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Quality Assurance in Higher Education:

A Synthesis of Annual
Quality Reports

QQI INSIGHTS.



**Dearbhú Cáilíochta
agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann**
Quality and
Qualifications Ireland

This report is a synthesis of the 2025 Annual Quality Reports submitted to QQI by six independent and private higher education institutions.

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FOREWORD

As Interim Chief Executive Officer of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), I am pleased to introduce this synthesis report, which presents a comprehensive analysis of the 2025 Annual Quality Reports (AQRs) submitted by some of Ireland's largest and long established independent and private higher education institutions. This report offers a timely and insightful overview of the evolving quality assurance landscape, highlighting developments, innovations, and challenges that affect the private higher education sector in Ireland.

The synthesis builds on QQI's commitment to transparency, sectoral learning, and continuous enhancement. It complements the QQI Insights Report on Quality in Irish Higher Education 2024, which examined external quality assurance trends and priorities. A thematic analysis report has also been produced for public higher education institutions, offering deeper insights into institutional practices and sector-wide developments. Together, these reports provide a holistic view of quality assurance in Irish higher education—one that reflects both institutional self-evaluation and external review.

The 2025 AQRs reveal a sector deeply engaged in aligning quality assurance with strategic goals, embracing digital transformation, and responding proactively to societal needs. Governance frameworks are evolving, with strengthened leadership, policy development, and student representation. Institutions are proactively addressing challenges such as GenAI and academic integrity through policy updates, staff training, and assessment redesign. QA systems are data-informed, inclusive, and responsive, with strong external engagement and sectoral collaboration. Technology integration, sustainability, and student-centred practices are key priorities. Collectively, the sector demonstrates a dynamic commitment to excellence, transparency, and innovation in quality enhancement.

QQI acknowledges the significant work undertaken by institutions in preparing their AQRs and thanks all contributors for their continued engagement with quality enhancement. We hope this synthesis will support reflection, dialogue, and shared learning across the independent and private higher education sector and inform future policy and practice.

We remain committed to working collaboratively with institutions, students, and stakeholders to ensure that Irish higher education continues to deliver high-quality, inclusive, and future-focused learning experiences.



Interim Chief Executive Officer
Quality and Qualifications Ireland

INTRODUCTION

This synthesis report brings together the key developments, priorities, and enhancement activities documented in the 2025 Annual Quality Reports (AQRs) of six independent and private higher education institutions (HEIs)¹ in Ireland: CCT College, Dublin (CCT), Dublin Business School (DBS), Griffith College, Hibernia College, National College of Ireland (NCI), and Open Training College (OTC).

The AQRs, prepared in accordance with QQI's quality assurance (QA) monitoring framework, serve as a primary source of evidence for the ongoing development and refinement of institutional quality assurance systems. Each report outlines progress against previously stated objectives, highlights new and emerging priorities, and details planned initiatives for the coming period, all within the context of the QQI-provided template and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The synthesis employs a qualitative, thematic analysis of the AQRs, using a structured coding framework to identify recurring themes and sectoral trends. The aim is to provide a clear and accessible overview of how these institutions are aligning strategic planning with QA goals, responding to sectoral challenges, and advancing enhancement initiatives across teaching, learning, assessment, governance, and student engagement. By drawing exclusively on the content of the attached reports, this synthesis offers a transparent and evidence-based account of the current landscape of QA in Ireland's independent and private higher education sector.

¹ During this reporting period, not all independent/private higher education institutions (HEIs) were required to submit an Annual Quality Report (AQR). The requirement applied only to those institutions that had formally indicated their interest in seeking delegated authority to make awards once this becomes available. Accordingly, this thematic analysis is based on AQRs submitted by the four largest HEIs for whom the report was mandatory, along with two additional voluntary submissions from institutions within the independent/private sector.

METHODOLOGY FOR SYNTHESIS

This thematic analysis of the AQRs has been conducted using GenAI (generative artificial intelligence). The methodology for the synthesis report employed an iterative qualitative data analysis process using licensed versions of [MAXQDA](#) desktop application and [MAXQDA Tailwind](#). Firstly, a coding framework was developed based on the AQR template and relevant sections of the AQRs were coded within MAXQDA desktop application.

Secondly, MAXQDA Tailwind's AI-drive thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes. The coding scheme was then refined based on initial findings and insights generated by the MAXQDA Tailwind's AI-driven analysis.

Finally, MAXQDA reporting tools were used to extract illustrative examples and conduct the thematic synthesis. This combined approach significantly expedited the identification of key themes and the subsequent thematic synthesis, facilitated by MAXQDA reporting tools.

In addition, a licensed Microsoft Copilot Proofreader Agent was used to assist with proofreading during the development of this synthesis. All suggested edits were reviewed by the executive. The tool provided an efficient first layer of proofing.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This synthesis report summarises the main developments and trends identified in the 2025 Annual Quality Reports (AQRs) of six independent and private HEIs in Ireland. Drawing exclusively from these reports, the synthesis highlights how each institution is advancing QA, strategic planning and enhancement initiatives in response to sectoral priorities and challenges.

STRATEGIC FOCUS

Institutions are aligning their strategic plans with QA objectives, with growing emphasis on sustainability, digital transformation, and inclusion.

GOVERNANCE AND QA

Governance structures and internal QA systems are being strengthened, with regular reviews and updates to policies and procedures.

TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

There is a strong focus on adapting teaching, learning, and assessment to digital and blended environments, while maintaining academic integrity. While GenAI is discussed in the Teaching and Learning and Academic Integrity sections of this report, this reflects its cross-cutting impact on pedagogy and policy.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Student feedback mechanisms are well established. Institutions are expanding support services, prioritising accessibility, wellbeing, and the needs of diverse and neurodivergent learners.

STAFF EXPERIENCE

Ongoing professional development is prioritised, with training in academic integrity, equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and digital skills. Staff are supported to engage in research and sectoral initiatives.

EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT AND RESEARCH

Collaboration with QQI, industry, and international partners is active, and institutions are advancing research activities and integrating sustainability goals.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

All institutions are committed to ongoing enhancement of QA systems, student supports, and governance, with a proactive approach to sectoral challenges.



1. QUALITY IN INDEPENDENT AND PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

This section presents a thematic synthesis of Part B of the 2025 AQRs submitted by six independent and private HEIs, listed below. Drawing on institutional reflections and reported developments, the analysis identifies shared strategic priorities, recurring challenges, and examples of effective practice. It offers a comparative perspective on how institutions are enhancing internal quality assurance systems, responding to sectoral drivers, and aligning quality initiatives with broader strategic goals.

1. CCT, Dublin
2. Dublin Business School (DBS)
3. Griffith College
4. Hibernia College
5. National College of Ireland (NCI)
6. Open Training College (OTC)

THEMATIC MAP

This thematic map provides a visual overview of the key themes explored in the synthesis of the six AQRs submitted by independent and private HEIs.

