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**Thematic Analysis of the
CINTE Review Reports of
Technological Universities
(TUs)**

**QQI
INSIGHTS.**



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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This thematic analysis synthesises the findings from the five Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) CINNTE institutional review reports on Ireland's Technological Universities (TUs):

- I. Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin),
- II. Munster Technological University (MTU),
- III. Technological University of the Shannon (TUS),
- IV. South East Technological University (SETU), and
- V. Atlantic Technological University (ATU).

The analysis reveals a widespread commitment to establishing robust quality assurance and enhancement (QAE) frameworks across all five institutions. While acknowledging the early stages of development for these newly formed universities and the impact of external factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the reports commend the TUs' commitment to a culture of continuous improvement and their proactive approach to quality enhancement.

The analysis also reveals several key themes, including, the need to improve student feedback mechanisms for effective collection, analysis, and response; clarifying roles and responsibilities within the new governance structures to ensure accountability; enhancing data integration and accessibility to facilitate data-driven decision-making; strengthening strategic partnerships to boost regional engagement and workforce development; and integrating research activities more effectively into the overall QAE framework. Underlying all these themes is the significant ongoing challenge of integrating legacy systems and practices from predecessor institutions.

INTRODUCTION

The reviews for four of the TUs were conducted in 2024, with TU Dublin being the first of the reviews conducted in 2021. The CINNTE cycle of reviews, which is carried out in accordance with ESG 2015¹ forms a crucial element in QQI's higher education quality assurance framework. This framework encompasses statutory quality assurance guidelines, each institution's internal quality assurance systems, annual quality reports (AQRs), and biennial quality dialogue meetings (QDMs). This analysis aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of quality assurance processes within these newly established TUs, drawing upon the findings and recommendations presented in the individual CINNTE review reports.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for the thematic analysis is structured using the objectives for the review as the framework. The analysis and themes arising are organised under the headings of the key objectives for the reviews as outlined in the [Terms of Reference](#) and the [addendum for review of TUs](#):

Objective 1 (Abbreviated): Review the effectiveness and implementation of QA procedures.

Objective 2 (Abbreviated): Evaluate quality enhancement via governance, policies, procedures, and alignment with institutional mission and goals.

Objective 3 (Abbreviated): Review the effectiveness of access, transfer, and progression procedures.

Framing the analysis around the core objectives of the CINNTE review provided a consistent thematic structure for coding across all five reports.

The thematic analysis generally focuses on the following questions:

- What are the key themes and topics addressed in the review reports?
- What are the key findings presented in the review reports?

¹ Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

APPROACH

This analysis employed a mixed-methods approach, combining the capabilities of [MAXQDA Tailwind](#) and [Microsoft Copilot](#). MAXQDA Tailwind, an AI qualitative data analysis assistant, facilitated the initial organisation and coding of the data. Tailwind's capabilities in managing large textual datasets and identifying recurring themes were beneficial in this phase.

Using the initial codes generated by MAXQDA Tailwind, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify overarching themes and sub-themes. This involved a process of reviewing the coded data, refining the themes, and identifying relationships between different themes.

To ensure the accuracy and clarity of the final report, Microsoft 365 Copilot was employed as a proofreading tool. Copilot was used to review the final draft for grammatical errors and stylistic inconsistencies.

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Established by the [Technological Universities Act \(2018\)](#)², Ireland's five Technological Universities (TUs) underwent institutional reviews as part of the extended QQI CINNTE cycle (2017-2024). This cycle also included Ireland's public higher education providers and four largest independent and private higher education institutions. Aligned with the European Standards and Guidelines ([ESG 2015](#)), the CINNTE reviews assessed the effectiveness of each TU's quality assurance procedures across education, training, research, and related services.

A dedicated [terms of reference](#), supplemented by a 2023 [addendum](#) and [handbook](#) specific to the TUs, guided the process. Completed in Q4 2024, the reviews involved institutional self-evaluation reports (ISERs), external desk reviews, on-site dialogues between representatives from the TUs and external review teams, and the publication of review reports with findings and recommendations.

