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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 fifteen public 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 Ireland’s public higher education institutions (HEIs). This report offers a timely and insightful overview of the evolving quality assurance landscape, highlighting sector-wide developments, innovations, and challenges.

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. 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. Institutions are advancing inclusive education, embedding sustainability, and navigating the opportunities and risks posed by emerging technologies such as generative AI. The reports also demonstrate a growing maturity in internal quality assurance systems, with enhanced use of data, benchmarking, and stakeholder engagement.

This synthesis highlights the sector’s resilience and adaptability in the face of complex challenges, including cybersecurity threats, funding constraints, and the integration of legacy systems within newly established technological universities. It also showcases the sector’s commitment to academic integrity, programme innovation, and research impact.

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 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
Quality and Qualifications Ireland

INTRODUCTION

This synthesis report presents a sector-wide analysis of Part B *Internal Quality Assurance Enhancement and Impact* of the 2025 Annual Quality Reports (AQRs), focusing on internal quality enhancement and impact across fifteen public higher education institutions. It identifies recurring themes, strategic priorities, and examples of good practice, offering insights into the evolving quality landscape in Irish higher education. The report is structured thematically, drawing on the AQRs of fifteen public HEIs¹, it highlights cross-cutting strategic themes and challenges.

In conjunction with this synthesis of Part B, QQI TEMRU² division conducted a monitoring exercise on Part A of the 2025 AQRs. This involved examining institutional policies and procedures and associated links included within Part A of the AQR. The findings indicate that institutions have comprehensive policies and procedures aligned to QQI core Quality Assurance (QA) guidelines. However, recurring issues were identified, including broken links, outdated documents, and limited accessibility for external users.

Public communication and self-evaluation emerged as well-developed policy areas, reflecting structured approaches and consistent engagement. Learner supports and teaching resources are also widely addressed, though intranet-based systems restrict external access. Staff recruitment and data management practices are mostly robust, but some AQRs lacked sufficient links or contained outdated information.

The AQRs for all institutions are published on QQI's [Monitoring and Reviews Library](#).

¹ At the time of drafting the synthesis report, Maynooth University (MU) had not submitted their 2025 Annual Quality Report to QQI.

² Tertiary Education Monitoring and Review Unit

METHODOLOGY FOR SYNTHESIS

This methodology for this synthesis report employed an iterative qualitative data analysis process using licensed versions of [MAXQDA³](#) 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.

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 report synthesises findings from the fifteen Annual Quality Reports (AQRs) submitted by Ireland's public higher education institutions. The analysis reveals a strong emphasis on aligning strategic plans with quality assurance goals, enhancing student experience through curriculum reform and graduate attribute initiatives (supported by N-TUTORR⁴ and HCI⁵ funding), and embracing digital transformation, including navigating the implications of generative AI (GenAI).

Additionally, institutions are increasingly prioritising inclusivity, diversity, and civic engagement as reflected through a range of strategic partnerships and initiatives. The AQRs highlight ongoing challenges such as cybersecurity vulnerabilities, funding limitations, and integrating legacy systems within newly established technological universities. The analysis presents a complex landscape of cross-cutting themes and development activities, which may be summarised under the following key areas:

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Institutions are aligning their strategic plans with quality assurance goals, working to enhance the student experience and improve teaching and learning outcomes. These activities include curriculum reforms, graduate attribute initiatives supported by external funding programmes such as N-TUTORR and HCI.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND INNOVATION

The AQRs indicate adoption of new technologies within curricula, adjustments to assessment practices, and support for student development. The influence of GenAI on teaching and assessment is frequently discussed, reflecting both challenges and adaptation to technological change.

INCLUSIVITY AND SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT

Institutions are deepening their focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion and further strengthening community and societal engagement. Examples include collaborative social justice projects, partnerships with civic organisations, and regional development initiatives. These efforts demonstrate an embedded commitment to societal needs and sustainable development goals.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Institutions continue to face issues including cybersecurity vulnerabilities, funding and resource constraints, and integration of legacy systems in newly established technological universities. Sector responses now include contingency planning and infrastructure testing to increase preparedness and resilience.

This synthesis provides an insight into the current context and landscape of quality assurance in Irish higher education, indicating recent developments, achievements, and ongoing challenges.

⁴ The National Technological University TransfOrmation for Recovery and Resilience

⁵ Human Capital Initiative



SECTION 1: QUALITY IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

This section presents a thematic synthesis of Part B of the 2025 AQRs submitted by fifteen public 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.	Atlantic Technological University (ATU)
2.	Dublin City University (DCU)
3.	Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design & Technology (IADT)
4.	Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT)
5.	Munster Technological University (MTU)
6.	National University of Ireland (NUI)
7.	RCSI University of Medicine & Health Sciences (RCSI)
8.	South East Technological University (SETU)
9.	Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin)
10.	Technological University of the Shannon (TUS)
11.	Trinity College Dublin (TCD)
12.	University College Cork (UCC)
13.	University College Dublin (UCD)
14.	University of Galway
15.	University of Limerick (UL)

THEMATIC MAP

This thematic map provides a visual overview of the key themes explored in the synthesis of the fifteen AQRs submitted by public higher education institutions.

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

Strategy, Governance and Management

Theme	Sub-Themes	Indicative Examples ⁶
Strategic Planning & Alignment	Institutional strategies; integration of QA, integration of legacy systems	ATU's integration of legacy systems; TU Dublin integration investment
Governance, Management & Leadership	Institutional restructuring, leadership appointments, governance frameworks	ATU-St. Angela's incorporation; UCD, TU Dublin, and University of Galway leadership transitions
Sustainability & Climate Action	Strategic integration, operations, research & innovation, teaching & learning	UCC, TCD
Inclusivity and Equity	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategies & policy frameworks, Athena SWAN, data collection, challenges	Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT) and Southside Travellers Action Group (STAG)
Societal & Community Engagement	Regional development, civic engagement, student engagement, knowledge transfer	SETU's regional and community engagement
Collaborative & Transnational Provision, Internationalisation	TNE, European alliances, FET partnerships, industry links	RCSI collaborations, DKIT engineering apprenticeship, DCU's engagement in ECIU
Internal Monitoring & Review	Periodic reviews, annual monitoring, CINNTE implementation	UCD-RCSI transnational review; TUS CINNTE QIP; SETU's QA framework
CINNTE Reviews	Implementation plans, strategic alignment	TUS CINNTE review, NUI Response to CINNTE

⁶ The indicative examples in the synthesis do not include the case studies submitted by institutions.



Quality Assurance Effectiveness and Impact

Theme	Sub-Themes	Indicative Examples
Data, QA Indicators & Benchmarking	Data dashboards, KPIs, benchmarking	MTU, DCU, TUS, DkIT, UCD, RCSI, UCC data driven quality enhancement;
Student Experience, Engagement & Supports	Feedback mechanisms, wellbeing, digital supports	University of Galway's Holistic Supports and Digital Transformation, MTU SUCCEED Programme, ATU's Breakfast Club;
Teaching, Learning & Assessment	Active learning, UDL, digital tools, assessment redesign	TU Dublin's Implementing the UEM model; Trinity's AI-informed assessment guidance
Work-Integrated Learning (WIL)	QA of work placement, employer partnerships, strategic frameworks	DkIT, IADT, MTU, TUS, University of Galway, UCC Developing a Strategic Framework for WIL
Staff Development & Communities of Practice	CPD, mentoring, CoPs, leadership development	TU Dublin's CoPs; UCC's School Managers CoP
Academic Integrity & GenAI	Policy updates, training, assessment redesign	TCD - Approach to Academic Integrity
Programme Development & Review	Strategic alignment, flexible pathways micro-credentials	ATU, DCU, DkIT, IADT, NUI, MTU, TUD, Trinity, TUS, UCC, UCD, University of Galway, UL. RCSI and SETU programme developments
Research	Ethics and integrity, research information management systems, postgraduate support, governance & quality, impact & collaboration	University Galway's IRRP2024 process and research partnerships; DkIT response to postgraduate student feedback, UCC-EirGrid MoU; IADT's ELEVATE programme

Additional Cross Cutting Themes

Theme	Sub-Themes	Indicative Examples
Funding	Funding streams, integration costs, research investment	DCU's QuID fund; TU RISE ;
Digital Transformation	Student records system, CRM systems, enhanced learning management systems, GenAI, data analytics, digital accessibility, process automation	ATU digital transformation, DCU SIS, IADT Illustro, TUD SRMS, DkIT system integration, MTU and NUI digital transformations, RCSI Digitary, SETU semesterisation
Cybersecurity & Digital Resilience	Policy, risk management, infrastructure, incident response	Trinity's risk system; Cybersecurity innovation at TUS, MTU's cyberattack recovery
Graduate Attributes and Curriculum Reform	Embedding graduate attributes, leveraging external funding, integration of new technologies	ATU, DCU, IADT strategic focus, N-TUTORR at DkIT, MTU Faculty Enhancement Review (FER)

1. QUALITY IMPLEMENTATION AND DEVELOPMENTS

1.1 STRATEGIC PLANNING AND ALIGNMENT

The institutions report on the development or implementation of strategic plans, typically covering the period up to 2028 or 2030. These plans serve as frameworks for institutional development, performance monitoring, and quality enhancement. Common strategic goals across the institutions include student success, sustainability, digital transformation, and research impact.

Technological Universities report significant efforts to integrate legacy systems, harmonise governance structures, and unify QA frameworks. This includes merging student records, HR, finance, and academic regulations. The complexities and challenges of this process are frequently highlighted in the reports of the TUs, as they face unique challenges related to integration and consolidation.

Integration of Legacy Systems at ATU

Atlantic Technological University AQR 2025 illustrates ATU's extensive efforts in integrating legacy systems, including HR, finance, and student records. While challenges were encountered, the detailed account of the approach, including phased implementation, offers valuable insights into managing such complex integration projects.

TU Dublin AQR 2025 similarly highlights the university's significant investment and phased approach to unifying their student records management systems.

SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE ACTION

The AQRs reveal a continued strategic commitment to sustainability and climate action across the Irish higher education sector. Institutions demonstrate a multifaceted approach, integrating sustainability into their strategic planning, operations, research, and teaching. While the level of engagement and specific initiatives vary across institutions, several common areas emerge:

Strategic Integration

- Institutions have formally adopted sustainability strategies and action plans, often aligning these with national and international frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Ireland's Climate Action Plan. These strategies typically encompass targets for carbon reduction, energy efficiency improvements, sustainable procurement, and waste reduction. The integration of sustainability into strategic planning demonstrates a commitment to embedding sustainability as a core institutional value.

Operational Initiatives

- A wide range of operational initiatives are underway to reduce environmental impact. These include energy efficiency upgrades to buildings, the promotion

of sustainable transport options, waste reduction programmes and the implementation of sustainable procurement policies. The scale and scope of these initiatives vary depending on institutional resources and context.

