Quality in Irish Higher Education

2020

QQI Insights

QQI *Insights* Series

QQI's unique position as the agency that spans all post-secondary education and training means that we have been centrally involved in many of the transformations and developments that have occurred in education and training in recent years. Our independent evaluations of providers and our research and analysis of provider-led evaluations provide high-level advice to policymakers and funders on quality in the education and training system.

This QQI *Insights* series aims to analyse and demonstrate the impact of measures taken by QQI to improve and enhance the quality of education and training for the benefit of learners. These *Insights* demonstrate how the work of QQI delivers impact through the promotion of quality improvement among education and training providers, and how this, in turn, enhances the experience and outcomes of learners. They also analyse our qualifications systems to better inform education and labour market decision-makers.

Topics chosen for the series stem from stakeholder feedback, common themes emerging from our independent evaluations of providers of education and training and our analysis of provider-led evaluations, and areas of national policy interest. Ultimately, the *Insights* series aims to shape a fuller understanding of quality and qualifications in education and training, to inform and influence policy, and to play a role in driving future transformation across the education and training sectors.

Acknowledgement for Synthesis in HE Report 2020

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Foreword

In this, the fourth of Quality and Qualifications Ireland's (QQI) synthesis reports of the annual institutional quality reports (AIQRs) of the publicly-regulated higher education institutions, QQI continues its strategic commitment to analysing and demonstrating the impact of measures taken to improve the quality of education and training for the benefit of learners in support of its mission to sustain public confidence in the quality of education and training, promote trust in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and drive a culture of continuous improvement by providers of education and training.

The synthesis report provides an overview of the main themes arising across the reports submitted by the 20 higher education institutions (HEIs) and the National University of Ireland (NUI) for the period from 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2019. It also sets out a summary of QQI's discussions with the HEIs during its periodic quality dialogue meetings, which took place via Microsoft Teams during June-July 2020. With academic year 2019/20 drawing to a close and HEIs' plans for academic year 2020/21 underway, the timing of these meetings provided QQI with a valuable insight into the institutions' experience of, and reflections on, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Irish higher education, as well as the commitment to quality and maintenance of learner experience in the face of this emergency across the sector.

The AIQR is a crucial component of QQI's framework of engagement with the publicly regulated HEIs, along with the institutional quality review process. The current review cycle – the CINNTE cycle – entered its fourth year in 2020, and the AIQR continued to be an important source of information for institutions compiling their institutional self-evaluation reports (ISERs), as well as for the teams of independent experts conducting reviews.

In this year's reports, institutions were invited to submit case studies of quality assurance practice and innovations; these case studies are embedded within this report and published in full in a separate collection of case studies, *Quality in Action in Irish Higher Education: Collection of Case Studies 2020*.

Quality in Irish Higher Education 2020 is directed at the institutions themselves with a view to disseminating examples of good practice detailed within the reports; it will also be of interest to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, the Higher Education Authority (HEA), and other national and international stakeholders.

The report provides a snapshot of the comprehensive QA infrastructures in place in Irish HEIs, as well as the breadth of activities within HEIs aimed at assuring and enhancing the quality of teaching, learning, research, and the learner experience. Its findings demonstrate the integration of quality, its assurance and enhancement, in institutions' strategic plans, as well as the impact of national initiatives on Irish higher education.

Pádraig Walsh
CEO, Quality and Qualifications Ireland

NUI GALWAY

1. Background and Context

a. The Annual Institutional Quality Report

QQI is the Irish state agency with responsibility for the external quality assurance (QA) of higher education and further education and training in Ireland. It is one of QQI's functions to monitor and review the internal QA of higher education institutions (HEIs) and – as part of this remit – each publicly-regulated higher education institution (HEI) in Ireland submits to QQI an annual institutional quality report (AIQR) for the previous academic year, comprising two parts, and detailing:

- **Part 1**: Baseline information in respect of the HEI's QA **policies, procedures, governance, and management**;
- **Part 2**: Institution-led QA and quality enhancement (QE) in the reporting period, including information on activities, themes, developments, and impacts in the institution.

Following submission, the AIQRs are published on QQI's website alongside AIQRs from previous years and, in their totality, the reports provide a contemporary record of quality, and its development, in Irish higher education.

The AIQR provides assurance to QQI that requisite QA procedures are being implemented and regulatory requirements met, and information contained in the AIQR acts as the basis for QQI's biennial quality dialogue meeting with each publicly-regulated HEI.

For HEIs, the report forms a single, transparent repository of policies and procedures; acts as a record of completed and ongoing quality enhancement activities; and sets out planned quality enhancement activities for subsequent reporting periods. It also serves to disseminate good practice throughout the sector.
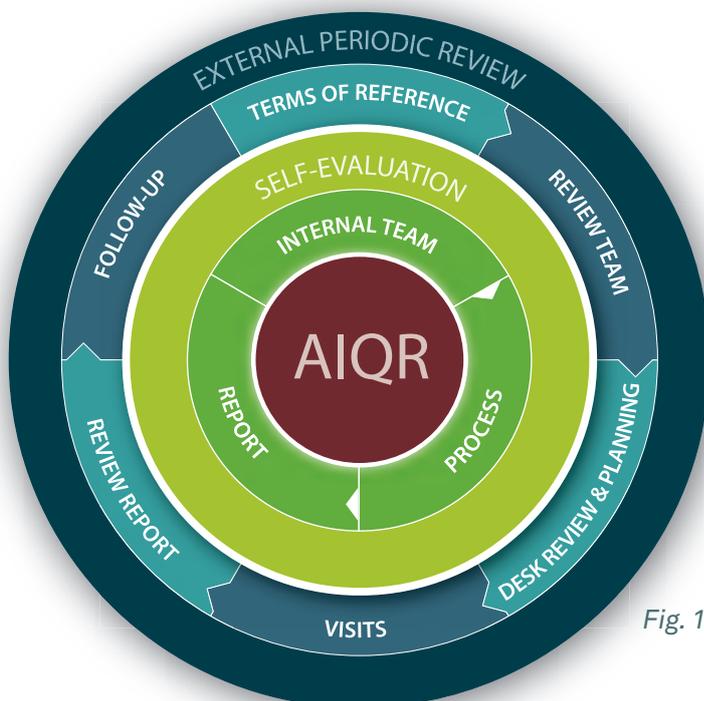
Fig. 1: The AIQR's role within internal and external QA

In addition to facilitating QQI's monitoring, the AIQRs are also relevant to a number of additional stakeholders:

- Parts 1 and 2 of the AIQR form an element of the evidence base considered by **review teams** as part of QQI's CINNTE cycle of institutional reviews of publicly-regulated HEIs;
- As a published document, the AIQR may also be a useful source of information for:
  » **institutional sharing of practice and benchmarking**;
  » (prospective) **students**;
  » the **Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science** and relevant **state agencies**;
  » **professional statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)**
  » **the general public**.

b. Process Enhancements

2020 was the fourth year of AIQR submissions by Irish publicly-regulated HEIs, and feedback from the HEIs as well as observations during QQI's analyses of submissions over the past four years prompted the initiation of an enhancement project in respect of the AIQR in late 2019. Following consultation with the sector, it is envisaged that a new Annual Quality Report (AQR) template and submission platform will be available in October 2020 for submission in 2021. The new template is explicitly aligned to European Standards and Guidelines (2015) and QQI Statutory Core QA Guidelines.

c. Synthesis Report Methodology

This synthesis report is the fourth to be published by QQI, and is based on the 21 AIQRs submitted in February 2020 in respect of the

reporting period from 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2019. As only a limited amount of quantitative information is included in each AIQR, the synthesis report focusses primarily on qualitative accounts of QA and QE across the sector during the reporting period, with the aim of highlighting and disseminating examples of good practice and identifying themes and key areas of focus for the publicly-regulated HEIs.

The AIQRs were submitted in the period directly before closure of the institutions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and it would be remiss not to consider the significant impact of the ensuing period of 'lockdown' on the Irish higher education system. For that reason, an overview of QA and QE impacts and enhancements discussed with the HEIs during QQI's periodic quality dialogue meetings, which took place virtually via Microsoft Teams in July 2020, is included in section 4 of this report.

An AIQR was submitted by each of the following institutions:

1. Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT)
2. Cork Institute of Technology (CIT)
3. Dublin City University (DCU)
4. Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT)
5. Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT)
6. Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT)
7. Institute of Technology, Carlow (ITC)
8. Institute of Technology, Sligo (ITS)
9. Institute of Technology, Tralee (IT Tralee)
10. Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT)
11. Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT)
12. Maynooth University (MU)
13. National University of Ireland (NUI)
14. National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway)
15. Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI)
16. Trinity College Dublin (TCD)

17. Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin)

18. University College Cork (UCC)

19. University College Dublin (UCD)

20. University of Limerick (UL)

21. Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT)

Two institutions submitted AIQRs for the first time: TU Dublin (established January 2019) and NUI.

As part of the submission process this year, core themes with national and international relevance were identified by QQI, and each institution was invited to submit up to three case studies illustrating practice in these thematic areas. A selection of the case studies received – some abridged for brevity – is incorporated in this synthesis report, accompanied by a number of case studies extracted directly from AIQR submissions. A collection of the unabridged case studies is published in a supplementary document, *Quality in Action in Irish Higher Education – Collection of Case Studies 2020*.

d. Factors Impacting QA During the Reporting Period

TU Designation

As in the previous reporting period, several bids by a number of consortia of institutes of technology (IoTs) for technological university designation, in line with the National Strategy for Higher Education 2030[1], commenced or continued during the 2018/2019 academic year.

The following alliances were preparing to submit applications for TU designation during the reporting period:

- IT Tralee/Cork IT (Munster TU; MTU);
- IT Carlow/IT Waterford (TU for the South-East of Ireland; TUSEI);
- GMIT/LYIT/IT Sligo (Connacht Ulster Alliance; CUA).

Just outside of the reporting period, AIT and LIT announced a joint bid to work towards designation as a technological university (AIT-LIT), with €0.8 million allocated to support development and restructuring in preparation for this[2].

Many HEIs detailed in their AIQR submissions the work undertaken and planned in reviewing and aligning individual quality assurance policies and procedures in preparation for designation, as well as progress towards increasing research profile and capacity in accordance with the eligibility criteria for application outlined in Section 28 of the Technological Universities Act 2018.

- Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) was established during the reporting period[3] and its experience of working towards a unified quality assurance framework for the new institution is instructive. An Academic Quality Project Team was established to lead this work. A case study detailing the institution's progress on aligning the QA and QE frameworks of its antecedent institutions to develop an all-university QA Framework (included at section 2b below) places emphasis on the importance of structured engagement with industry, professional bodies and the wider communities within which the constituent campuses are based and an integration of quality enhancement processes into quality assurance processes.

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1   Accessible at https://assets.gov.ie/24558/c90f9fae0a70444cbe20feeff7b55558.pdf.

2   See https://www.ait.ie/news-and-events/news/government-allocated-0.8-million-to-facilitate-technological-university-vis.

3   https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2019-press-releases/PR19-01-01.html.

- In preparing for the establishment of the Connacht-Ulster Alliance TU, IT Sligo and LYIT emphasised in their AIQRs the significant focus on communication and consultation with internal stakeholders during the reporting period. For IT Sligo, this included monthly updates for key bodies and institute-wide staff consultation events. At consortium level, according to CUA partner GMIT, the focus was on *inter alia* commencing joint policy development and harmonisation for the partner institutions, as well as developing an Academic Governance Framework and a common international strategy.

- IT Carlow provided details of ongoing projects (28 in total), jointly funded by IT Carlow and TUSEI partner, WIT, in areas such as equality, diversity and inclusion, promoting access to higher education, and network building.

- CIT provided details of the work of the TURN (Technological University Research Network) working group, which aimed to examine and report on how emerging TUs could achieve their sectoral and national strategic objectives and investigate the supports that would be required for them to do so most effectively and efficiently. CIT led the TURN working group sub-group dedicated to 'Defining the essence of a TU in the context of the Irish education landscape'.

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

Case Study 1

Case Study: Progress towards TU CUA
GMIT

Connacht Ulster Alliance (CUA) 2018-2019 Academic Year

The CUA continues to make progress towards its ambition to obtain Technological University status for the three partner institutes of IT Sligo, GMIT and LYIT. Specific examples of this progress over the academic year 2018-19 include:

- An increase in the number of meetings of the three Executives, where agreement was reached on the vision and mission for the new TU.
- A common approach to the development and validation of Structured Research Masters was agreed in line with the new TU Act (2018).
- The development of an Academic Governance Framework is progressing with plans to review and agree a common Marks & Standards policy.
- Work is progressing on the development of a common international strategy.
- The governance and management of the Alliance has been enhanced by:
  » The establishment of additional sub-groups under each of the four workgroups.
  » Enhanced Terms of Reference for the Workgroups and sub-groups with a renewed focus on developing the application for submission to the HEA.
  » The appointment of external consultants to assist with bringing this project to successful completion.
- In the spirit of more inclusive engagement the first meeting of middle managers was convened. This included Heads of Departments and Heads of Function. The outcome of this meeting was the establishment of a new sub-group referred to as the Transitions sub-group who are tasked with delivering on the following core areas:
  » Location of TU HQ and staff based there;
  » Recruitment of new positions, internally/externally;
  » Balance/proportionality of new posts across the three partner organisations;
    » Respective roles of Faculty and College Boards (consideration and proposed amendment of Governance and Organisation paper, paragraphs. 21 – 23; 31 – 36 faculties; 24 – 25; 37 – 38 colleges); and
  » Budgetary processes for the new TU.
- The establishment of a union consultative forum dealing with IR issues was initiated. All four unions will have access to this forum with time allowances for members to engage and attend meetings.
- The Alliance participated and played an active role in the Technological University Research Network (TURN). Dr Michael Hannon chaired a sub-committee of TURN dealing with 'Multi-Campus Management and Systems Integration' the outcomes of which informed the final report

Case Study 1 (continued)

- The structure for the submission document has been agreed together with a target submission date of 2020/2021.
- In relation to the HEA's Strategy and Performance System, otherwise known as the Compact, the three partners agreed an additional CUA Common Objective focused on achieving the metrics for the application.

Funding and Physical Infrastructure

Financial constraints remained a concern across the sector, with reference in several reports to the difficulties caused by reduced funding from the state. For example, one submission alluded to references in quality review reports produced during the reporting period to the impact of continued reductions in funding, while another pointed out that a reduced capacity to make improvements to physical resources has led to a corresponding reduction in the space available to students.

However, although funding restrictions and reductions did in some cases lead to the need to reduce both investment in physical infrastructure and staff resourcing (despite a frequent growth in HE enrolments), institutions nonetheless proved themselves resourceful and innovative in sourcing alternative streams of revenue and allocating existing revenue, with the AIQRs providing much detail of external funding secured from state agencies, industry and alumni, and evidence of physical (and virtual) resource improvements.

- NUI Galway provided details of its new budget allocation model, prompted by the Review of Income Generation and Resource Allocation Model (RIGRAM), which concluded in June 2018. The aim of the review was "to find an agreed model of resource allocation, commensurate with enhanced devolution of decision-making and responsibility to the Colleges, that would both incentivise income generation and enable the delivery of teaching and research and services at the appropriate point, whether central or devolved. Under RIGRAM, increases in the Expenditure Budget for a College are directly linked to increases in the income earned by that College … the RIGRAM Group continues to monitor development of the model."

- UCD's Governing Authority approved Phase 1 of its Future Campus master plan, which will lead to the creation of the Centre for Creativity, which will house Architecture, Planning and Environment Policy, together with components of Engineering and Design, as well as a teaching and learning hub.

- IT Carlow expanded its Centre for Aerospace Engineering, completed its Sports Campus and continued preparations for further development, including a new Science Building.

- UL's new Glucksman Library was officially opened in June 2019. With the addition of 7,600m^2 to the original library building, the library has doubled in size and capacity and includes discrete spaces for postgraduate and faculty study, group study and exhibition spaces, along with a Digital Scholarship Centre, social learning spaces and an Assistive Technology Centre.

Brexit

Preparing for the **United Kingdom's impending exit from the European Union** was a key theme for the Irish higher education sector during the reporting period, and this was acknowledged and supported in the awarding in October 2019 of higher education landscape funding to two North-South cross-border strategic alliance building projects involving two IoTs, LYIT and DkIT.[4]

Surprisingly, only two HEIs detailed in their AIQR submissions the strategic planning under way both to identify and mitigate risks arising from Brexit to strengthen existing relationships – and build new ones – with key stakeholders, both in industry and in HE, in Northern Ireland.