It serves as a guide to help readers navigate the structure and focus areas within this report.

Quality Implementation and Developments

Theme	Sub-Themes	Indicative Examples
Strategic Planning Frameworks and Goal Alignment	- Strategic plans with QA integration - Progress tracking via digital tools and governance meetings - Responsiveness to external drivers (QQI, CINNTE, national data gaps) - Forward-looking goals: new programmes, research, student engagement	CCT, DBS, Griffith, Hibernia, NCI, OTC strategic planning and alignment DBS, Griffith, Hibernia, NCI CINNTE reviews

Theme	Sub-Themes	Indicative Examples
Governance, Management & Leadership	• Structural evolution and leadership renewal • Strengthened governance frameworks • QA leadership roles and policy development • Embedding academic integrity in governance structures	CCT, DBS, Griffith, Hibernia, NCI, OTC personnel and leadership updates.
Internal Monitoring and Review	• Programme Development, Review and Validation: periodic reviews, policy updates, stakeholder involvement and NFQ alignment, student feedback mechanisms, IQA impact reporting • Devolved Responsibility (DR) • Advancing Research and Innovation Activities: formal research strategies, infrastructure investment, ethics committees, EU collaborations and publication outputs	CCT, DBS, Griffith, Hibernia, NCI, OTC programme development, review and validation. Griffith, Hibernia provide detailed and proactive approaches. CCT, DBS, Griffith, Hibernia, NCI enhancement of research capacity and output. Case Study: Establishing the Research Ethics Committee (REC) at the Open Training College
Teaching, Learning and Assessment: Strategic Priorities and Practice	• GenAI influence on assessment and academic integrity • QA-led continuous improvement and national alignment • Student engagement via digital tools and governance roles	CCT, DBS, Griffith, OTC, NCI, OTC offer updates on monitoring experiences, delivery methods, and innovation in teaching, learning and assessment. Case Study: Teaching, Learning and Assessment at CCT: A Collaborative Approach in CCT College Dublin

Theme	Sub-Themes	Indicative Examples
CINTE External Quality Assurance Review	- Strategic recalibration and QA updates - ISER and Institutional Profile as central tool - Stakeholder engagement and review impact	DBS, Griffith, Hibernia, NCI updates on progress
Other Cross-Cutting Strategic Priorities	- Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI): Governance structures and data-driven evaluation, policy development, staff training, student support - Sustainability in Strategy and Practice: UN SDG integration, curriculum design, student projects - Internationalisation: TrustEd mark, transnational programmes, QA alignment with ESG and national principles for academic integrity - Blended and Online Learning Transformation: QQI guideline alignment, infrastructure upgrades	Griffith, OTC, Hibernia, NCI, CCT report policy updates Griffith, NCI, CCT offer training and awareness initiatives Awards Recognition: CCT (ASIAM), NCI and Griffith (Athena Swan) Case study: Integrating UN SDGs into Strategic Management Assessments in NCI Case study: Extension of Scope to Fully Online Provision in Hibernia College

Internal QA: Enhancements and Impacts

Theme	Sub-Themes	Indicative Examples
Technology Integration in Teaching and Learning	GenAI reshaping pedagogy, upgrades to learner management systems (LMS), ethical AI governance	CCT, DBS, Griffith, Hibernia, NCI, OTC – technology integration and development is a central theme. <u>Case Study:</u> Artificial Intelligence Special Advisory Group established by Griffith College
Data, QA Indicators and Benchmarking	Diverse data sources, internal KPIs, benchmarking against national/ international standards, and QA manual updates.	CCT, DBS, Griffith, Hibernia, NCI, OTC utilise various data sources for QA.

Theme	Sub-Themes	Indicative Examples
Student Experience, Engagement and Supports	Feedback mechanisms, mental health and disability supports, digital engagement tools	CCT, DBS, Griffith, Hibernia, NCI, OTC present a multifaceted picture of student engagement and support services <u>Case Study: Transforming Engagement: A Case Study on the Pilot Rollout of Vevox at DBS.</u>
Academic Integrity	GenAI-related policy updates, NAIN engagement, integrity training, assessment redesign, and unique models like the “Swiss Cheese Model”.	CCT, DBS, Griffith, Hibernia, NCI, OTC present comprehensive detail on GenAI-related policy updates, integrity training and assessment redesign.
External Engagements and Partnerships	Collaboration with QQI, industry advisory boards, TrustEd Mark, EU projects, and student representation in external reviews.	CCT, DBS, Griffith, Hibernia, NCI, OTC include details of external engagements, showcasing a wide range of activities and partnerships.

2. QUALITY IMPLEMENTATION AND DEVELOPMENTS

2.1 STRATEGIC PLANNING FRAMEWORKS AND GOAL ALIGNMENT

All six institutions demonstrate a clear commitment to strategic planning, although the scope, structure and implementation methods vary. Multi-year strategic plans are commonly used to guide institutional activities, encompassing areas such as teaching, learning, assessment, research, and broader organisational goals. In some cases, strategic planning is influenced by external entities, such as parent organisations or national review frameworks.

Progress Tracking and Evaluation

Institutions employ a range of mechanisms to monitor progress toward strategic goals. These include narrative summaries, structured tables categorising objectives (e.g. completed, ongoing, delayed), and digital tools like MS Planner. Regular meetings at various governance levels support ongoing evaluation. The level of detail in reporting varies, with some institutions offering specific examples of achievements and challenges, while others provide general overviews.

Integration with Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QA/QE)

Strategic planning is closely aligned with QA and enhancement activities. Institutions embed QA initiatives—such as programme reviews, policy updates, and academic misconduct frameworks—within their strategic plans. In some cases, QA actions are used to advance multiple strategic goals simultaneously, demonstrating the interconnectedness of QA and strategic development.

Unique Strategic Emphases

While common themes exist, some institutions highlight distinctive priorities. These include sustainability (e.g. integration of UN SDGs into curriculum and planning), leadership transitions, and internal governance reforms. One institution notably aligns its strategic objectives with those of its parent organisation, reflecting a layered planning approach.

Responsiveness to External Drivers

Institutions show adaptability in response to external pressures, including alignment with QQI guidelines, implementation of external review recommendations, and responses to gaps such as the absence of national student survey data. Strategic rationalisation—such as programme consolidation—is used to maintain focus on core offerings.

Forward-Looking Objectives

Strategic plans also outline future goals, including the development of new programmes, enhancement of student engagement, expansion of research activity, and continued implementation of external review recommendations. These objectives reflect a sustained commitment to strategic growth and continuous improvement.

Despite differences in structure and emphasis, all institutions use strategic planning as

a foundational tool to guide decision-making, align goals, and monitor progress. The integration of QA, responsiveness to external drivers, and forward-looking objectives collectively illustrate a dynamic and evolving strategic landscape in Irish higher education.

