in International Financial Services and NFQ Level 8 Higher Diploma in Financial Services Analytics</p> <p>Graduate of Higher Certificate in International Financial Services (Apprenticeship)</p> <p>Graduate of BA (Hons) in Business Management</p> <p>Graduate of NFQ Level 8 Apprenticeship, Higher Diploma in Financial Services Analytics</p>	<i>Discuss the relevance of the NCI experience following graduation including any continued contact with NCI or return to study at NCI.</i>
12:40 – 13:40	Lunch		
13:40 – 14:20	21. International Students (non-EEA)	<p>Master of Science in International Business</p> <p>BA (Hons) in Early Childhood Education and Care</p> <p>Master of Science in Cyber Security</p> <p>BA (Hons) in Psychology</p> <p>Master of Arts in Human Resource Management</p> <p>Master of Science in Data Analytics (full time) (2)</p>	<i>Discussion with NCI international students from across the institution, to include representation from different years, disciplines and service users.</i>
14:25 – 15:05	22. NCI professional services as core enablers of NCI activities	<p>Finance Office Representatives (2)</p> <p>IT Representatives (2)</p> <p>Estates and Facilities Representative</p> <p>Marketing & Communications Representatives (2)</p> <p>Academic Operations and Central Timetabling Representatives (4)</p>	<i>Discuss relevant procedures that support QA & QE and how central services enable Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, Research, and NCI outreach activities.</i>
15:05 – 15:20	Comfort Break		

15:20 – 16:05	23. The Employability of NCI graduates - meeting with selected employers of graduates and providers of Work Placements and Apprenticeships.	<p>Citi Representative</p> <p>Osborne Representative</p> <p>Employment and Recruitment Federation Ireland Representative</p> <p>Peter McVerry Trust Representative</p> <p>Amazon Web Services Representative</p> <p>HLB Ireland Representative</p> <p>Public Sector & Government Services Representative</p> <p>Health Service Executive Representative</p> <p>HSBC Continental Europe Representative</p> <p>Enterprise Mobility Representative</p>	<i>Discuss employers' experiences of recruiting NCI graduates and/or hosting NCI students for work placements, and their ability to engage with NCI at institutional and/or School/programme level.</i>
16:05 – 16:35	24. External Partnership Management	<p>Academic Partnerships Manager, NCI Academic Operations</p> <p>NCI Programme Director, Department of Social Protection Programmes</p> <p>Registrar</p> <p>Director of CELL & Interim Dean of School of Business</p> <p>Dean of School of Computing</p>	<i>Discuss arrangement re QA/QE for external partnerships.</i>
16.35 – 17.05	Private Review Team Meeting		<i>Brief recap on the day and prep for Day 4.</i>

DAY 4: THURSDAY, 5 DECEMBER 2024

Time (GMT)	Group	Role	Purpose
09:00 – 10:30	Private Review Team Meeting		
10:30 – 11:00	QQI Meets with Institutional Coordinator	Director of QIE QQI Representatives (2)	To gather feedback
11:00 – 11:30	QQI meets with Review Team	Review Team QQI Representatives (2)	<i>To discuss the review team's key findings</i>
11:30 – 12:00	Private Review Team Meeting		
12:00 – 12:30	Meeting with President, Vice-President, Registrar, Director of QIE	NCI President Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research Registrar Director of QIE	<i>High-level emerging findings shared prior to Oral Report</i>
12:35 – 13:05	Oral Report	SMT NCI Representatives	<i>High-level emerging findings shared</i>
13:05 – 14:00	Lunch reception		

Glossary

Acronym/Term	Definition/meaning
AI	Artificial Intelligence
APM	Annual Programme Monitoring
APSC	Academic Policy and Standards Committee
AQRs	Annual Quality Reports
AsIAm	Ireland's Autism Charity
ATP	Admission/Access, Transfer and Progression
CELL	Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning
CINTE	Name/branding for QQI's first external HEI review cycle
Coursebuilder	Generates information on the programme and module presented in the course-finder section of NCI's website as well as providing the content for Programme Brochures
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DA	Delegated Authority
DCR	Document Change Request
DLDU	Digital Learning Design Unit
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
ELI	Early Learning Initiative
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
Erasmus+	New programme combining all the EU's current schemes for education, training, youth and sport.
ESG (2015)	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
EU	European Union
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulations
GenAI	Generative AI (Artificial intelligence) capable of generating text, images, videos, or other data using generative models, in response to prompts
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEANet	Ireland's National Research and Education Network
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HR	Human Resources
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers Confederation
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IHEQN	The Irish Higher Education Quality Network
IP	Institutional Profile
ISER	Institutional Self-Evaluation Report

KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LLM	Large Language Models
LTAC	Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee
MIS	Management Information System
MOODLE	Virtual Learning Environment
MOU	Memorandum(s) of Understanding
MRV	Main Review Visit
MS	Microsoft
NAIN	National Academic Integrity Network
NCI/the College	National College of Ireland
NCISU	NCI Students' Union
NEIC	North-East Inner-City Council
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
P-TECH	Pathways to Technology
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PLM ESG	Programme Lifecycle Management Executive sub-group
PMDS	Performance Management and Delivery System
PSRBs	Professional, Statutory and Regulatory and Bodies
QAE	Quality Assurance and Enhancement
QAES	Quality Assurance and Enhancement System
QIE	Quality and Institutional Effectiveness
QIEP	Quality Improvement and Effectiveness Plan
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Quercus+	NCI's Student Information System
RPEL	Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning
RT/ the Team	CINNTE Review Team
SDG	(UN's) Sustainable Development Goals
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-based
SMT	Senior Management Team
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
SWAN	(Athena) SWAN (Scientific Women's Academic Network) is an equality charter mark framework and accreditation scheme
Technology One	The Central Timetabling System
TEU	Teaching Enhancement Unit
ToR	Terms of Reference
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
Unibuddy (Community)	A closed messaging group exclusively created for NCI international freshers
Zendesk	Digital Support Hub for students

