



Dearbhú Cáilíochta
agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and
Qualifications Ireland



Higher Education Pathway Assessment Report: National College of Ireland



About this assessment

This report details the findings of the assessment conducted by an Assessment Panel on behalf of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) of National College of Ireland's IEM Application Statement (IEMAS), which was submitted to QQI as part of the provider's application for authorisation to use the TrustEd Ireland mark. The desk assessment was conducted by the following Assessment Panel:

Name	Role	Affiliation
Dr. Claire Carney	Chairperson	International Higher Education Consultant, United Kingdom
Prof. Graham Butler	Report Writer/Secretary	Full Professor of Law, Linnaeus University, Sweden
Dr. Áine Ní Shé	International Education Expert	Munster Technological University, Ireland
Kurdo Araz	Learner	RCSI, University of Medicine and Health Sciences, Ireland

Outcome of the assessment

This assessment evaluates the provider's compliance with the criteria set out in the Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners (HE Code). From the evidence provided by the provider in the self- assessment document, the IEM Application Statement (IEMAS), the Assessment Panel concludes that the provider should be:

Outcome	Please tick
Authorised to use TrustEd Ireland Mark	✓
Not Authorised to use TrustEd Ireland Mark	

Please see below a summary of the outcome by HE Code principle (5.1-5.6)

Principle 5.1 Marketing and Recruitment:

Principle: HE providers recruit international learners in a transparent and ethical manner. In their marketing and promotional materials, they ensure that clear, accurate, transparent, accessible, relevant and up to date information is provided.

5.1.1 (a) HE providers shall endeavour proactively to understand the information needs of prospective international learners.

5.1.1 (b) HE providers shall ensure that information provided to potential international learners about the institution and its provision is clear, accurate, transparent, accessible, relevant and up to date. This shall include information about the intended purpose of the provision e.g., to prepare a learner for further study or specific employment. Where necessary, it should also include information on associated immigration requirements, including requirements for learners requiring entry visas and/or immigration permission.

5.1.1 (c) Where applicable, information should also be provided on the professional accreditation status of programmes.

5.1.1 (d) Where applicable, information on practice placement requirements, and how these may be fulfilled, should also be made known to prospective international learners.

5.1.1 (e) HE providers shall be compliant with information for learner requirements, as set out in Section 67 of the 2012 Act as amended. They shall confirm:

- (i) whether or not the successful completion of the programme entitles the learner to an award;
- (ii) the awarding body making the award;
- (iii) the title of the award;
- (iv) whether the award is one that is included within the NFQ;
- (v) the level at which the award is included within the NFQ;
- (vi) whether the award is a major, minor, special purpose or supplemental award, as identified within the NFQ;
- (vii) the procedures for access, transfer and progression that are in place, including the pathways for international learners for further study, employment, and residency, where applicable (see also section 4.2 above);
- (viii) details, where appropriate, of the arrangements in place for the protection of enrolled learners under Section 65 of the 2012 Act as amended (see section 4.5.2 above and Appendix Two of this code).

5.1.1 (f) HE providers shall ensure that information is provided in a way that is accessible to international learners and assists them in making informed decisions. This information should support international learners in understanding all matters related to a programme prior to enrolment. If provided in a different language, it is the responsibility of the HE provider to ensure that the information is clear, accurate, transparent, accessible, relevant and up to date.

5.1.1 (g) HE providers shall accurately represent their organisation and facilities in all marketing and promotional materials and ensure that no false or misleading information is issued.

5.1.1 (h) HE providers shall provide appropriate contact details for an appropriate person or persons to provide assistance with queries from international learners prior to enrolment.

5.1.1 (i) HE providers shall state the commencement dates for all programmes.

5.1.2 (a) Prior to enrolment, HE providers shall ensure the availability and provision of relevant financial information pertaining to the study and average subsistence costs of their programme provision, from the period of enrolment through to graduation.

5.1.2 (b) Prior to enrolment, HE providers shall ensure that the learner is made aware of any insurance requirements, e.g., medical or travel insurance, and of the availability of accommodation, and any accommodation services provided.

5.1.2 (c) HE providers shall have a written agreement with each education agent, recruitment partner or consultant that formally represents their programme provision.

5.1.2 (d) HE providers shall ensure that any contractual arrangements entered with an education agent, recruitment partner or consultant incorporate the principles of the London Statement. Existing contracts that do not incorporate these principles shall be amended appropriately within two years of the date of the HE provider's application for authorisation to use the IEM.

5.1.2 (e) The contract between the HE provider and education agent, recruitment partner or consultant shall include a termination clause in instances where the agent does not comply with the principles of the London Statement or is found to have acted in an unethical fashion to the detriment of international learners.