- TCD established a college-level Brexit risk working group, chaired by its new chief risk officer. A Brexit clinic to consider the impact on recruitment, data protection, procurement, health and safety, research funding, and goods and services was held in October 2019, and a dedicated website for staff and students has been developed.
- AIT created a separate, specific agreement for data processors based in the UK.

The IoTs as Designated Awarding Bodies

January 1, 2020, saw the **designation of IoTs as awarding bodies** for awards up to level 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications following the commencement of Section 36 of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019[5]. There was reflection from some institutions on the preparations required for the imminent awarding of primary responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement to the IoTs, with one institution affirming its increased emphasis on quality enhancement (AIT) and another (CIT) confirming that work had begun

on considering new award standards; other institutions cited revising and reviewing QA systems (IADT) and amending parchments (IT Carlow) to reflect their new status. Some IoTs confirmed that they would be adopting existing QQI standards (CIT) as a bridging measure, and one institution (WIT) provided details of its work on developing and defining the institution's approach to academic risk management as part of a new policy.

There was limited explicit detail of activities undertaken and planned in support of this change in status in submissions; this may be expected given the short time frame between the legislative amendment and report submission period. It is, however, expected that next year's annual quality reports will incorporate this area more comprehensively.

Gender, Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion

As was evident in the AIQRs submitted for the previous reporting period, there has been an enormous focus on **gender, diversity, equality and inclusion** among the Irish HEIs following publication of the *Gender Equality Taskforce Report*[6] in November 2018, and most AIQRs documented the attainment or renewal of, or application for, the Advance HE Athena SWAN bronze award in line with the recommendations of that report. The number of Irish HEIs that have now achieved the award is 11, with six HEIs having been awarded Athena SWAN accreditation for some of their constituent schools, colleges, and departments.

Many HEIs conducted workshops and networking events to encourage students to consider employment in industries that do not traditionally attract female students, as well as outreach programmes to encourage girls' primary and secondary schools to contemplate programmes of education in STEM areas.

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4   https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2019-press-releases/PR19-10-18.html.
5   https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/dc86bf-mary-mitchell-oconnor-welcomes-introduction-of-self-awarding-powers-/.
6   Accessible at: https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2018/11/Gender-Equality-Taskforce-Action-Plan-2018-2020.pdf.

Several AIQRs made reference to participation by female academics and professional services staff in the Aurora Higher Education Leadership Development Programme, and the reports also provided details of applications – and success in applying for – funding for new and additional female-specific senior academic positions (at professorial and SL3 grade for IoTs and universities, respectively) under the Higher Education Authority's Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI).

A number of submissions contained details of new or revised policies in respect of gender identity and gender expression, as well as consent, and, for some institutions, equality, diversity, and inclusion formed a pillar of their existing or draft strategic plans.

- AIT, CIT, and IT Carlow were successful in their applications for funding for new posts under the SALI initiative.
- AIT approved a new equality and gender expression policy, and embedded equality, diversity, and inclusion within its new strategic plan.
- UCD's new governing authority was elected in November 2018 in line with a new quota system to ensure gender equality. The new governing authority is, for the first time in the university's history, chaired by a woman.
- GMIT updated its academic council policy to ensure equal gender representation on future councils.
- IADT approved new consent framework during the reporting period.
- TCD published a Gender Action Plan as part of its successful renewal of its Athena SWAN bronze award. Implementation of the plan has begun, with unconscious bias training delivered by the Director of Diversity and Inclusion to school Athena SWAN self-assessment teams and school executives. Unconscious bias training is mandatory for chair professor recruitment panels and for academic promotion committees.
- At UL, the Plassey Campus Centre gave autonomy to one of its student village managers to develop the concept of Rainbow Housing, resulting in 250 students now living in LGBTQ+-themed housing.

DÚN LAOGHAIRE INSTITUTE OF ART, DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

2. Strategy, Governance and Management

a. Strategic Importance of Quality Assurance

This year's AIQRs continue to show clear linkages between institutions' missions and strategic priorities, and their quality assurance and enhancement activities. This is evident throughout the reports and examples are provided below under the various thematic areas considered; for example, the stated strategic objectives of many IoTs to serve their regional communities and – particularly for those involved in bids to establish technological universities – to ensure a continued focus on vocationally and professionally oriented science and technology programmes were major influencing factors in the demonstrable strengthening of focus on flexible and blended learning and their quality assurance and enhancement.

For many institutions, research was stated as a main pillar of their strategies, and the reports provided evidence of a plethora of activities undertaken by institutions to increase the quality of research, and to encourage a deeper engagement with research by learners at both under- and post graduate level – these include the adoption of new policies and the revision of existing ones; the provision of workshops and training; and the development and redesign of programmes of education and training to encourage a deeper engagement by learners with research.

Ten institutions launched new strategies either during or immediately before the reporting period commenced, and the themes of quality, quality assurance and quality enhancement were highlighted in many of these, either

as a discrete strategic pillar, or as crucial scaffolding for the achievement of strategic priorities. The key role of both internal and external stakeholders in the development of new strategic plans was also highlighted across the AIQRs.

- AIT describes its new strategy (for the period 2019-23) as focussing on mission distinctiveness, with QA as its lodestar. Its strategic objectives are set out under five pillars and, the institution states, quality is the prerequisite for all.

- NUI's strategic plan 2018-22 notes that "academic quality underpins the NUI brand, which is shared by the constituent universities and recognised colleges".

- IADT acknowledges in its AIQR the central role played by quality in its strategic plan (2019-23) in its central strategic value of 'Excellence'. The strategic plan states the objective of applying excellence in "ensur[ing] [its] processes and procedures are efficient and meet the needs of staff, students and other stakeholders" and "develop[ing] an evaluation process that supports the ongoing review of IADT, encourages continuous improvement and enables flexibility to respond to changes in the internal and external environment".

- UCC launched an academic strategy during the reporting period, which will run from 2018-22. The strategy stresses the university's commitment to a "quality enhancement approach and a culture of transparency and accountability".

- IT Carlow acknowledges in its submission that its new strategic plan (2019-23) guides all institute activities, including quality.

- In its strategic plan for the period 2019-23, UL states its commitment to contributing to national objectives of quality and excellence.
- WIT affirms in its AIQR that the evolution of quality assurance and enhancement systems in support of strategic objectives in the reporting period was strongly driven by the Waterford Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2018-2021.
- During the reporting period, NUI Galway was planning to implement a new strategic plan in January 2020, and highlighted in the AIQR its 'meitheal' approach to strategic planning, which was developed through "sustained and meaningful dialogue with communities inside and outside of the university", and will be used to partner with four discrete groups of stakeholders: the 'meitheal scoláirí' with the students' union; the 'meitheal foirne' with staff; the 'meitheal alumni'; and the 'meitheal pobail', which will facilitate relations and new partnerships with communities beyond the campus, including employers, community groups and cultural organisations.

b. Enhancements to QA Frameworks and Systems

The commitment of institutions to the further development and improvement of existing quality assurance frameworks, and (for newly-established institutions) the establishment of new quality assurance frameworks, was clear across the AIQRs for the reporting period. Some institutions approved new policies on quality or quality frameworks, while others reviewed and revised existing quality handbooks and manuals.

- UL developed a new quality policy to replace its institutional quality statement. The policy provides an overview of the primary institutional quality arrangements, and sets out how these arrangements satisfy core statutory quality requirements. Further, UL published a new quality manual in 2019, which provides an overview of the institution and institution-level QA and QE arrangements. Chapters 2 to 12 are structured around and address the individual elements of QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.
- WIT established a new quality assurance framework during the reporting period, which sets out the overarching philosophy and guides academic quality assurance and quality improvement activities at WIT, as well as articulating the values in accordance with which policies and procedures should be developed and implemented. To support staff in their implementation, WIT also produced a suite of online multimedia support material on QA processes.
- LIT approved a comprehensive Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework for the period 2019-2024.
- DkIT revised its quality manual to ensure clarity and accessibility.
- LYIT revised its quality assurance handbook to include amendments to sections on *inter alia* strategic planning, data collection, ownership and retention, and ongoing monitoring of doctoral degrees.
- IT Carlow facilitated an external audit of its quality manual during the reporting period, resulting in an updated work plan to include actions arising as outcomes of the review.
- RCSI noted in its AIQR plans to implement a new overarching RCSI Quality Framework in the next reporting period.

Case Study 2

Development of a new QA-QE Framework[7]

TU Dublin

Development of the TU Dublin Quality Framework

As a Designated Awarding Body, with the authority in Irish law to make awards, the distinctive mission and functions accords TU Dublin the scope to be unique in its approach to programme offerings. This requires a flexible and systemic approach to quality, in order to achieve and maintain excellence in its mission, and to define the unique positioning within the HE sector in Ireland and internationally. The strategy for embedding quality culture to support quality enhancement, i.e., continuous improvement, requires a robust quality framework that builds upon the quality assurance of the merged institutions. An Academic Quality Project Team was established to develop the new quality framework and started by defining the principles and philosophical perspectives that will underpin the new quality framework. The aim of the project is to develop a quality system that will not only encourage and support student-centred practices but will ensure a student-centred learning environment.

Approach to Embedding Quality Culture Supporting Continuous Improvement

After determining the objectives and the underpinning principles, the nature of the new quality system, and specifically its role towards upholding academic standards, while concurrently driving continuous improvements, means a shift of emphases to QE while recognising the importance of QA. The approach taken represents Academic Quality as a continuum with;

- One end being the very rigid QA system characterised by adherence to rules and metrics which ensures accountability and conformity through tightly controlled and well-defined audit processes involving root-cause analyses and prescriptive corrective actions.
- On the other end of the continuum is a Quality Framework characterised by lesser reliance on rigid rules and metrics, instead providing clear principles and processes, allowing for validly interpretation in different ways.

Considering the above outline, the challenge for the TU Dublin team is in making the decision on where to objectively position the new TU Dublin quality system between the two extreme ends of the continuum to maximise the advantages of both, while curbing the highlighted disadvantages. Another challenge that the project team faces is to ensure the new system will be sufficiently informed by external stakeholders to continually improve teaching, learning, (including research practice) and the overall student learning experience. The goal is to develop a system that is primarily characterised by quality enhancement procedures.

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7   Note: This is an abridged version of the case study submitted by TU Dublin; the unabridged case study is available in *Quality in Action in Higher Education 2020 – Collection of Case Studies.*

Case Study 2 (continued)

Approach to Development of the Unitary Quality Framework for TU Dublin

It is common for academic quality enhancement in higher education to be seen as simple augmentation of quality assurance. In such a model, quality assurance is on the opposite end of a continuum to quality enhancement and there is a progression from quality assurance processes leading on to quality enhancement processes. In this way, quality enhancement is dependent on quality assurance, and the data from the quality assurance is used to inform quality enhancement.

However, it has been argued that the most successful model, within which the quality of the learning experience can be improved more effectively and efficiently, is where quality enhancement processes, such as educational development, are combined or integrated into quality assurance processes to create a more holistic approach to quality enhancement. In this model, quality assurance and quality enhancement are integral parts of the same process and can be designed to assure and support a student-centred learning environment. This model has been adopted for the new quality system within TU Dublin. It will be enabled by structured stakeholder engagements such as with community, industry, and professional bodies, with the student as an active participant in all such engagements.

Once the objectives, principles and model were agreed, the Project Team set out to develop the quality system, which will include all academic quality assurance and enhancement policies and procedures (Handbook for Academic Quality Enhancement) and assessment policies and regulations (Marks and Standards document).

Development of the new quality system is ongoing as part of the transformation process divided into the following activity steps:

1. Review of three current quality systems
2. Definition of objectives, underlying principles, and characteristic for new QA-QE system;
3. Mapping to external policies, principles, and guidelines;
4. Drafting of Handbook for Academic Quality Enhancement and Marks & Standards;
5. Stakeholder Consultations and Review of Draft;
6. Revision of Handbook for Academic Quality Enhancement and Marks & Standards documents;
7. Formal Adoption and Phased Activation into Practice.

c. Changes to Policies and Procedures and Key Roles

New and Revised Policies and Procedures

Some key themes were evident across the policies and procedures drafted, implemented, and revised during the reporting period:

- **Programme provision, approval, and review**: One institution updated its policy on programme approval (CIT), while another produced policy guidelines for programmatic reviews in linked providers (NUI). Two institutions reviewed their policies on collaborative provision (GMIT, NUI Galway), while another updated its linked provision framework (UL).

- **Blended and online learning**: One institution (IADT) approved a new virtual learning environment policy, while another published a new blended learning policy (LIT).

- **Data and data protection**: Two institutions implemented new policies on learning analytics (GMIT, TU Dublin). Several institutions updated and approved new policies on data protection, records management (CIT, UL) and IT security (UL).

- **Academic integrity and plagiarism**: Three institutions (DCU, GMIT, IADT) updated existing policies, or adopted new ones, on academic integrity and plagiarism.

- **Equality, diversity, and inclusion**: Gender identity and expression policies were drafted or implemented by four institutions (AIT, IADT, TCD, TU Dublin). IADT also approved a policy on active consent.

- **Access and Progression**: One institution implemented a new policy on supports for students experiencing pregnancy, maternity and paternity (NUI Galway), another adopted a new policy on reasonable accommodations in examinations for students with disabilities

(LYIT), and one published a new policy on recording of lectures (LIT). Several institutions implemented, or were in the process of updating, their RPL policies during the period (AIT, DCU, DkIT, LIT).

- **Research**: Three institutions (AIT, CIT, TCD) published new polices on intellectual property and conflicts of interest. Several institutions implemented new research ethics and integrity policies (LIT, TU Dublin, UCD), while new open access policies commenced development or were adopted in three institutions (CIT, TU Dublin, WIT).

Key Appointments during Reporting Period

A number of key appointments were made in institutions during the reporting period, many of which affirmed the key role of quality assurance and enhancement within institutions, while reflecting both national policy developments ongoing during the period and changes in the institutions' own strategic foci, following the publication of new strategic plans.

Among the appointments made during the reporting period were the following:

- Specifically within the area of quality, UL appointed a new Director of Quality, while MU began the recruitment process for this role. GMIT appointed a new Assistant Registrar (Quality), while IT Sligo assigned the role of Quality Administrator to the assistant registrar on a fixed nine-month contract.

- IT Tallaght appointed a new Acting President, and Acting Vice-President Academic Affairs and Registrar.

- Several appointments were made in the areas of equality, diversity, and inclusion, including the appointment of an Assistant Dean, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in a faculty of UL, an Assistant Vice-Provost EDI in TCD, and the role of Vice-President for Equality and Diversity in LIT.

- The appointment of a Director of Graduate and Professional Development in GMIT, a Regional Skills Forum Manager in CIT,

and the creation of the roles of learning technologist and instructional designer in IT Carlow and GMIT, respectively, evidence the shift towards flexible and blended learning in support of professional development and lifelong learning evident across the sector.

- UL also appointed a Vice-President Research and Enterprise signalling the increased strategic importance of research as a main pillar of the institution's strategic plan.
- NUI Galway appointed a new Vice-President International.
- GMIT appointed a new Vice-President for the Mayo Campus, in line with HEA recommendations.
- A dedicated technological university project officer was appointed in IT Sligo.
- Two IoTs, DkIT and CIT, appointed research integrity officers.

d. Governance and Management of Quality

The AIQRs provided evidence of institutions' commitment to the integrity of decision-making and the management of risk among their governing bodies and academic councils. In particular, the central role of academic council (along with its sub-committees) as the key internal authority with statutory responsibility for the governance of academic affairs within the institutions, was evident. Particularly among the IoTs, governance and management of risk must be given due consideration to ensure that their increased autonomy as designated awarding bodies up to NFQ level 9 is adequately supported by effective governance and risk management.

Several institutions reported having conducted reviews of governance and risk during the reporting period.

- NUI Galway reported a review of the functioning of its governing authority, including the efficacy of its committee structures. The report was conducted by the Institute of Public Administration, with the final report delivered to NUI Galway's Údarás na hOllscoile in March 2019. Outcomes of the working group's deliberations were to be considered by Údarás in 2020.
- Further, NUI Galway provided details in its submission of its review of academic committees to ensure that committee structure reflects a recent revision of NUI Galway academic structure to create a smaller number of larger, more autonomous colleges.
- UCC facilitated an external thematic review of its academic decision-making during the reporting period. The review was conducted at university, college, adult & continuing education, and school levels, and resulted in a report that included recommendations under the headings of 'decision-making models', 'institutional culture', 'policy development and implementation' and 'information systems'. These outcomes will be carried forward in the action plan associated with UCC's new academic strategy.
- TCD created a draft risk register, detailing its compliance with quality legislation, which informed preliminary planning for a review of the institution's compliance with quality legislation by internal audit, and will inform the college risk register. TCD updated its Risk Management Policy during the reporting period, and appointed a new Chief Risk Officer in July 2018.