Research and Innovation

- Institutions are actively engaged in sustainability-focused research and innovation. This includes securing significant research funding, publishing in high-impact journals, and collaborating with industry and community partners to develop innovative solutions. The focus areas vary, encompassing renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, circular economy, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Teaching and Learning

- There is a growing trend towards integrating sustainability into the curriculum. This includes the development of dedicated sustainability modules, the integration of sustainability themes into existing courses, and the use of innovative pedagogical approaches to engage students in sustainability issues. Several institutions highlight the use of student-led initiatives and projects to promote sustainability awareness and action.

University College Cork (UCC)

UCC's 2023-2024 sustainability initiatives yielded significant results. The university achieved a 6th place global ranking in the UI Green Metric and 67th in the Times Higher Education Impact Ranking, and was the first university to receive a 5th Green Flag award. A 32% reduction in GHG emissions (scopes 1 & 2) was achieved, exceeding initial targets. The Enterprise Centre Deep Retrofit reduced emissions by over 80%, achieving a B1 BER rating. UCC developed and delivered its own Climate Leadership Training course, and a disposable cup ban resulted in a saving of over 2 million cups. In October 2024, UCC published its first Annual Sustainability Report, encompassing all 17 SDGs. The inaugural UCC Sustainable Futures Forum (November 2023) featured former President Mary Robinson, and UCC sent a delegation to COP28. Sustainability research generated €14 million in income, and further funding was secured for initiatives such as the Floating Wind Testbed. A Memorandum of Understanding with EirGrid was signed to support Ireland's transition to zero-emissions electricity.

Trinity College Dublin

During the reporting period TCD approved its first Sustainability Strategy (2023-2030) and action plan, aligning with its Strategic Plan (2020-2025). The strategy prioritises tackling climate change, restoring biodiversity, and creating healthy futures, addressing these through education, research, operations, and community engagement. A new Environmental and Sustainability Principal Committee of Board oversees the strategy's implementation, supported by a Sustainability Management Group and a Green Campus Committee. The strategy's progress will be reported on regularly.

INCLUSIVITY AND EQUITY

A strong commitment to inclusivity and equity permeates the strategic planning of Irish higher education institutions. Across the fifteen AQRs from public HEIs, inclusivity and equity are actively integrated into strategic objectives and operational plans. This is evidenced by the widespread adoption of dedicated EDI strategies and action plans, often incorporating specific, measurable targets for increasing representation of underrepresented groups among students and staff. Initiatives to widen participation in higher education, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with disabilities, and mature learners, are frequently highlighted.

Furthermore, the integration of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles into teaching and learning is presented as a key strategy for creating more inclusive learning environments. The consistent use of data-driven approaches to monitor progress towards equity goals underscores a commitment to evidence-based decision-making in this area.

The emphasis on data-driven approaches suggests a move towards more effective and sustainable strategies for achieving equity goals. However, ongoing challenges remain in fully realising these ambitions, particularly in relation to resource allocation, addressing systemic inequalities, and ensuring that inclusivity is not merely a superficial add-on but is deeply embedded in institutional culture and practice.

While the specific initiatives and approaches vary across institutions, reflecting their unique contexts and missions, the overarching theme of creating more equitable and inclusive learning and working environments is consistently present and several initiatives emerge:

Policy and Strategic Frameworks

- Many institutions demonstrate a commitment to EDI through the development and implementation of EDI policies and strategies. These frameworks often address gender equality, race equality, disability inclusion, and LGBTQ+⁷ inclusion. However, the level of detail and the specific actions outlined vary considerably. Some institutions provide comprehensive action plans with measurable targets and timelines, while others offer a more general overview of their EDI commitments.

Athena SWAN

- Participation in the Athena SWAN charter is a recurring theme. Institutions report on their institutional awards (bronze, silver, or gold) and/or departmental awards. The reports often highlight actions taken to address gender imbalances in areas such as representation, promotion, and leadership.

Addressing Specific Equality Grounds

Several institutions report on initiatives targeting specific equality grounds beyond gender. These include:

7 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer



- **Race Equality:** some institutions mention the adoption of anti-racism principles, the establishment of race equality working groups, and the development of race equality action plans.
- **Disability Inclusion:** many institutions highlight their disability support services, including assistive technology, reasonable accommodations, and access improvements. Some institutions mention specific initiatives for students with autism or intellectual disabilities.
- **LGBTQ+ Inclusion:** several institutions report on initiatives to promote LGBTQ+ inclusion, such as LGBTQ+ awareness training and the establishment of LGBTQ+ support networks.
- **Traveller and Roma Inclusion:** specific initiatives to support the inclusion of students from the Traveller and Roma communities are mentioned in some reports.

Staff Training and Development

- Many institutions report on EDI training and development initiatives for staff. These initiatives aim to raise awareness of EDI issues, develop staff competencies in inclusive practices, and promote a culture of respect and equality. The types of training offered vary, including unconscious bias training, diversity and inclusion training, and training on specific equality grounds.

Student Engagement and Support

- Several institutions highlight initiatives to engage students in EDI work and provide targeted support services for students from underrepresented groups. This includes student-led initiatives, mentoring programmes, and the establishment of student-focused EDI networks or groups.

Data Collection and Reporting

- The collection and reporting of EDI data varies across institutions. Some institutions provide detailed data on staff and student demographics, while others offer a more limited overview. The use of this data to inform EDI initiatives and track progress is also inconsistent across the reports.

Challenges

Several AQRs highlight challenges in implementing comprehensive EDI initiatives. These include resource constraints, inconsistencies in the quality and consistency of EDI data collection and analysis, difficulties in sustaining momentum over time, and the need to address deeper systemic issues impacting EDI.

IADT and Southside Travellers Action Group (STAG)

IADT's partnership with Southside Travellers Action Group (STAG) is ongoing, including collaborating on events such as the Traveller Wagon visiting IADT campus celebrating Traveller culture and heritage as part of the Dublin Learning City festival; and supporting IADT film students to in filming a documentary celebrating Traveller heritage.

Meetings with peers in other HEIs are leading to further work with stakeholders to develop a programme of work to support people from Traveller and Roma communities to access higher education.

SOCIETAL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The AQRs reveal a strong, though varied, embedding of societal and community engagement goals within institutional strategic planning. Core topics and activities associated with this theme include:

Regional Development

- Many institutions emphasise their important role in supporting economic and societal development within the regions. This may involve partnerships with local businesses, government agencies, and community organisations. The strategic embedding is evident in the setting of specific targets related to regional impact, such as graduate employment within the region or collaborations with local industries.

Addressing Societal Challenges

- Institutions frequently highlight their contributions to addressing pressing societal issues. These challenges may relate to health, sustainability, social justice, and skills development. Strategic integration is shown through the allocation of resources (funding, staff time) to specific projects addressing these challenges and the inclusion of related KPIs in performance agreements.

Student Engagement and Development

- Many institutions emphasise the importance of providing students with opportunities for community engagement. This is often framed as enhancing student learning, developing civic responsibility, and improving employability. Strategic alignment is demonstrated through the integration of service-learning or community-based projects into curricula, the allocation of funding for student-led initiatives, and the inclusion of community engagement in graduate attribute frameworks.

Knowledge Transfer and Impact

- Institutions highlight the transfer of knowledge and expertise from the university to the community. This can involve research collaborations, consultancy services, and the dissemination of research findings to the public. Strategic planning often includes targets for knowledge transfer activities, such as the number of industry collaborations or the creation of spin-off companies.

The degree to which societal and community engagement is embedded varies. Some institutions have dedicated sections in their strategic plans outlining specific goals, targets, and initiatives. Others integrate these activities more implicitly within broader strategic themes. The level of detail in reporting on progress towards these goals also varies. However, the overall trend indicates a growing recognition of the importance of societal engagement as a core aspect of institutional mission and identity. The use of KPIs and performance indicators to track progress towards strategic goals related to community engagement is becoming increasingly common.

RESEARCH

Research remains a core pillar of institutions' strategic plans though the emphasis varies. Some institutions are evidently more research-intensive, with strategic plans including targets for research funding, knowledge transfer and publications, while others, though incorporating research into their strategies, may prioritise teaching and student learning.

The technological universities tend to emphasise applied research and, in some instances, direct connection to regional economic development. The traditional universities on the other hand, may place greater emphasis on fundamental research, with many increasingly focussing on societal impact of their research activity. Research is considered further below.

Atlantic Technological University (ATU) 'Engaged Research Impact'

ATU completed its first strategic plan in Q2 2024, which includes the key theme "Engaged Research with Impact". The plan acknowledges that the Northern and Western regions lag behind in research and innovation compared to other regions and the EU average. ATU aims to play a crucial role in enriching the region by supporting sustainable regional development.

Implementation of the [TU Research and Innovation Supporting Enterprise \(TU RISE\) Scheme](#) to support research capacity building commenced during the reporting period. Final amendments were made to the programme's structure, including amendments to work packages and budgets. The VPRI function led a consultation process with the HEA to assist project planning and additional resource alignment, which is nearing conclusion by Q1 2025.

Significant recruitment was completed throughout 2024, several more positions remain to be filled early in 2025 under the programme.

The research strategy alignment will commence in early 2025 in parallel with the remaining staff and managerial appointments under the TU RISE programme. This follows from the ATU Strategy launched in 2024, which outlines key strategic considerations for research and innovation. In 2024, the Knowledge Transfer Office formally opened at ATU, and three staff members were recruited.

Under the TU RISE programme, specific supports have been created to facilitate stronger enterprise engagement. The first appointments into enterprise operations in pillar IV have been completed, and the first industry engagements under the programme were in Q4 of 2024. Further significant enterprise engagement works are planned throughout 2025.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration is a consistent strategic theme across AQRs and takes many forms, including, inter-institutional collaboration (national and international), industry partnerships, community engagement and global partnerships, expanding networks and research capacity through joint projects, exchanges, and participation in international research consortia.

The governance structures supporting collaborative and transnational activities vary. Some institutions have dedicated committees or units responsible for overseeing these activities, others integrate these activities into existing governance structures, such as Academic Councils or Programme Boards. The strategic embedding is evident in the inclusion of collaborative and transnational activities within institutional strategic plans and performance agreements. Many institutions highlight the importance of these activities for enhancing their international profile, meeting regional needs, and fostering innovation. The AQRs reveal a diverse range of collaborative and transnational activities:

Inter-institutional Collaborations

- Many institutions report collaborations with other Irish higher education institutions (HEIs). These collaborations often involve joint programmes, research projects, or staff exchanges. The rationale frequently cited is to share resources, expertise, and enhance the student experience.