5.1.2 (f) HE providers shall conduct due diligence e.g., three reference checks, to verify the track record of education agents, recruitment partners or consultants, in relation to learner protection issues, prior to entering into a contractual agreement.

5.1.2 (g) HE providers shall ensure that all education agents, recruitment partners or consultants contracted to them are in possession of accurate and up to date information regarding the provider and its provision.

5.1.2 (h) HE providers shall have in place a transparent process for monitoring and reviewing the activities of education agents, recruitment partners or consultants including, where appropriate, feedback from applicants, to ensure that the education agent, recruitment partner or consultant is operating within the spirit of the HE Code and the London Statement.

5.1.2 (i) HE providers required to put in place arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners under Section 65 of the 2012 Act as amended shall do so prior to the recruitment of learners (see also section 4.5 and Appendix Two of this HE code).

Summary

National College of Ireland (NCI) has a comprehensive approach to marketing and recruitment, ensuring provision for transparency and ethical practices in its interactions with prospective international learners and education agents. This involves processes for information provision and agent management.

For prospective international learners, communication is timely and professionally delivered through a dedicated international team and NCI provides information through various channels to address their needs. The NCI website and annual prospectus are primary resources, providing clear, accurate, and up-to-date information on programmes, modules, career opportunities, and living arrangements in Ireland. These materials undergo annual review and sign-off by academic schools and the director of marketing, with content aligned with QQI-validated specifications. Country-specific and language-specific guidance is available on dedicated webpages.

Financial information is provided via the Cost of Living webpage, advising a budget for living expenses, supplemented by information on start-up costs like immigration registration fees and medical insurance. The preparation guide includes instructions on visa applications, financial planning, and medical insurance. Professional accreditations for programmes (e.g., Psychological Society of Ireland, ACCA exemptions for accounting) are highlighted. For programmes with practice placements, such as the BA in Early Childhood Education and Care, handbooks outline expectations, timelines, and support structures. NCI adheres to statutory information requirements under applicable law, detailing awarding bodies, National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) levels, and progression pathways. Direct points of contact, including the international office and regional

managers, are listed on the website. Programme commencement dates are published in the Academic Calendar and International Brochure.

In its engagement with education agents, NCI operates a defined and comprehensive process. Recruitment agents are required to enter into a formal written agreement, established through an agent application form.

This form collects information on the agent's partnerships, recruitment history, and anticipated enrolments. Regional managers conduct reference checks, contacting at least two professional referees (one from a higher education institution) via an agent reference request email. This process assesses aspects of the agent's operations, including reliability and ethical practices. Contracts are issued following feedback review and termination clauses are included, allowing NCI to end contracts for breaches. Decisions on contract termination are made by the Director of Marketing and International Development. Student feedback from the student enroller survey is used for performance assessment and identification of areas for improvement or potential contract termination. A monthly agent newsletter informs agents of institutional developments and policy changes. NCI, as an obligated provider, participates in the statutory Protection for Enrolled Learners (PEL) scheme, to provide financial protection for enrolled learners

Principle 5.2 Admissions and Qualifications' Recognition:

HE providers operate fair, transparent and consistent admission policies that support the successful participation of international learners in their chosen programmes

5.2 (a) HE providers shall clearly specify entry requirements for international learners that support the successful participation of the learners in their chosen programmes.

5.2 (b) HE providers' entry requirements shall clearly specify English language proficiency requirements for applicants whose first language is not English. These should include references to the benchmarks used in assessing proficiency requirements and, like other entry requirements, support the successful participation of international learners in their chosen programmes.

5.2 (c) HE providers shall adopt the principles, and follow the guidance, contained in the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) and subsidiary texts in assessing the qualifications presented by international learners for the purpose of admission to their programmes. Qualifications should be assessed in an accessible and fair manner and within a reasonable timeframe.

5.2 (d) HE providers should recognise qualifications that are recognised for the purpose of access to programmes in an international applicant's own higher education system, unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated between the requirements for admission in the applicant's own higher education system and those of the Irish HE provider.

5.2 (e) HE providers shall provide a timely written response to international applicants who are refused admission.

5.2 (f) Where a HE provider decides to withhold recognition of a qualification from an international learner for the purpose of admission, the reasons for the refusal to grant recognition shall be stated, and information provided concerning possible measures the applicant may take to obtain recognition at a later stage. If a HE provider decides to withhold recognition of a qualification for the purpose of admission, or if no decision is taken, the applicant shall be able to make an appeal within a reasonable time limit.

5.2 (g) HE providers shall support QQI, as appropriate, in implementing its statutory function to facilitate the recognition outside the state of awards made in the state, including the home countries of their international learners.