The CINNTE review reports reveal a consistent emphasis on establishing robust QA frameworks across the five TUs. The reports also reflect the varying stages of the institutions' integration. While all TUs demonstrated effective QA procedures, a recurring theme was the need to fully integrate legacy systems and practices from predecessor institutions, creating unified policies and procedures. Furthermore, enhancing student feedback mechanisms to ensure effective collection, analysis, and response was a consistent recommendation. The reports' assessments often acknowledged the early stages of development, suggesting that time was needed to fully implement and evaluate the effectiveness of newly established QA systems.

Despite the challenges of integration, the reports commend the TUs' commitment to a culture of continuous improvement and enhancement. The establishment of new governance structures, policies, and procedures, often informed by extensive stakeholder consultation, demonstrated a proactive approach to quality. However, the need for greater clarity in roles, responsibilities, and accountability within these new structures emerged as a key area for future development. The consistent emphasis on both quality assurance and enhancement underscores a shared commitment to building high-quality, student-centred institutions.

2 <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2018/act/3/enacted/en/html>

SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY USED TO PREPARE THE ISER

The institutional self-evaluation report (ISER) is a key document developed by institutions as part of the CINNTE review process. It provides the institution the opportunity to reflect on and assess the effectiveness of its teaching, learning, research and service provision in relation to the strategic objectives of the organisation. The process of self-evaluation involves staff, learners and other stakeholders, both internal and external, reviewing engagement and procedures within the institution.

This section analyses the findings of the CINNTE review teams regarding the methodologies employed by each TU in preparing its ISER. The analysis examines common approaches, variations in methodology, and the influence of contextual factors on the self-evaluation process, as reported by the external review teams.

- **Comprehensive and inclusive process:** All five review reports highlighted the TUs' commitment to comprehensive self-evaluation processes. These involved extensive consultations with staff, students, and external stakeholders, ensuring a broad range of perspectives were incorporated. The findings underscore the TUs' recognition of the importance of inclusive participation in the self-evaluation process. The breadth of consultation aimed to ensure that the ISERs accurately reflected the realities of the institutions and provided a robust basis for external review, though the nature and scale of consultation varied across the TUs.
- **Future-oriented Approach:** Review teams noted that the ISERs were largely future-oriented, focusing on plans for continuous improvement and alignment with strategic objectives. The self-evaluation process was used not just to assess current practices but also to identify areas for future development and enhancement. This forward-looking approach reflects the TUs' commitment to ongoing quality enhancement. The ISERs served as a mechanism for identifying priorities, setting targets, and developing action plans for future improvements. The feasibility and achievability of the proposed plans varied across the institutions, depending on factors such as resource availability and the pace of institutional integration.
- **Alignment with External Standards and Frameworks:** All TUs aligned their ISER methodologies with relevant external standards and frameworks, primarily the ESG 2015 and [QQI QA guidelines](#). This alignment ensured that the self-evaluation processes were conducted in a transparent and comparable manner. It also facilitated the external review teams' assessment of the TUs' quality assurance systems.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** While all TUs engaged in consultation with its stakeholders, the specific methodologies and the extent of stakeholder engagement varied. The variations in methodology highlight the diverse approaches adopted by the TUs in conducting their self-evaluations. These variations may reflect differences in institutional culture, resources, and the stage of integration. The level of student engagement also varied, with some TUs demonstrating more robust mechanisms for incorporating the student voice than others.

- **Student Involvement:** The review reports indicate that student involvement in the ISER process was evident across all TUs, although with varying methods and degrees of engagement. Some institutions adopted structured approaches, such as dedicated working groups and forums with student representatives, while others relied on less formal feedback channels. These differences often reflected each TU's unique culture and available resources.

Despite these efforts, challenges remained in achieving comprehensive student participation, including resource limitations, representation gaps, and external disruptions like the Covid-19 pandemic and, in one case, a cyberattack. While student perspectives were generally sought, the true impact of their input on the final ISERs was sometimes unclear.