Transnational Education (TNE)

- Several institutions report transnational education activities, including joint programmes with international partners. These collaborations often involve the delivery of programmes in other countries, sometimes leading to dual awards. The motivations for TNE include expanding access to higher education, enhancing the international profile of the institution, and meeting global skills demands.

European University Alliances

- Institutions also report on their involvement in European University Alliances. These alliances facilitate joint programmes, staff and student mobility, and research collaborations across multiple European countries. The strategic rationale often includes enhancing internationalisation, fostering innovation, and contributing to the European Higher Education Area.

Partnerships with Further Education and Training (FET) Institutions

- Some institutions highlight collaborations with FET through the ETBs, to create more flexible pathways for students transitioning from FET to HE. This may involve joint tertiary programmes or articulation agreements.

Industry Partnerships

- Institutions also report on collaborations with industry partners to develop programmes that meet specific workforce needs. This often involves work-integrated learning opportunities, such as internships or apprenticeships.

Examples of collaboration at RCSI

RCSI Hospitals Group

RCSI is the Academic Partner of the RCSI Hospitals Group, which comprises Beaumont Hospital, Connolly Hospital, Cavan and Monaghan Hospital, Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Louth County Hospital and the Rotunda Hospital. RCSI students undertake their education and clinical training placements across the hospitals of the Group in addition to a range of associated GP practices, private hospitals (e.g. Mater Private, Bons Secours) and other clinical facilities. The RCSI Hospitals Group serves populations across North Dublin, Meath, Louth, Cavan and Monaghan in an area that stretches from Dublin City Centre, north to the border with Northern Ireland, and west to the border with County Donegal. This area comprises urban, rural and commuter belt areas with a total catchment population of 875,000. The Group provides a wide range of emergency, diagnostic, treatment and rehabilitation services supported by a workforce of 11,200 WTE staff.

Dublin City Council & Dublin Fire Brigade

In 2002, RCSI entered into a partnership agreement with Dublin City Council and Dublin Fire Brigade (DFB) for the development and provision of education and training in accordance with the standards and procedures set down by the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC). Through this agreement, a Diploma in Emergency Medical Technology (NFQ Level 7) is undertaken over two academic years by all DFB personnel as part of their employment as firefighter/paramedics for the provision of fire & rescue services in the Dublin Metropolitan Area. This successful partnership, which has been in situ for 22 years, has a partnership board which meets regularly to provide oversight of the programme and to consider options for future development of the programme and the implementation of any clinical or legislative changes to the programme. By the end of 2024, over 700 people will have undertaken or are currently undertaking the paramedic programme, with another class beginning in Spring 2025. As a measure of quality, PHECC requires all training institutes to undergo audits. This process also ensures that standards are maintained, and the education provided meets requirements. Recently RCSI/DFB underwent this process and received extremely positive feedback.

Irish Hospice Foundation

RCSI has provided postgraduate education programmes in bereavement and loss in partnership with the Irish Hospice Foundation, since 2004. RCSI offers three programmes in collaboration with IHF, one Professional Internal Certificate and two Masters programmes. Programme Examination Boards are facilitated by RCSI and held twice per year.

Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) – Civil Engineering Apprenticeship Collaboration

DkIT, recognising a significant skills shortage in the civil engineering profession and a decline in the number of graduates collaborated with industry to develop an alternative access route through apprenticeships.

New civil engineering apprenticeships (NFQ Levels 6 and 7) were launched in June 2023, with the first cohort commencing in September 2023. The programme involved a unique structure: a residential week at the start of each academic year, four days of industry-based work per week, and one day of online lectures. Monthly on-campus workshops and labs were also included. An Apprenticeship Manager was appointed to facilitate communication and coordination between employers, apprentices, and DkIT staff.

The initial cohort comprised 44 apprentices from various companies and disciplines, demonstrating industry demand for this alternative pathway. Apprentices reported finding the programme challenging but highly beneficial, appreciating the opportunity to apply their learning in real-time and benefit from both academic instruction and on-the-job mentorship. DkIT is expanding the programme to include NFQ Levels 8 and 9, creating a complete progression pathway through apprenticeships.

DkIT's civil engineering apprenticeship programme demonstrates a successful model for addressing skills shortages through collaboration with industry and the creation of an alternative access route to higher education. The programme structure, combining online learning with practical experience and mentorship, proved effective in engaging apprentices and meeting industry needs. The planned expansion of the programme further highlights its potential for long-term impact.

The Impact of the European Consortium of Innovative Universities (ECIU) on Dublin City University (DCU)

DCU is a member of the European Consortium of Innovative Universities (ECIU), a network that has evolved into a European University Alliance. DCU's participation in ECIU, beginning in 2012, has been instrumental in shaping its internationalisation strategy.

Key aspects of DCU's engagement include:

- **ECIUn and ECIUn+ Projects:** DCU participated in the ECIUn (2019-2022) and ECIUn+ (2022-2026) projects, funded by the European Commission. These projects focused on collaborative learning, micro-credentials, and flexible learning pathways. DCU played a leadership role in the development and implementation of these projects, particularly in relation to micro-credentials.
- **Challenge-Based Learning:** DCU has integrated challenge-based learning into its programmes as part of its commitment to the ECIU University. This approach involves students working on real-world problems in collaboration with partners from other ECIU universities.
- **Micro-credentials:** DCU has been a leader in the development and implementation of micro-credentials within the ECIU University, working closely with the European Commission to support the e-sealing and issuing of micro-credentials using the European Digital Credential Platform. This has involved participation in national and international fora on quality assurance for micro-credentials.
- **Staff and Student Mobility:** DCU has facilitated staff and student mobility through Erasmus+ and other funding mechanisms, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange with partner universities.

Governance and Implementation:

DCU has established governance structures to oversee its ECIU activities:

- **DCU ECIU Strategic Oversight Committee:** provides institutional oversight and guidance.
- **ECIUn+ Implementation Group:** responsible for delivering on DCU's commitments within the ECIUn+ project.

Impact and Outcomes:

DCU's engagement with ECIU has had several positive impacts:

- **Curriculum Innovation:** The integration of challenge-based learning and micro-credentials has led to curriculum innovation and enhanced student learning experiences.
- **Enhanced Internationalization:** Staff and student mobility have strengthened DCU's international profile and fostered collaborations with other European universities.
- **Leadership in Micro-credentials:** DCU's leadership role in the development and implementation of micro-credentials has positioned it as a key player in this emerging area of higher education.
- **Strengthened Institutional Capacity:** Participation in ECIU has enhanced DCU's capacity for international collaboration and innovation.

INTERNATIONALISATION

The fifteen AQRs from the public HEIs reveal a strategic and multifaceted commitment to internationalisation, extending beyond student recruitment to encompass strategic partnerships, curriculum development, and the creation of a globally connected learning environment. International student recruitment is a consistent priority, with institutions reporting significant numbers of non-EU students and highlighting both the successes and challenges associated with this. Student mobility, facilitated largely through Erasmus+ and other exchange programs, is actively promoted, although visa restrictions and global events are acknowledged as significant barriers. The establishment of numerous international partnerships, often within the framework of European University alliances, is a recurring theme, demonstrating a commitment to collaborative research, teaching initiatives, and the development of transnational education programmes.

Beyond student recruitment and mobility, the AQRs reveal a growing emphasis on internationalisation of the curriculum, incorporating global perspectives and content into existing programmes and developing new, internationally focused offerings. Institutions are also investing in dedicated support services for international students, recognising the importance of providing an inclusive environment that facilitates successful integration into the university community. While the specific approaches and priorities vary across institutions, the overarching theme of internationalisation as a strategic imperative is consistently present, underscoring a collective commitment to creating a globally connected and internationally competitive higher education sector.

1.2 GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

The AQRs provide valuable insights into the diverse approaches to governance, management, and leadership within the Irish higher education sector. While significant challenges remain, particularly for institutions undergoing integration or significant change, the reports also demonstrate a strong commitment to enhancing governance frameworks, developing leadership capacity, and fostering a culture of quality assurance and continuous improvement.

INSTITUTIONAL RESTRUCTURING AND INTEGRATION

Many institutions underwent significant restructuring and integration processes, particularly the recently formed technological universities. These processes involved aligning policies, procedures, and systems across multiple campuses or legacy institutions, often presenting significant challenges in terms of harmonising operations and cultures. The establishment of new organisational structures and leadership teams was a key focus, with varying approaches to the design and implementation of these changes.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES AND NEW APPOINTMENTS

- Several institutions reported leadership changes during the reporting period. Noteworthy among these was the commencement of a new president at UCD, who began their term in May 2023. Additionally, interim presidents were



appointed at both TU Dublin and University of Galway. Since the time of the AQR reporting period, permanent presidents have assumed their roles at these institutions.

The AQRs document numerous senior appointments beyond those of presidents and interim presidents. While specific titles vary across institutions, these appointments generally fall into several categories:

ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP

- Many institutions appointed new Deans, Heads of School, Heads of Department, and other academic leadership roles. These appointments often reflect institutional restructuring, the creation of new academic units, or the need to fill vacancies.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES LEADERSHIP

- Several institutions appointed new leaders in key professional service areas, such as finance, human resources, IT, student services, and research. These appointments often reflect a focus on improving operational efficiency, enhancing service delivery, and strengthening strategic planning.

EDI AND SUSTAINABILITY LEADERSHIP

- Several institutions created or filled new roles focused on EDI and sustainability. This reflects a growing institutional emphasis on these areas.

PROJECT-SPECIFIC ROLES

- Some appointments were made to manage specific projects or initiatives, such as those related to institutional transformation, digital integration, or research development.

The nature of these appointments suggests a broad focus on strengthening institutional capacity, improving operational efficiency, and advancing strategic priorities across the Irish higher education sector. Many of these appointments reflect a move towards more integrated and data-driven approaches to management and a greater emphasis on EDI and sustainability.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

- The reports highlight the importance of robust governance structures and processes in supporting institutional effectiveness. Many institutions detail the composition and meeting schedules of their governing bodies, academic councils, and various committees. Several institutions describe efforts to enhance their governance frameworks, including clarifying roles and responsibilities, streamlining decision-making processes, and improving communication.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- The reports also highlight challenges related to governance, management, and leadership. These include the complexities of institutional integration, the need for effective communication strategies, and the ongoing need to adapt to a

rapidly changing higher education landscape. However, the reports also identify opportunities for enhancing leadership development, improving governance structures, and fostering a more collaborative and inclusive culture.

ATU: Integrating St. Angela's College into ATU

ATU was established on 1 April 2022 and in November 2022, ATU and St. Angela's College Sligo jointly applied to incorporate St. Angela's into ATU.

The incorporation of St. Angela's College into ATU, completed during the reporting period on November 1, 2023, involved several key steps:

Joint Application: ATU and St. Angela's College submitted a joint application for incorporation.

Advisory Panel Review: An advisory panel reviewed the incorporation proposal in January 2023.