Summary

NCI operates a framework for admissions and qualifications recognition that aims to be fair, transparent, and consistent for international learners. The institution's approach to entry requirements for its programmes is established in alignment with QQI validation policies and criteria. These requirements are reviewed through NCI's ongoing programme validation, review, and revalidation processes. Minimum entry requirements specific to different countries are disseminated through the international brochure and via the application process webpage.

For applicants whose primary language is not English, NCI has established English language proficiency requirements. These are outlined on the hugely comprehensive dedicated English language requirements webpage, within the NCI English language policy statement, and in international admissions brochures, and are also communicated through education agents. Applicants are expected to satisfy these standards prior to programme acceptance. The benchmarks used for assessing proficiency are subject to periodic review to ensure their ongoing appropriateness.

NCI's admissions procedures accommodate a diverse range of international qualifications. The institution recognises qualifications that grant access to higher education in an applicant's home state, unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated. This includes considering alternative forms of evidence, such as prior work experience or portfolio submissions, in certain cases.

Regarding adherence to the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), NCI states that it is fully compliant in its admissions process (section 5.2 (c)). While acknowledging that NCI has embedded the principles of the LRC in its admissions process, the panel finds that this criterion is partially met, but not fully, and is therefore a condition of authorisation. In addition, while noting NCI's stated intention to review and update its QA manual as an outcome of its recent CINNTE Institutional Review, it requires that the relevant policy be updated to ensure that NCI is fully compliant with section 5.2 (c).

Condition 1

5.2 (c): The panel sets a condition for full compliance with 5.2 (c) to be achieved within 1 year of TrustEd Ireland authorisation.

Recommendation 1

5.2 (c)-(f): Moreover, NCI is asked to review its admission policy and procedures and any other relevant policies and processes against the principles and guidance in the LRC and subsidiary texts, and against criteria 5.2 (c)-(f), to establish clearly where gaps exist in institutional policy and practice. The panel sets a recommendation for this review to be completed within 1 year of TrustEd Ireland authorisation.

In terms of communication regarding admission decisions, NCI aims to provide timely and structured responses to applicants. In instances where an applicant is unsuccessful, a standard template letter is issued. This letter specifies the reason for the refusal and provides information on alternative study options, along with contact details for further clarification. Applicants who wish to challenge an admission decision or a non- recognition outcome have access to an established appeal process.

Furthermore, NCI demonstrates support for QQI's statutory function in facilitating the international recognition of Irish awards. A primary method for this is the issuance of the diploma supplement to graduates.

Additionally, NCI commits to keeping QQI informed of any issues encountered regarding the recognition of its awards in other jurisdictions, based on feedback received from learners, recognition bodies, or international employers. This commitment contributes to the ongoing credibility and acceptance of NCI qualifications globally

Principle 5.3 Fees, Refunds and Subsistence:

HE providers provide all learners with clear, accurate, transparent, accessible, relevant and up to date information on all study costs, including subsistence and accommodation. HE providers shall inform learners about fees and other costs associated with undertaking a programme of study in Ireland

5.3.1 (a) HE providers shall provide information on compulsory fees for the full duration of the programme from registration and admission to graduation or exit from the programme. Where fees may change, this shall be clear to applicants in the information provided.

5.3.1 (b) HE providers shall provide information on the collection or payment of fees, including sanctions for late payment and debt collection for moneys owed.

5.3.1 (c) HE providers shall establish a fees structure that supports the mission of the organisation and reflects the costs associated with quality provision.

5.3.1 (d) HE providers shall ensure that there are no additional fees or unexpected charges that international learners have not been made aware of.

5.3.1 (e) HE providers shall issue a receipt to international learners upon receipt of payment of fees which will include a breakdown of fees paid.

5.3.1 (f) HE providers shall establish and publish a procedure on full and partial refunds. This procedure shall outline the conditions under which a refund will be granted e.g., a refused entry visa application, in the case of a non-EU/EEA Swiss learner.

5.3.1 (g) HE providers shall provide information on any financial supports or resources that exist within the organisation, or nationally, for international learners.

5.3.2 (a) HE providers shall provide information on the indicative costs of studying on their programmes e.g., the costs of textbooks, electronic resources, computer requirements, protective equipment.

5.3.2 (b) HE providers shall furnish prospective learners with general advice regarding the average cost of living e.g., accommodation, food, transport and medical care, for the programme duration.

5.3.2 (c) HE providers shall provide information on:

- (i) fees for accommodation services, if offered by the HE provider or other accommodation service providers;
- (ii) fees for complaints and appeals procedures as relevant e.g., rechecking of exam results.

5.3.2 (d) HE providers shall provide information on any other costs related to the provision of student services as considered relevant by the provider.