Case Study 3

Developing an Academic Risk Policy

WIT

The Academic Quality Committee has identified academic risk and academic risk reporting as a key theme of importance for the future. The committee developed a policy document that creates a clear pathway for understanding and codifying academic risk occurrences and the reporting responsibilities arising for risk events. It is intended that this will not alone be implemented in the Institute, but also be published at an international higher education conference for consideration by peers outside of our community.

The Academic Risk Policy was considered in detail by the Audit and Risk Committee. A by-product of developing the overall quality assurance framework was to highlight the extent to which each oversight function (i.e. Governing Body, Academic Council, and Executive Board) is aware of and responding to their obligations and more significantly how errors or instances of non-compliance are managed and reported.

e. Collaborations (including Transnational and International Provision)

As in previous reporting periods, collaborations with a range of entities – from providers to industry partners to community groups, both domestic and international – featured strongly across the AIQRs, with a variety of partnerships highlighted. There was a rich variety of examples of collaborative initiatives within Ireland, including:

- RCSI and NUI published a document clarifying their relationship.
- IT Carlow held its Biennial Seminar on Collaboration in Higher Education in March 2019, in conjunction with the Reform and Delivery Office in DPER and the Department of Education and Skills as part of 'Our Public Services 2020', a holistic public service initiative for development and innovation in the public service.
- IADT engaged in a project with UCD to produce two books of case studies focussing on inclusive teaching and learning, with the first focussing on universal design for curriculum design, and the second on inclusive assessment practices.
- CIT engaged in the Cyber Ireland initiative in collaboration with the IDA, holding three nationwide Cyber Ireland Cluster Initiation Workshops in Cork, Dublin and Galway in February 2019. These workshops aimed to meet the need for deep, specialised and experienced cybersecurity talent and graduates with up-to-date skills and competencies relevant to industry.
- As part of a collaborative project with stakeholders from industry and business, GMIT produced an employability statement.

Apprenticeships

Both the development of new apprenticeships and the provision by institutions of post-2016 apprenticeships as collaborating providers were reported in submissions. There was an emphasis on creating flexible opportunities for students to 'learn as they earned' by delivering programmes using a blend of face-to-face and online modes – for example:

- UL successfully achieved funding for seven new apprenticeship programmes up to level 10 on the NFQ, which are delivered flexibly, with a mix of online, blended, and on-the-job learning.

- AIT provided details of the collaboration between its Faculty of Continuing, Professional, Online and Distance Learning and the Institute of Professional Auctioneers and Valuers to develop the Certificate in Business in Real Estate Administration.

In two submissions, there were reflections on the challenges encountered by institutions in providing apprenticeship programmes collaboratively, specifically challenges in clarifying responsibilities for quality assurance between collaborative partners. The need for strong working relationships between the consortia, coordinating and collaborative institutions is noted. It is likely that other institutions have also experienced similar challenges, and QQI would welcome further discussion of these themes by institutions in future reports.

In the context of pre-2016 craft apprenticeship TU Dublin and CIT noted in their reports some specific challenges that arose during the reporting period. The institutions reported on their continuing work with SOLAS on the quality assurance of these apprenticeship programmes. Other details provided in respect of apprenticeship programmes include the following:

- CIT noted that the increase in enrolments in the Faculty of Engineering & Science was most pronounced in the Centre for Craft Studies, the School of Science & Informatics and the School of Building & Civil Engineering, reflecting not only the continuing recovery of construction-related areas, but also the growing popularity of 'new' apprenticeships.

- WIT plans to begin provision of a Higher Certificate apprenticeship programme for laboratory technicians during the next reporting period.
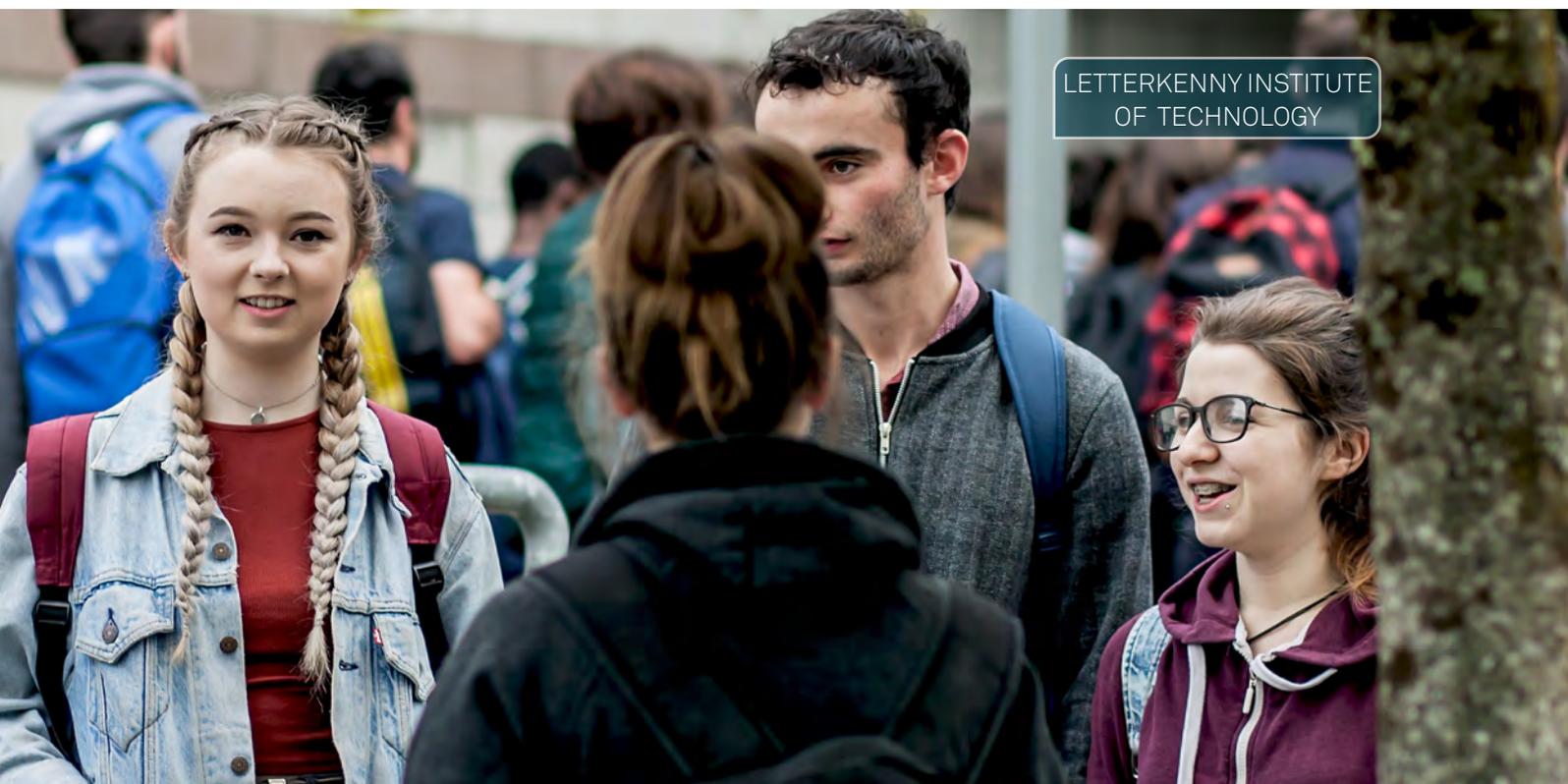
LETTERKENNY INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Case Study 4

Engagement and Collaboration with Industry – Apprenticeship in HE

IT Sligo

The following case study which details the Insurance Practitioner programme responds to the Institute's Strategic objective related to Partnership and External engagement. The end of this reporting period witnessed the first iteration of the programme come to a successful completion with the graduates being conferred early in the next reporting period.

The Insurance Practitioner apprenticeship programme is Industry Led. The initial proposal was submitted to the apprenticeship council by Zurich Insurance and while the apprenticeship council endorsed the concept of the Insurance Practitioner apprenticeship, it recommended that there would be broader industry representation and that the apprenticeship would be available to a broad range of employers. The Insurance Institute of Ireland (III) developed the programme proposal on behalf of the industry, developing the learner specifications and setting up the initial consortium steering group (CSG). The III approached Institute of Technology Sligo (ITS) to assist in the design, validation, and delivery of the programme to the occupational profile specified by the industry CSG. The industry CSG appointed ITS as the Coordinating Provider, with the brief to develop a national programme using distance learning technologies. The strong industry representation was key to a successful implementation, with the focus on a programme which met the needs of the insurance industry, with a focus on preparing future leaders in the insurance industry. Also key was the involvement of SOLAS, HEA, QQI and THEA who advised in the start-up phase of programme development.

The brief to deliver a National Programme was achieved at launch in September 2016, with the launch of a 3-year BA (Honours) in Insurance Practice - with 67 apprentices employed by almost 40 employers with an apprentice in every ETB area. The students are employed by insurance companies across Ireland and take the learning through online and blended learning from their home base, with mentoring support from senior executives in their companies. The Insurance Practitioner apprenticeship operates a day release alternance model which means that the apprentices take their ITS classes on day release rather than the block approach adopted by the traditional employer. This was designed to compensate for the removal of the training allowance from the apprentice and delivers a more cost-efficient delivery for both the employer and apprentice. The use of on-line technologies allowed a truly national programme of scale to be developed and large global players and small brokers among the employers have providing apprenticeship opportunities.

The students achieve a consistent delivery and assessment supported from ITS, who also oversee the overall quality assurance of the programme, and the III with regular face to face days where the apprentices have the opportunity to meet with their lecture team. The programme includes embedded insurance qualifications leading to professional designations required to demonstrate competence in a regulated industry.

Case Study 4 (continued)

In 2017 the CSG proposed the expansion to include companies who provided life insurance. The Life Insurance Association (LIA) are now delivery partners and play an active role on the CSG. The involvement of the III and LIA as industry representatives has a number of advantages. As educational organisations the III and LIA understand the challenges of delivering and validating a work-based programme and are key in activating the industry to recruit apprentices.

The strengths of the industry partnership and the guidance of the CSG has ensured a sustainable apprenticeship delivery model, which provides capacity for development in the regions, and has substantially increased the national uptake by females in apprenticeship programmes, with females representing over 40% of each intake. The development of the Insurance Practitioner apprenticeship provides the blueprint for the development of a sustainable apprenticeship with national reach and industry engagement.

Transnational and International Partnerships

An array of international and transnational partnerships was highlighted in submissions – and many institutions reported plans for further partnerships underway. The breadth of partnership and provision types listed across submissions is proof of the central strategic importance of internationalisation across the sector, with Erasmus+, international placements, joint awards, articulation arrangements and provision by institutions at branch campuses detailed.

During the 2020 quality dialogue meetings, many institutions noted that experiences of responding to the issues caused by COVID-19 for their transnational partnerships from January 2020 onwards informed planning in advance of the cessation of face-to-face provision on 12 March 2020. It remains to be seen how the COVID-19 pandemic will affect this crucial strand of activity, as well as the viability of study in Irish institutions for international students, and this was a concern raised frequently by institutions during QQI's 2020 dialogue meetings (see section 4).

The following list provides only a short survey of the breadth of examples offered:

- UL developed a new, jointly-awarded programme with four other European universities.
- RCSI signed a Transnational Collaboration Agreement (TNCA) with Soochow University, China, during the reporting period, to establish a Dual Degree programme in Pharmacy. The TNCA incorporates an Articulation Agreement under which students will enter the SU Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy degree programme and, having met the stated requirements by the end of the second year of the programme, will transfer to RCSI where they will complete Years 3 & 4 of the Integrated Master's Degree in Pharmacy (M. Pharm.). Students successfully completing the four years of study will graduate with the SU BSc in Pharmacy and the RCSI/NUI BSc in International Pharmacy.

- DkIT established a bilateral agreement with the Jagiellonia University Medical College Krakow for the purpose of staff collaboration in the field of Mental Health Nursing; further, the institution completed audits on clinical learning sites in March 2019 for DkIT Psychiatric Nursing students going on Erasmus Traineeships to UCL, Denmark.

- DkIT also detailed the embedding of a period of Erasmus study and/or placement into a range of programmes within the Department of the Built Environment.

New policies and procedures in respect of collaborative, joint and dual provision were implemented during the reporting period, and there were internal and external reviews of audits in respect of these types of provision.

- CIT detailed the HEA's audit of its Erasmus+ mobility project of 2017/18, which took place in November 2018. Matters in scope included CIT's Erasmus mobility programme, its promotion and impact on the institution and its place within CIT's internationalisation strategy and overall institutional strategy. The audit report concluded that Erasmus+ is a 'core activity of CIT, and referred to examples of best practice, including the 'strategic move' of CIT's Faculty of Business and Humanities to engage internationally (within and beyond Erasmus), with the objective of providing an international experience to students.

- In its revised QA Handbook, LYIT documented the strategic criteria and principles driving its collaborative partnerships.

- UCD convened an Outbound Mobility Working Group to make recommendations and oversee measures to enhance the supports available to UCD students who wish to undertake study abroad as part of their programmes.

- TCD approved and published a new quality procedure for dual and joint degrees in June 2019, which addresses the institution's strategic objective to grow the number of dual and joint awards in which it is involved.

- UCC established its Collaborative and Transnational Task & Finish Group to undertake an assessment of transnational and collaborative provision in the institution, and to provide recommendations on future university and strategy processes for collaborative and transnational education.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK

Case Study 5

Enhancement of Quality through Governance, Policy and Procedures – the Case of Global Relations[8]

TCD

In recent years, the nature of international partnerships between higher education institutions has evolved beyond research collaboration activities. Opportunities for the development of dual degree programmes, global academic networks and second campuses have emerged.

This has presented Trinity with the opportunity to build on its long record of internationalisation and to expand its international reach. Trinity has embraced these opportunities by putting in place structures that support internationalisation and by developing policies, procedures, and processes to guide this growth and to assure the quality of education partnerships, the equivalence of teaching and learning, and the student experience.

Governance

Established as a sub-committee of Council, the International Committee was charged with developing a five-year business plan to meet the strategic targets for international policy and student enrolment outlined in the College's Strategic Plan 2008-2012. In parallel, the Planning Group, a sub-committee of the Executive Officer Group, approved the financial support for Trinity's international ambitions. The International Committee was reconstituted in 2018/19 as the Global Relations Committee, with a membership and remit to better reflect the new global relations environment.

Strategies

Trinity's first Global Relations Strategy (GRS) was developed in 2012, following the appointment of the University's first Vice-President for Global Relations (VPGR) and the formation of a Global Relations Office (GRO) in 2011. This first explicit public articulation of an internationalisation strategy in Trinity included international student recruitment targets, which involved doubling the number of non-EU students between 2011 and 2016. Following a review in early 2014, and in the context of decreasing state funding and Trinity's Strategic Plan 2014-2019, the level of ambition was increased over a longer timeframe, specifically in relation to non-EU student recruitment and strategic partnerships/articulation agreements. GRS2 committed to a mid-term review, which took place in 2017. This mid-term review recommended, inter alia, facilitating global partnerships by more direct engagement at a School level. Accordingly, the third iteration of the Global Relations Strategy, GRS3, refers to School Directors of Global Relations in each School. The GRS3 will run to 2023/24 and is built around four pillars: Building global collaborations and partnerships; Ensuring a global student community; Leveraging the global reach and impact of Trinity's research, education, and innovation; Supporting the continued delivery of a high-quality student experience. The strategy also renews focus on engagement with Europe, and Trinity is a partner in the European initiative to build a European Universities Network-CHARM-EU.

Case Study 5 (continued)

Policies, Procedures and Processes

A suite of policies, procedures and processes have been developed in support of the Global Relations strategies. The first Dual and Joint Awards Policy was approved in October 2015. This was followed by the Non-EU Collaborative and Transnational Education Partnerships Policy, the Education Recruitment Agents Policy, and the Study Abroad Providers Policy, both approved in June 2016. An International Partnership Toolkit was developed in 2017 to support Trinity staff in the development of academic partnerships by providing a guide to partnership types, advice on risk management and due diligence in the development of partnerships, and access to an International Partnerships database. A Dual and Joint Awards QA Procedure was approved in June 2019 and is expected to be used in the first review of transnational education in 2019/20. A draft crisis management procedure for students on study/placement abroad is being developed (led by the Director of Student Services), Procedures for the Recognition of Foreign Qualifications (led by the Academic Registry) and a Policy on Quality Assurance of the Year Abroad are in development for 2020/21.