Agreement of Transition Principles: An agreement was signed to protect the educational contract of existing students registered before the 2022/23 academic year.

Proactive Stakeholder Engagement: Before the incorporation date, St. Angela's staff were actively involved in ATU's Academic Council, University Planning Team, and other fora. This proactive approach facilitated a smoother transition.

System Integration: Following incorporation, St. Angela's was integrated into ATU's systems, including Banner, AMM, and GURU. This involved significant staff training and support.

Challenges:

Maintaining Educational Contracts: Ensuring a smooth transition for existing students while incorporating St. Angela's into ATU's systems and awarding structures presented a significant challenge.

System Integration: Integrating St. Angela's into ATU's diverse IT infrastructure required careful planning and execution.

Outcomes:

Successful Incorporation: St. Angela's College was successfully incorporated into ATU on November 1, 2023.

Protection of Student Contracts: The agreement ensured that existing students' educational contracts were protected.

Enhanced Institutional Capacity: The merger expanded ATU's programme offerings and student capacity.

Improved Collaboration: Proactive stakeholder engagement fostered collaboration and a smoother transition.

The incorporation of St. Angela's College into ATU demonstrates that proactive stakeholder engagement, careful planning, and a focus on protecting student interests were key factors in achieving a smooth transition.

1.3 INTERNAL MONITORING AND REVIEW

The AQRs reveal diverse approaches to internal monitoring and review reflecting institutional contexts and priorities.

PERIODIC REVIEWS

All HEIs conduct periodic reviews, though frequency, scope, and methodologies vary. Some institutions utilise established cyclical review schedules, while others adopt a more ad-hoc approach. Units of review include programmes, faculties, departments, service delivery units, and thematic areas. Methodologies range from on-site visits to desk reviews and virtual processes, with varying panel sizes and compositions. Virtual processes have increased, becoming standard practice in many institutions.

UCD AQR 2025 - Internal Periodic Quality Review Process

This short extract from UCD AQR describes a joint UCD/RCSI institutional transnational quality review, reflecting both collaborative and transnational quality assurance activities.

New Handbooks for Internal Periodic Quality Review for Academic Schools and Professional Support Units were published following a comprehensive review. A joint UCD/RCSI institutional transnational quality review took place at the RCSI & UCD Malaysia Campus (RUMC) in Penang, Malaysia. This included the joint review and development of a new Handbook for the Cyclical Review of the Effectiveness of a Linked Provider's QA Procedures.

EXPERT REVIEW TEAMS/PANELS

- Expert review teams/panels are generally diverse, including internal and external experts, academics, practitioners, and student representatives. Panel size and composition vary depending on the review type and scope. Many institutions strive for gender balance.

ANNUAL MONITORING

- Most HEIs conduct annual monitoring, often focusing on programme board reporting, external examining, student feedback, and programme changes. Student feedback mechanisms are widespread, though challenges remain in response rates and data interpretation. Analysis of external examiner reports is also common, informing quality enhancement initiatives.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEWS (CINNTE)

Several HEIs underwent a QQI CINNTE institutional review or were preparing for institutional review during the reporting period, providing an external perspective on IQA systems and leading to recommendations for improvement. Implementation of these recommendations is ongoing; this topic is further expanded on in the next section.

CHALLENGES AND IMPROVEMENTS

- Recurring challenges include ensuring sustained stakeholder engagement, capturing tangible evidence of impact, and measuring the effectiveness of quality initiatives. Institutions are addressing these through improved data collection, analysis, and reporting, as well as enhanced communication and collaboration. Digital tools and platforms are increasingly important in streamlining internal monitoring and review.

1.4 QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT AND ENHANCEMENT

Institutions, as evidenced within the AQRs, demonstrate an ongoing commitment to improving their internal quality assurance (IQA) frameworks. Strategic alignment is prioritised, alongside the advancement of digital transformation initiatives, which support the evolution of QA processes and procedures. A consistent application of policies and procedures across all campuses and units remains a key challenge that HEIs continually strive to address.

South East Technological University (SETU)

SETU focused on foundational integration and strategic alignment of its quality assurance framework following its establishment. During the reporting period, SETU prepared for its first CINNTE institutional review, engaging over 100 staff and students across a Steering Group and seven working groups. A Joint Quality Committee was established, comprising members of the Governing Body, Academic Council, and student representatives, to oversee academic and service quality.

SETU published its institutional Quality Framework and new Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes, aligning core academic policies including assessment, progression, and recognition of prior learning. The university also identified five strategic QA themes to guide development: award flexibility, performance criteria, access and lifelong learning, industry engagement, and governance responsiveness.

These developments demonstrate SETU's commitment to embedding quality assurance at the heart of its governance and academic structures.

PROACTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF CINNTE RECOMMENDATIONS

The impact of QQI's CINNTE review as a catalyst for further quality enhancement initiatives and the effective use of CINNTE review to support strategic planning is evidenced across the AQRs. The AQRs reveal a range of approaches to self-evaluation, highlighting both common challenges and diverse strategies employed in responding to the external review recommendations. While all institutions acknowledge the CINNTE review as a significant opportunity for self-reflection and improvement, the level of detail provided regarding the implementation of recommendations varies across the reports. The reports highlight the importance of developing comprehensive implementation plans in response to review recommendations with clear timelines, responsibilities, and mechanisms for monitoring progress.

Technological University of the Shannon (TUS)

The TUS AQR details their 2023-2024 QQI CINNTE Institutional Review. The process began with a comprehensive self-evaluation resulting in an Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) submitted in February 2024. This was followed by a site visit in April 2024, involving interactions with approximately 270 stakeholders.

The QQI CINNTE Institutional Review Report, published in October 2024, highlighted several strengths: strong governance, effective quality systems, a collaborative vision, and dedication to supporting students and staff. The report also included 15 recommendations, focusing on areas such as developing a unified operational model, providing additional support for Heads of Departments, improving student communication strategies, and prioritizing workforce planning and staff wellbeing.

In response, TUS began developing a CINNTE Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), continuing dialogue with stakeholders to implement the recommendations. The review process overall demonstrated TUS's progress in building robust quality assurance systems and its commitment to ongoing enhancement.

2. IQA SYSTEM ENHANCEMENT AND IMPACTS

USE OF DATA, QA INDICATORS AND BENCHMARKING

All fifteen AQRs demonstrate the use of data in various aspects of institutional operations, reflecting a growing trend towards data-driven decision-making in Irish HEs, though the level of sophistication in data analysis and the integration of data into strategic planning and quality enhancement activities varies considerably across institutions.

The reports reference a wide range of data types, including, student data (such as enrolment, progression, retention, graduate outcomes and feedback surveys), staff data (such as demographics, training and development participation, staff wellbeing surveys), financial data (budgets, income from various sources), data related to research activities (such as research funding, publications, collaborations, knowledge transfer activities), and external data (such as national student surveys, international rankings).

While many institutions utilise various QA indicators, there's a lack of standardisation across the sector. Benchmarking is widely employed, but the selection of benchmarks and the depth of analysis vary. There is potential for improvement in data literacy, the development of standardised indicators, and the integration of data-driven decision-making across all aspects of institutional operations. The examples of notable practice below demonstrate how institutions can effectively leverage data, indicators, and benchmarking to enhance quality assurance and achieve strategic objectives.

- MTU's use of the HEA System Performance Framework to align its performance objectives with national priorities and its own strategic plan demonstrates a strong connection between data, indicators, and strategic decision-making,
- DCU's development of Power BI dashboards to enhance strategic business intelligence showcases effective data visualization for decision-making,
- TUS's comprehensive use of KPIs and metrics to monitor the implementation of its strategic plan demonstrates a robust approach to data-driven decision-making,
- DkIT's use of a data analytics graduate to create an interactive dashboard for presenting Graduate Outcomes Survey data is an example of leveraging specialised skills to enhance data analysis and visualisation,
- UCD's implementation of a new risk management system and the use of Tableau for data analytics demonstrate a commitment to improving data management and analysis capabilities,
- RCSI's use of Student Pulse surveys and their "You said, we did" campaign to close the feedback loop effectively demonstrates a commitment to using student feedback to inform decision-making.

University College Cork (UCC)

The UCC AQR describes a sophisticated approach to data-driven quality enhancement. It emphasises the use of diverse data sources, including both quantitative and qualitative indicators, and the integration of data analysis into strategic planning and decision-making. The report highlights the use of data visualisation tools (Power BI) to make data more accessible and understandable for stakeholders, facilitating data-driven decision-making. Benchmarking against national and international standards is also a key component of their approach. The impact of this data-driven approach is demonstrated through measurable improvements in various areas, such as graduation rates, employment rates, and CO2 emissions.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The AQRs detail a range of digital transformation activities across the different institutions. These initiatives are often funded by programs like N-TUTORR and Technological Sector Advancement Fund (TSAF), highlighting a national focus on this area.

Student Record Management Systems (SRMS)

- Several institutions report on significant upgrades or migrations to new Student Record Management Systems. These projects involve substantial investment, complex data migration, aiming to improve efficiency, data integration, and the overall student experience. Challenges frequently cited include aligning legacy systems and managing the transition.

Learning Management Systems (LMS) and Digital Learning Platforms

- Many institutions describe upgrades or implementations of new Learning Management Systems (LMS), often Canvas or Moodle. These upgrades aim to create a more unified and accessible learning environment, often incorporating features for enhanced accessibility and integration with other systems. Some institutions also report on the development of bespoke digital learning platforms or resources.

Online Assessment and Feedback Tools

- The use of digital tools for assessment and feedback is widespread. Several institutions mention using online assessment platforms, often integrated with their LMS, to streamline the assessment process and provide more timely feedback to students. There's also a growing focus on addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by generative AI in assessment design.

Other Digital Initiatives

- A variety of other digital initiatives are mentioned, including the development of student apps.

Across all institutions, common challenges associated with digital transformation include the complex integration of legacy systems, the logistical and technical difficulties of migrating data to new platforms, and the ongoing need to train staff to effectively use new technologies. Resource constraints, such as limited funding and competing priorities, were also noted, while the rise of GenAI tools has presented both opportunities and challenges, requiring institutions to adapt policies and practices.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE, ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORTS

The 2024 AQRs demonstrate that Irish HEIs are prioritising enhancing the student experience, engagement and support, responding to both pre-existing challenges and those exacerbated by the ongoing cost-of-living and accommodation crisis, and the evolving digital landscape. The impact of the cost-of-living crisis and accommodation shortages was a recurring theme with institutions acknowledging the challenges faced by students in finding affordable and suitable housing.