Summary

NCI maintains a comprehensive suite of supports and services designed to foster a welcoming and inclusive environment for its international learners, promoting their integration and a positive learning experience.

A strong culture of inclusion is evident, supported by intercultural workshops and dedicated international staff.

A dedicated international support team serves as the primary point of contact for international students, offering guidance on settling in, pastoral care, and residency compliance with national authorities. This team's structure and responsibilities are clearly communicated, ensuring accessibility for students. Prior to arrival, NCI provides extensive pre-arrival and transition support through an online programme featuring newsletters, webinars, and resources covering crucial aspects such as accommodation options, financial planning, and an introduction to life and study in Ireland.

The welcome programme, a key component of the induction process, introduces new international students to academic expectations, cultural norms, and their responsibilities under immigration regulations. These sessions also include dedicated segments on academic integrity, delivered by the library's academic integrity team, covering essential skills like referencing and ethical research practices. NCI ensures that induction is accessible year-round, accommodating students enrolling at different times. Academic information and policies are continuously available through a comprehensive digital and physical Student Support Hub, which also provides timely reminders for key academic deadlines.

NCI actively promotes student engagement and integration by encouraging both domestic and

international students to participate in the Students' Union, clubs, and societies. Initiatives like the international peer mentor programme, an integral part of the welcome programme, and various cultural events, aim to enhance cross-cultural interaction and social integration. Career development support, including workshops and networking opportunities, is also provided to assist international students in their transition to employment.

NCI has also just recently established an international student emergency fund to replace the previous case-by-case/discretionary basis through the international office.

Feedback mechanisms are robust, with an active class representative system and structured student surveys, including the international graduate survey and national student surveys, used to gather input at various stages of the student lifecycle. All students have access to a formal complaints and grievance procedure, promoting informal resolution while providing a clear pathway for more serious concerns. The effectiveness of student support services is consistently monitored and enhanced through institutional oversight and student feedback, ensuring continuous improvement.

Furthermore, NCI is committed to staff training and development to enhance intercultural competence and support for non-native English speakers. This includes external training sessions focused on intercultural awareness and communication. The institution's Athena Swan Action Plan incorporates principles of diversity, equality, and inclusion into curriculum design and promotes Universal Design for Learning training, equipping staff with strategies to make learning materials accessible to students with diverse linguistic proficiencies.

Principle 5.4 Supports and Services for International Learners

HE providers shall foster a supportive environment which supports the wellbeing and integration of all learners into the student body and ensures a positive learning experience for all learners

5.4.1 (a) HE providers shall designate appropriate personnel to be responsible for inquiries about learner support issues from international learners e.g., course coordinator, counsellor, or international officer.

5.4.1 (b) HE providers shall offer information to international learners prior to their arrival to help them adjust to their new surroundings e.g., information on transport, banking, availability of accommodation and accommodation services.

5.4.1 (c) HE providers shall ensure that inductions offered to learners also meet the needs of international learners, including intercultural awareness. They should direct learners to services, supports and facilities relevant or appropriate to their programme of study. They should also remind international learners requiring entry visas and/or immigration permissions of their responsibilities under the Department of Justice's student immigration regime.

5.4.1 (d) The induction programme shall be provided to all cohorts of international learners who register or enrol at various times of the year, including learners who access programmes through advanced entry.

5.4.1 (e) HE providers shall provide information on appropriate learner supports and services to facilitate learner integration into the wider HE community.

5.4.1 (f) HE providers shall ensure that international learners are aware of opportunities to participate in, and be represented at, engagements between the provider and the learner body. Where possible, they should provide, in collaboration with learner representative bodies, information on national learner engagement initiatives and opportunities for international learners to avail of training opportunities.

5.4.1 (g) HE providers shall have mechanisms in place to support international learners financially in instances of personal or other emergency or hardship.

5.4.1 (h) HE providers shall facilitate and encourage feedback from international learners on the delivery of any supports and services. This includes informing learners about complaints processes for these services.

5.4.1 (i) Institutional approaches to quality assuring learner services and supports will include all learners, including international learners.

5.4.2 (a) HE providers shall offer induction that is accessible to all learners and, where appropriate, tailored to the needs of international learners. They shall provide full information and advice on all relevant institutional and academic policies.

5.4.2 (b) Induction shall be provided to learners and cohorts who enrol at different points during the year, including those accessing programmes through advanced entry.

5.4.2 (c) HE providers shall ensure the information provided at induction is easily accessible throughout the academic year and shall offer reminders of this information at key points during the year e.g., in the lead-up to examinations or submission of assignments.