2.2 GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

As independent and private HEIs advance their strategic planning goals, they are simultaneously strengthening governance and leadership structures to support effective QA implementation. The 2025 AQR submissions highlight how institutions are responding to evolving regulatory expectations by enhancing academic integrity, promoting inclusive decision-making, and renewing leadership roles. Structural reorganisation and the creation of new positions reflect a sector-wide commitment to institutional capacity-building. These governance developments are not only aligned with strategic planning but also shaped by institutional reviews and quality enhancement initiatives—reinforcing a shared emphasis on transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement.

Structural Evolution and Leadership Renewal

Some institutions have reported notable structural and leadership transformations aimed at strengthening governance. These include the creation of new senior academic and operational roles, expansion of governing boards to include independent members for enhanced oversight and reorganisation of internal units to better reflect institutional growth and maturity.

Strengthened Governance Frameworks

Governance systems are well-established and structured, with regular meetings held across boards, councils, and committees. These frameworks promote transparent decision-making, ensure cross-functional representation—including student voices—and facilitate the escalation of subcommittee outputs to senior governance bodies.

Strategic Planning and Institutional Review

Institutions are actively engaged in strategic planning, with a more recent emphasis on preparation for or response to external reviews such as CINNTE. Governance structures have played a central role in coordinating the self-evaluation reports for tracking strategic actions and aligning QA activities with national standards and sectoral expectations.

Quality Assurance Leadership and Policy Development

Leadership in QA continues to be reinforced through the appointment of dedicated QA leads and external experts. Institutions are reviewing and updating QA manuals, assessment workflows, and document management systems. Policy development is increasingly evidence-based, with proposals undergoing formal review by Academic Councils.

Academic Integrity and Collaborative Governance

Academic integrity is embedded within governance structures through the establishment of dedicated committees and taskforces. Institutions have developed frameworks aligned with National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) guidance and adopting shared governance models for collaborative programmes that balance academic autonomy with corporate responsibility.

Student Engagement in Governance

Efforts to formalise student engagement in governance are evident across institutions. These include the development of standard operating procedures and role descriptors for student representatives, provision of training and peer learning opportunities, and implementation of recognition and reward systems to support sustained student involvement.

2.3 INTERNAL MONITORING AND REVIEW

With strengthened governance in place, institutions are now focusing on internal monitoring and review mechanisms to evaluate and enhance programme quality and institutional effectiveness.

2.3.1 PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT, REVIEW AND VALIDATION

All institutions conducted periodic programme reviews as part of their internal quality QA systems, though the frequency and scope varied. Some reports detailed specific programme revalidations and departmental reviews. Common policy updates included academic integrity (often referencing the National Academic Integrity Network), EDI and revisions to teaching, learning and assessment strategies. One report was particularly notable for its extensive policy updates, reflecting a thorough and integrated approach to QA.

Governance and Management Structures

Institutions reported on their governance structures and IQA-related meetings, with varying levels of detail. Most included schedules for governance bodies and documented leadership or management changes, particularly within QA teams as well as details of governance updates, including committee restructuring and new appointments. The depth of reporting reflected differences in organisational structures and requirements.

Programme Development

Institutions report ongoing programme development as part of their broader QA activities, although the scale and depth vary. Some provide detailed data on review panels and stakeholder involvement, while others focus on qualitative outcomes. External stakeholders—such as industry partners, professional bodies, and academic experts—play a key role in programme design and accreditation. Institutions employ varied frameworks and methodologies, including updated validation templates, internal committee oversight, and processes for expanding online provision. Programme

development is strategically aligned with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), with several institutions are pursuing external recognition through the TrustEd Mark. Strategic priorities differ ranging from expansion of programmes in certain discipline areas, extension towards blended learning, programme rationalisation and expansion of online and postgraduate offerings.

Student Feedback and Engagement

All reports described mechanisms for collecting student feedback, including surveys, focus groups, and consultations. One review specifically examined student engagement in academic governance, noting mixed perceptions and outlining improvement actions. While the level of detail varied, the importance of student feedback in internal QA was consistently emphasised.

Impact and Outcomes of Internal Quality Assurance

All reports described their internal quality assurance (IQA) systems, although the depth of impact and outcome reporting varied. Some focused on evaluating the effectiveness of their IQA frameworks, while others highlighted findings from self-evaluations or student satisfaction surveys. One report included detailed feedback from academic governance, identifying areas for improvement. Overall, the emphasis on measuring IQA impact differed significantly across documents which is likely reflective of those institutions preparing for institutional reviews.

Future Plans and Enhancements

All reports have included plans for future IQA improvements and enhancements. These plans are built upon the findings of programme reviews, self-evaluations, and student feedback. While specific areas for improvement have varied, common themes include strengthening student engagement, improving communication, enhancing support services, and addressing challenges related to academic integrity and the use of GenAI tools.



Establishing the Research Ethics Committee (REC) at the Open Training College (OTC) ([AQR 2025, p.40](#))

In 2023, OTC received QQI approval to deliver a Level 8 Honours degree programme—BA in Applied Social Studies (Disability Service Management). A key requirement for this approval was the implementation of an ethics approval process within the Applied Research Methods module. This led to the establishment of the OTC Research Ethics Committee (REC), a significant institutional development with wide-ranging impacts.

Key Metrics

- The REC was formally established in 2023.
- The Applied Research Methods module is a 15-credit component of the new Level 8 programme.
- The REC policy, terms of reference, and guiding documents were published and made available online.
- Training sessions were delivered to REC members prior to reviewing applications.

Challenges Faced

- **Committee Formation:** Ensuring the REC had appropriate expertise in disability-related research ethics required extensive planning and external consultation.
- **Regulatory Alignment:** The REC had to comply with multiple national and sectoral guidelines, including those from the HSE, NDA, and CORU.
- **Student Preparedness:** Many students lacked prior experience with ethical approval processes, resulting in incomplete applications and delays.
- **External Approvals:** Students conducting research in external organisations faced delays due to host ethics committee requirements.
- **Administrative Burden:** The REC's workload increased significantly, requiring structured scheduling and streamlined processes.
- **Impact Highlights**
- **Improved Research Quality:** Ethical oversight has led to better-designed student research projects that prioritise participant welfare.
- **Enhanced Student Competency:** Students gained confidence and skills in ethical decision-making and research design.
- **Institutional Reputation:** OTC's commitment to ethical standards has strengthened its standing in the disability and social care sectors.
- **Operational Improvements:** Standardised forms, online submissions, and proactive tutor involvement have improved efficiency.
- **Ongoing Adaptation:** The REC continues to evolve in response to emerging ethical challenges, including digital research method.

2.3.2 DEVOLVED RESPONSIBILITY

Across the six institutions, only three report devolved responsibility for programme development, monitoring, and review, revealing a range of approaches. Among these, one adopts a collaborative model with central support enabling programme-level autonomy; another uses a formalised system led by a review committee; and a third demonstrates strong internal control, managing reviews independently with expert panel involvement and forward planning. Institutions without devolved responsibility focus on scheduled programme reviews during the reporting period. Overall, the reports show significant variation in how devolved responsibility is implemented, shaped by differing levels of central support, process formalisation, and external stakeholder involvement.