International Partnerships to Date

The number and type of international partnerships has increased over the lifespan of the GRS2. From a baseline of one joint programme with Singapore Institute of Technology, initiated in 2011/12, there are now nine Dual degree programmes under the Columbia Framework, and a number of articulation arrangements (including with Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology, University of Science and Technology Beijing (USTB)). The first cohort of students from the School of Engineering UM-SJTU Joint Institute entered in 2019/20 under an articulation arrangement.

In addition, the International Foundation Programme (IEP) was developed (2015/16) in partnership with Marino Institute of Education to facilitate entry for international students to UG degree programmes from countries and systems that do not lead to direct entry into Trinity. Students choose from one of two pathways currently on offer – Pathway A in Law, Business, Economics and Social Sciences and Pathway B in Engineering, Science and Health Sciences.

Supports for International Students

There has been significant growth over the last six years in non-EU student numbers (1,123 in 2011/12 to 2,897 in 2018/19). The Global Relations Office has developed a specialised international student experience team to meet the specific support needs of these international students. The Global Room was launched in 2013 as a student support hub and social space. Seven Global Officers have been appointed across nine Schools/Areas to work between the Schools and GRO on recruitment, marketing, partnership development, alumni activities, and to provide support to incoming and outgoing students.

Under GR3 it is planned to build on Trinity's achievements to date by further diversifying the student body, expanding our international partnerships, providing more opportunities for students to study abroad, and continuing to integrate students into the global Trinity community.

3. Effectiveness and Impact of Quality Assurance

a. Programme Development, Approval, Monitoring and Review

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act was passed during the reporting period in July 2019, bringing with it a new Section 55B(3), which focuses on the process by which awards acquire the status of being listed in the National Framework of Qualifications. For designated awarding bodies, the AIQR provides a means for institutions to detail transparently their internal programme approval, monitoring and review policies and processes; submissions provided details of how, through these processes, institutions ensure that learners will achieve the knowledge, skill and competence commensurate with the relevant NFQ level upon completion of the associated programme.

NFQ and Learning Outcomes

Clear definition of learning outcomes at both programme and module level in line with the requirements of QQI's Core QAG[9], and linkages between learning outcomes and the relevant awarding body's award standards during the programme validation, provide assurance that the associated award is correctly levelled to the NFQ. Some institutions provided details of training for staff in developing programme and module learning outcomes – for example, IT Sligo provides academic staff with training in devising programme and module learning outcomes for the purposes of programme design and development, and, the institution further confirmed, all proposed new programmes are designed with overall programme objectives that are in line with IT Sligo's strategic plans.

Several institutions reported in their submissions that they had conducted thematic analyses of programme validation and review reports during the reporting period, and it is to be welcomed that the outcomes of these analyses, as well as the valuable reflections included in those institutions' AIQR submissions, stress the importance of clearly defined learning outcomes at both module and programme level and the demonstrable alignment of these with the NFQ.

- In LIT, of the five key themes identified during the review, three related to learning outcomes, both in respect of their clear definition and differentiation, and their mapping (as part of a matrix) to the relevant NFQ awards standards.
- GMIT highlighted the volume, level, and wording of learning outcomes as an area of focus in programme validation reports.
- TU Dublin, as part of an analysis of its quality review reports for the period, has committed to further improving the vocabulary used in module learning outcomes and further specification of assessment types, and to mapping programme learning outcomes to module syllabi, learning outcomes and assessments.

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9   QQI Core QAG, 2 p. 10

- IT Sligo's review revealed that, of the five categories of conditions primarily imposed in review reports, two related to learning outcomes: insufficient mapping of programme outcomes to the relevant QQI standards and insufficient specific learning outcomes. The institution confirmed that programme development teams were able to articulate any deficits identified in discussion with validation panel members at the site visit. On foot of the analysis, the institution has produced written guidance for programme teams, and plans to develop a new programme template in the next reporting period.

Rigorous programme validation and approval processes help ensure that the award to which a particular programme leads is correctly levelled with the NFQ; there were some instructive detailed descriptions of institutions' internal programme validation processes included in the AIQRs. A particularly comprehensive overview of the process was provided by CIT, and this is reproduced as a case study below.

Significant elements of the process include determination of a programme's financial viability and strategic importance; commentary on the teaching and learning strategy proposed, as well as quantitative data supporting this strategy's feasibility (supported by qualitative data from relevant stakeholders during a site visit); a depiction of the various stages at which programme learning outcomes are achieved on a curriculum map; consideration of assessment weighting and distribution; and industry input at programme development stage.

WATERFORD INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Case Study 6

Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review Process
CIT

The validation (accreditation), monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes in Cork Institute of Technology is carried out under CIT's academic and quality assurance regulations as agreed with Quality and Qualifications Ireland.

For new taught programmes, validation is predicated on successful completion of both internal and independent external quality reviews. These include a review of the content and structure of the proposed programme and of the staffing, resourcing levels and supports envisaged. The final decision on validation is taken by the Governing Body of CIT on the advice of the Institute's Academic Council.

Executive responsibility for the implementation of procedures for the validation and quality assurance of programmes lies with the Office of the Registrar & Vice-President for Academic Affairs. Programme validation is generally granted for five years, after which a review of the operation, enduring quality and continuing relevance of the programme is carried out to establish its eligibility for renewal of validation. This Programmatic Review is carried out on a school/college basis and takes into account the operational and strategic context as well as programme-level elements. The continuous monitoring and development of the academic programmes is a matter for the programme boards, which are comprised of heads of academic unit, programme staff and learner representatives. Assessment results and decisions on progression and award classification require ratification by the Academic Council.

Feasibility Study

The CIT programme validation process requires that a Feasibility Study is produced for every programme proposed for development. This study presents a detailed projection of the resource requirements of the new programme, vis-à-vis the projected intake and demand trajectory over a five-year period. The Feasibility Study is reviewed by a Working Party of the Institute Executive Board. Except for those rare cases where a programme is of extraordinary strategic significance, proposals require a sound business case to pass this feasibility review, otherwise they are halted by the Institute Executive before they go into full development.

QA of Teaching and Learning Modules in Programmes

The design of the formal module descriptor enforces the systematic capture of fundamental elements of the teaching and learning strategy at the module level, defining and describing the module learning outcomes, indicative content, the assessment and re-assessment formats and weightings, and the delivery formats, including the extent of independent learning expected.

At the programme level, CIT's processes for initial programme validation and programmatic review require departments to comment on the teaching and learning strategy for each programme in the programme self-evaluation report submitted to the external expert panel.

Case Study 6 (continued)

The information contained therein, and the qualitative feedback obtained by the panels from their meetings with learners, graduates and lecturing staff, is complemented by quantitative student performance data which give an indication of the success of the programme teaching and learning strategy in relation to the achievement of the learning outcomes by the different cohorts of learners.

The overall programme document provides a curriculum map showing where the intended programme learning outcomes are achieved. Peer reviewers are asked to ascertain that each programme outcome is supported by a sufficient number of modules to ensure it can be achieved by the average learner, irrespective of elective choice. Furthermore, an assessment matrix for each programme is reviewed to ensure that the time and nature of the assessment tasks is appropriate. Reviewers will frequently address issues such as assessment clustering or over-reliance on one form of assessment methodology.

At an earlier stage of programme (re-)development, the appropriateness of the proposed teaching and learning strategies is investigated when academic units seek advice on their programme proposals from employer groups or industry advisory panels. Thus, industry feedback was a significant factor in the decision of the CIT Faculty of Business & Humanities to extend the inclusion of significant work placement periods to the furthest extent possible across its complete portfolio of programmes.

Stakeholder Input into Programme Development, Approval, Monitoring and Review

Touched upon briefly in the previous case study, input to the development, approval, monitoring and review of programmes by a range of both internal and external stakeholders provides assurance that programmes are and remain current and relevant to learners, graduates, and employers. Across the AIQRs, meaningful stakeholder input to these processes was repeatedly noted as important, with institutions variously providing detail of how engagement from learners, graduates, industry, and the communities that they serve, is incorporated at each stage.

Industry

In particular, the central position of industry with regard to programme development, approval, monitoring and review was stressed across the AIQRs – examples included collaborations with industry in the development of apprenticeship and Springboard+ programmes; partnerships with regional skills fora to design and deliver industry-focussed programmes; and the involvement of industry in advisory boards, which feed into programme development and review.

The involvement of **PSRBs** in programme development and approval was a universal feature in submissions, with all reports making reference to PSRB approval of the relevant programmes for the purpose of accreditation or the awarding of exemptions, for the purpose of ensuring, ultimately, that graduates of the programmes possess the requisite knowledge, skill and competence to integrate into the world of work and/or engage in further training to become a qualified professional.

In some cases, the involvement of PSRBs in programme development extends beyond

accreditation and the granting of exemptions, and there is welcome evidence of collaboration between HEIs and PSRBs to facilitate observation by PSRB representatives of internal academic validation processes as well as – in some cases – the incorporation of PSRB representatives as programme validation panel members where appropriate. In such cases, the increased familiarity among PSRBs with HEI internal processes may lead to opportunities to dovetail processes and reduce the burden of accreditation and approval on both HEIs and PSRBs, which is much to be welcomed.

- GMIT's review of the validation process for special-purpose and minor awards led to changes to the composition of validation panels, resulting in more external input.

- CIT endeavours to familiarise PSRBs with its academic quality assurance procedures and criteria by, for example, arranging for representatives of PSRBs observe academic review processes, or, if appropriate, inviting representatives of such bodies to participate in academic review as a panel member.

- UL relies on strong linkages with industry and professional bodies to provide guest speakers and networking opportunities, and UL's report highlights the research scholarships provided by the Project Management Institute Educational Foundation.

- A number of institutions provided details of their engagement with the healthcare professionals regulator, CORU, in advance of the introduction of the register for social workers.

- Each school in DkIT has an industry advisory board, which meets annually to exchange information and feed into curriculum development.

- TU Dublin (institution-wide) highlighted as one of the themes identified for commendation across its quality review reports the inclusion of industry practitioners on programmes as guest and part-time lecturers, as well as the leveraging potential of alumni to assist in the promotion, and to inform the development, of programmes.

TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY DUBLIN

Case Study 7

An Innovative Learning Partnership – UNUM and Institute of Technology Carlow[10]

IT Carlow

The Institute of Technology Carlow is a key driver of regional development and this was a key consideration in the decision of US Fortune 250 company UNUM to establish their strategic software services centre in Carlow. UNUM's investment announcement stated that 'the Institute of Technology Carlow, are genuinely interested in partnering with UNUM to help us succeed'. Since then the development of the UNUM/Institute of Technology Carlow partnership has demonstrated the potential breadth of an industry/higher education partnership. Today almost one third of UNUM Irish employees are Institute of Technology Carlow graduates and the symbiotic relationship between the two organisations is based on co and joint learning and continues to evolve.

The partnership between UNUM and Institute of Technology Carlow is multi-faceted. UNUM have a well-developed corporate social responsibility and engagement strategy that has informed and promoted the interaction with the Institute. From their arrival in Carlow, the company has been interested in building mutually beneficial linkages with the Institute from the outset, providing them with access to potential employees with required skill sets and providing the Institute with access to the expertise of a major international corporation. In addition, the company has invested in software development facilities at the Institute, student placements and internships and graduate recruitment. A senior manager from UNUM is on the Institute's Governing Body and also on the board of the InsurTech Networking Centre DAC. A bespoke solution for upskilling UNUM employees commenced on a pilot basis in 2018/19. This programme allows UNUM employees to remain in employment but gain new or additional level 8 qualifications with demonstrable impact for the economy and society through the fact that one third of UNUM employees in Carlow are Institute of Technology Carlow graduates. This adds to their personal skill set but also increases employee engagement in UNUM.

The partnership has been developed through the building of a relationship based on trust and respect where all parties input is welcomed and encouraged, and the partnership is strategically important to both. Institute of Technology Carlow has aligned certain elements of computing modules to include areas of specific interest to UNUM and the company founded the UNUM Software Development Centre (SDC) at the Institute's Carlow campus.

In 2015/16 the Institute announced a Research Fellowship Programme scholarship programme for employees of UNUM who are suitably qualified Masters or Doctoral candidates intending to pursue research in any discipline with one of the research centre at the Institute to enable and sustain a creative and collaborative research community between the partners.

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10   Note: This is an abridged version of the case study submitted by IT Carlow; the unabridged case study is available in *Quality in Action in Higher Education 2020 – Collection of Case Studies.*

Case Study 7 (continued)

Key transferable business skills along with technical knowledge, from IT systems management to software development to project management and research, are developed in partnership in a model that ensures graduates are prepared for employment in any international IT organisation.

A highly sought after MSc in Data Science has been developed by the Computing Department with UNUM input and launched. Technology based PhD and MSc graduates are highly sought after by industry for their intellectual capacity and applied skills. In March 2019 it was announced that UNUM were building their capacity in data analytics in Ireland and the statement from the board stated that 'Ireland will be our Data Science Incubation Hub. Institute of Technology Carlow is the collegiate feeder program to our Hub in Ireland'. This follows the successful inauguration of the InsurTech Networking Centre earlier in 2019 in which UNUM is a key industry partner and a member of the advisory board. The overall focus is always on learner enhancement, supporting programmes and research innovation.

At an institute level the engagement with UNUM is informing policy development regarding programme design and delivery, placement for learners and volunteerism. During the Institute's programmatic review processes from 2015, the Institute has greatly increased the work-based experiential placement opportunities for learners. Placement learning opportunities are required to adhere to basic general principles, regardless of the length of time spent in the placement. The formal placement opportunity offered by UNUM acts as a gateway to employment in addition to being a programme element.

From the commencement of the relationship the partnership has involved programme design, validation and delivery. The relationship between teaching faculty, professional services and UNUM staff has developed and grown through programme initiatives and also the provision of IT facilities by the company in the Institute.

Learners

In line with the ESG[11] provision that institutions ensure that 'programmes are designed by involving students and other stakeholders in the work', and corresponding provision of the QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines[12], there was some evidence of **learner involvement in programme development and approval** across the AIQRs, with nine of the institutions reporting learner involvement in internal approval/evaluation and review panels.

However, it is disappointing to note that this is a reduction from the previous reporting period, when ten institutions reported student panel membership. It is to be hoped that institutions will consider developing new, and strengthening existing, opportunities for students to contribute to programme development, approval, monitoring and review processes, particularly through participation as full panel members in evaluation and review processes.

11   European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area 2015, 1.2 Design and Approval of Programmes, p. 11.

12   QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines p. 10.

Submissions included welcome details of new **training initiatives** to prepare students for participation in review/evaluation panels and in programme boards, with some of these facilitated externally, and some organised by the institutions themselves.

Further details of the opportunities provided by institutions for students to contribute to the programme development, approval, monitoring, and review processes are included below at section 3f, Information and Data Management.

- DCU reported the implementation of faculty-level staff-student fora during the reporting period. These fora aim to provide an informal opportunity for ongoing dialogue between staff and students, supplementing formal feedback structures, as well as student representation at formal university committees.

- UCC continued implementation of its Quality Peer Reviewer Digital Badge, which is awarded to all student reviewers who participate in quality review panels.

Approximately 30 hours of learner effort is required to attain the badge. This effort which takes the form of training, review of documentation, participation as a full panel member, contributing to the panel report, and submission of an artefact/report, which is assessed by UCC's Quality Enhancement Unit.

- RCSI confirmed its commitment to substantive student involvement in the institution's internal QA review processes – in particular, through student membership of peer review groups. It reflected that recruitment of student members of peer review groups is very difficult, as Students' Union officers are targeted, and balancing the role with substantial course work and student union responsibilities can be challenging. However, it noted that students are involved in the governance of RCSI QA policies and procedures through Students' Union representation on the RCSI Quality Committee, and governing committees and boards.

Case Study 8

Embedding the Learner Voice in Review Panels

LYIT

McManus and Vickery (2018) in their QQI report A Thematic Analysis of Reports on the Accreditation/Approval/Review of Programmes of Higher Education identified the need for greater student representation on review panels across the higher education sector. As part of the development of our Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) version 3.0 (September 2018) the institute committed to student representation on all of our programme review and programme validation panels. In September, the Quality Office in conjunction with the Dept. of Law and Humanities developed a Certificate in Academic Programme Evaluation and Validation (Special Purpose Award). The aim of the programme was to provide learners with the key skills, knowledge and competencies required to participate on a range of panels within an Irish Higher Education setting.