5.4.2 (d) HE providers will include academic integrity as a core component of induction for all learners, including international learners. Recognition will be given in inductions to the different education cultures of international learners, and the content, advice and support they impart will be relevant and specific to the Irish higher education context. Formal and informal conversations about academic integrity should be held on an ongoing basis throughout the period of enrolment of all learners, including international learners.

5.4.2 (e) HE providers shall endeavour to integrate their international learners, through their inductions and through their policies, procedures, and services, into the wider learner community.

5.4.2 (f) HE providers shall continue to provide staff with training and support to facilitate an appropriate and effective delivery of programmes and services to international learners. This should include, where appropriate, training in intercultural competence and support for the development of English language education competence.

Summary

NCI maintains a comprehensive suite of supports and services designed to foster a welcoming and inclusive environment for its international learners, promoting their integration and a positive learning experience.

A strong culture of inclusion is evident, supported by intercultural workshops and dedicated international staff.

A dedicated international support team serves as the primary point of contact for international students, offering guidance on settling in, pastoral care, and residency compliance with national

authorities. This team's structure and responsibilities are clearly communicated, ensuring accessibility for students. Prior to arrival, NCI provides extensive pre-arrival and transition support through an online programme featuring newsletters, webinars, and resources covering crucial aspects such as accommodation options, financial planning, and an introduction to life and study in Ireland.

The welcome programme, a key component of the induction process, introduces new international students to academic expectations, cultural norms, and their responsibilities under immigration regulations. These sessions also include dedicated segments on academic integrity, delivered by the library's academic integrity team, covering essential skills like referencing and ethical research practices. NCI ensures that induction is accessible year-round, accommodating students enrolling at different times. Academic information and policies are continuously available through a comprehensive digital and physical Student Support Hub, which also provides timely reminders for key academic deadlines.

NCI actively promotes student engagement and integration by encouraging both domestic and international students to participate in the Students' Union, clubs, and societies. Initiatives like the international peer mentor programme, an integral part of the welcome programme, and various cultural events, aim to enhance cross-cultural interaction and social integration. Career development support, including workshops and networking opportunities, is also provided to assist international students in their transition to employment.

NCI has also just recently established an international student emergency fund to replace the previous case-by-case/discretionary basis through the international office.

Feedback mechanisms are robust, with an active class representative system and structured student surveys, including the international graduate survey and national student surveys, used to gather input at various stages of the student lifecycle. All students have access to a formal complaints and grievance procedure, promoting informal resolution while providing a clear pathway for more serious concerns. The effectiveness of student support services is consistently monitored and enhanced through institutional oversight and student feedback, ensuring continuous improvement.

Furthermore, NCI is committed to staff training and development to enhance intercultural competence and support for non-native English speakers. This includes external training sessions focused on intercultural awareness and communication. The institution's Athena Swan Action Plan incorporates principles of diversity, equality, and inclusion into curriculum design and promotes Universal Design for Learning training, equipping staff with strategies to make learning materials accessible to students with diverse linguistic proficiencies.

Commendation 1

Section 5.4: NCI can be commended for its induction processes and the quality of work demonstrated in this area. The institution's approach to welcoming and integrating international learners was noted as exceptional. The induction program is designed to be comprehensive, providing international students with essential information and support prior to their arrival and throughout their initial period at the college. This includes structured sessions that introduce academic expectations, cultural norms, and critical immigration responsibilities. Furthermore, distinct sessions on academic integrity are delivered as a core component of induction, fostering an understanding of ethical practices from the outset. Practical guidance is provided on a range of topics crucial for settling in, such as transport, banking, accommodation, and obtaining necessary identification.

Principle 5.5 English Language Policy Statement and International Foundation Year Programmes

The English language supports provided by HE providers to international learners, including through the provision of international foundation year programmes, are underpinned by a coherent and transparent institutional policy approach.

5.5 (a) HE providers shall have an English language policy statement for international learners that shall:

- (i) document the policy approach and process to the assessment of English language proficiency entry requirements;
- (ii) document, as appropriate, the institution's policy approach to the provision, support, and development of English for Academic Purposes;
- (iii) set out the institution's policy approach to the provision of English language supports to non-native English speakers prior to commencement and throughout the duration of their higher education programmes;
- (iv) document the arrangements, including, as appropriate, the quality assurance, credit and/or awarding arrangements, for different types of EAP programmes, such as:
 - pre-sessional programmes/modules,
 - in-sessional programmes/modules

5.5 (b) HE providers offering international foundation year programmes shall set out in their English language policy statement for international learners

- (i) the quality assurance, credit and/or awarding arrangements for these programmes,
- (ii) the corporate and academic governance arrangements in place where such programmes are provided in partnership with other entities e.g., a private English language education provider, other independent/private education provider or campus company.