- **Impact of External Factors:** Several review reports explicitly acknowledge the influence of external factors on the ISER process. These factors often resulted in delays, adaptations to the planned methodology, and a need for increased flexibility in the approach to self-evaluation.
 - **Covid-19 Pandemic:** The Covid-19 pandemic had a marked impact on the TU Dublin review, as all phases of the cyclical evaluation had to be conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams due to public health restrictions. This transition from face-to-face to online meetings altered the ways in which interactions took place and data was collected.
 - **Cyber Attacks:** MTU experienced a major cyber-attack in February 2023, significantly impacting its operations and the ISER development. According to the report, the cyberattack “significantly slowed and hampered” the ISER process, affecting “many initiatives and practices across the university.”
 - **National Restrictions and Delays:** Several review reports note that national policy delays were external factors affecting the institutions' ability to implement their management structures and organisational designs during the review periods. Review teams observed that delays and restrictions, such as limitations on professorial ranks or borrowing frameworks for capital development, impacted the strategic capacity of the institutions.

SECTION 3: EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF QA

This section examines the findings from the five CINNTE reports regarding current QA procedures within the TUs. The analysis focuses on the effectiveness and implementation of QA systems, encompassing their governance, management, and specific procedures across various areas such as programme delivery, teaching and learning, assessment, student support, and research. The findings highlight commonalities and variations in approach, reflecting the unique contexts and stages of integration within each TU.

QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

The review teams' findings on QA procedures across the five TUs reflect a complex landscape with evidence of both significant progress and challenges. The overarching findings clearly indicate widespread commitment to establishing comprehensive cross-institutional quality assurance and enhancement (QAE) frameworks.

- **QAE Frameworks:** Each TU has established or is actively developing a comprehensive cross-organisational quality assurance and enhancement framework. While approaches vary, these frameworks aim to ensure academic and research excellence and foster continuous improvement in the quality of education and services provided. Some institutions opted for development of an entirely new framework (e.g. TU Dublin) while others (e.g. MTU) adapted and unified systems from predecessor institutions. This reflects different strategic choices and resource constraints.
- **Phased approach to development:** All the institutions adopted a phased approach to development and implementation, the complexities of integrating multiple legacy systems and institutional cultures are reflected in the review reports.
- **QA Policies and Procedures:** A substantial effort from all institutions was dedicated to the development of new QA policies and procedures, aligned with national and international best practices and involving consultation with stakeholders. ATU, for example, established a Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team (QAET), funded by the HEA Transformation Fund, who undertook extensive consultation to develop policies and procedures that aligned with ESG 2015 and QQI's QA guidelines.
- **Data-driven quality assurance:** The importance of data-driven quality assurance was emphasised in the reports, but the integration of data systems from predecessor institutions was recognised as presenting significant challenges. While review teams acknowledged significant progress in establishing the foundational elements of QAE frameworks, within the review reports, they also identified areas requiring further attention. These related to challenges in balancing legacy practices and new QAE frameworks, data integration, improving communication and transparency, and addressing resource constraints.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The review teams found that all five TUs were actively developing or refining their governance and management structures to support quality assurance and enhancement. These structures typically comprise a Governing Body, an Academic Council and various committees addressing areas such as academic planning, research, teaching, learning and student experience. A key feature across all TUs is the inclusion of student representatives at various governance levels (Governing Body, Academic Council, subcommittees), ensuring the student voice is integrated into decision-making processes. While the review teams noted that establishment of these structures represents considerable progress, the reviews also highlighted ongoing challenges related to the **pace of change, complexity of governance structures, clarifying roles and responsibilities, streamlining decision-making, improving communication, and fully integrating legacy systems** from predecessor institutions.

As illustrated in the individual review reports, the governance challenges varied across the TUs. The review team noted that TU Dublin faced the complex transition from three independent campuses to a unitary structure, requiring careful delegation of authority and resource allocation to avoid undue complexity and maintain agility in governance. For MTU, while making progress in unifying its framework, there was a need to clarify responsibilities and ensure adequate resourcing for quality assurance, particularly concerning student feedback and the professional development of staff. ATU faced significant challenges related to the ongoing integration of legacy institutions, the review report notes the complexity of the governance structure and potential overlap in responsibilities and emphasised the need for a final management structure aligned with the institution's strategic intent to fully integrate resources on a university-wide basis.