The programme encouraged learners to apply their developing knowledge, skills, and competences throughout a series of 3 workshops and in the module assessment. The Teaching and Learning approach adopted key themes from informed national and international research and policy reports; and shared understandings emerging from our grounded experience in teaching practice. This programme utilised a blended learning approach and brought together the best of both face-to-face and online strategies.

The programme was delivered in March/April 2019 with eleven postgraduate learners from a range of subject areas participating. Ten of the learners successfully completed the programme assessment (mock panel report and presentation). The learners have since participated in a range of panels for the institute. Two students participated in Central Service Reviews and five different students took part in 13 programme validations. The feedback from the learners is positive and many of the panel chairs have commented on the excellent and valuable contribution of the learner representatives. It is planned to run the next iteration of the training programme in March 2021.

b. Teaching, Learning and Assessment

As in previous reporting periods, an array of initiatives aimed at enhancing teaching, learning and assessment in the publicly-regulated HEIs was reported, many of which are detailed in other sections of this synthesis report. Examples range from the provision of accredited and informal opportunities for professional development to those involved in the provision and support of programmes,

to the development of training for students in respect of assessment literacy.

In some cases, submissions detailed how teaching, learning, and assessment strategies are explicitly considered during programme review and validation processes (see CIT case study in section 3a above).

There were also details in the AIQRs of reviews of curricula, with UCC outlining its 'Connected Curriculum Project', one of its strategic priorities, which aims to ensure that the six key elements of research-based teaching,

employability, sustainability, inter- and trans-disciplinarity, global reach, and civic and community engagement are embedded across the curriculum at UCC, and UCD providing details in a comprehensive case study of its Curriculum Review and Enhancement process.

Fig. 2:   UCC's Connected Curriculum project (QQI quality dialogue meeting with UCC, July 2020)

CORK INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Case Study 9

Defining Educational Excellence (Curriculum Review and Enhancement Project)[13]

UCD

UCD introduced a modularised curriculum in 2005. Ten years on, programmes had not been reviewed at a University-wide level and there was a concern of an over-emphasis on modules to the detriment of programme coherence and cohesion. To address the opportunities and challenges presented by the maturing modular curriculum, UCD initiated a University-wide project in 2015: the Curriculum Review and Enhancement Project (CRE process).

The CRE process provided the University with the opportunity to create greater programme cohesion and coherence by identifying how individual modules fit into broader programme objectives. The process placed a strong emphasis on the articulation of outcomes, with a focus on coherently organising, delivering and assessing curricula to embed and assure these outcomes for students.

Conducted over a 15-month period, with a four-stage methodology, the CRE process was led locally by Project Champions. It resulted in the publication of programme vision and value statements and programme learning outcomes for 598 taught programmes, as well as a curriculum mapping exercise whereby contributing modules were mapped to the programme outcomes.

While Academic Regulations were kept under annual review, a full re-draft had last taken place to support modularisation (September 2006). Informed by the learning from the CRE process, the University decided it was timely to evaluate the regulations to determine whether they could make a more significant contribution to UCD's current strategic priorities. In 2016, Academic Council established a working group whose primary objective in reviewing the regulations was to determine how new Academic Regulations could best support students to learn and progress in their programmes. The working group was chaired by the Registrar and made up of student, faculty, and staff representatives from across the University. Informal and formal consultation was undertaken with targeted individuals and groups, the Students' Union, and all faculty and staff using a variety of consultation and survey methods. Survey feedback and consequent actions were published for faculty, staff, and students to view.

As an outcome of the CRE process and the review of Academic Regulations, it was recognised that the structures overseeing approval of academic programmes and their quality required review and approval at various governance boards. The principle of allowing a governance board at the appropriate level to approve changes within the broad Academic Regulations framework was agreed allowing the University Boards to focus more on strategy and broader quality issues.

13   Note: This is an abridged version of the case study submitted by UCD; the unabridged case study is available in *Quality in Action in Higher Education 2020 – Collection of Case Studies.*

Case Study 9 (continued)

Recognising that education excellence requires operational and systems support, the University's structures, and processes for implementing student-related delegated authority decisions have been enhanced during this time. An Academic Regulations Implementation Group devised and delivered the technical and operational solutions required to implement the new regulations (major modifications were required to Banner, CMS, the Research Management System and SISWeb).

In addition to the programme vision, value statements and learning outcomes mentioned above, recommendations from the CRE Steering Committee were incorporated into the Education Strategy 2015-2020: Our Students' Education and Experience. The process also provided an opportunity for module co-ordinators to reflect on how their modules fitted into programmes as well as opportunities to engage with students – further enhancements of the quality process.

Supporting UCD's Vision for 2020 and its strategic initiatives, as well as the implementation of recommendations from the CRE process, a new set of Academic Regulations was approved by Academic Council in 2018, to come into effect from academic year 2019/20. They establish a single set of regulations for all taught programmes in the University, and separate regulations for graduate research students. Greater emphasis is placed on ensuring programme coherence, and specific measures are introduced to ensure transparent and fair grading processes, in addition to providing timely and effective feedback to students on all assessed work. New programme structures were introduced to promote both depth and breadth in learning outcomes, and greater efficiency is provided for by devolving decision-making. New possibilities are also provided for, such as integrated assessment across multiple modules and the assessment of learning outcomes achieved outside traditional module structures.

At an operational level, the new Academic Regulations are supported by a new curriculum system. This allows the more comprehensive information required by the regulations at module, major and programme level to be captured and reported on. The advanced reporting and auditing capabilities facilitate improved governance, and provide greater clarity, flexibility and coherence for faculty and staff.

ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS IRELAND

Flexible Learning

The influence of Ireland's *National Skills Strategy 2025*[14], the *Project Ireland 2040 National Development Plan*[15] and the HEA's *Higher Education System Performance Framework 2018-20*[16], as well as the rapidly changing world of work, was evident in the drive in many HEIs to provide a **greater breadth of flexible learning opportunities**, with an increased offering of special purpose awards and minor awards to support up- and reskilling, and a greater number of **blended learning programmes**. All three documents place strong emphasis on the provision of skills development opportunities relevant to the needs of learners, society, and the economy, as well as the promotion of flexible and lifelong learning. In line with the HEA document, many institutions began the development of, or published, employability statements and/or employability and employment guides (TCD, CIT, GMIT), while a change in the criteria for enrolling on programmes provided under the Springboard+ scheme, which permits those in employment to avail of the scheme, also led to further opportunities for HEIs to facilitate industry-based projects at learners' places of work as part of the programme (TU Dublin, DkIT, AIT).

New policies on blended learning were developed and existing policies augmented during the reporting period, and several institutions provided specific (often accredited) training for staff on designing and adapting programmes for blended and online environments. One institution, TU Dublin, established a cross-university working group to consider QQI's Statutory QA Guidelines for Blended Learning to determine where revisions may be required to the institution's policies and procedures, and infrastructure and supports for blended learning.

It is likely that the significant investment of time by institutions in this area, which is evident across the AIQRs, was helpful for both staff and students during the 2019/20 academic year when institutions were forced to cease face-to-face provision due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other developments in this area included the following:

- GMIT affirmed its focus on flexible programme delivery in its new strategic plan, with digital learning, programmes with an applied focus, and employability and professional practice comprising three of five priorities on which the institution will concentrate in the initial period of its implementation. In support of this shift, a review of validation reports conducted by GMIT revealed a strong shift in programme development towards short industry-focussed awards, online and blended delivery, and postgraduate programmes.

- IT Carlow implemented its *Roadmap for the Implementation of pilot blended learning programmes in Institute of Technology, Carlow* in 2018/19, taking on a learning technologist to support staff in the pilot roll-out.

- LIT developed and delivered an accredited special purpose award in Designing and Adapting Coursework for Blended and Online Learning and approved a new Blended Learning Policy.

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14   https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf

15   https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/37937/12baa8fe0dcb43a78122fb316dc51277.pdf#page=64

16   The Higher Education System Performance Framework 2018-20 sets as one of its objectives the provision of a "strong talent pipeline combining knowledge, skills and employability" and includes as indicators *inter alia* an increase to 10% of the number of those aged 25-64 engaged in lifelong learning by 2020; an increase to 25% of the number of HE entrants studying on a flexible basis; and the introduction of employability statements for all disciplines in all HEIs by 2020. The Framework is accessible at: https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/higher-education-system-performance-framework-2018-2020.pdf.

- WIT noted that the institution's drive in recent years to build capacity for new modes of delivery, including collaborative, long-distance, blended and fully online programmes, led during the reporting period to the significant positive impact of the graduation of the first cohort of Irish Prison Officers from the Higher Certificate in Custodial Care.

- TU Dublin commenced delivery from its Tallaght campus of online taster modules for part-time accounting students, and, as above, the institution's cross-campus working group considered QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines on Blended Learning. Outputs from the group include a working definition for blended learning for use in TU Dublin, a checklist for programme committees developing blended learning programmes, and a set of recommendations to further enhance TU Dublin's blended learning delivery.

- The three institutions that comprise CUA were awarded funding through the HEA's

Innovation and Transformation Funding Call and was successful for the "Innovative Opportunities Transforming Education (iNOTE) Project", which aligns with, and will form a direct response to, the key system objectives for the Higher Education System 2018 -2020. This will be achieved via the completion of five work packages focusing on:

i. developing a quality assurance policy for flexible delivery;

ii. building digital capabilities amongst CUA staff;

iii. developing a range of digitally enhanced student supports for those undertaking programmes through flexible delivery;

iv. developing and delivering work based programmes (WBP) utilising digital capabilities for flexible delivery and

v. mainstreaming, disseminating, and evaluating CUA digital capabilities for flexible delivery.

Fig. 3: Work packages comprising the CUA partners' iNote project (QQI quality dialogue meeting with GMIT, July 2020)
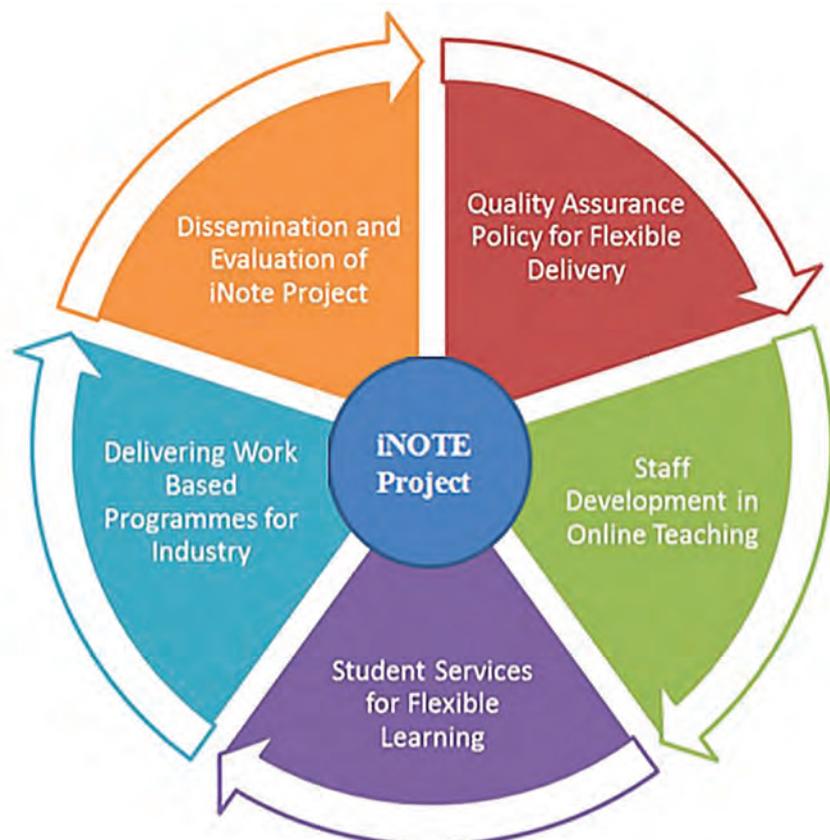
Case Study 10

The Success of the Springboard+ Initiative

AIT

The Faculty of Continuing, Professional, Online and Distance Learning co-ordinated the Springboard+ initiative in Athlone Institute of Technology during 2018/2019. The primary objective of Springboard+ is to provide upskilling and reskilling courses to develop the talent base in Ireland in key growth sectors of the economy. It provides free and heavily subsidised upskilling and reskilling higher education opportunities in areas of identified skills need. The initiative's primary target group when it was established was unemployed people with a previous history of employment. Over recent years with the decline in numbers on the live register the focus was changed to include more people in employment and those returning to the workforce.

All programmes approved for funding under Springboard+ are selected by an independent panel of experts from industry and education following a competitive tendering process. In particular, programmes with a proven track record in getting people back into employment are recommended for funding.

During 2018/2019, the Faculty partnered with local industry in the Midlands region and the Regional Skills Forum manager to design and deliver industry focused programmes. These accredited programmes were customised to the needs of industry and were delivered using flexible delivery channels such as online and blended learning to suit industry partners and programme learners. During 2018/2019, Athlone Institute of Technology was awarded over 350 student places on industry focused programmes at levels 6 to 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications. Each programme was a direct response to the current and projected skills needs in all sectors and industries in the region. The Springboard+ initiative continues to drive regional growth through the upskilling and reskilling of the workforce and its attendant benefits to business in the region.

MAYNOOTH
UNIVERSITY

Case Study 11

FutureLearn Strategic Partnership

DCU

As a global strategic partner of Future Learn, DCU offer a range of short and longer accredited courses from micro-credentials to postgraduate degrees aimed at working professionals and global learners.

During 2018/19, DCU offered courses across a wide variety of subject areas including Artificial Intelligence, Irish Language and Culture and Fin-Tech for Business Leaders, providing an increasing suite of online courses and mini modules to promote greater access to higher education and additional flexible pathways for life-long learning.

Through this strategic partnership, DCU also offer a number of scholarships for online study to refugees and asylum seekers living in Ireland, with a total of 20 scholarships offered throughout the academic term 2018/19. Plans are in place to further develop the range of online and blended short courses available as part of DCU's commitment to opening up education through new digitally-enhanced models of teaching and learning.

Assessment/Feedback

In its eight principles of assessment of/for/as learning[17], The National Forum for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education stresses *inter alia* the importance of assessments that develop students' skills in evaluating their own work, so as to assist in their development into self-regulated learners; assessment and feedback that is clear and understandable by staff and students; and the enhancement of assessment and feedback through staff's engagement in professional development.

A variety of illustrations of good practice aligned with these principles was put forward in the AIQRs. There were valuable examples of how academic staff are supported in developing **meaningful assessments of various types**, suited to the learning environment and particular learner cohort. There was particular consideration of how best institutions could

assist early career lecturers, with supports ranging from informal briefing sessions to accredited modules and programmes.

Prompted by the critical review of teaching, learning and assessment strategies undertaken during the programmatic review process, one institution (DkIT) considered how best group work could be assessed, resulting in the production of a framework and guidelines for assessed group work, while another developed innovative methods of familiarising learners with the assessment lexicon (see IADT case study, below).

- CIT created a resource for new and early career lecturers to manage the first few critical elements of teaching in higher education based on the work of Prof Phil Race, and the 'Teaching and Assessment at CIT (TACIT) Guides', a series of short

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17   https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/our-priorities/student-success/assessment-of-for-as-learning/#!/Principles

guides (available both online and in print versions) that provide hints, tips and practical guidance on key aspects of learning and teaching practice to help refresh thinking or spark ideas about possible approaches to take in teaching.

- TCD engaged in an NFETL-funded project focussing on increasing assessment literacy in students transitioning into higher education. The project aims to address the gap between staff, who have tacit understanding of assessment practices, criteria and standards, and students, who do not yet have that understanding, and seeks to build the student's capacity to make evaluative judgments about their own work so that they become agents of their own learning.

- TU Dublin produced a draft college statement on a consistent feedback strategy has been produced and was shared at the institution's Programme Chairs Forum.

- IT Carlow referenced its programme, Academic Success: Skills for Learning, Skills for Life, accessible to all learners via Blackboard, and noted that many of its lecturing staff are embedding the programme in their assessments.

Case Study 12

Student Engagement with an Assessment Lexicon; a structured self-assessment to help demystify the assessment process

IADT

This case study was developed by a studio-based Art & Design lecturer in response to requests from final-year students for more formalised interim feedback. It is not typically useful or instructive to give alpha grades for work in progress, as an alternative she designed a structured self-assessment exercise.