5.5 (c) For compliance with this HE Code, an international foundation programme shall lead to one of the following awards included within the NFQ:

- (i) QQI preparation for undergraduate programmes, leading to NFQ Level 5 Special Purpose Award (foundation qualification)
- (ii) QQI preparation for postgraduate programme, leading to NFQ Level 8 Special Purpose Award (foundation qualification)
- (iii) equivalent programmes leading to awards that are included within the NFQ and validated by an Irish awarding body.

5.5 (d) Where HE providers currently offer international foundation year programmes that do not lead to awards that are included within the NFQ, they must secure programme validation/course approval for such programmes through an Irish awarding body within two years of the date on which they are authorised to use the IEM.

Summary

NCI maintains an English language policy statement that clearly delineates its methodology for evaluating English language proficiency requirements for international learners. This statement also outlines the institution's approach to providing and developing English for academic purposes and broader language support for non-native English speakers, both prior to their enrolment and throughout their academic journey. The policy reflects NCI's commitment to equipping students with the necessary language skills for successful participation in their programmes.

Entry requirements for English language proficiency are clearly defined and accessible via a dedicated webpage and other institutional materials. Prospective international students whose first language is not English are required to demonstrate that they meet these standards before being accepted into a programme. NCI accepts a range of internationally recognised English proficiency tests with specific minimum score requirements established for each programme. Proof of proficiency must be current, typically not older than two years at the point of enrolment.

Exemptions may be granted to applicants who have completed their previous education in an English-medium institution or are from designated English-speaking states.

For international students who do not meet the direct English language entry requirements, NCI has established an alternative pathway. This collaboration offers an accredited foundation programme, specifically the Level 5 specific purpose certificate. This programme is structured to enhance academic English proficiency alongside subject-specific preparation, offering pathways in certain areas. The partnership and the foundation programme were formally approved by NCI's Academic Council in 2024 and subsequently notified to QQI, ensuring a clear and recognised route for progression into NCI's undergraduate degrees upon successful completion.

The effectiveness of NCI's English language requirements is reviewed and benchmarked at various stages of the institution's Quality Assurance processes. This includes programme development, validation, and revalidation, ensuring that language proficiency expectations remain aligned with academic standards and student success. NCI aims to continuously refine these requirements to reflect best practices within the sector.

Recommendation 2

5.5. (a): This all stated, NCI is requested to revise the definition of international learner in line with the

definition in the HE Code Section 2.2. NCI should act within twelve weeks following TrustEd Ireland authorisation.

Recommendation 3

5.5 (a): Furthermore, consideration ought to be given to focused in-sessional English language supports to help ensure international learners progress on their programme of study.

Principle 5.6 International Learners outside the State

HE providers ensure that learners outside the state who are enrolled on their programmes receive quality learning experiences, where these programmes lead to awards that are included within the NFQ, and whether they are offered in transnational education settings and/or through remote, fully online modes of learning.

5.6.1 (a) HE providers, having regard to their statutory quality assurance obligations, shall ensure that the academic quality, standard and recognition of their transnational education programmes are equivalent to the academic quality, standard and recognition of the programmes they provide within the state.

5.6.1 (b) HE providers shall apply the principles and criteria set out in this HE Code in an equivalent manner in transnational education settings, including in relation to the provision of learner support services.

5.6.1 (c) HE providers shall support QQI, as appropriate, in implementing its statutory function to facilitate the recognition outside the state of awards made in the state. This facilitatory function extends to awards included within the NFQ, where the programmes leading to these awards are provided outside the state.

5.6.1 (d) Linked providers who intend to offer transnational education programmes that lead to awards within the NFQ shall only do so with the agreement of the designated awarding body or bodies making the awards.

5.6.2 (a) HE providers, having regard to their statutory quality assurance obligations, shall ensure that the academic quality, standard and recognition of their remote online programmes are equivalent to the academic quality, standard and recognition of the programmes they provide through other teaching and learning modes.

5.6.2 (b) HE providers shall apply the principles and criteria set out in this HE Code in an equivalent manner in relation to learners outside the state enrolled on remote online programmes that lead to awards included within the NFQ, including in relation to the provision of learner support services.

5.6.2 (c) HE providers shall support QQI, as appropriate, in implementing its statutory function to facilitate the recognition outside the state of awards made in the state. This facilitatory function extends to awards included within the NFQ, where the programmes leading to these awards are offered as remote online programmes.

5.6.2 (d) Linked providers who intend to offer remote online programmes to learners outside the state that lead to awards within the NFQ shall only do so with the agreement of the designated awarding body or bodies making the awards.

Summary

NCI indicates this is not applicable. That said, it declares that it is in the process of applying for an extension to its QA scope of provision to include fully online programmes that can be offered nationally and/or transnationally, with the outcome of this application not anticipated until late Autumn 2025.