Significant efforts were made to improve student engagement through diverse feedback mechanisms, including surveys, focus groups, and in-class feedback sessions. A strong emphasis was placed on closing the feedback loop, with institutions actively communicating actions taken in response to student input. Many HEIs embraced student-as-partners approaches, involving students in curriculum development, assessment design, and quality enhancement projects. Extracurricular activities, including clubs, societies, sports, and volunteering opportunities, were also highlighted as key contributors to a positive student experience.

Learner support services were significantly enhanced, with institutions expanding their offerings in academic support (writing centres, maths support, learning support centres), wellbeing services (counselling, health services, disability services), and career development (counselling, work placements, employability skills training). Many institutions utilised online platforms to provide accessible resources and peer support, particularly in the area of mental health. The increasing use of digital tools and platforms to deliver support services was a notable trend. Several institutions also highlighted initiatives to address the digital divide and ensure equitable access to technology for all students.

TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

The AQRs reveal a widespread commitment across Irish HEIs to enhancing teaching, learning, and assessment practices. A significant trend is the ongoing digital transformation of the educational landscape, with institutions investing in upgraded Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) and exploring various technology-enhanced learning tools. This includes the integration of interactive online resources, virtual laboratories, and, increasingly, the use of AI tools to support teaching and learning. However, the reports also highlight concerns regarding the ethical use of AI in assessment and the importance of maintaining academic integrity in this evolving context.

University of Galway: Student Experience and Support

The University of Galway's commitment to student success is evident in its multifaceted approach to student support and its strategic integration of digital technologies to enhance the student experience. This case study highlights key initiatives implemented during the 2023-2024 academic year, focusing on the interplay between holistic support services and digital transformation. The university implemented several key initiatives to improve student wellbeing and engagement:

Holistic Support Services: The University offers a comprehensive range of support services, including:

- **Access Centre:** Providing support for students from underrepresented groups, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, mature students, and students with disabilities. This includes initiatives like the Uni4U programme for primary school students and professional mentoring partnerships with industry.
- **Disability Support Service (DSS):** Offering a wide range of supports and accommodations for students with disabilities, including assistive technology training and alternative assessment formats. The university's achievement of ADHD-friendly university designation highlights its commitment to inclusivity.
- **Student Counselling Service:** Providing confidential mental health and wellbeing support to students, including a daily drop-in service and a range of awareness-raising initiatives.
- **Pastoral Care:** Offering a range of support services to students, including individual consultations, workshops, and social events.
- **Learning Support Service:** Providing academic skills support to students through tutorials, workshops, and online resources.
- **Career Development Centre:** Offering career guidance, workshops, and one-to-one consultations to help students prepare for their future careers. This includes initiatives like the CÉIM programme for first-year students.
- **Multi-Sensory Room:** Providing a calming and stimulating space for students who need sensory regulation.

Digital Transformation: The university also leveraged digital tools to enhance student support:

- **Cara: AI-powered Virtual Assistant:** Providing 24/7 access to information and support, directing students to appropriate resources and services.
- **Student Digital Pathways (SDP):** Integrating various digital tools to provide a holistic record of student skills and achievements enhancing employability and lifelong learning.
- **Tús Maith Online Hub:** Providing a centralised online resource for first-year students.

The integrated approach to student support and digital transformation has yielded several positive outcomes, including improved student wellbeing, enhanced student engagement, increased inclusivity and improved student success.

MTU AQR 2025: SUCCEED Programme

SUCCEED is a university-wide initiative that transforms StudentSurvey.ie data into actionable insights to improve teaching, learning, assessment, and student engagement. The programme's unique mapping of initiatives to survey indicators, and its focus on closing the feedback loop, demonstrates an innovative approach to data-driven decision-making and student-centred enhancement. The measurable improvements in StudentSurvey.ie scores further highlight the programme's impact.

Atlantic Technological University (ATU) Breakfast Club

ATU, facing challenges related to the accommodation crisis and cost-of-living pressures, sought to create a welcoming and supportive campus environment for its geographically dispersed student population.

The ATU Breakfast Club, initially launched on the Sligo campus, provided a complimentary breakfast to students each Tuesday morning. This initiative aimed to address several student needs: providing a comfortable space for students commuting long distances, offering a small but meaningful contribution to alleviate financial pressures, creating a social space on campus, and providing opportunities for nutritional advice.

The Breakfast Club proved highly successful, with significant attendance from both domestic and international students. Its success led to the establishment of similar breakfast clubs on other ATU campuses, demonstrating the initiative's scalability and positive impact on student wellbeing and sense of community.

Alongside technological advancements, many institutions emphasised the adoption of active learning pedagogies, including problem-based, case-based, and project-based learning, to foster deeper student engagement and understanding. The integration of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to create more inclusive learning environments was also a recurring theme.

Significant efforts were made to improve assessment practices, with a move towards more authentic assessment methods that better reflect real-world applications of knowledge and skills. Institutions emphasised the importance of providing timely and constructive feedback to students, often utilising online tools and personalised feedback reports.

Programmatic reviews were frequently mentioned as a key mechanism for evaluating and enhancing teaching, learning, and assessment at the programme level. The reports also highlight the crucial role of staff development in supporting these changes, with many institutions offering professional development opportunities in areas such as

teaching methodologies, assessment design, and the effective use of technology in education. Communities of practice are also utilised to foster collaboration and knowledge sharing among teaching staff.

Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin): Implementing the University Education Model (UEM)

The UEM is a central component of TU Dublin's Strategic Intent, aiming to create a more student-centred, digitally enhanced, and impactful learning experience. It's grounded in the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and seeks to prepare graduates for the demands of a rapidly changing world. During the reporting period the focus was on creating awareness, advancing embedded practices and further integrating UEM across the institution.

The UEM's implementation involved a multi-pronged strategy:

- **Awareness and Buy-in:** A high-profile launch event and targeted workshops across all Professional Services and Vice-President Office groups aimed to build awareness and secure buy-in from all stakeholders. The workshops were tailored to the specific needs and contexts of each functional area, fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration.
- **Learner Engagement:** The establishment of the TU Dublin Learner Assembly provided a formal structure for regular, structured learner engagement. This initiative aimed to ensure that student voices directly informed the UEM's development and implementation. The Assembly's framework and initial report documented the approach and lessons learned, providing a foundation for future iterations.
- **Faculty and School Integration:** Faculty and School leaders received support in interpreting and implementing UEM goals, facilitating the integration of UEM principles into daily operations. Workshops and resources were provided to guide this process, ensuring alignment across the university.
- **Governance and Coordination:** A dedicated UEM Oversight Group to oversee the implementation process, coordinate activities, and ensure alignment with university-wide initiatives.
- **Strategic Alignment:** The UEM team actively contributed to university-wide strategic initiatives including the development of Graduate Attributes, Assessment Principles, and the Liberal Arts programme. This ensures synergy and coherence across the university's strategic goals.

While the UEM's implementation has been largely successful, some challenges were encountered including balancing the demands of the UEM with existing workloads and resource limitations.

TU Dublin's UEM implementation demonstrates a comprehensive and strategic approach to educational transformation. The multi-faceted strategy, encompassing stakeholder engagement, learner participation, and strategic alignment, has yielded significant progress towards creating a more student-centred, digitally enhanced, and impactful learning experience.

WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING (WIL)

Several of the AQRs mention work-integrated learning (WIL), although the terminology and scope of activities vary across institutions. While some institutions reference quality assurance processes related to work placements and work-integrated learning, the specific approaches and level of detail varies. Several AQRs mention work placements/WIL but do not provide specific information on quality assurance processes in the AQR. Across the reports, some common themes emerge regarding the quality assurance of work placements, these include, **employer partnerships:** strong relationships with employers are crucial for ensuring high-quality placement opportunities; **student preparation:** Providing students with adequate preparation for placements is emphasised; **monitoring and evaluation:** mechanisms for monitoring student experiences and evaluating placement effectiveness, this often involves collecting feedback from students and employers; **addressing challenges:** the reports acknowledge challenges such as increasing demand for placements, ensuring equitable access, and managing the logistical aspects of placements.

- DkIT provides an overview of its work placement processes. The report includes statistics on placement numbers, preparation activities, and feedback mechanisms. The integration of placement preparation into programme boards and the use of graduate outcome surveys to assess placement impact are highlighted. Challenges in engaging students with online placement resources are also acknowledged.
- IADT highlights the importance of industry links and practical experience for students. Again, while not explicitly using “work-integrated learning,” the described activities clearly fall under this umbrella.
- MTU’s AQR mentions its *Ready Steady Work* programme, a placement programme for under-represented groups, demonstrating a commitment to WIL with a focus on equity and inclusion.
- TUS AQR mentions work placements within the context of its programmes. The report details a new collaborative programme with further education institutions that includes a work placement component. The report also highlights the role of Erasmus+ in facilitating international work placements.
- The University of Galway AQR describes numerous activities that align with WIL principles, particularly within the context of student placements and engagement with external partners. The report details the work placement programme emphasising its role in student employability and the efforts made to enhance the quality of placement experiences. The report also highlights the importance of partnerships with external organisations, many of which provide opportunities for students to gain practical and apply their learning in real-world settings
- UCC’s AQR details its work in developing a strategic framework for Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). The report outlines the mapping of existing WIL practices, identifies challenges such as staff resourcing and supervision, and describes the development of a framework to ensure consistent, high-quality WIL experiences for students. The adoption of the InPlace software system to manage WIL activities is also highlighted.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE (COP)

Staff development and communities of practice are significant themes across the AQRs. A wide range of professional development opportunities were offered to staff, encompassing both accredited programmes leading to formal qualifications and non-accredited initiatives such as workshops, seminars, and online courses. These initiatives frequently focused on enhancing teaching methodologies, assessment design, digital literacy, inclusive practices, and leadership skills. Formal mentoring programmes were also widely implemented to support staff career progression and peer learning.

The strategic use of CoPs emerged as a key mechanism for fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing among staff across various disciplines and roles. These collaborative spaces enabled staff to share best practices, address common challenges, and drive innovation in teaching and learning. While CoPs proved highly effective in many institutions, the reports also acknowledged challenges related to time constraints and maintaining consistent engagement among participants.

TU Dublin: Communities of Practice (CoPs) for Staff Development

TU Dublin's structured approach to supporting CoPs is a notable initiative. Thirteen CoPs were supported in 2023-2024, covering diverse areas from authentic assessment to race equity. The university provided training for facilitators, held regular meetings for knowledge sharing, and actively sought to address challenges such as time constraints and engagement levels. This structured approach, combined with the provision of resources like a facilitator's guide, demonstrates a commitment to fostering a culture of collaboration across the university.

UCC: School Managers' Community of Practice

UCC's School Managers' community of practice was established in response to a recommendation from the CINTE institutional review. The CoP brings together school managers from across the university to share best practices, discuss challenges, and develop solutions. The CoP's agility in responding to emerging issues, such as new financial controls, and its contribution to improving processes (e.g., external examiner access to assessment materials) demonstrate its value in supporting both individual development and institutional effectiveness. The dissemination of the CoP's work through a poster presentation at a good practice symposium highlights a commitment to sharing learnings across the wider university community.