During a two-hour session, students were introduced to a locally-devised "assessment lexicon" that is often used by colleagues within the department to consider the standards of student work. This assessment lexicon isn't used as a stand-alone and strict measure of student work, it is not a rubric. The lexicon theorises and proposes language that is appropriate to describe the standard of work across the full range of alpha grades used within the department.

The lecturer prepared a document for each student which had four statements in areas related to the weightings and assessment outcomes for this module (research, fabrication & design). After each statement there were nine words, one from each grade band on the lexicon, each student was instructed to complete each of the four statements by circling as many words as they felt described their work to date.

After giving learners time to complete the document, she spent time with each of them discussing the words they had chosen and gave them her own impression of where their work sat in relation to the words on the page. The exercise allowed students to select multiple

Case Study 12 (continued)

words and they expressed interest in this approach, it allowed them to openly declare that work could be both 'thoughtful' and 'inexact' at the same time.

This assessment was designed with Universal Design for Learning principles in mind and aligns with UDL principles in the following ways:

1. It is designed to provide transparency in assessment and feedback.

2. It is a scaffolded method of assessment, giving learners prompt individual guidance and critique.

3. It reduced the assessment load by replacing what could have been a formal interim presentation.

4. It gives the students voice and agency with regard to assessment and their progress.

It is difficult to measure the impact of a single event like this on such a small group of students, however one anecdotal measure could be the 'success' of summative feedback. Of a total of twenty-four participating students only one expressed surprise or upset with their final grades, and this student did not attend the interim assessment. After seven years of running this module, that is the highest rate of meeting expectations the lecturer had ever experienced. It is usual for four or five students to express disappointment with a grade lower than they expected.

This exercise is only useful if done as a method of facilitating a conversation around grading. If there is no time for the follow up one-to-one sessions, then it should not be attempted. Discussion should focus on helping students identify good habits and strategies for maintaining or improving the standard of their work.

It is important to note that this exercise describes the self-assessment of the standard of work, not the standard of learning, however the structure could be used to assess learning. A focus on learning may be a useful exercise to perform at the beginning of each year of study as it would prompt students to reflect on learning to date and identify any gaps in learning they felt they may need to address in order to succeed during the upcoming year.

There was much detail across the AIQRs of engagement with, and detailed analysis of, **external examiner reports**, which both quality assure, and improve the validity of, assessments, and in many cases facilitate reflection by institutions and academic staff on how teaching, learning and assessment can be enhanced, while providing assurance of existing good practice in these areas. The AIQRs illustrate that, in general, summaries of external examiner commentary are fed back to schools and departments, with staff usually required to provide responses on how external examiner recommendations have been acted upon. In addition, external examiner commentary is generally brought to academic council for its consideration.

- AIT, through its Vice President Academic Affairs and Registrar and President, conducts an annual review of its external AIT examiner reports. A summary of reports is drafted by the AIT's quality office, and each faculty is then asked

for updates on how recommendations from the external examiners have been addressed.

- WIT conducted a synthesis of external examiner reports during the reporting period, identifying the following themes: communication of continuous assessment material to examiners; anonymising of all assessment; provision of summary data to external examiners to enable a year-on-year analysis; production of programme assessment matrices and development of generic marking criteria. Further, based on findings from the synthesis, the institution's academic council has begun phasing out programme examiners and confirming subject-level and school-level examiners, to ensure deep academic specialism at subject level, and to ensure consistency of standards in modules across programmes.

- IT Tralee presented a summary report of action items and recommendations from external examiners, along with responses from schools and departments, to its academic council for its consideration.

- LIT was planning the initiation of uploading continuous assessment details to its new examinations management system, GURU, during the reporting period, which it notes will allow external examiners to view the assessment of modules in a holistic manner.

Case Study 13

Listening to External Examiners

UL

External examiners report annually on the quality of education across all disciplines and programmes. Drawn from the School of Law, the following case study provides one example of how this process enhances quality. At the first School meeting of the academic year, comments from external examiners are collated and discussed. For example, at the first meeting of 2018/19, positive comments such as the following were noted:

I am very happy with the content and standard of the exams and assessments…; The papers, essays, and other assessments that I reviewed have been marked fairly and conscientiously; Coursework and examinations had evidently been rigorously assessed against the intended learning outcomes; I would congratulate the team on putting together an excellent programme; I found the assessment methods entirely suitable in providing feedback, assessing student attainment, and achieving the learning outcomes of the modules and programme; I received very detailed information which assisted me greatly in my role as extern; The staff are very committed, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and professional. The students perform to a high standard; The modules I evaluate are all taught by academics passionate about their subjects. The students are given the opportunity to engage with the relevant law and given suitable feedback and support.

The examiner reports are very useful in reassuring staff of the excellent work in which they engage, pointing out areas where improvements can be made and highlighting best practice in other institutions. In 2018/19, for example, items raised related to feedback, multiple choice question (MCQ) assessments and approaches to plagiarism. The School dealt with these

Case Study 13 (continued)

issues in the first meeting of the academic year, where it was agreed that MCQ assessment techniques should not be overused or given too much weight. It was also agreed that decisions on plagiarism should be decided internally and that feedback should always be provided on formative assessments.

The issue of feedback was again followed up at the School's meeting of 13 February 2019, where exit survey results were discussed. While survey participants were positive in relation to the approachability of lecturers, it was noted that feedback on assessments is an ongoing issue and that continual assessment needs to be available across a range of modules. A review of assessment practices across all law modules and programmes was actioned by the School's Director of Teaching and Learning. Based on a review of the results at the School's April meeting, it was agreed that for formative assessments, students must receive individual feedback during the semester. For summative assessments, an answering guide will be prepared with each examination and an exam report will be prepared at the end of grading. This report will be sent to the external examiner and should be available, together with the answering guide, for all student script viewings and appeals. The guidelines and reports will be available on SULIS (the University's online learning environment) after the relevant examination process is complete.

Combined with exit survey results, the external examiner reports enable the School to discuss what is working well and what can be improved. On foot of such feedback, the School has put in place:

- best practice guidelines for staff in relation to submitting materials to external examiners (2015),
- an internal book of modules for clarity on how each module is being assessed (2015),
- a teaching and learning policy (2017), teaching and assessment practice guidelines (2017),
- a web page providing students with information on grade rechecks and appeals (2017), and
- a review of the assessment of all law modules across all programmes (2019).

c. The Learner Experience

Student Supports

An array of supports for learners aimed at increasing student success, improving retention and progression, and ensuring that students were provided with adequate pastoral care, were detailed across submissions.

Academic supports included the provision of assistance to students, often by dedicated centres, in areas such as academic writing, ICT, science and maths. In some cases, academic supports were provided by means of peer support from other learners. There was also particular emphasis in many AIQRs of assistance for students in preparation for work placement and seeking work after graduation.

- DkIT's Careers and Employability Office provided 479 one-to-one career guidance sessions to students during the reporting period, which represented a 20% increase since 2017/2018. The office, via its placement officers, supported and managed the placement of 742 students and delivered 76 placement preparation workshops during the same period.
- IT Carlow affirmed that the work of its Maths Learner Support Centre and Academic Writing Centre, along with supplemental academic support available to students experiencing difficulties with their studies, has supported the retention of learners.
- UL's AIQR provided details of the five learner support centres operated by its Centre for Teaching and Learning, including the cross-institutional Regional Peer-Supported Learning Centre, which provided support across both academic semesters to more than 1,600 accounting, computer programming and computer science students. UL notes that students who participated in the support schemes offered by the PSLC were more likely to achieve a C3 or higher grade than those who did not.
- GMIT detailed its 'The Next Step' employability toolkit, introduced during the reporting period, which aims to support students as they transition out of GMIT by equipping them with the skills and knowledge they need to enable them to plan for and achieve their career goals. As part of the toolkit, students analyse an occupation and industry sector and devise a career strategy. They also undertake a skills audit, complete a personality assessment, prepare a CV, develop an elevator pitch, prepare for interviews, and develop a LinkedIn profile.

Case Study 14

Providing more Flexible Student Support

DkIT

DkIT provides a wide range of supports for learners. Evidence indicates that they are effective. However, the changing profile of students, including increasing numbers of commuting and part-time students, mean that there is a need to ensure equitable access to support. This means developing more flexible and accessible support provision to complement the current, largely face-to-face offerings and offering opportunities to increase learner support capacity in ways that will cater for a student body which accesses learning in ever more diverse ways.

Case Study 14 (continued)

DkIT secured funding under the HEA's 2018 Innovation and Transformation Fund to develop a digital student support hub. A comprehensive needs analysis formed the first phase of the project. This included focus groups with students, a student survey, interviews with key staff and individual service reviews. In addition, other relevant data was drawn upon, including studentsurvey.ie, the INDEx survey, VLE logs etc.

The findings indicated that students are very satisfied with the support they receive and feel that generally it meets their needs very well. While support is perceived as accessible this is less true out of term and in the evenings. Other barriers include working, commuting, timetables, and awareness. The VLE, Moodle, was preferred as the home for the hub but accessibility via a mobile phone is a priority. While students would welcome additional virtual support, particularly learning support, they considered this complementary to the core face-to-face services. They valued face-to-face support and relationships with staff and were very clear that they did not want these to be replaced by online support. Lecturers play a key role in raising awareness of supports and encouraging students to use them.

The needs analysis enabled identification of three core principles to structure the design of the virtual student support hub:

- The hub should facilitate and support positive relationships.
- The hub should promote engagement with support services.
- The hub should be accessible and increase access to support.

All providers of student support currently are interpreting these principles within the context of their aims and contexts to provide the framework for virtual service provision. This framework will then guide the final development of the hub.

Details were provided of the renovation and improvement of informal student learning spaces and libraries, and there was ample evidence across submissions of **pastoral supports**: inductions were delivered for first-semester students, and for particular cohorts of students (for example, mature learners, learners with disabilities, learners from minority backgrounds), and other particular supports, including inductions, peer assistance, mentoring, were detailed in the reports. The importance of providing assistance for those students in need of mental health supports was also a common theme, and institutions described the development of courses aimed at developing learners' ability to identify **mental health issues**, and expanding the range of tools available to learners to tackle any challenges with mental wellbeing that they experience.

Some AIQRs detailed the provision of programmes aimed at encouraging, acknowledging and rewarding students' involvement in institutional life beyond the classroom, including sports, volunteering, involvement with clubs and societies and other types of **experiential learning** that add value for both the learner and the institution; others detailed novel ways of assisting learners to organise, collate and present work – including achievements arising from extra-curricular activities – in a coherent and accessible way to assist in organising their studies and enhancing career readiness.

- WIT provided a 10-credit special purpose award to those students who completed a cycle of peer-to-peer mentoring.
- TCD's report details its 'Trinity in Twelve Weeks' induction programme for first-year students – a shorter version of the programme is available for single-semester students.
- TU Dublin provides a 'spiralling induction' for first-year students of Mechanical Engineering, as well as a regular open event for mature applicants to TU Dublin.
- AIT developed an individual study plan (ISP) for students enrolled on level 9 and 10 structured research programmes. Using Microsoft Class Notebook as its basis, which allows for the set-up of an easily accessible, user-friendly tool, the ISP documents the learners' progress and learning throughout the programme and allows students (and their supervisors) to track their progress through their programme.

- DCU detailed its 'Reflect' platform – an online tool that allows students to create a 'virtual portfolio' of their academic, professional, and personal achievements. The platform provides a lifelong support to DCU students in securing meaningful employment on graduation and remaining employable for the rest of their careers.
- Prompted by the well-documented rise in mental health issues among students, particularly postgraduate students, CIT embedded a 10-credit Wellness and Resilience module in its structured PhD programme.
- DkIT secured funding from the HEA Innovation and Transformation fund for its Gateway to Success project, which will allow students greater and more flexible access to student support via an online hub.
- TU Dublin conducted REACT online training to stress the importance of alcohol safety among its students.

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Case Study 15

Experiential Learning – Enhancing and Developing the Student Experience

MU

A variety of experiential learning programmes are available to students of Maynooth University (MU). The programmes, organised by the Experiential Learning office (within the Office of the Dean of Teaching and Learning) aim to enrich the undergraduate education experience and enable MU students to experience more from their degree programme by developing and cultivating high-impact learning experiences, both inside and outside the classroom, where students learn by doing and reflecting on this experience. Currently, three experiential programmes are available to students: SPUR (Summer Programme for Undergraduate Research); MUSE (Maynooth University Student Experience Award) and Skills for Success modules.

MUSE (Maynooth University Student Experience Awards)

The Maynooth University Student Experience (MUSE) Awards recognise and reward student's contribution to non-credit bearing activities such as work experience, volunteering, club and society involvement, student representation. The programme started in 2017/18 with 30 students receiving the award and is growing steadily with over 14,140 students' hours recognised since across six thematic areas of: University Community and Campus Life; Volunteering and Civic Engagement; Internationalization; Leadership; Social and Cultural; and Enterprise and Work Experience. The MUSE awards provide students with the opportunity to:

- Increase their self-awareness as they reflect on their achievements
- Stand out from their peers
- Enhance their employability skills
- Develop confidence in articulating skills gained whilst in Maynooth University
- Enhance their career readiness as they prepare for their future

SPUR (Summer Programme for Undergraduate Research)

SPUR is an active 6-week research based and paid experiential learning programme for undergraduate students who wish to learn more about the postgraduate experience and possibly pursue a career in research. Student interest in the programme is high, with 60 places on offer across 30 departments for summer 2020. Participants in the programme are provided with an opportunity to:

- Gain insight into research whilst developing networks with student peers and faculty
- Identify and develop appropriate research objectives in collaboration with their academic mentor and employ appropriate methodologies to address these
- Work collaboratively, illustrate, and present their research effectively to others in the field

Case Study 15 (continued)

- Reflect on the experience, identifying what was learned, opportunities for growth, and how the experience informs their future educational and career goals

SKILLS FOR SUCCESS: Professional Development and Employability Modules

Skills for Success are professional development and employability modules that are credit bearing and available to eligible 2nd year students. The modules involve a number of employers and provide students with the opportunity to develop a strong sense of self-awareness, as well as enabling them to identify and develop a range of employability skills fundamental to their future career. The module started in 2017/18 with 79 students registered and has since grown to 99 students. To date it has provided 235 students with the opportunity to take part in simulated interviews in front of employers and alums. Participation in the module overall enables students to:

- Gain an insight into organisational culture and preferred working styles
- Develop self-awareness and understand the importance of reflective practice and its role in effective, continuous professional development and lifelong learning
- Structure and articulate ideas effectively, orally and in writing
- Recognise the skills, qualities and abilities graduate employers seek in potential employees, and how they are evaluated
- Identify methods used to assess candidates during selection processes
- Understand how to exploit their skills in sourcing, securing, and excelling in their chosen future career.

In addition, there was evidence of an increase in available supports for students with specific learning needs, with several institutions offering a wider range of **assistive technologies and diagnostic tools**, as well as training for staff in their use, and some outlining progress in their applications to become an autism-friendly campus. Engagement with the HEAR and DARE schemes (alternative admissions schemes for school leavers who have experienced socio-economic disadvantage, and for school-leavers whose disabilities have had a negative impact on their second-level education, respectively) continued for many institutions – although some institutions are at the beginning of their engagement with these schemes.

Learner Voice/Student Feedback

The learner voice was at the heart of a range of activities undertaken during the reporting period, and the AIQRs illustrate how **student feedback** informed many of the enhancements undertaken by institutions. Further, the learner voice is incorporated into institutions' governing bodies, academic councils (and academic council sub-committees) by means of the inclusion of student members.

Additional details of learner input into the programme approval and review processes in some institutions are provided in section 3a above, while additional details of surveys of learners conducted by institutions – both national and institution-specific – are provided in the section on Information and Data Management (section 3f).

- CIT reported that a 2018 review of its Student Ombudsman function, conducted by its academic council, found that the ombudsman function is "working well, with the Student Ombudsman seen as an honest broker who has the trust of all parties".

- DkIT invites programme-level feedback from all students at the end of each semester. The resulting programme-based reports are provided for review to all heads of department.

- DCU incorporates student feedback into its annual and periodic programme review processes. This includes feedback provided during programme award boards, informal feedback, and student surveys, as well as a 3-year consolidated report of ISSE results by subject area, and where possible, programme level compiled by DCU's Quality Promotion Office. Student feedback received at modular level as part of the Quality and Enhancement of Student Teaching (QuEST) also informs the student feedback element of annual programme review.