Therefore, whilst NCI does not currently engage in transnational education or offer fully online programmes to international learners outside the state, it can be agreed that, at this time, this is not applicable.

Summary of assessment outcomes

This section provides for the Assessment Panel findings and outcomes by principle and criterion

Overview of the provider's international profile and activities

NCI is an independent, not-for-profit higher education institution in Dublin, committed to its mission of 'changing lives through education'. This mission underpins its approach to teaching, learning, research, and comprehensive student support, fostering a learning environment that is both locally connected and globally integrated. Since January 2024, NCI has been a Higher Education Authority (HEA)-funded institution.

NCI currently hosts over 6,000 students from 121 nationalities, with international students comprising approximately 28% of total enrolments in the 2022/23 academic year, a proportion exceeding the HEA average. The institution offers a portfolio of 95 programs, ranging from Level 6 Certificates to Level 10 Doctoral programs on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), across the institution. These programs are delivered through flexible learning pathways, including full-time, part-time, and blended and online learning options, designed to enhance accessibility for a varied student demographic.

A core strategic objective for NCI is the cultivation of a balanced and integrated student body, ensuring that international students are fully included within the institution's broader strategic priorities and evidence for this is apparent across all NCI activities and materials. This commitment extends to enhancing global engagement opportunities, such as participation in Erasmus+ initiatives. The institution prioritises maintaining a diverse and inclusive learning environment, supported by a robust international student experience. This is facilitated by a dedicated international office and student support services, which provide comprehensive guidance on

immigration compliance, accommodation, mental health, wellbeing, and career development, including post-study work options through the third level graduate scheme. To enrich student life further, NCI actively promotes cross-cultural exchange, networking events, and broad student engagement through various clubs and societies, many of which are supported by the Students' Union.

NCI's commitment to quality and inclusivity is evidenced by its QS rating, with maximum stars awarded in areas such as social responsibility and inclusiveness. The institution also holds a renewed (2024) Athena Bronze Award, affirming its dedication to gender equality and inclusion. Admissions processes adhere to regulatory frameworks, and NCI supports the recognition of Irish awards abroad, including through the issuance of a diploma supplement. Furthermore, NCI employs a structured process for engaging with recruitment agents, requiring formal written agreements, thorough vetting, adherence to ethical principles, and includes clear termination clauses for non-compliance. Agent activities are monitored through ongoing training and feedback mechanisms, including student surveys.

While NCI does not currently operate with a Quality Assurance scope of provision for transnational education, it is actively pursuing an extension to its QA scope to include fully online programs that could be offered nationally and/or transnationally, with the outcome anticipated in late Autumn 2025. This ongoing development reflects NCI's ambition to further expand its global reach and educational offerings.

Overall, NCI has a comprehensive approach to most areas assessed and as such most criteria within the HE Code principles for international learners are assessed as fully compliant, indicating a consistent approach to international provision. Only one was marked as partially compliant (5.2 (c)) and NCI are urged to update relevant policy promptly to achieve full compliance.

Recommended condition(s) for authorisation:

Condition 1

5.2 (c): NCI is required to update the LRC policy to ensure that NCI is fully compliant with section 5.2 (c). The panel sets a condition for full compliance with 5.2 (c) to be achieved within 1 year of TrustEd Ireland authorisation.

Commendations:

Commendation 1

Section 5.4: NCI can be commended for its induction processes and the quality of work demonstrated in this area. The institution's approach to welcoming and integrating international learners was noted as exceptional. The induction program is designed to be comprehensive, providing international students with essential information and support prior to their arrival and throughout their initial period at the college. This includes structured sessions that introduce academic expectations, cultural norms, and critical immigration responsibilities. Furthermore, distinct sessions on academic integrity are delivered as a core component of induction, fostering an understanding of ethical practices from the outset. Practical guidance is provided on a range of topics crucial for settling in, such as transport, banking, accommodation, and obtaining necessary identification.

Recommendations:**Recommendation 1**

5.2 (c)-(f): NCI is asked to review its admission policy and procedures and any other relevant policies and processes against the principles and guidance in the LRC and subsidiary texts, and against section 5.2(c) - (f), to establish clearly where gaps exist in institutional policy and practice, within 1 year of TrustEd Ireland authorisation.

Recommendation 2

5.5 (a): NCI is requested to revise the definition of international learner in line with the definition in the HE Code Section 2.2 within twelve weeks following TrustEd Ireland authorisation.

Recommendation 3

5.5 (a): Consideration ought to be given to focused in-session English language supports to help ensure international learners progress on their programme of study.

Declaration of Assessment Panel

This report has been agreed by the Assessment Panel and is signed on their behalf by the Chairperson.