SETU's organisational restructuring under a change management framework highlighted the complexities of unifying operations and integrating legacy systems, while resource constraints limited progress. TUS faced challenges in achieving operational cohesion across multiple campuses, requiring a unified operational model and addressing resource vulnerabilities (funding, accommodation, career pathways) to support its ambitious strategic objectives. Across all institutions, effective communication and transparency in decision-making processes emerged as crucial areas for improvement.

The specific challenges encountered varied depending on factors such as the size and complexity of the new universities, pre-existing governance structures, and the pace of integration. The reports consistently highlight the need for ongoing attention to these areas to ensure the long-term success of the TUs.

PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The CINNTE review reports reveal common themes regarding programmes of education and training across the five TUs. In summary, these themes relate to programme portfolio management, student feedback mechanisms, staff support for programme delivery and the integration of external stakeholder perspectives.

- **Programme Portfolio Management:** All five reports highlight the challenge of managing a large and often duplicated programme portfolio following the integration of legacy institutions. Many TUs are undertaking portfolio reviews to streamline offerings, address duplication and ensure alignment with strategic goals. Some reports commend the TUs for their efforts in developing new policies and procedures for programme development and review. Some reports also recommend conducting a comprehensive review of the programme portfolio.
- **Student Feedback Mechanisms:** A recurring theme is the need for more robust, systematic and transparent mechanisms for collecting and responding to student feedback on programmes. Review reports highlight inconsistencies in current practices, including low response rates to surveys and the lack of clear processes for closing feedback loops. The importance of incorporating student feedback into programme development and review is consistently emphasised in the reports.
- **Staff Support for Programme Development:** The reports highlight the need for adequate support and professional development for academic staff involved in programme delivery. This includes, for example, providing training on effective teaching methodologies, assessment techniques and the ethical use of GenAI.
- **Integration of External Stakeholder Perspective:** The establishment of strong industry partnerships and engagement with external stakeholders is frequently commended in the review reports. Nonetheless, the reports also emphasise the importance of engaging with external stakeholders, and involving industry partners, employers, and professional bodies, in programme design, delivery, and review. This includes formalising partnership arrangements and establishing robust mechanisms for collecting and acting upon feedback from external stakeholders. The need for a more strategic approach to external stakeholder engagement is emphasised.

In summary, the CINNTE reports reveal a consistent need for TUs to refine their programme portfolio management, enhance student feedback mechanisms, strengthen staff support for programme delivery, and further integrate external stakeholder perspectives to ensure the quality and relevance of their educational offerings.

STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

The review reports reveal a strong commitment to staff development but also highlight challenges related to recruitment, retention, and diversity. Frequently commended is the commitment to staff development, the provision of training opportunities, and initiatives promoting equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

- **Workforce Planning and Strategy:** The need for a comprehensive workforce planning strategy to address recruitment, retention, and diversification of staff was a recurring theme. This includes addressing challenges related to national HR policies, competition with the private sector, and the need for international recruitment.
- **Staff Development and Training:** All reports highlight the importance of providing comprehensive staff development and training opportunities. This includes addressing the ethical use of GenAI and ensuring equitable access to professional development for all staff.
- **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI):** The TUs' commitment to EDI was frequently commended but reports also highlighted the need for further progress in achieving gender equity and diversity in staff representation, particularly at senior levels.
- **Staff Wellbeing:** Several reports mentioned the importance of addressing staff wellbeing, particularly workload and stress levels.

TEACHING LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT (TLA)

This section captures the recurring themes related to teaching, learning and assessment across the five review reports.