- LIT's academic council sub-committee on Admissions, Academic Progress and Student Retention was reformed during the reporting period and, the institution states, authorised an increased role and voice for student representatives through its activities.

- RCSI provided details in its submission of how student feedback is collected, analysed, and disseminated within the institution. Particular emphasis is placed on closing the feedback loop, and RCSI makes available to students qualitative reports via Moodle (without open-ended comments). Further, to support staff in their efforts to close the feedback loop, RCSI's Quality Enhancement Office developed and circulated a 'Closing the

Feedback Loop' best practice guide to all schools and professional support units in receipt of end-of-semester reports. During the reporting period, a number of units in RCSI implemented 'you said, we did' campaigns to publicise their implementation of student feedback.

- TCD developed and approved a new Procedure for Conduct of Focus Groups for Student Feedback on Modules and Programmes during the reporting period.

- IT Tralee's 'Joint Academic Work Shop' (JAWS) Forum provides students with an opportunity to raise feedback or concerns in respect of their teaching and learning experience.

- UCD conducted an all-university, anonymous online student feedback on modules survey, which has the stated aim of "ensur[ing] that students are given a voice in the module enhancement process".

- UL extended its 'QA3 survey', which explores students' experience of the programmes on which they are enrolled, to all UL programmes.

- TU Dublin's School of Business held focus groups with both industry and current students to review its programmes and discuss the introduction of work placement in programmes.

Graduate Attribute Frameworks

Graduate attribute frameworks were produced, augmented or further incorporated into their activities by many HEIs during the reporting period, with a focus on graduating work-ready active citizens in democratic societies, very much in line with the Council of Europe *Recommendations on Public Responsibility for Higher Education and Research*[18]. Although the frameworks have an employability-focus, there is also a strong emphasis across the

18   https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/PublicResponsibility/Recommendations_EN.asp

frameworks on students' personal development and a stated objective from many of the relevant HEIs to embed the attributes not only into programme curricula, but also into extra-curricular activities coordinated and facilitated by the institution.

- AIT introduced its AIT Graduate Attributes during the reporting period. The attributes are intended to shape the professional growth of learners, as well as their overall holistic development as individuals. As an aid to staff in ensuring that the attributes inform learning, teaching and assessment strategies at institute and faculty level, a template was devised by the AIT Placement Models Working Group, which will allow staff to map the attributes to their assessments.

- TU Dublin (Tallaght Campus) engaged in a series of initiatives aimed at aligning activities to TU Dublin graduate attributes, which, it is envisaged, will enrich the development of graduates to maximise their employment potential.

- NUI Galway commenced work on its Graduate Attributes project during the reporting period, with a report published in October 2019. NUI Galway envisages that its graduate attributes will be broad statements of capability and disposition, which will aim to capture the essence of what it is to be a 'graduate' and be ready to move on to the next level of study, research, employment, cultural, or societal contribution.

- As one of improvements made to its Academic Module Manager, LIT incorporated its programme-specific graduate attributes into the system, to allow programme developers to map their programmes to the pre-approved list of attributes that a graduate will have attained upon successful completion of that programme.

- IT Carlow continued implementation and embedding of its Graduate Attributes Framework across all institute activities – including all extra-curricular activities, such as sporting, social, community-based and voluntary activities – during the reporting period.

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Fig. 4: IT Carlow Graduate Attributes (QQI quality dialogue meeting with IT Carlow, July 2020)

Access, Transfer, and Progression

The desire to strengthen **diversity in student population, to inculcate a more inclusive environment within institutions, and to improve access, progression, and retention** for students from minority and traditionally disadvantaged backgrounds was also apparent across the AIQR submissions.

Many institutions provided details of **specific measures to support mature learners**, such as dedicated inductions and open evenings, while several institutions provided details of their designation as **colleges or universities of sanctuary** (AIT and NUI Galway), or their introduction of sanctuary scholarships for asylum seekers, refugees, and those in the direct provision system wishing to pursue educational opportunities (CIT and GMIT). In addition:

- TCD continued implementation of its one-year, pre-university International Foundation Programme, which aims to increase access to the institution by international students and promote diversity by attracting students from a wide range of cultural and academic backgrounds.

- CIT organised a Traveller Assembly to explore the topic of "Supporting Travellers in Second-Level Education: Progress through Partnership" in March 2019. This event brought together a large group of Travellers, second-level professionals, and third-level access practitioners for an open dialogue on Traveller needs in accessing education and the supports required for ensuring a positive educational experience for students from the Traveller Community.

- DkIT reported the development of a student success strategy, following the recommendation in the Higher Education Authority (HEA) Higher Education System Performance Framework (2018-2020) that HEIs put in place an institute-wide Student Success Strategy which embeds 'whole of HEI' approaches to student access and completion.

- TU Dublin provided the Certificate in Preparatory Studies for Third Level, an outreach collaborative programme run in collaboration with the South Dublin County Partnership. The course aims to build confidence and offers a taster to potential students who may be unsure whether college is for them. In 2018, the institution enrolled 70 students on the certificate, of whom 80% completed the programme; in 2019, there was a 75% completion rate among the 60 students who enrolled.

Case Study 16

The University of Sanctuary Movement

NUI Galway

University of Sanctuary Movement: In September 2019 NUI Galway became a designated University of Sanctuary, a movement aimed at promoting the inclusion of International Protection Applicants, refugees, and Irish Travellers within the community.

The Steering Committee for the movement has embedded the ethos of the Places of Sanctuary across campus with the aspiration of creating an inclusive, inviting, and welcoming campus for all people. The overall aim of the NUI Galway campaign is to break down the barriers for individuals regardless of their societal positioning, and offer a genuine 'Welcome to NUI Galway'.

The NUI Galway University of Sanctuary Campaign is led by the ethos of the Places of Sanctuary Movement: Learn, Embed, and Share.

The University of Sanctuary initiative at NUI Galway aims to increase public awareness of International Protection, migration, and Traveller-specific topics across campus, in an effort to address the low levels of participation of underrepresented groups in third-level education. International Protection Applicants, refugees, vulnerable migrants, and Irish Travellers are too frequently excluded from participation in education due to inequitable societal barriers. NUI Galway aims to make its university community a much more inclusive and equitable space for all.

There was a focus on ensuring that teaching and learning, supports and the physical environment within the institutions were adapted to meet the needs of **students with particular learning and access requirements**, for example, IT Sligo initiated a partnership with AsIAm to become the first IoT to be recognised as an Autism-Friendly Campus, and also developed and delivered a Digital Badge in Universal Design for Learning during the reporting period.

Evidence in some submissions of collaboration between HEIs and providers of **further education and training**, as well as the development of **foundation and access**

courses to encourage progression to third level by non-traditional learners, is in line with the recommendations of the *National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education progress review*[19] and to be welcomed.

- UL conducted an internal quality review of the Centre for Teaching and Learning with the aim of consolidating strengths and further increasing its impact on widening participation in higher education and student success at UL. The review has, according to UL, led to the structural alignment of roles and responsibilities in the centre with UL's new strategic plan.

- UL also piloted the QQI Maths for STEM course in 2018/19, after formally recognising it as an alternative to the Higher Level Leaving Certificate Mathematics for Adult Learners. The programme is delivered on UL premises by the Further Education and Training Division of Limerick Clare Education and Training Board (ETB), and a memorandum of understanding was signed with the ETB in July 2019 to ensure continued delivery of the programme for a further four years.

- TU Dublin's Tallaght Campus developed and validated tailored CDM minor awards for specific students with disabilities, resulting in the creation of access opportunities for a small number of non-traditional learners who might not otherwise have been able to access higher education.

- WIT's mid-term review of its strategic plan confirmed progress and enhancement in the institution's continuing development of relationships with further education institutions, and the seamless transition of further education learners into WIT.

- DCU secured external funding through the DCU Trust to install three sensory pods for use by students with autism.

There were details, too, of **particular supports for students whose first language is not English** to ensure as smooth an integration as possible, with one institution (TU Dublin) describing the production of an audio glossary of terminology for 4th year international science students from China, and the modification of English language classes to meet students' needs to focus in particular on technical English.

Case Study 17

Lecture Capture

RCSI

Arising from an initiative of the RCSI Undergraduate Students' Union, RCSI began a pilot project to record lectures in the first two years of the medical degree programme. The rationale for this was that affording an opportunity to review lecture presentations of material that they found challenging off-line would permit students, especially those for whom English is not their first language, to learn and revise at their own pace, thereby facilitating understanding and retention. The pilot focused on lectures addressing complex topics as identified by students and covered some 15% of the lecture content of the first three semesters. A survey conducted mid-year indicated that 66% of students had used the recorded material in their study and 83% of these found the resource useful. In parallel, focus groups held with academic staff identified a number of areas of concern including

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19   https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2019/01/HEA-Progress-Review-2021-NAP.pdf

the potential impact on student attendance at lectures, copyright issues and resource implications. The pilot project will continue with ongoing monitoring of student uptake of recorded material.

d. Staff Development and Support

The crucial role of **continuous professional development** in enhancing the student learning experience is evident among the AIQRs, with institutions providing opportunities for staff "to reflect on, plan and contribute to evidence-based enhancement and transformation of teaching and learning approaches", while "contributing to the quality assurance and enhancement of the teaching and learning experience", in line with the *National Forum for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education's National Professional Development Framework for All Staff Who Teach in Higher Education*[20].

Professional development provided to staff in HEIs included both accredited and non-accredited activities and ran the gamut from peer mentoring to seminar series to accredited programmes of education and training. Institutions provided staff training on policies and procedures, as well as in respect of topics from blended and online learning to assessment literacy.

- IT Carlow continued to fund staff to complete 10-credit modules as part of the MA in Teaching and Learning (MATL), including a Research Supervision Module, which was offered a number of times during the reporting period.
- DCU implemented a new Performance Management Scheme, which provides a structured mechanism for feedback and for supporting learning and career development. The scheme will be supported by the establishment of a steering and working group, with representation from across academic, support and professional staff, to develop and implement a revised Performance Review and Development scheme.
- CIT held a series of *Conversations on Teaching and Learning* throughout the reporting period, covering topics such as universal design, RPL, peer mentoring and professional development strategies; it also took as the theme of its Breakfast Seminar Series 2018/19 'Research-based Teaching Strategies', conducting a total of seven sessions involving 68 staff members.
- CIT also conducted a dedicated Career Planning and Employability workshop for PhD candidates in December 2018.
- WIT provided enhanced support for supervisors of research masters and doctoral research programmes through provision of workshops and seminars.

DkIT's Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) offered and recruited to the Certificate in Assessment and Feedback for the first time. This module from the institution's Master of Arts in Learning and Teaching provides an opportunity for staff to undertake a shorter programme of accredited professional development, focused specifically on assessment and feedback.

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20   https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/publication/national-professional-development-framework-for-all-staff-who-teach-in-higher-education/

Case Study 18

Development of Staff CPD at LIT

LIT

A key priority of the LIT Strategic Plan Teaching 2018-2022 is the provision of "high quality teaching and active learning" part of the process of achieving this is to "Upskill academic staff to keep pace with new technologies and pedagogies and incorporate these into their teaching and delivery methods". In line with this priority is LIT's Teaching and Learning Strategy 2018-2023 which identifies the key goals of developing "accredited special purpose awards in Teaching and Learning to allow wider access to credited CPD by LIT Staff." A recent staff survey on CPD requirements highlighted the need for staff CPD that would support career progression and the provision of accredited programmes. The flexible delivery of these programmes was identified as a key enabler of staff participation.

To support the provision of CPD for staff in 2018 The Quality, Teaching and Learning Centre in collaboration with the Flexible Learning Department developed a 10 credit Special Purpose Award in Designing and Adapting Blended and Online Coursework. This award is an opportunity for staff to gain accredited CPD through a flexible delivery method. The SPA is run over one semester and is delivered fully online to enable staff from all campuses (Moylish, Thurles, Clonmel and Ennis) to participate. A total of 36 staff completed the SPA in 2019 with a further 36 registering for the course in 2020. Building on this a further SPA in Reflective Academic Practice was developed and is now running with 27 participants enrolled in 2020, with a third SPA in Research Methods currently being developed.
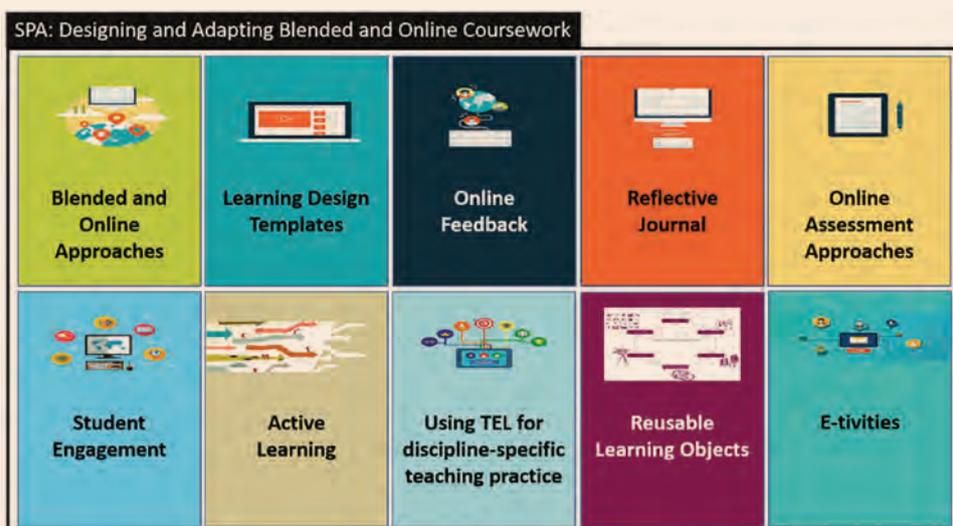
These SPAs are the initial foundation modules in the development of a flexible CPD pathway to enable staff progress to Structured Masters/Doctorate level. The taught component includes the current SPAs being offered by LIT and also 3 SPAs currently being delivered by AIT. The inclusion of the additional modules from AIT helps to supports the diversity of choice of topic that staff can choose from and provides more flexible pathways in how staff can

Case Study 18 (continued)

study and complete the modules. The modules are delivered in different formats, ranging from a fully online course to one SPA being delivered face to face over a 5 day block at the end of semester 2 with another module using a blended approach combining face to face workshops with weekly online tutorials. This CPD offering is aligned with the National Forum's Professional Development Framework and provides a coherent pathway in teaching, learning and assessment.

Case Study 19

Staff Training and Consultation on Live Scribe Pen and the Institute Recording Policy

IT Tralee

Due to noted issues voiced by individual lecturers regarding the Live Scribe pen, a series of demonstration sessions were scheduled for lecturing staff during Semester One. Four training sessions were offered with 18 lecturers in attendance. The purpose of these sessions was to demonstrate the Live Scribe Pen as an aid for students with note taking difficulties and allow staff the opportunity to trial the pens themselves. In addition, staff were offered the opportunity to view the Recording Policy and contribute to the wording of the Student Undertaking sign sheet. Following staff consultation, the Student Undertaking sign sheet was amended to reflect staff contribution.

Further details of the professional development opportunities provided to postgraduate research students and research staff can be found at section 3g.

e. Public Information, Communication and Engagement

As in other reporting periods, institutions communicated with stakeholders through a variety of means, including their websites, social media, open days, and events. The AIQRs included examples of how institutions **encourage and maintain transparency** through the initiatives to improve publication of accessible policies, procedures, and reports across submissions.

- DkIT's Careers and Employability Centre facilitated several open events, including the session, "Building the Region Together", with guest speakers from the pharmaceutical and engineering industries, along with final-year and postgraduate students from Engineering, Science, Youthwork and Event Management.

- AIT implemented its Customer Service Charter was implemented during the reporting period, with the stated aim of enabling clear communication of the institution's commitment to the delivery of education and services as part of the fulfilment of a framework for effective governance.

- CIT's International and Admissions Offices considerably reduced its response times for potential international applicants by re-engineering its mode of collaboration with regard to the admission of international learners by means of a digitally supported process, improving workflow and information-sharing between the two offices.

- As part of the redesign of its website, LIT has created a dedicated section on RPL. It is planned that further relevant information supports for the various stakeholders and RPL tools will be developed and deployed on the website over the coming academic year.

- NUI Galway became the first institution to publish its CINNTE institutional self-evaluation report (ISER). The CINNTE review team commended the institution for its transparency and openness.