Assessment Panel Chairperson:

Dr Claire Carney

Date:

8 October 2025

Signed:

Claire Carney

National College of Ireland HE Assessment Report Provider Response

Introduction

National College of Ireland welcomes the findings of the QQI-appointed Assessment Panel and appreciates the panel's constructive engagement throughout the TrustEd Ireland assessment process.

This document sets out NCI's formal Provider Response and Factual Accuracy Statement, in line with QQI's Policy on Authorisation to Use the International Education Mark (QP27/IEM 03).

The College confirms that the panel's report has been reviewed by the IEM Working Group and that no factual inaccuracies have been identified. For contextual accuracy, NCI wishes to note that the statement in Section 5.6 regarding the planned extension of NCI's QA Scope of Provision reflects the College's position at the time of submission (May 2025). Since that date, the scope extension project has progressed and now relates solely to national online provision, with no transnational element included in the current application.

The following tables summarise NCI's responses to the condition and recommendations arising from the panel's report.

Responses to Condition for Authorisation

No	Condition	Response
1	Section 5.2 (c). NCI is required to update the LRC policy to ensure that NCI is fully compliant with section 5.2 (c). The panel sets a condition for full compliance with 5.2 (c) to be achieved within 1 year of TrustEd Ireland authorisation.	<p><i>NCI accepts this condition and confirms that a comprehensive review and revision of all admissions and recognition policies will be undertaken to ensure full alignment with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) and the associated criteria 5.2(c)-(f) of the HE Code.</i></p> <p><i>This work is already embedded in NCI's institutional CINNTE Implementation Plan (August 2025), which commits to the full review and publication of all QAES policies (which is currently on-going), ensuring that all policies under ESG Part 1 and QQI's Statutory QA Guidelines are accurate, complete, and accessible.</i></p> <p><i>The Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (QIE) Office, in collaboration with the Admissions Office and Academic Programmes and Quality Committee (APQC), will lead this review. It will include a revision of the Admissions Policy, Recognition of International Qualifications procedures, and associated documentation (including applicant communication templates) to ensure:</i></p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>consistent application of LRC principles,</i> • <i>transparent appeal and feedback mechanisms for applicants, and</i> • <i>explicit cross-referencing to ENIC-NARIC benchmarking practices and QQI guidance.</i> <p><i>The revised policy suite will be presented to the Academic Council for approval within one year of TrustEd Ireland authorisation, in line with NCI's ongoing QAES refresh and CINNTE Implementation Plan milestones.</i></p>
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Responses to Recommendations

No	Recommendation	Response
1	Section 5.2 (c)-(f). NCI is asked to review its admission policy and procedures and any other relevant policies and processes against the principles and guidance in the LRC and subsidiary texts, and against section 5.2(c) - (f), to establish clearly where gaps exist in institutional policy and practice, within 1 year of TrustEd Ireland authorisation.	<i>See response to Condition 1 above (5.2(c)).</i>
2	Section 5.5 (a). NCI is requested to revise the definition of international learner in line with the	<i>NCI accepts this recommendation and confirms that the definition will be reviewed and updated within</i>

	<p>definition in the HE Code Section 2.2 within twelve weeks following TrustEd Ireland authorisation.</p>	<p><i>twelve weeks of receiving formal authorisation to use the International Education Mark. The revised definition will be incorporated across all relevant institutional policies, specifically the English Language Policy and Fees Policy, to ensure consistent terminology throughout NCI's quality system.</i></p> <p><i>The revised wording will align directly with the HE Code Section 2.2, as follows:</i></p> <p><i>International Learner:</i></p> <p><i>'A person who is not an Irish citizen but is lawfully in the state primarily to receive education and training'.</i></p> <p><i>And 'further... one who:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• is in the State enrolled on a programme leading to an award included within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ); or</i> <i>• is in the State enrolled on an English language programme; or</i> <i>• is a learner outside the State enrolled on a programme leading to an award included within the NFQ.</i>
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		<p><i>For operational clarity within NCI, this will be interpreted to include both EU/EEA/Swiss learners and non-EU learners studying in Ireland, as well as any future learners enrolled on NCI programmes delivered online or outside the State.</i></p>
<p>3</p>	<p>Section 5.5.(a.). Consideration ought to be given to focused in-sessional English language supports to help ensure international learners progress on their programme of study.</p>	<p><i>NCI notes and welcomes the panel’s recommendation to give further consideration to focused in-sessional English-language supports to assist international learners in progressing successfully through their programmes of study.</i></p> <p><i>This recommendation will be brought to the Teaching Enhancement Unit to engage with the Academic Schools to explore the potential for more structured, discipline-specific or in-sessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) supports.</i></p>