2.3.3 ADVANCING RESEARCH AND INNOVATION ACTIVITIES

The reports reflect a strong and widespread commitment in some of these institutions to advance research, innovation, and enterprise. A recurring theme is the formulation and implementation of formal research strategies. These strategies are designed to increase research activity, align with institutional missions, and support researchers at different career stages. Some institutions have developed multi-year plans with clearly defined objectives, such as boosting doctoral research and supporting early-career academics. Others have adopted strategies that emphasise excellence in research-led teaching and industry engagement. The process of strategy development varies, with some institutions engaging in extensive stakeholder consultation, while others focus on aligning with external frameworks and standards.

Investment in research infrastructure is another prominent feature. Institutions are expanding research offices, strengthening research committees, and developing institutional repositories to manage and share research outputs more effectively. There is also a concerted effort to increase research participation and output through dedicated staff appointments, the organisation of academic conferences, and encouragement of publications in peer-reviewed journals. One institution stands out for its detailed account of EU-funded collaborations and student research awards, offering a more granular view of its research activities compared to others that provide broader overviews.

While strategic planning and measurable outcomes are central to many institutions' approaches, some adopt a more holistic model. This includes fostering a research-oriented culture through initiatives such as compiling repositories of research conferences and enhancing staff mobility. Ethical considerations also emerge as a significant theme, with one institution detailing the establishment of a Research Ethics Committee. This account includes both the challenges faced and the impact on research quality, student confidence, and institutional reputation—an area less explicitly addressed in other reports.

Student involvement in research is mentioned across several reports, though the nature and extent of this engagement vary. Examples range from participation in

academic conferences to conducting independent research projects, reflecting diverse approaches to integrating students into the research ecosystem.

Overall, the reports reveal a commitment to enhancing research, with institutions tailoring their strategies and priorities to their unique contexts and goals.

2.4 TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT: STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND PRACTICE

Insights from internal reviews are shaping institutional approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment—particularly in response to emerging challenges such as GenAI and evolving student needs. A consistent theme across the reports is the transformative impact of GenAI, prompting institutions to adopt varied strategies that balance innovation with academic integrity. These include the development of diverse assessment methods, formal GenAI usage policies, and revised assessment templates. Staff training and enhanced oversight further reflect a proactive stance, as institutions navigate the opportunities and risks associated with AI in education.

QA and continuous improvement also feature prominently. Institutions are demonstrating a clear commitment to ongoing evaluation and enhancement of teaching, learning, and assessment practices. This is evident in the establishment of working groups dedicated to assessment review, the implementation of multi-year strategic plans, and the regular updating of QA manuals. Engagement with national networks and alignment with statutory guidelines further underscore the sector-wide emphasis on maintaining and enhancing quality. Internal self-evaluation exercises, often linked to external review processes, are being used to benchmark progress and inform strategic direction.

Student engagement and support are addressed through a variety of initiatives, reflecting a shared recognition of their importance to learner success. Some institutions have adopted digital tools to enhance real-time engagement, while others have introduced structured programmes aimed at supporting students during the critical early weeks of their studies. There is also a growing emphasis on involving students in governance structures, ensuring their voices are heard in institutional decision-making. Feedback mechanisms, such as end-of-year surveys, are being used to identify areas for improvement and to shape future support strategies.

Academic integrity, particularly in the context of GenAI, is another recurring concern. Institutions are taking steps to safeguard academic standards through the development of new policies and procedures, the deployment of plagiarism detection software, and the provision of targeted staff training. In some cases, academic integrity is being embedded directly into broader teaching, learning, and assessment strategies, reflecting a holistic approach to upholding standards.

Finally, the influence of external frameworks and guidelines is evident across the reports. Institutions are aligning their practices with national QA standards and participating in formal review processes to ensure consistency and accountability. Engagement with sectoral networks and adherence to guidance for online and blended learning further demonstrate the importance placed on external validation and sector-wide coherence.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment at CCT: A Collaborative Approach in CCT College Dublin ([AQR 2025, p. 49](#))

CCT College Dublin's Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA) case study highlights a collaborative, evidence-based approach led by the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) Working Group. Established in October 2024, the group guided the redesign and launch of the new TLA Strategy in February 2025. Comprising academic and support staff, students, and leadership, the CTL meets regularly to integrate feedback from internal and external sources, promote authentic assessment, uphold academic integrity (including GenAI considerations), and maintain the CCT Lecturer Handbook as a key resource.

The five TLA Strategic Priorities are:

Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Priority 4	Priority 5
Programme approach to embedding relevant knowledge, skills and competencies and upholding academic integrity	Enhanced physical and blended learning environment ensuring commitment to student participation, access, diversity and inclusion	Cultivating leading edge transversal skills, including a commitment to life long learning	Students as partners across all aspects of their learning journey	Professional development and evidence based Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

Key Metrics and Activities:

- Hosted the **ICEP Conference** (Dec 2023) on academic integrity.
- Facilitated the **CCT Conversation Series**, including GenAI playgrounds and Communities of Practice.
- Developed resources such as the **Module Design Handbook** and **Peer Observation of Teaching** framework.
- Mapped CTL activities to the **National Professional Development Framework**, categorising support into unstructured, collaborative, structured, and accredited formats.

CTL Framework



The CTL Framework activities and initiatives can be loosely aligned to the National Professional Development Framework, see table 1. This type of alignment will facilitate future CTL initiatives being identified and mapped to the National framework.

Impact Highlights:

- Strengthened lecturer engagement and professional development.
- Enhanced student-centred learning through scaffolded, authentic assessments.
- Fostered a culture of continuous improvement and shared ownership of TLA practices.
- Positioned CCT as a proactive contributor to national teaching and learning discourse.

Summary of Challenges

- Integrating Diverse Feedback Sources: Coordinating input from students, lecturers, external examiners, and validation panels into a unified strategy was complex and time intensive.
- Designing Assessments to Address GenAI Risks: Ensuring assessments remained authentic and resistant to generative AI misuse required continuous innovation and redesign.
- Balancing Inclusivity with Academic Rigour: Embedding Universal Design for Learning while maintaining robust academic standards posed pedagogical and operational challenges.
- Resource Constraints for Professional Development: Delivering structured development activities (e.g. peer observation, conversation series) demanded significant staff time and coordination.

- **Strategic Alignment Across Stakeholders:** Aligning the new TLA strategy with institutional and research strategies required sustained collaboration across leadership and academic units.
- **Maintaining Engagement Across Programmes:** Ensuring consistent participation and responsiveness from all programme teams in CTL initiatives was an ongoing challenge.

Looking ahead, the CTL Working Group will continue to refine TLA practices, update resources, and organise an international conference on academic integrity. The strategy's alignment with national frameworks ensures sustainability and sectoral relevance.