2.1 ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND RESPONSE TO GENAI

The fifteen AQRs reveal a range of responses to the challenges and opportunities presented by Generative AI (GenAI) and a widespread commitment to upholding academic integrity. While approaches vary across institutions, several common themes emerge:

POLICY AND GUIDANCE DEVELOPMENT

- Many institutions developed or updated their academic integrity policies to explicitly address the use of GenAI tools. This often involved defining what constitutes misuse of AI in academic work and outlining the consequences of such actions. Several institutions referenced national guidelines (e.g., NAIN) in their policy updates.
- Guidance documents and FAQs were created to support both students and staff in understanding the ethical use of GenAI. These resources often included examples of appropriate and inappropriate AI use, clarifying expectations and reducing ambiguity.

TRAINING AND AWARENESS INITIATIVES

- Numerous institutions implemented training programs to educate students and staff on academic integrity in the context of GenAI. These initiatives ranged from online modules and workshops to in-person sessions and presentations. Some institutions used digital badges to track completion and recognize participation.
- Many institutions held dedicated Academic Integrity Weeks or similar events to raise awareness and promote discussion around academic integrity and the responsible use of AI. These events often included workshops, presentations by experts, and opportunities for students and staff to engage with the topic.

TECHNOLOGICAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

- Several institutions utilised plagiarism detection software (e.g., Turnitin) to detect AI-generated content, although the limitations of such software in identifying sophisticated AI-generated text were acknowledged.
- Some institutions explored or implemented new tools to address contract cheating and collusion recognising the growing prevalence of these forms of academic misconduct.

ASSESSMENT REDESIGN

Institutions recognised the need to adapt assessment strategies to mitigate the risks associated with GenAI. This involved exploring alternative assessment methods, such as more in-class assessments, oral examinations, and project-based assignments, that are less susceptible to AI misuse. Some institutions provided guidance and resources to support faculty in redesigning assessments.

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

- Many institutions actively participated in national and international networks focused on academic integrity, such as the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN). This collaboration facilitated the sharing of best practices, resources, and insights.

The AQRs demonstrate a widespread recognition of the need to adapt to the challenges posed by GenAI while maintaining high standards of academic integrity. Institutions are employing a multi-pronged approach, combining policy development, training, technological tools, assessment redesign, and collaboration to address this evolving issue. The emphasis on proactive measures, such as education and assessment redesign, alongside reactive measures, such as plagiarism detection and misconduct procedures, suggests a holistic and comprehensive approach to ensuring academic integrity in the age of GenAI.

Trinity College Dublin: Approach to Academic Integrity

Trinity College Dublin's 2025 Annual Quality Report (AQR) details several initiatives related to academic integrity in the context of generative AI. Key elements include:

- **ICAI-McCabe Survey:** Administration of the International Centre for Academic Integrity (ICAI)-McCabe Survey of Attitudes towards Academic Integrity to assess student and staff perceptions.
- **Academic Integrity Week:** Hosting of an Academic Integrity Week with keynote presentations and workshops for students and staff.
- **LibGuide and Website Updates:** Updates to the Library's LibGuide on Academic Integrity and creation of a dedicated webpage on the Academic Affairs website with resources on academic integrity.
- **New Academic Misconduct Procedure:** Piloting of a new academic misconduct procedure, with feedback informing revisions before full implementation.
- **Policy Updates:** Updates to the Plagiarism policy (renamed Academic Integrity policy), Programme Handbook policy, and Curriculum Glossary.
- **Planned College Statement on GenAI:** Plans to finalise a College statement on the use of AI/GenAI in teaching, learning, and research

2.2 PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW

Programme development and review processes across the institutions as reporting in the AQRs demonstrate a commitment to quality assurance and enhancement. Though there are significant variations in approach, reflecting differing institutional contexts, strategic priorities, and resource availability. The technological universities continue to grapple with challenges related to integration following establishment, other challenges

include digital transformation, and the need to adapt to a rapidly changing higher education landscape.

Common themes in programme development include: **alignment with strategic objectives** - with most institutions explicitly linking programme development to their strategic plans; **stakeholder engagement** - illustrating the importance of involving various stakeholders in programme development; **flexible learning pathways** – the importance of flexible learning pathways, including micro-credentials and blended learning is highlighted by many institutions; **digital transformation** – the integration of digital technologies into programme development and delivery is a recurring theme; and **programme review** – several institutions mention programmatic review as a key mechanism for evaluating existing programmes and informing future development.

- **ATU:** The incorporation of St. Angela's College into ATU required significant programme integration and the development of a unified Quality Assurance and Enhancement framework, this is further expanded on below.
- **DCU:** DCU Futures initiative involved the launch of new interdisciplinary undergraduate programmes and the development of a transversal skills framework. This initiative demonstrates a commitment to innovative pedagogies and the development of future-ready graduates.
- **DkIT:** DkIT's programme development and review processes are central to its quality assurance framework, ensuring programmes align with evolving academic and professional standards. New programmes undergo evaluation against established criteria, identifying areas for enhancement. Programme changes are categorised as minor, structural, or major, determining the level of review required. The resulting reports inform iterative improvements in programme design and delivery. Programmatic reviews, encompassing multiple programmes, are planned for 2024/25 and 2025/26.
- **IADT:** During the reporting period, IADT engaged in extensive programme development and review. The transition to a semesterised academic calendar necessitated substantial revisions to programmes and updates to institutional systems. This process was carried out through a phased strategy, involving thorough planning and active stakeholder consultation.
- **NUI:** The NUI AQR details several activities related to programme development and review. A review of policies and quality mechanisms concerning NUI degrees and qualifications resulted in proposals presented to the Senate, these included considerations of minimum contribution to collaborative degrees and actions from the CINNTE Institutional Implementation Plan. The Senate approved a review of NUI Grade Descriptors, and a proposal to review the approval of QA procedures in recognised colleges was approved and published.
- **MTU:** MTU's CINNTE Institutional Review highlighted the importance of establishing a unified institutional QA infrastructure and a strategic approach to programme portfolio management. The review's recommendations are informing ongoing programme development and enhancement activities.

- **TU Dublin:** TU Dublin's implementation of a new Student Records Management System (SRMS) is a major digital transformation initiative that will impact programme management and data reporting.
- **Trinity College Dublin:** Trinity's Postgraduate Renewal Programme involved a phased approach to programme enhancement, focusing on clarifying processes, improving student and staff experiences, and integrating interdisciplinary, international, and intersectoral opportunities.
- **TUS:** The TUS AQR outlines a number of new programmes (postgraduate and undergraduate) and differential validations approved during the reporting period. A thematic analysis with common themes emerging from external validation panels was conducted. Special purpose awards and micro-credentials were introduced across various departments.
- **UCC:** UCC's work on work-integrated learning (WIL) highlights the challenges and opportunities of embedding real-world learning experiences into the curriculum.
- **UCD:** UCD's RESET initiative focuses on enhancing student wellbeing and resilience through workshops and the integration of wellbeing into the curriculum.
- **University of Galway:** The University of Galway's revised undergraduate medical programme demonstrates a shift towards a more clinically contextualised, competency-based curriculum with a strong emphasis on student-centred learning and longitudinal clinical placements.
- **UL:** UL's establishment of the Limerick International College at Henan Polytechnic University (LICHPU) illustrates a successful model for transnational education.

The following short summaries from two AQRs demonstrate the strong commitment of institutions to programme development and review with differences in emphasis and scope.

RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences

- **New Programme Development:** The AQR highlights the establishment of a new School of Dentistry and the development of a Bachelor of Dental Surgery programme. This involved significant planning, stakeholder engagement (including a Programme Steering Group and Curriculum Committee), alignment with national accreditation standards (Dental Council of Ireland), and collaboration with a curriculum partner (University of Plymouth/Peninsula Dental School). The report also mentions the approval of several new postgraduate programmes by the Awards & Qualifications Committee, demonstrating a proactive approach to expanding its programme portfolio.
- **Curriculum Review and Enhancement:** The School of Medicine's ongoing evaluation and refinement of its new medical curriculum (Years 1 and 2) is highlighted. This includes data-driven adjustments based on student feedback and a focus on personalised feedback mechanisms. Similar curriculum reviews and enhancements are mentioned for the School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular and the School of Physiotherapy.

South East Technological University (SETU):

- **Alignment with Strategic Plan:** SETU explicitly links its quality assurance and enhancement activities to its strategic plan, "Connecting for Impact". The five strategic themes for QA directly support the University's broader strategic objectives.
- **Development of a Unitary Framework:** A significant focus is on establishing a unified quality assurance and governance framework, including the development of new Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes. This involved aligning core academic policies and processes across previously separate institutions.
- **Phased Implementation of Semesterisation:** The implementation of a semesterised academic calendar is presented as a major undertaking, involving a three-phase plan. This highlights the significant effort required to align programmes and systems with a new academic structure.
- **Programme Validations and Reviews:** The AQR details several programme validations and reviews conducted during the reporting period. The report also notes that all undergraduate programmes were reviewed and revised as necessary in preparation for the semesterisation process.
- **Micro-credentials:** SETU highlights the development of a new programme development and quality assurance process for micro-credentials reflecting the growing importance of short, flexible learning pathways.

2.3 RESEARCH ACTIVITIES AND DEVELOPMENTS

Ensuring the quality and integrity of research is paramount for the public Irish higher education institutions. The AQRs illustrate diverse strategies employed in managing research activities, fostering research integrity, supporting postgraduate researchers and measuring research impact. The reports demonstrate the strategic alignment of research and the integration of research into both broader institutional strategies and national policy objectives. While there is evidence of a strong commitment to research quality assurance across the institutions, there is considerable variation in the specific mechanisms and approaches employed. The AQRs reveal that many institutions are actively engaged in the ongoing development and enhancement of their QA frameworks, including those elements for the QA of research. This suggests a commitment to continuous improvement in research quality and impact. The following are the core themes emerging from the AQRs.

Many institutions highlight the enhancement of research governance structures, policies and procedures in their AQRs, and the further development of research activities.

RESEARCH ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

- Public HEIs are updating and refining research ethics policies and procedures to address evolving challenges, changes in legislation, and the needs of postgraduate research. This includes the creation of new policies, such as those relating to academic integrity and guidance on the use of emerging technologies. All institutions demonstrate a significant commitment to research integrity, evidenced by the presence of research ethics committees, policies on research misconduct, and training initiatives for staff and researchers.

RESEARCH INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

- Several institutions report on implementing or upgrading their research information management system to improve data management and reporting. The creation and improvement of institutional repositories to ensure open access to research outputs also emerges as theme.