- **Student-Centred Learning:** Across all five reports a strong commitment to student-centred learning is evident, this is reflected in various initiative examples included within the reports. While some TUs demonstrated a deep-seated culture of student-centredness actively incorporating diverse pedagogical approaches (e.g., ATU's multifaceted approach encompassing problem-based learning, research-informed learning, peer mentoring, and work-based learning), others faced challenges in translating the principle into consistent practice across all campuses and programmes, with some inconsistencies in student experiences noted.
- **Assessment Practices:** The CINNTE reports reveal a mixed picture regarding assessment practices. While there's a clear movement towards authentic assessment methods that better reflect real-world applications, a persistent challenge lies in the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms. The need for timely, constructive, and consistent feedback emerged as a recurring theme across all five institutions. Some of the key themes include:

- **Feedback Mechanisms:** All reports emphasise the need for improved feedback mechanisms, including timely and constructive feedback to students. Inconsistencies in feedback practices across campuses and programmes were noted.
- **Authentic Assessment:** Several reports commend the use of authentic assessment methods that align with real-world applications and skills development.
- **Assessment Practice Integration:** The integration of assessment practices from predecessor institutions presented challenges for several TUs, requiring the development of unified policies and procedures.
- **Workload Management:** Some review teams raised concern about student workload management in relation to assessment, particularly the concentration of assessments towards the end of a semester.
- **Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL):** The rapid shift to online and blended learning during the Covid-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for technological innovation in TLA. However, this also presented challenges in the provision of technical support and the need for consistent delivery models. The reports consistently recommend the development of embedded technical support services for academic staff, particularly those delivering online or blended programmes. Furthermore, ensuring equitable access to digital resources and technologies across all campuses and student cohorts emerged as a crucial aspect of maintaining quality and inclusivity in the learning experience.

SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS

The five CINNTE reports reveal several recurring themes concerning the student experience, student support, and engagement. The themes centre on student voice and representation, support services, teaching and learning and the overall impact of institutional integration. The reports commend the TUs for their efforts in fostering a student-centred learning environment and the effectiveness of student support services is frequently praised. Mental health and wellbeing services are a priority, with all TUs providing counselling, pastoral care, and health services. Initiatives such as mental health awareness programmes and peer support platforms are common.

- **Support Services:** The provision of comprehensive and accessible student support services is a recurring theme. The reports highlight the value and importance of supports in addressing mental health concerns, providing disability support and offering academic guidance. Several reports also note challenges in ensuring consistent service delivery across campuses and addressing resource limitations. The need for improved communications regarding availability and accessibility of support services was emphasised in some reports.

- **Teaching and Learning:** The reports highlight the importance of a student-centred approach to teaching and learning. Several reports mention the use of innovative teaching methodologies, such as problem-based learning and universal design for learning (UDL). However, concerns are raised about inconsistencies in teaching quality and the need for more robust mechanisms for collecting and acting upon student feedback on teaching. The importance of providing timely and constructive feedback to students is consistently emphasised.
- **Student Voice and Representation:** All five reports stress the importance of incorporating the student voice into university governance and decision-making processes. However, the reports also highlight inconsistencies in the effectiveness of student representation across different programmes and campuses. Some reports recommend conducting a full audit of student voice mechanisms to ensure effective collection, analysis and response to student feedback. The need for a more structured and planned approach to student consultation is noted in one report.
- **Impact of Institutional Integration:** The reports acknowledge the challenges associated with integrating the student experience following the integration of legacy institutions. This includes ensuring consistency in student support services, teaching and learning practices, and access to resources across different campuses. The need to foster a sense of belonging and community across the institutions is also highlighted. The impact of the accommodation crisis on the student experience is also frequently mentioned.

The CINNTE reports highlight the importance of prioritising student experience and engagement in the context of institutional integration. Strengthening student voice mechanisms, ensuring consistent and accessible support services, enhancing teaching and learning practices and addressing the challenges of creating a unified and inclusive student experience across multiple campus are all key focus points for the TUs.

INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

The thematic analysis reveals a common focus on integrating legacy systems, improving data quality and accessibility, and leveraging data for informed decision-making across the five TUs. However, the specific challenges and approaches varied depending on each institution's unique context and stage of integration.

- **System Integration and Data Consolidation:** The core theme arising across the five reports is system integration and data consolidation. All five reports highlight the challenges of integrating disparate information systems from predecessor institutions. Review teams note the complexities of merging IT systems and integrating student record management systems, financial management systems, staff records, and library systems.