2.5 INTERNATIONALISATION

Internationalisation is being strategically embedded across these institutions through a combination of transnational programme delivery, global partnerships, and QA enhancements. Several are actively preparing applications for the TrustEd mark, signalling a commitment to international standards. Others have validated fully online and transnational programmes often in collaboration with European partners or professional bodies. Strategic plans increasingly prioritise global connectivity, with dedicated structures such as Erasmus Committees, international ethics frameworks and QA processes aligned with ESG and NAIN guidelines. While some institutions demonstrate mature integration through international and collaborative research hubs, others are in earlier stages, focusing on benchmarking and aligning with regulatory frameworks to support future international engagement.

2.6 CINNTE EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

As internal practices continue to evolve and mature, external quality assurance reviews—such as CINNTE—offer an essential perspective for affirming institutional progress and guiding strategic refinement. Four institutions completed CINNTE reviews in 2024 and have described the process as a pivotal external influence on strategic planning and quality enhancement. It has prompted meaningful self-evaluation and strategic recalibration, often supported by internal activities such as QA manual updates and internal reviews. While one institution focused exclusively on internal processes without specific reference CINNTE, others are at different stages of engagement and different stages of review. Others are preparing for future reviews reporting positive outcomes and outlining implementation plans. Preparatory efforts, including the publication of key documents and community engagement are common, with one institution noting the review's extension to fully online learning. Another highlighted a comprehensive self-evaluation involving stakeholders but also acknowledged delays in planned QA actions due to the CINNTE review.

For those institutions engaged in external review, the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) and Institutional Profile (IP) are noted as central to the CINNTE process. The reporting of stakeholder involvement varies, with some institutions actively engaging staff and students, while others offer limited detail. The impact of external review ranges from strengthening QA and guiding strategic decisions to causing delays in other project timelines underscoring the multifaceted influence on institutional operations.

2.7 OTHER CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Beyond core QA activities, institutions are integrating broader strategic priorities—particularly Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and sustainability—into their enhancement frameworks. These cross-cutting themes reflect evolving sectoral and societal expectations and are shaping institutional cultures, governance, curriculum design, student support and strategic decision-making. While institutional maturity and depth of engagement vary, the reports reveal a shared commitment to advancing inclusive practices, environmental responsibility, global connectivity and continuous improvement through structured review and planning. These themes are not only shaping institutional cultures but also informing QA governance, curriculum design, student support, and strategic decision-making across the sector.

2.7.1 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

While all institutions express a commitment to fostering inclusive environments, the breadth and maturity of their equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) strategies differ markedly.

Policy and Procedure Development

Several institutions have updated or expanded their EDI policies to reflect broader inclusion goals. Examples include the development of comprehensive EDI frameworks, updates to equality policies, and the introduction of specific policies on gender identity, inclusive language, disability support, and LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Some institutions have embedded EDI considerations into QA manuals and student support protocols.

Training and Awareness

Training is a cornerstone of institutional EDI strategies. Initiatives include unconscious bias training, dignity and respect workshops, neurodiversity awareness, and mental health and wellbeing programmes. Some institutions have introduced digital badges or mandatory training modules for staff and students, while others have partnered with external organisations to deliver targeted sessions on race equality, gender identity, and inclusive leadership.

Student Engagement and Support

Student involvement in EDI is increasingly prioritised. Institutions report efforts to enhance the visibility and accessibility of support services, promote student representation in governance structures, and co-create initiatives with students. Some have developed orientation programmes tailored to diverse student cohorts, while others have introduced new roles or forums to amplify student voices in EDI planning and implementation.

Strategic Commitment and Governance

EDI is often embedded in institutional strategic plans, with dedicated committees or offices overseeing implementation. Some institutions have pursued external recognition through awards such as Athena SWAN or engaged in accreditation processes with national advocacy organisations such as ASIAM. Governance structures typically include senior leadership sponsorship and cross-functional collaboration.

Data Collection and Reporting

A number of institutions are using data to inform and evaluate EDI initiatives. This includes publishing gender pay gap reports, conducting staff and student surveys, and benchmarking policies against national standards. Data-driven approaches are used to identify gaps, monitor progress, and guide future actions.

Variation in Engagement

While many institutions report robust and evolving EDI practices, others provide limited detail or no information at all. This disparity highlights differing levels of institutional maturity and prioritisation of EDI within the QA landscape.

2.7.2 SUSTAINABILITY IN STRATEGY AND PRACTICE

Institutions demonstrate varied levels of engagement with sustainability ranging from strategic integration to practical implementation. Several institutions have embedded sustainability within their strategic frameworks, aligning with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and establishing dedicated offices or committees to oversee progress. Common initiatives include energy efficiency upgrades, carbon footprint reduction, and the elimination of single-use plastics. Some institutions have developed interdisciplinary sustainability modules, integrated sustainability into curricula, and launched postgraduate programmes focused on sustainability leadership. Others have prioritised awareness-raising through SDG-themed events, student-led projects, and partnerships with local and international stakeholders. Notably, one institution achieved Beacon Status for sustainable healthcare and topped national rankings for planetary health education, while another published its first comprehensive sustainability report and hosted a high-profile sustainability forum.



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2.7.3 BLENDED AND ONLINE LEARNING TRANSFORMATION

All six institutions are actively reshaping their programme delivery models in response to the 2023 QQI Statutory QA Guidelines for Blended and Fully Online Learning. This transformation is not just technical—it's pedagogical and cultural. Recent actions include:

- undertaking gap analyses and action plans to align with QQI statutory guidelines.
- preparing to extend the scope of provision, enabling fully online and transnational programme delivery.
- investments in digital infrastructure, such as new student information systems and virtual learning environments.
- a strong emphasis on assessment redesign, particularly to address the challenges posed by GenAI.

This strategic priority is expected to enable greater flexibility, accessibility and scalability in programme delivery, while also prompting institutions to rethink how learning is adequately resourced, supported and assessed.

Integrating UN SDGs into Strategic Management Assessments in NCI ([AQR 2025, p. 79](#))

During the 2023–2024 academic year, the School of Business in NCI piloted an initiative to embed the UN SDGs into the Strategic Management module for third- and fourth-year students. The aim was to promote socially responsible thinking and real-world learning by encouraging students to apply global sustainability frameworks to business strategy.

Students were asked to assume the role of consultants and advise senior management on strategic initiatives that could enhance organisational competitiveness while aligning with selected SDGs. The assignment was designed to be multifaceted and included several components:

- Deliverables included a short, written report (700 words), a data analysis table, an email summary of key findings, and an in-person presentation.
- Students were supported through weekly tutorials that offered structured opportunities to explore case studies, refine strategies, and discuss findings.
- Real-world data sources such as Ireland's SDG GeoHive Portal and reports from PwC, KPMG, ESB, and Formula 1 were used to support student research.