University of Galway: Quality Assurance of Research Activities and Programmes

The **IRRP2024** is a peer-reviewed research assessment process at the University of Galway, where distinguished international reviewers evaluate the quality of each School's research. This evaluation compares the School's research standing with international best practices, adhering to the principles of the [Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment](#).

In addition to rating research quality, reviewers provide feedback on School performance, taking into account staffing, resources, and the broader environment, with particular attention to the impacts of Covid-19. For each assessment, Schools submit: (1) research outputs, (2) a research environment report, and (3) impact case studies. Reviewers base their quality ratings on these three core components of research performance. The **QA004 IRRP2024** document outlines the policy and procedures established by the IRRP Steering Group and approved by Academic Council.

Panel chairs have been appointed to oversee this three-year process:

Year 1: Schools completed their submissions by 21 June 2024, providing a total of 652 research outputs and 22 impact case studies. Each research output will be evaluated by two readers, while impact case studies and research environment reports will be assessed by the panel chair and overall chair. Over 70 readers will participate in the assessments between October and February/March, with the goal of finalizing review reports before the end of the 2024/25 academic year.

Year 2: Schools are at the preliminary stages, with submissions due by 20 June 2025.

Research Information and Management System

The university's Information Solutions and Support (ISS) team prioritises IT support for the research community. A dedicated IT research advisory resource works closely with the Research Office, Institutes, and Colleges.

In 2023/2024, ISS assisted in implementing Phase 1 of the Research Information Management System (RIMS) by deploying the Elsevier PURE system.

RIMS is comprised of two main elements:

- I. **Research Information System:** This system captures and presents the full scope of research activities, outputs, impacts, and collaborations to both internal and external audiences. It provides a comprehensive, user-friendly portal for managing and displaying research activities, consolidating profiles, publications, awards, and more at both individual and organizational levels. Its customizable reporting capabilities offer valuable insights and analytics.

- II. **Research Grant Management System:** This system streamlines the management of research grants, from identifying funding opportunities to internal review and approval workflows, and from contract initiation through to project completion and closure.

A sophisticated and customisable reporting function is central to both components. The profile and portal aspect of the system is scheduled to launch by the end of March 2025, with development of the grant management element to commence thereafter and an anticipated implementation within twelve months.

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENT SUPPORT

- The AQRs reflect a wide range of activities reflecting the institutions' commitment to supporting postgraduate students. Activities reported include improving supervision guidelines and providing enhanced support for supervisors and students, and training in research skills and methodologies, professional development for supervisors and staff, and collecting and acting on student feedback to enhance the postgraduate student experience.

DKIT response to postgraduate student feedback

As part of the DKIT's commitment to continuous improvement, postgraduate research students were invited to provide feedback on areas for enhancement within their research programme and associated support services. The responses highlighted several key themes, including Financial Support, Training and Development, Career Support, Community and Networking, Supervisory Oversight, Administrative Support, Research Infrastructure and General Satisfaction. DKIT's QA Improvement and Enhancement Plans include planned actions relating to the postgraduate research experience for the reporting period 2024/2025.

RESEARCH IMPACT AND COLLABORATION

Research impact and collaboration emerge as central and cross-cutting themes across different sections of the AQR, with a strong emphasis on inter-institutional partnerships, industry-academia links, community engagement, and participation in international networks. Institutions actively seek to translate research into policy influence, community benefit, and commercial innovation, while also striving to develop metrics for assessing research outcomes, challenges remain around consistently measuring impact.

Overall, the thematic analysis reveals a sector-wide commitment to enhancing research impact through collaborative approaches. The variation in strategies and challenges

faced by different institutions highlights the importance of context-specific initiatives and ongoing adaptation to maximise the societal and economic contributions of research.

- The **University of Galway AQR** identifies a number of research partnerships, with regional, national and international impact, these include
 - National Parks and Wildlife Service: A partnership to enhance research and learning in the Burren
 - UN Food & Agriculture Organisation: Collaboration on climate-smart food systems
 - Galway International Arts Festival and Deloitte Ireland: Strategic partnerships to support interdisciplinary research and innovation
- **UCC AQR** demonstrates significant progress in research impact and collaboration, particularly through its strategic focus on sustainability and European research funding. Notable collaborations including a Memorandum of Understanding with EirGrid to support Ireland's transition to a zero-emissions electricity system.

IADT ELEVATE

IADT successfully secured funding under the TU RISE scheme in 2023. The IADT ELEVATE programme, initiated in January 2024, aims to shape the innovation agenda for the creative and cultural sectors as outlined in IADT's strategy. The programme will run until 31 December 2027.

Since its inception, the programme has welcomed its first PhD candidates and facilitated a research collaboration between IADT and Maynooth University (MU) through a Memorandum of Agreement. The projects align closely with the ELEVATE project plan and the Creation Bridges programmes, which focus on screen, design, and policy, aiming to generate positive social change.

The programme plans to recruit six 'creation bridge leads', three post-doctoral fellows, and three masters' by research candidates. Several key staff, including an industry liaison officer, technician, and programme manager, have already been recruited, with additional roles to be filled in due course.

The University Industry Innovation Network (UIIN) will host an online training programme, "Impactful Researchers", tailored for IADT staff. This programme aims to enhance the commercial, creative, and societal impact of their research through external engagement, alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and effective communication strategies.

Overall, this initiative represents a significant development for research at IADT.

3. ADDITIONAL CROSS CUTTING THEMES

FUNDING

The AQRs from public higher education institutions demonstrate that funding is a universal consideration, though the depth and focus of discussion differs. Some reports highlight funding secured for particular initiatives, while others delve into ongoing funding challenges or stress the critical role of various funding sources in supporting institutional operations and strategic priorities.

Collectively, the reports portray a complex funding environment for HEIs, with institutions accessing a wide array of revenue streams. These include core exchequer funding, targeted grants provided by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), European Union funding, competitive research grants, support through industry partnerships, and philanthropic contributions.

FUNDING FOR INTEGRATION AND TRANSFORMATION

- Several institutions, particularly the newly formed technological universities highlight the funding challenges of integration and transformation needs of the TUs. These include merging IT systems, Human Resources (HR) systems, student record systems, and aligning policies and procedures. While substantial funding was secured through streams like the Technological University Transition Fund (TUTF), TSAF, TU RISE, N-TUTORR, and SATLE⁸, a recurring theme is the time-limited nature of these grants. Although funding supported crucial initiatives such as system upgrades, staff development, and student support, institutions highlighted the need for more sustainable, long-term funding models to support the ongoing integration and development of the TUs.

FUNDING FOR SPECIFIC INITIATIVES

- Institutions drew on multiple funding sources to support strategic goals in quality assurance, digital transformation, and student support during the reporting period. The N-TUTORR programme emerged a critical enabler for system-wide digital and academic integrity improvements. HEA funding underpinned a wide spectrum of initiatives, while European Commission funding supported international partnerships and mobility programmes such as Erasmus+. The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education also funded teaching and learning projects.

FUNDING FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

- Within the AQRs, the HEIs reported significant success in securing research funding from diverse sources, including the ERC⁹, Horizon Europe, SFI¹⁰ and HEA schemes (TU RISE, TSAF). These funds supported various activities, including,

⁸ Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement

⁹ European Research Council

¹⁰ Science Foundation Ireland

establishing new research centres, recruiting researchers, developing research infrastructure, and fostering collaborations with industry partners. Institutions consistently emphasised the need for sustained investment in research capacity and diversified funding models to ensure the long-term sustainability of research excellence.

AQRs consistently demonstrate that securing adequate and sustainable funding remains a concern for public HEIs.

Dublin City University (DCU)

The DCU 2025 AQR details various funding aspects, primarily focusing on internal quality enhancement initiatives and participation in external European projects.

Internal Funding Initiatives:

- **Quality Improvement and Development Fund (QuID):** This is a significant internal funding mechanism established in 2012, designed to support community-led quality enhancement initiatives across the university. The fund operates through an open call for proposals, with an annual theme selected by the Quality Promotion Committee, aligning with strategic priorities or contemporary issues. In 2024, the theme focused on 'Transitioning AI from a Threat to a Tool' leading to 11 funded projects out of 19 applications. Since its inception, QuID has supported 165 projects, demonstrating its role in fostering innovation and excellence through modest investments.

External and Project-Specific Funding:

- **ECIU Alliance Funding:** DCU's involvement in the European Consortium of Innovative Universities (ECIU) has attracted significant external funding. The ECIUn+ project, a second phase initiative, secured Erasmus+ funds for its operations from November 2022 to October 2026. Additionally, staff mobilities within the ECIU framework received funding from Erasmus+, the ECIU Researchers Mobility Fund, and individual School funding. The university also reported receiving support funds from the HEA in 2024 for ECIU activities.
- **H2020 SMART-ER Project:** DCU was an active partner in the H2020 'Science with and for Society' (SwafS) project, SMART-ER, which concluded in early 2024. This project delivered various initiatives, including seed funding, citizen science, and a training academy.
- **DCU Futures Project:** This ambitious project, aimed at reimagining undergraduate education, represents a substantial €19.9 million investment. Its oversight falls under the Strategic Learning Innovation Projects (SLIP) steering group, which is accountable to the HEA for project delivery.

- **Erasmus+ INTEGRITY Project:** The DCU Teaching Enhancement Unit collaborated on the INTEGRITY project, funded under the Erasmus+ KA2 strand, focusing on enhancing academic integrity in teaching and learning processes.
- **QQI 'Rethinking Assessment Initiative':** Funding from this QQI initiative supported the development of DCU's approaches and guidance for Interactive Oral Assessment.

DCU's report highlights a dual approach to funding including internal mechanisms like o foster grassroots quality enhancement and active participation in larger, externally funded projects to advance strategic objectives.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Institutions are developing or implementing new digital platforms and tools to enhance various aspects of their operations. Examples include institutional repositories for research outputs, online career services platforms, and dedicated student engagement apps.

These key developments demonstrate a broad commitment to leveraging digital technologies to enhance the quality of education, research, and administrative processes in higher education. However, the pace and scope of implementation vary significantly across institutions, reflecting differences in resources, priorities, and existing infrastructure. Key developments include:

STUDENT RECORD SYSTEM (SRS) MODERNISATION AND INTEGRATION

- A major focus across multiple institutions is the upgrade and/or integration of student record management systems. This often involves migrating from outdated, unsupported systems to modern, cloud-based platforms (e.g., Banner 9 at ATU, DCU, IADT, MTU, and TUD). The aim is to improve data management, reporting capabilities, and the overall student experience by streamlining administrative processes. This is a significant undertaking, often involving complex data migration and integration challenges.

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (CRM) SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATION AND INTEGRATION

- Several institutions are implementing or integrating CRM systems to enhance communication and engagement with prospective and current students. This allows for more personalised interactions, improved tracking of applications, and better management of student support services. The integration of CRM with existing student record systems is a key aspect of this development.