- **Enhancing Data Quality and Accessibility:** Improving data quality and making it more accessible to stakeholders (staff, students, and the public) is another recurring theme. Inconsistent data collection methods, lack of data standardisation, and difficulties in accessing relevant data for decision-making are noted by review teams.
- **Leveraging Data for Informed Decision-Making:** The review reports emphasise the importance of using data to inform strategic planning, quality assurance, and continuous improvement, with some reports noting the difficulties in some institutions in obtaining reliable data.

To address these challenges, TUs have implemented a range of strategies. These included establishing dedicated teams and setting timelines for system integration, creating centralised units for data management and analysis, and developing data repositories to enhance accessibility. For example, SETU's Centre for Organisational Research, Data and Analysis (CORDA), established to support evidence-informed strategic planning and quality assurance. Furthermore, the institutions are leveraging data analytics tools and dashboards to track key performance indicators (KPIs), such as student performance, retention, and progression, ultimately aiming for data-driven decision-making to proactively manage risks and enhance the student experience.

EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

All five TUs emphasise strong engagement and collaboration with external partners, including industry, educational institutions, and community organisations. This is seen as essential for enhancing educational quality, supporting workforce development, and driving regional economic growth and innovation. Each university has established strategic partnerships that align with these goals. These partnerships often involve joint programmes, research collaborations, and community engagement.

- **Strategic Partnerships:** All five reports emphasise the importance of establishing and maintaining strong partnerships with industry, community organisations, and other stakeholders. These partnerships are viewed as crucial for informing curriculum development, providing work placement opportunities, supporting research activities, and contributing to regional economic development. Several reports recommend developing more formal and systematic approaches to managing these partnerships.
- **Responsiveness to Regional Needs:** The reports underline the importance of aligning the TUs' activities with the specific economic, social, and cultural needs of their regions. This includes tailoring curriculum offerings to meet local industry demands, supporting regional workforce development initiatives, and contributing to community development projects. The role of the TUs as "anchor institutions" in their respective regions is highlighted in some reports.

- **Alignment with Strategic Goals:** The reports highlight the need to align industry and community engagement activities with the TUs' overall strategic goals. This includes developing clear strategies for external engagement, establishing mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the impact of engagement activities, and ensuring effective resource allocation.
- **International Partnerships:** The reports highlight how the TUs have established significant international partnerships and engagement strategies. In terms of research and innovation, the TUs actively engage in regional and international collaborations to enhance their research impact and visibility. They participate in European Universities alliances and other international partnerships to support transnational cooperation and address global challenges. For example, TUS' collaboration with in the Regional University Network in Europe (RUN-EU) was strongly commended during the university's CINNTE review.

SECTION 4: QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

The findings of the review teams with regard to quality enhancement across the five TUs reveal several interconnected themes.

This section addresses five prominent areas: the strategic alignment of enhancement initiatives with institutional plans; the challenges of integrating legacy systems and practices; the need for greater clarity in governance structures, roles, and responsibilities; the importance of data-driven decision-making, including student engagement; and the impact of external factors on enhancement efforts.

- **Strategic Alignment and Planning:** A major theme across all five reports is the strong link between quality enhancement efforts and each TU's strategic plan. These plans, frequently developed through extensive stakeholder consultation, including significant student input, provide a clear roadmap for the institutions. Specific mechanisms used to connect quality enhancement to strategic goals, such as KPIs, action plans, and reporting structures, varied across institutions but consistently demonstrated a proactive approach to quality improvement.
- **Institutional Integration and Legacy Systems:** The integration of multiple institutions into a single unifying entity, presents a significant challenge to integration of QA systems. This recurring theme highlights the complexities of integrating diverse legacy systems and practices. The integration difficulties encompassed policies, procedures, IT systems, assessment methods, and student support services, all of which impact the student experience. The reports consistently emphasise the substantial time and resources required to overcome these integration hurdles, underscoring the need for careful planning and phased implementation strategies. For example, the need to replace legacy regulations with unified policies and procedures was a common recommendation.
- **Governance, Roles, Responsibilities, and Accountability:** The establishment of new governance structures—Governing Bodies, Academic Councils, and various committees—was a crucial step in establishing a framework for quality enhancement. Crucially, the inclusion of student representatives at various levels is noted, demonstrating a commitment to student voice. However, the review reports consistently highlight a need for greater clarity in roles, responsibilities, and accountability within these structures. Specific issues identified include overlapping responsibilities, unclear reporting lines, and a lack of delegated authority. The size and composition of Academic Councils also emerged as a point of discussion, raising questions about their agility and effectiveness in decision-making.