Key Metrics

To measure the reach and impact of the initiative:

- A total of 92 presentations were submitted.
- 54 students chose to focus on the UN SDGs.
- 14 out of 17 SDGs were used as the central theme in student projects.
- Challenges Identified

While the initiative was well received, several challenges emerged:

- Many students had limited prior awareness of the UN SDGs, requiring additional guidance.
- There was a need for structured support to help students apply SDGs meaningfully within business contexts.
- Ensuring accessibility and relevance of data sources posed a challenge for some students.

Impact Highlights

The initiative had a notable impact on student learning and engagement:

- Students demonstrated enhanced critical thinking and real-world problem-solving skills.
- The assignment fostered greater awareness of sustainability and global challenges.

- Positive feedback indicated that students found the assignment personally meaningful and professionally relevant, with several expressing increased motivation and deeper understanding of strategic management.

Future Development Plans

Building on the success of the pilot, NCI plans to expand the initiative:

- Extend SDG integration to other modules such as Ethics and Human Resource Management.
- Develop exemplar materials including presentations and data tables for future cohorts.
- Design classroom tutorials focused on SDG themes like climate change, social justice, and gender equality.
- Pilot a badge-level Sustainability course for students and staff in 2025, in partnership with the School of Business and the Centre for Experiential Learning and Leadership (CELL).

Extension of Scope to Fully Online Provision in Hibernia College ([AQR 2025, p. 54](#))

In 2023, Hibernia College initiated a strategic project to secure QQI approval for an extension of scope to deliver fully online programmes. This involved a comprehensive review and enhancement of the College's Quality Assurance Framework (HCQF), aligning with refreshed QQI guidelines for blended and online learning.

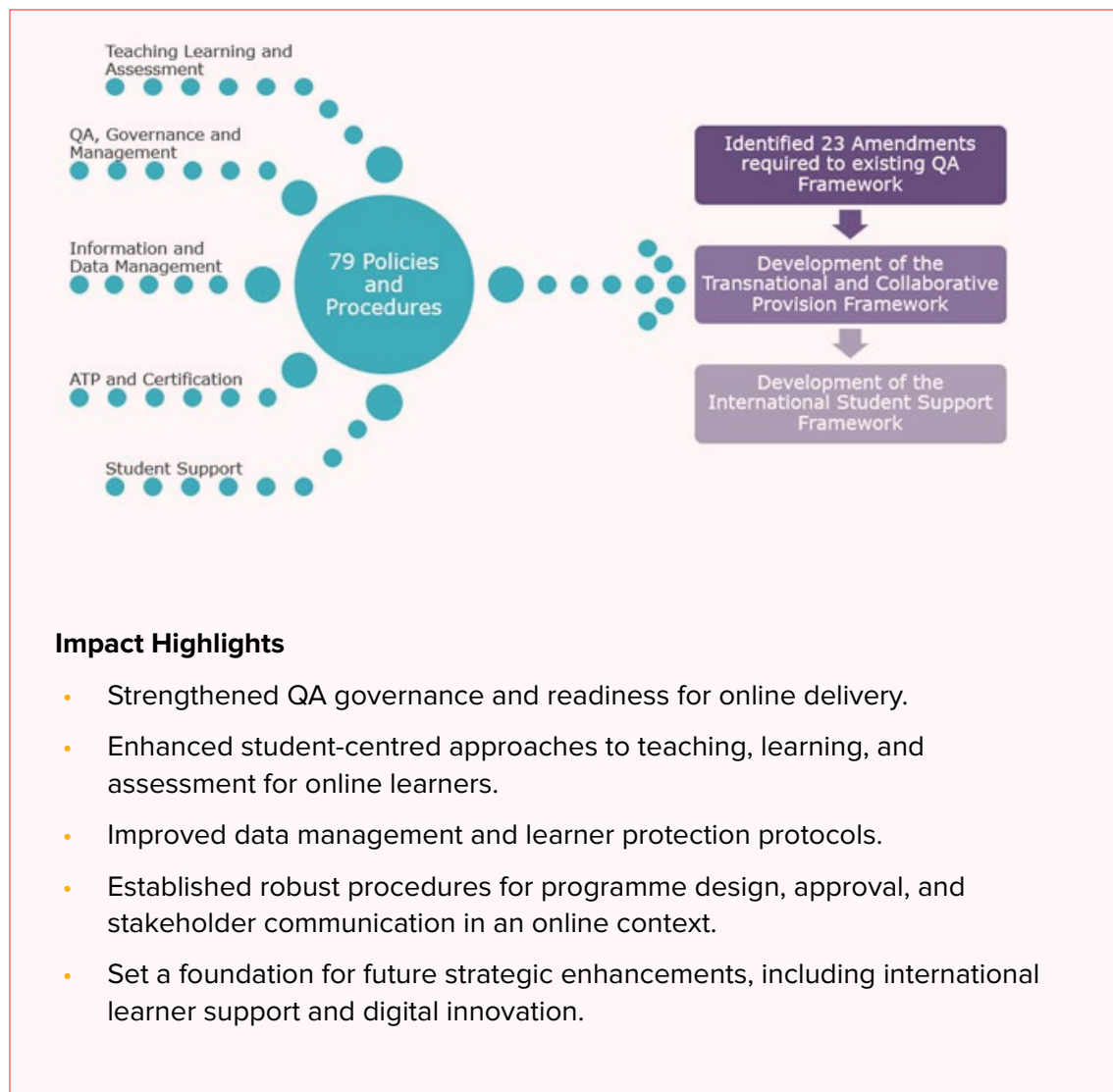
Key Metrics

- **23 QA items** in the HCQF were amended.
- **2 new frameworks** were developed to address identified gaps.
- **16 College representatives** participated in the independent panel review.
- **6 panel sessions** conducted during a virtual site visit in July 2024.
- **7 recommendations** and **5 commendations** issued by the panel.
- **Approval granted** by QQI PAEC for extension of scope.



Challenges

- **Gap analysis complexity:** Required full review of all QA policies and procedures.
- **Cross-functional coordination:** Involved collaboration across Student Support, Marketing, Digital Learning, and Finance teams.
- **Identity verification:** Identified as a future area for policy development.
- **Technology deployment:** Need for a formal policy on testing and implementing new educational technologies.





3. INTERNAL QA: ENHANCEMENTS AND IMPACTS

These strategic themes are further reflected in the internal QA enhancements and impacts reported, demonstrating how institutions are translating priorities into practice.

3.1 TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

The integration of technology into teaching and learning has emerged as a defining theme across the annual quality reports of several institutions. This shift is largely driven by the growing influence of GenAI, which is prompting institutions to rethink not only their digital infrastructure but also their pedagogical and assessment strategies.

A number of institutions have invested in upgrading their learning management systems to improve usability, accessibility and student engagement. One institution introduced a new Moodle service provider to enhance its virtual campus experience, while another embedded accessibility tools directly into its LMS to support diverse learner needs. Elsewhere, SharePoint was adopted to streamline access to academic resources and improve internal communication.