ENHANCED LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (LMS)

- While many institutions already utilise LMS (e.g., Moodle, Brightspace, Canvas), there's a trend towards upgrading to newer versions or implementing new features to improve the learning experience. This includes incorporating interactive elements, accessibility features, and tools to support various teaching and learning methodologies.

GENERATIVE AI (GENAI) INTEGRATION AND MITIGATION

- The emergence of GenAI has prompted institutions to develop strategies for its responsible integration into teaching, learning, and assessment. This includes developing guidelines for ethical AI use, creating training resources for staff and students, and exploring ways to mitigate the risks of AI misuse in assessment.

DATA ANALYTICS AND REPORTING

- Institutions are increasingly focusing on improving their data collection, analysis, and reporting capabilities. This involves implementing new data visualisation tools (e.g., Power BI), developing dashboards to track key performance indicators, and using data to inform decision-making related to teaching, learning, and institutional operations.

DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY

- Several institutions highlight initiatives to improve digital accessibility and inclusivity for students with disabilities. This includes implementing accessibility checkers for online content, providing assistive technologies, and creating sensory-friendly learning spaces.

PROCESS AUTOMATION AND STREAMLINING

- Institutions are using automation tools (e.g., Power Automate) to streamline administrative processes, such as external examiner nominations, student fee processing, and application management. This improves efficiency, reduces manual workload, and minimises errors.

Digital transformations across the HEIs show varied levels of progress and focus. Several institutions highlight significant investments and implementations, while others describe ongoing projects or plans.

SIGNIFICANT IMPLEMENTATIONS

- ATU AQR demonstrates extensive digital transformation across multiple areas. This includes the integration of core **HR** and finance systems, migration to a new payroll system, and ongoing projects to merge student record systems (Banner) with EduCampus. ATU also rolled out a module management system (AMM) and a research information management system (RIMS) across campuses. A key focus is on CRM integration for admissions and student support.
- DCU successfully launched a new Student Information System (SIS). DCU are developing Power BI dashboards for enhanced business intelligence and are

actively addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by Generative AI (GenAI), including interim guidance on GenAI and assessment.

- IADT's digital transformation is largely focused on infrastructure and process improvements. This includes the construction of a new Digital Media Building and the implementation of a new institutional repository (Illustro). IADT also streamlined direct application processes and implemented improved data upload processes for student fees.
- TUD's significant digital transformation is the planned launch of a unified, cloud-based Student Record Management System (SRMS)D. This involves merging three legacy systems and integrating new modules for enhanced student and staff experiences. They are also developing unitary assessment regulations.

ONGOING PROJECTS AND PLANS

- **DkIT** mentions ongoing system integration projects, highlighting progress on a data reporting platform and the implementation of GURU exam paper management system.
- **MTU's** digital transformation is closely tied to its TU Transformation Programme, with progress made on harmonising finance functions and are working on merging student record systems (MyBan).
- **NUI's** digital transformation focuses on streamlining processes related to matriculation exemptions and external examining.
- **RCSI** has implemented Digitary online credentials system across campuses and is using Synthesia AI for video creation to enhance communications.
- **SETU's** implementation of a semesterised academic calendar, required significant data updates in Banner. SETU also implemented a batch upload process for direct student applications and improved data extraction from the student record system.

CYBERSECURITY

Across the 2025 AQRs, several sector-wide initiatives have emerged in relation to cybersecurity and digital resilience. These initiatives reflect a growing strategic emphasis on safeguarding institutional data, infrastructure, and learning environments in response to evolving digital threats.

STRATEGIC POLICY DEVELOPMENT

- Institutions are formalising cybersecurity governance through the approval of dedicated IT and Cybersecurity Policies, often integrated with broader risk and compliance frameworks.

RISK MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

- Enhanced risk management platforms are being deployed to automate risk tracking, improve transparency, and enable proactive mitigation of digital threats.

INFRASTRUCTURE SECURITY ENHANCEMENTS

- Investments are being made in digital infrastructure upgrades to protect institutional assets and learning environments.

DATA GOVERNANCE AND COMPLIANCE

- New policies governing data retention and digital content management (e.g., within Virtual Learning Environments) are being introduced to ensure compliance with data protection regulations and ethical standards.

CYBERSECURITY AWARENESS AND TRAINING

- Institutions are embedding cybersecurity awareness into staff development programmes, student training, and research integrity modules, often with a focus on ethical digital practices and responsible use of GenAI.

Within the AQRs, there is evidence of contingency planning, system recovery protocols, and infrastructure testing to ensure readiness in the event of a cyber-attack and a maturing approach to cybersecurity across the sector, with institutions moving towards preventative frameworks.

Trinity College Dublin

TCD demonstrated a structured and strategic approach to cybersecurity during the 2023–2024 reporting period, embedding digital resilience within institutional governance and operational systems. A new IT and Cyber Security Policy was approved in June 2024, reflecting the university’s commitment to safeguarding its digital infrastructure.

To strengthen risk oversight, Trinity introduced a university-wide Risk Management System in early 2023. This system, according to the AQR, “automates risk tracking, enhances transparency, and supports proactive mitigation of digital threats” and was developed with extensive stakeholder input and accompanied by targeted training to ensure effective implementation.

Physical and digital infrastructure security was further reinforced through the installation of a new access control system in the library, “integrating gate-based entry and security software to protect collections and study spaces.

Cybersecurity awareness is support through the Digital Learning and Development Team which collaborates across the university to create secure and accessible online learning resources. This team plays a key role in promoting safe digital practices and supporting blended learning environments.

Technological University of the Shannon (TUS)

During the 2023–2024 reporting period, TUS undertook a multi-pronged approach to enhance its cybersecurity posture and digital resilience. Central to this was the establishment of the Digital Technologies Innovation Laboratory (DTIL), which serves as a testbed for emerging technologies and digital tools. The lab supports proactive risk assessment and informs strategic investment in secure digital infrastructure.

Cybersecurity was also embedded within the university's broader governance structures, with oversight provided by the Audit & Risk Subcommittee of the Governing Body. In parallel, the university launched a redesigned website with strict access controls, GDPR-compliant cookie management, and secure data handling protocols.

Through the NTUTORR programme, TUS implemented targeted initiatives to protect academic integrity and digital systems, including piloting e-proctoring, training staff on Generative AI risks, and deploying interactive digital tools to support secure learning environments.

Staff development was prioritised through workshops and campus roadshows focused on ethical technology use and digital risk awareness, contributing to a culture of shared responsibility for cybersecurity across the institution.

RESPONSE TO A CYBER INCIDENT

- The AQR of MTU details a proactive and transparent approach to crisis management in response to a direct cyber-attack in 2023, this is summarised below.

Cybersecurity Response and Recovery at MTU

In February 2023, MTU experienced a significant cyber-attack targeting its Cork campuses, which disrupted core operations and exposed vulnerabilities in data protection systems. The university's response throughout the 2023–2024 reporting period demonstrates a structured and multi-layered approach to digital resilience and institutional recovery.

A key priority was the identification and notification of affected individuals. MTU undertook a detailed review of the data breach and issued GDPR-compliant notifications and guidance to those impacted, prioritising high-risk and vulnerable cases. This process was completed by May 2024 and supported by a dedicated online resource—the MTU Cyber Care Support Portal.

To ensure accountability and oversight, MTU commissioned an independent investigation by KPMG. The final report was submitted to the Audit and Risk

Committee in June 2024. Most recommendations were implemented promptly, with remaining actions scheduled for completion by the end of the calendar year.

In response to the attack, MTU also amended the Terms of Reference of its Audit & Risk and Strategic Development Committees to explicitly include ICT Security Oversight, embedding cybersecurity governance within its institutional structures.

Operationally, MTU developed and deployed a secure contingency system to replace the compromised MAXe examination paper management system. This interim solution was resource-intensive but effective, and following stakeholder consultation, the university reinstated MAXe for the 2024/25 academic year with enhanced authentication protocols.

GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES AND CURRICULUM REFORM

Across all institutions there is a strong emphasis on embedding graduate attributes (often including digital literacy, sustainability and teamwork) within curricula alongside initiatives to enhance teaching methodologies, assessment practices and student supports. Several institutions detail developments in graduate attributes and curriculum reform within their AQRs. Institutions leveraged external funding opportunities (e.g. N-TUTORR, HCI) to support curriculum reform and integration of new technologies. The impact of GenAI on teaching and assessment, as previously discussed in this synthesis was a recurring theme.

ATU's strategic plan for 2024–2028 designates “Enabling Education for Student Success” as a central theme. This focus includes key elements such as teaching and learning, the learning environment, a flexible curriculum, and the student profile, all aiming to enhance student outcomes. Additionally, ATU actively contributed to the N-TUTORR initiative, which aimed to advance learning, teaching, and assessment practices, resulting in the development of a Sustainable Futures Curriculum Framework.

DCU's 2023-2028 strategy centres on transforming student experiences. Through the DCU Futures project, new interdisciplinary programmes were introduced, and a Transversal Skills Competence Framework was developed. The framework is supported by the MySkills platform, allowing students to track and validate their skills.

IADT's Strategic Plan 2024-28, “Towards a university for the Creative Industries,” emphasises curriculum development, with initiatives such as new micro-credential programmes and a collaborative (with FET) BA (Hons) Immersive Media Production programme.

The N-TUTORR programme also influenced curriculum development at **DkIT**, with a focus on digital transformation, sustainable development goals, and EDI.

MTU: The Faculty Enhancement Review (FER) process, designed to review programme portfolios, is underway at MTU. The N-TUTORR initiative contributed to the development of a Curriculum Framework, incorporating themes such as digital transformation, UDL, and academic integrity.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This synthesis report offers a comprehensive overview of the quality assurance practices within Irish public higher education, based on an analysis of the fifteen Annual Quality Reports (AQRs). The findings indicate a sector that is proactively engaged in strategic planning and successfully integrating quality assurance with institutional goals.

Significant attention is given to enhancing the student experience through curriculum reforms, graduate attribute initiatives, and improved support services. The ongoing commitment to student-centred approaches, integrating student feedback into decision making processes, continuing to enhance student support services and promoting well-being and inclusivity will positively impact on student outcomes.

Additionally, the sector demonstrates adaptability in navigating digital transformation and addressing the challenges and opportunities of generative AI. Ongoing professional development for staff, the adoption of emerging technologies and the integration of digital literacy into the curriculum are identified as key strategies for enhancing teaching and learning. However, the AQRs reveal robust measures will be needed to address persistent cybersecurity vulnerabilities.

The AQRs evidence the maturity of internal quality assurance systems within public HEIs. The sector has shown resilience in addressing challenges and adapting to an evolving higher education landscape.





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