- **Data-Driven Decision-Making, Including Student Engagement:** The CINNTE reports highlight the importance of data-driven decision-making in quality enhancement. This involves collecting and analysing data on student performance, teaching effectiveness, research outputs, and other relevant metrics including comprehensive student feedback, to inform strategic planning and interventions. However, the reports also note challenges in data integration, data quality, and the capacity for effective data analysis. Several institutions are investing in data analytics tools and dashboards to improve data accessibility and inform decision-making, but the need for robust data governance frameworks and improved data literacy among staff emerged as a key area for future development.
- **Impact of External Factors:** As noted earlier in this analysis, the TUs' quality enhancement efforts were significantly influenced by external factors. The Covid-19 pandemic necessitated rapid transitions to online learning, impacting teaching and assessment practices and requiring adaptations to support services, all of which affected student engagement. A major cyberattack in one institution significantly disrupted operations, delaying planned initiatives and impacting the ability to collect and analyse data for the purposes of the CINNTE review. These external factors often resulted in delays, adaptations to planned methodologies, and increased flexibility in the approach to quality enhancement.

SECTION 5: CONCLUSIONS

This thematic analysis of five CINNTE review reports reveals a complex yet ultimately positive picture of QAE within Ireland's TUs. While the reports acknowledge the significant challenges inherent in integrating multiple legacy institutions – including the unification of disparate systems, policies, and cultures – they also commend the TUs' proactive and substantial efforts to establish robust QAE frameworks informed by extensive stakeholder consultation.

The establishment of new governance structures represents significant progress; however, the reports consistently highlight the need for greater clarity in roles, responsibilities, and accountability within these structures. The importance of data-driven decision-making is emphasised throughout the reports with associated challenges identified.

The TUs' strong engagement with external partners, particularly within their regions, is frequently commended, but developing more formal and systematic approaches to managing these partnerships and ensuring alignment with strategic goals remains an area for development. The review reports highlight the importance of, and the need for a more comprehensive approach to research integration, including dedicated resources and strategic planning.

This thematic analysis highlights a shared commitment to building high-quality, student-centred institutions. This is reflected in the emphasis on student feedback mechanisms, although improvements are needed in ensuring effective collection, analysis, and response to this feedback. Similarly, while progress has been made in establishing comprehensive staff development and training opportunities, review teams highlighted challenges related to recruitment and retention.

The findings of the CINNTE review reports offer valuable insights for the TUs as they continue their journey towards becoming fully integrated, high-performing institutions.

SECTION 6: INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES

Each of the five TUs provided institutional responses addressing the findings and recommendations outlined in their respective reports. The key themes in these responses indicate a positive view of the CINNTE review process and a recognition that the process can support progress.

The institutions expressed gratitude for the comprehensive and rigorous evaluation by the CINNTE review teams. The review was viewed as an opportunity for **reflection and engagement**. Appreciation was expressed for the objective and valuable insights provided.

There was a strong focus on **aligning strategic missions with quality assurance frameworks** and fostering diverse and effective external partnerships. The institutions emphasised their commitment to **continuous improvement**, strategic alignment, and the development of strategic plans.

The responses highlighted the importance of establishing and **enhancing quality assurance and governance frameworks**. The institutions were commended for their structured approaches, effective governance, and quality systems.

A significant emphasis was placed on **student-centred approaches**, including student support services and the development of a quality culture. The institutions were recognised for their commitment to enhancing the student experience.

The institutions valued **stakeholder engagement** and the importance of **internationalisation**. They highlighted their efforts in building strong relationships with stakeholders and their commitment to international collaborations.

The responses were generally optimistic and forward-looking, with a focus on **achieving long-term ambitions and strategic development**. The institutions were determined to address the recommendations from the review and were proactive in their approach to continuous improvement.



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