Responses to GenAI varied in tone and ambition. Some institutions took a forward-looking approach, embedding AI into the curriculum through initiatives such as hackathons and developing comprehensive guidelines to support ethical use. These efforts were often accompanied by staff training and policy updates, reflecting a desire to equip both educators and students with the skills to navigate AI responsibly. Others adopted a more cautious stance, focusing on academic integrity and the risks associated with AI-assisted misconduct. One institution introduced a dedicated module on academic integrity and AI, while another temporarily shifted towards oral assessments as a safeguard against misuse.

Concerns about equity and access also surfaced, with one institution highlighting the potential for socio-economic disparities in digital literacy and calling for a coordinated national response to AI integration. This underscores the broader challenge of ensuring that technological innovation does not inadvertently widen existing gaps in higher education.

Beyond AI, institutions are experimenting with a range of digital tools to enhance engagement. Interactive platforms for polling and Q&A, as well as creative tools for event programming, are being used to enrich the student experience. These innovations are often supported by robust QA frameworks, which help ensure that technology adoption aligns with institutional goals and maintains academic standards.

Across the sector, there is a clear recognition that technology is not simply an operational upgrade—it is a strategic imperative. Whether through proactive curriculum redesign or cautious policy refinement, institutions are working to ensure that their teaching, learning, and assessment practices remain fit for purpose in an increasingly digital and AI-influenced landscape.

Artificial Intelligence Special Advisory Group established by Griffith College ([AQR 2025, p. 117](#))

Griffith College established the AI Special Advisory Group (AI SAG) in response to the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence and its implications for higher education. Operating on behalf of the Board of Directors, the group oversees the ethical and effective implementation of AI technologies across the institution, ensuring alignment with best practices, compliance standards (e.g. GDPR), and academic integrity.

Key Metrics & Achievements

- **2 institutional documents developed:** (i) Institutional Policy on AI Use, (ii) Control Principles for Academic Use of AI.
- **AI Usage Guidelines** published and disseminated.
- **Dedicated academic integrity and AI resource pages** created for staff and students.
- **Ongoing maintenance** of AI teaching and learning resources since late 2022.
- **Staff engagement** in research and CPD events related to AI and academic integrity.
- **Integration with QQI and NAIN** updates and best practices.

Challenges

- **Balancing innovation with integrity:** Ensuring AI tools enhance learning without compromising academic standards.
- **Data governance concerns:** Addressing ethical use, ownership, and compliance with GDPR.
- **Faculty autonomy vs. consistency:** Allowing discipline-specific approaches while maintaining institutional coherence.
- **Rapid technological change:** Keeping policies and training up to date with evolving AI capabilities.

Impact Highlights

- Strengthened institutional readiness for AI integration in teaching, learning, and assessment.
- Enhanced awareness and understanding of AI's role and risks among staff and students.
- Positioned Griffith College as a proactive leader in AI governance within Irish higher education.
- Supported the development of future-proofed assessment strategies that incorporate AI responsibly.

3.2 DATA, QA INDICATORS AND BENCHMARKING

The reports reveal a wide range of approaches by these institutions to data collection, QA indicators, and benchmarking. While common themes emerge, such as the importance of diverse data sources and the value of benchmarking, the specific strategies and initiatives differ, reflecting the unique contexts and priorities of each institution. Collectively, the reports underscore the need for consistent internal data analysis principles and alignment with both national and international standards.

Data Sources and Collection Methods

The reports reviewed utilise a variety of data sources for QA. Common sources include programme reviews, expert review team data, and governance meeting records. However, the specific data sources vary across institutions. Several reports include student satisfaction surveys, while others incorporate both staff and student surveys and interviews. One institution relies heavily on internal datasets such as KPIs and MIS, alongside participation in national data collection initiatives. Another report uniquely features data from a digital engagement platform, illustrating the integration of technology in data gathering. The absence of national student survey data in one report highlights potential gaps in data coverage.

Quality Assurance Initiatives

Institutions undertake a diverse range of QA initiatives. These include enhancements in EDI practices and academic integrity; the development of guidelines for emerging technologies such as GenAI; updates to QA manuals; sustainability initiatives; and the establishment of consistent internal principles for data analysis and benchmarking. Some reports highlight participation in national data collection efforts and the publication of institutional reports such as gender pay gap analyses. Benchmarking of policies and procedures related to continuing professional development (CPD) and EDI is also noted. While programme reviews are a common feature, their focus and depth differ across institutions.

Benchmarking and External Comparisons

All reports reference benchmarking, either explicitly or implicitly. Some benchmark against national and international best practices, while others compare their approaches to those of peer institutions, particularly in areas such as generative AI guidance. One institution plans to develop a consistent internal framework for benchmarking against external comparators. Participation in sectoral data and information management activities is also used as a benchmarking tool. The extent and methods of benchmarking vary significantly, reflecting differing strategic priorities and capacities.

3.3 STAFF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Staff training and development are consistently recognised as central to internal QA across the reports. While all institutions address these areas, their approaches differ—some embed training within strategic planning and policy development, while others concentrate on targeted events or adapting to new technologies. A shared emphasis

emerges around academic integrity, particularly in response to the challenges posed by AI tools, alongside a strong commitment to external collaboration and the exchange of best practices. The scope and detail of initiatives vary, reflecting the distinct contexts and capacities of each institution.

3.4 STUDENT EXPERIENCE, ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORTS

The shared commitment by institutions to enhance the student experience is evident in all the reports, while also highlighting varied approaches to feedback mechanisms, support provision, technology integration, and effectiveness tracking. These differences reflect the distinct priorities and contexts of each institution, offering insight into wider practices and emerging trends across this cohort.

Feedback Mechanisms and Student Voice

All institutions utilise student surveys to gather feedback, with one report providing quantitative data on participation and satisfaction levels. Another institution employs an interactive platform to enhance lecture engagement and feedback collection, showcasing a technologically advanced approach. The inclusion of student representatives in feedback processes is highlighted in several reports, with one offering a comprehensive review of student representation, identifying areas for improvement and proposing concrete actions.

Support Services Offered

A wide range of support services are evident across the reports. One institution stands out for its comprehensive approach, including assistive technology, mental health counselling, and a centralised student hub. Others emphasise academic support, mental health initiatives, disability services, and reasonable accommodations. One report highlights new facilities such as an Academic Support Centre and Assistive Technology Services, while another focuses on tutorial and placement support, providing quantitative data on service utilisation and satisfaction.

Technology Integration and Accessibility

Several institutions leverage technology to improve accessibility and information dissemination. Common platforms include Moodle and dedicated student hubs or webpages. One institution integrates accessibility tools into its learning platform, while another demonstrates a proactive approach to interactive learning through the use of a digital engagement tool.

Effectiveness and Future Directions

While many reports describe initiatives, one uniquely provides quantitative data on student satisfaction and support utilisation, enabling a more concrete assessment of effectiveness. Others highlight ongoing efforts to improve services, such as developing new policies, enhancing communication, and creating centralised support hubs. The absence of national student survey data in one report points to a potential gap in comprehensive student satisfaction tracking.

Transforming Engagement: A Case Study on the Pilot Rollout of Vevox at Dublin Business School [\(AQR 2025, p. 99\)](#)

Theme: Innovative EdTech Implementation for Enhanced Learning and Engagement

Rationale: Student and faculty feedback highlighted the need for an interactive platform to enhance engagement and support effective learning across diverse multimodal environments.

In January 2024, DBS launched Vevox, a live polling and Q&A platform, to address engagement challenges and improve real-time feedback in teaching and learning. The rollout was driven by student and faculty feedback, particularly in large classes where participation was low. Vevox's anonymous and interactive features—such as live polls, quizzes, word clouds, and asynchronous surveys—enabled inclusive engagement and adaptive teaching strategies.

The implementation followed a structured plan: stakeholder meetings, technical setup with Single Sign-On and Moodle integration, and comprehensive training led by the Learning Unit (LU). A communications strategy supported awareness and adoption, including newsletters, workshops, and student council engagement.

Key Metrics (2024):

- **240 sessions** conducted across departments.
- **7,781 participants** engaged.
- **1,532 polls, 37 Q&As, and 46 surveys** created.
- A record **1,113 responses** during a September induction session—one of Vevox's highest globally.

Impact Highlights:

- Lecturers reported improved participation, deeper discussions, and better curriculum responsiveness.
- Students valued anonymity and ease of access, contributing more freely.
- Vevox became a strategic tool beyond teaching—used in inductions, library workshops, academic integrity training, and institutional surveys.
- The LU leveraged Vevox for feedback on Moodle upgrades, GenAI usage, and staff development needs.
- The platform's secure data handling resolved prior concerns with free polling tools.
- The pilot demonstrated Vevox's transformative potential in fostering engagement, inclusivity, and feedback-driven learning. Its integration across academic and administrative functions has set a new standard for interactive education at DBS.

3.5 ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

National Coordination and Shared Challenges

All institutions demonstrated a proactive response to the rise of generative AI, updating policies and procedures to address emerging risks. Revisions include updates to QA manuals and policies which now reflect broader academic integrity frameworks. Some institutions have formed dedicated task forces and published guidelines regarding the use of GenAI. Engagement with the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) was consistent, reflecting a nationally coordinated effort to uphold academic standards.

Policy Updates and Frameworks

Policies have evolved from focusing solely on plagiarism to encompassing broader academic integrity concerns, including GenAI usage. New guidelines and structured sanction frameworks have been introduced with one institution adopting a multi-layered “Swiss Cheese Model” to minimise vulnerabilities and promote a whole-of-institution commitment.

Educational Initiatives

Staff and student training were central to integrity strategies. Initiatives include workshops, CPD sessions and specialised modules on academic integrity and GenAI. Some institutions have integrated AI-related education directly into curricula, reinforcing awareness, ethical use and promoting a culture of good practice.

Assessment Adaptations

Assessment practices are being adapted to counter GenAI misuse. Strategies have included redesigning instruments, authentic assessments, strengthening final exams - including a return to in-person exams – and staff training on assessment redesign. While plagiarism detection software was used, emphasis is now placed on holistic approaches beyond technological solutions.

Unique Institutional Approaches

Distinctive strategies emerged, such as multi-layered integrity models, research into learner attitudes, and the formation of dedicated task forces or working groups. These approaches highlight institutional flexibility and innovation in addressing complex integrity challenges.

3.6 EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Collaboration with QQI and national initiatives is a prominent theme across the reports, with most institutions demonstrating significant engagement with QQI, particularly with those engaged in institutional reviews. It also includes programme validation and participation in national initiatives such as the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN). These activities underscore QQI's central role in QA and the interconnectedness of Irish HEIs. The one institution that does not explicitly detail significant QQI engagement still reports through the submission of its AQR.

Industry engagement and partnerships are consistently emphasised. Institutions report strong ties with industry through advisory boards, incorporation of industry input into programme development, and facilitation of student projects with industry partners. One institution provides a particularly detailed account of industry representatives involved in institutional activities, offering a granular view of collaboration. While the level of detail varies, the importance of industry engagement for programme relevance and student employability is a shared priority.

International engagement and accreditation are evident in several reports. One institution stands out for its detailed account of international partnerships, including student exchange programmes and participation in EU-funded projects. Institutions are also seeking the TrustEd Mark, further reflecting their global outlook and commitment to international standards.

Institutional reviews and QA processes are highlighted, particularly through references to the CINNTE review. Two institutions provide detailed accounts of their engagement with this process, one focusing on extensive preparation and consultation, and the other on the inclusive nature of the review, involving students and external partners.

Student involvement and representation in external engagement is not universally addressed but is notably present in two reports. One institution mentions its use of the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP), while another highlights student participation in the CINNTE review and the impact of student feedback. These examples suggest a growing and continued recognition of the student voice in shaping institutional partnerships and collaborations.

Each institution brings unique approaches to external engagement. One provides a comprehensive list of activities and partnerships, another offers a detailed description of international collaborations and achievements, and a third focuses on compliance with regulatory bodies and ethical standards. These distinct emphases reflect the varied strategic priorities and contexts of each institution.



4. CONCLUSIONS

This report brings together the key insights from the 2025 Annual Quality Reports submitted by six of Ireland's independent and private HEIs. Its purpose is to highlight how these institutions are advancing quality assurance (QA) in alignment with strategic goals and sectoral priorities.

Overall, QA across the institutions is effective and evolving. Strategic planning is tightly integrated with QA, supported by strong governance, regular policy updates, and leadership renewal. Institutions are actively responding to external reviews and national frameworks, demonstrating a commitment to continuous improvement.

Several shared themes have emerged in the reports:

- **Strategic Alignment:** QA is embedded in institutional strategies, with growing emphasis on sustainability, inclusion, and digital transformation.
- **Governance and Leadership:** Structures are being strengthened to support transparency, academic integrity, and student representation.
- **Teaching and Assessment:** GenAI is reshaping assessment design and integrity policies, prompting innovation and caution.
- **Student and Staff Experience:** Support services are expanding, with a focus on accessibility, wellbeing, and professional development.
- **Technology and Data:** Institutions are investing in digital tools and using data to inform QA decisions and benchmarking.
- **External Engagement:** Collaboration with QQI, industry, and international partners is central to programme relevance and global connectivity.

Looking ahead, the sector is well-positioned to address key priorities and embrace emerging challenges which include:

- Managing the impact of GenAI on academic integrity and assessment.
- Embedding sustainability and EDI into QA frameworks.
- Adapting to blended and online learning guidelines.
- Strengthening data strategies and benchmarking practices.
- Resourcing staff development and maintaining engagement across programmes.

The AQRs demonstrate the maturity and resilience of internal QA systems across these independent and private HEIs, highlighting a collective capacity to adapt, innovate, and support students within an evolving higher education landscape.





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