- UL detailed its web development project. The goal of this project is to provide the direction and operational resources required to deliver a new mobile-optimised accessible website with a user-centred design process that will not only clearly identify and meet external user needs and goals but also clarify and align internal business and stakeholder aims to produce a usable modern website that advances UL's strategic, marketing and communications ambitions.

- WIT affirmed its commitment to openness, transparency, and ease of engagement in its AIQR, stressing that all of its policies and procedures are published, accessible, readily available and easily understood.

The theme of **social responsibility and societal engagement** was also accorded prominence across the AIQRs, with a diverse array of examples of HEIs' engagement with their immediate communities and wider society. An emphasis across the sector on engagement with their communities through outreach,

social innovation programmes, and other initiatives pointed to institutions' societal and regional missions21.

QQI would welcome further consideration in future report submissions of how the effectiveness and impact of such initiatives – on learners, staff and curriculum, for example – could be evaluated and measured.

- TCD launched the Provost Innovation Challenge @Tangent during the period, its first social innovation programme, which aimed to address the problem of homelessness during the reporting period. The winning team was awarded a place on LaunchBox, the student accelerator programme.

- NUI Galway's Community University Sustainability Partnership (CUSP) aims to "graduate students who are societally aware and valued for their world readiness". The CUSP General Board is a multidisciplinary, voluntary team of over 30 students and staff from across NUI Galway's campus as well as community partners, who work together to establish NUI Galway as a leading institutional model for sustainability. Further, NUI Galway affirms in its AIQR that it aims to continue to embed sustainability literacy into all aspects of university learning and research to allow students to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to foster and demonstrate sustainable thinking and decision-making, even after graduation.

- LIT included a new elective in its BA (Hons) in Community Development – the 'Working with Older People' module aims to increase initiatives and funding for community programmes that involve a multi-generational dimension and/or focus on working with local people.

- RCSI included 'supporting healthcare and society' as one of the three strategic pillars in its new strategic plan.

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21   See Universities Act 1997, s. 12; Technological Universities Act 2018, s. 9; Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992, s. 5.

- TU Dublin provided social media training for community leaders and representatives via the Fingal Public Participation Network. Further, TU Dublin provided sports coaching for primary school children and for minority groups (i.e. vulnerable adults, persons with intellectual disabilities and persons with physical disabilities).

f. Information and Data Management

In this as in other reporting periods, institutions provided ample detail of how **data generated from internal review processes, surveys, benchmarking exercises, and other analyses drive enhancements of the student experience**. Institutions invested significant resources in developing new and existing information management systems and data analysis processes, and there were details in the AIQRs of how institutions ensured compliance with the GDPR, which was implemented directly before commencement of the reporting period.

Several institutions adopted new **policies on learning analytics** during the reporting period, which will provide those institutions with a framework for embedding a deeper consideration in institutional operations of students' interaction with virtual learning environments (for example, log-in information, time interacting with online materials/other students), with the aim of identifying patterns of activity conducive to a deeper engagement with subject matter, or – conversely – patterns that may help identify students who are experiencing challenges (and subsequent provision of supports and intervention to avoid these potential negative repercussions, such as failure or withdrawal).

In an effort to increase the **visibility and usability of data** generated in institutions, many reported that data dashboards displaying student lifecycle and records data had been

developed or were underway – AIT reported on the establishment of a student lifecycle dashboard, while GMIT provided details of an interactive dashboard used in the institution to display HEA Student Record System data.

Institutions also reported employing a range of internal surveys and focus groups to inform planning and enhancements during the reporting period. In addition to institutions' own internal surveys of staff and students, externally operated **surveys**, such as studentsurvey.ie (formerly ISSE) and the Graduate Outcomes Survey and First Destinations Survey – and institutions' analyses of same – provide valuable sources of data for institutions, with many endeavouring to increase response rates to ensure as reliable a sample as possible to allow for more accurate conclusions, as well as to facilitate benchmarking against peer institutions. Some institutions reported considerable success in doing so – for example, AIT reported its highest response rate to the survey during the reporting period, with 69% of students completing studentsurvey.ie 2019.

- In CIT, three analyses of responses to studentsurvey.ie were carried out – a meta-analysis, comparing CIT's response to that of other institutes of technology and universities, which investigated whether differences were increasing or decreasing over time; a benchmarking exercise for internal purposes against selected institutions; and a work-based learning index, based on a series of survey questions in the area of work-based learning, and comparing CIT's responses to these questions to a selected university.

- RCSI provided details of its analysis of data collected from students across its programmes, at RCSI Dublin and in overseas branch campuses. In RCSI, reports documenting analyses (quantitative and qualitative) of survey responses are circulated to programme directors and – to close the feedback loop – quantitative reports are routinely

made available to students via Moodle. Further, a number of RCSI units implement 'you said, we did' campaigns to publicise responses to student feedback in parallel with regular feedback sessions to classes and class representatives.

- TCD developed and adopted its Procedure for Conduct of Focus Groups for Student Feedback on Modules and Programmes during the reporting period, which has resulted in the establishment of a panel of trained facilitators. To date, ten focus groups have been facilitated across three schools, and two Student Support Services areas.

- DkIT produced student progression data produced for school, department, programme, stage, and NFQ level, and reported that its annual analysis of CAO application data feeds into programme development and review planning

- UCC reported that it undertakes regular reviews of qualitative and quantitative data on student feedback at institutional, module and programme levels, as well as student entry data, student performance and completion data and that its academic council regularly reviews student profile data.

- Among the surveys and analyses conducted by UL was its student exit survey. Relevant results of the exit survey are shared with a variety of internal stakeholders, including course directors, heads of departments/schools, deans, executive committee, and academic council. UL's director of quality presents the key findings from the exit survey to academic council annually, and heads of support departments and divisions receive reports based on comments made in respect of their services.

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- TU Dublin reported that it conducts ongoing analysis of CAO entry data for full-time undergraduate entrants, and, further, that CAO entry data has been embedded in its revised annual monitoring report template to ensure a better understanding of characteristics of entrants – for example, to identify feeder schools, and to review Leaving Certificate scores in subjects known to be clear indicators of academic capability in certain disciplines.

- LIT continued to maintain and populate its Quality Drive, a digital repository of the academic record developed during the last reporting period, which contains *inter alia* the record of academic council and associated documentation; faculty, department, and programme board documentation.

- In WIT, research metrics are gathered and reported on by the WIT Research Support Unit, which supports the quality enhancement of activities such as research funding, publications, research masters and PhD performance.

Several institutions reported that they had adopted or enhanced information and examinations management systems with a view to improving the efficiency and ensuring the security of processes.

- IT Sligo conducted a pilot of GURU with the stated aim of providing a more efficient method of recording and disseminating external examiner feedback; ensuring greater security and oversight in the examinations process.

- GMIT rolled out GURU to all schools following a pilot of the system last year, in response to which 'largely positive' feedback was received. Training was also provided for those engaging with the system.

- LIT rolled out GURU during the reporting period and reports that GURU has enabled change management in the organisation, allowing the reduction of traditional 'non-

value-added' activities, increased security, and the improvement of the work of external examiners, among other benefits.

- DCU completed a comprehensive competitive dialogue process as part of vendor selection for a new Student Information System (SIS) in the reporting period, during which it also initiated planning for the SIS programme, including the establishment of a programme management team and governance structures to lead the implementation of the programme.

g. Self-evaluation, Monitoring and Review

As part of the AIQR submission, institutions provide some limited data on the type and panel composition of internal reviews and evaluations of the effectiveness of QA processes conducted during the reporting period, including:

- breakdowns of process type (i.e. programme approval/review; research review; school/department/faculty review; service unit review; linked provider/collaborative partner review; or thematic review);

- composition of review panels; and

- profile of review panel chairs.

QQI acknowledges that the existing AIQR template does not define sufficiently well the information required under each of the above categories; further, the sub-categories for which data is sought are not always mutually exclusive, which can lead to difficulties interpreting and comparing data. It is hoped that the new AQR template will assist in this regard. However, in spite of these deficits, it is nonetheless possible to observe some trends and developments from both the data provided and the information received during QQI's biennial dialogue meetings.

Internal Evaluations and Reviews

As in previous reporting periods, there was some **divergence between the types of review conducted by IoTs and by universities**, with IoTs focussing on programmatic reviews, and universities taking a broader approach, with reviews on department, school, and (professional service) unit level; however, QQI welcomes evidence from the AIQRs (see graph 'Profile of Reviews completed during the Reporting Period' below) and discussions during its dialogue meetings that, increasingly, the IoTs are also expanding the scope of their review schedules to include *inter alia* service

units. QQI would expect to see a further increase in these numbers in future reporting periods, reflecting the increasing maturity of QA systems in the IoT sector, particularly in light of their designation in 2020 as autonomous awarding bodies in their own right for awards up to NFQ level 9.

In the 2020 reports, too, a number of institutions, both universities and IoTs, reported that they had carried out **research reviews** during the reporting period. In future submissions, QQI would welcome further detail of the methodology employed and the scope of research review processes.

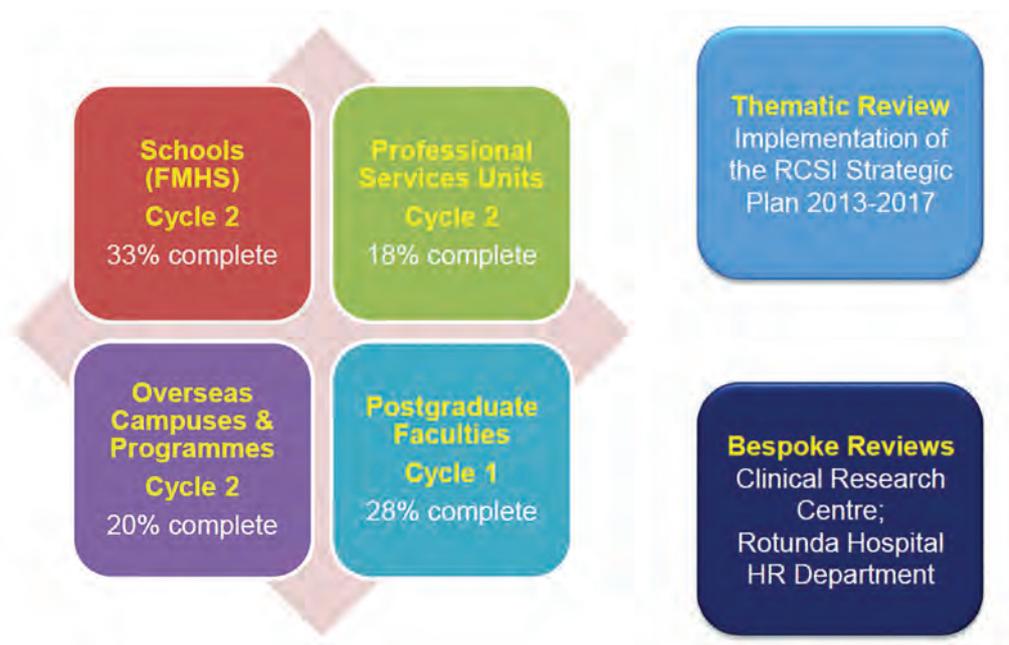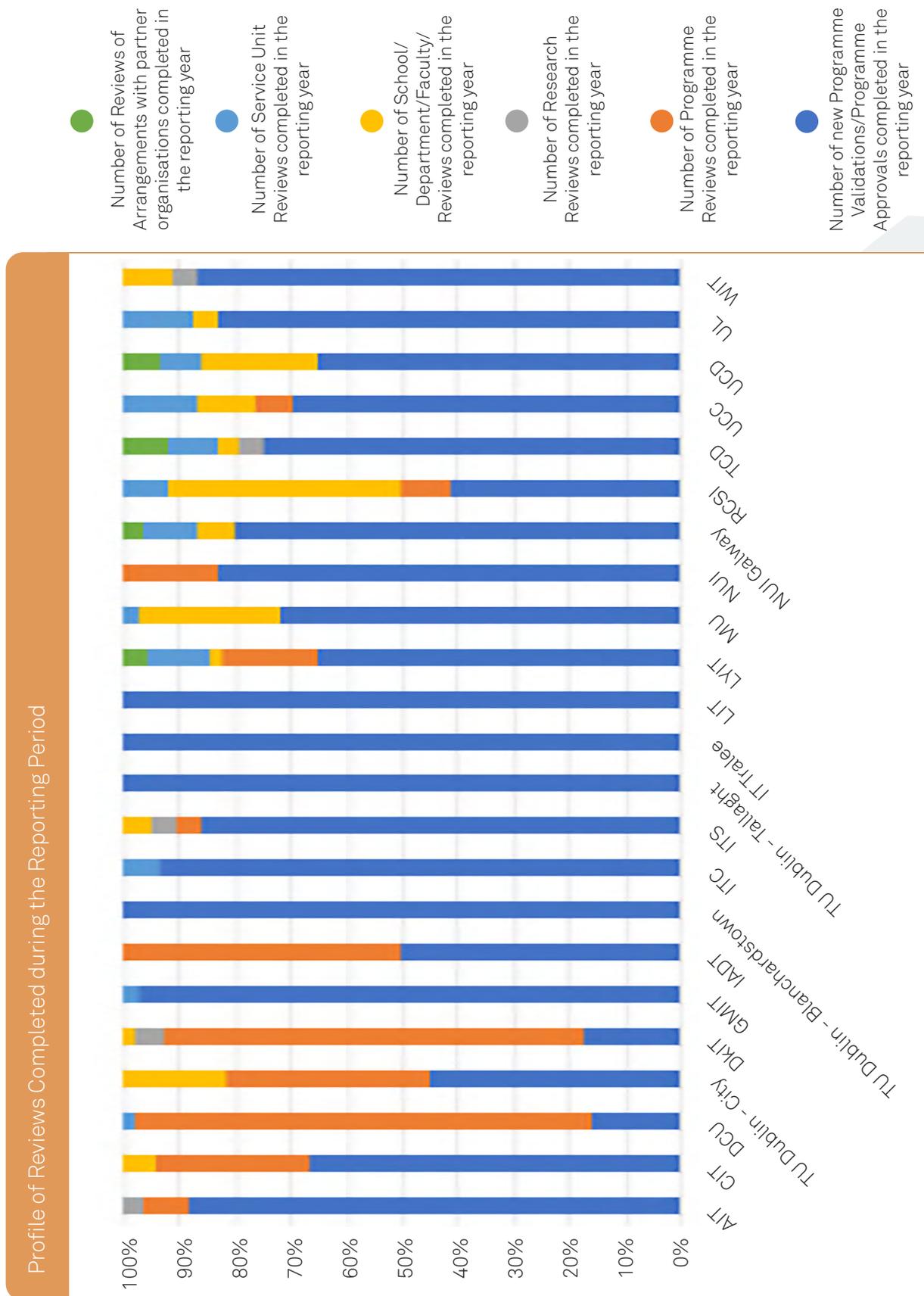*Fig. 5: RCSI internal review cycle (QQI quality dialogue meeting with RCSI, July 2020)*

Fig. 6: Profile of reviews completed during the reporting period

Legend:
- Number of Reviews of Arrangements with partner organisations completed in the reporting year
- Number of Service Unit Reviews completed in the reporting year
- Number of School/Department/Faculty/Reviews completed in the reporting year
- Number of Research Reviews completed in the reporting year
- Number of Programme Reviews completed in the reporting year
- Number of new Programme Validations/Programme Approvals completed in the reporting year

Profile of Reviews Completed during the Reporting Period

Institutions: WIT, UL, UCD, UCC, TCD, RCSI, NUI Galway, MU, LYIT, LIT, IT Tralee, TU Dublin - Tallaght, ITS, ITC, TU Dublin - Blanchardstown, IADT, GMIT, DkIT, TU Dublin - City, DCU, CIT, AIT

Panel Composition

The 2020 AIQRs did not show any great reduction in the reliance on **domestic – and internal – panel members** that was observed in previous reporting periods. Further, while some institutions have made strategic decisions that all review and evaluation panels should be chaired by internal senior management, a preponderance of internal members of review and evaluation panels is generally to be discouraged. QQI acknowledges that domestic – and even internal – reviewers and evaluators bring with them the advantage of familiarity with the Irish higher education system and landscape, and, in some cases, with the institution itself, and that international panel members may require significant briefing and/or mentoring by institutions prior to review or evaluation processes; however, the recruitment of international panel members is accompanied by significant benefits for institutions, including the facilitation of benchmarking, and the addition of an external perspective to internal reviews. QQI would welcome a more balanced representation of international and domestic experts on review and evaluation panels in future AQR returns. During discussions at the quality dialogue meetings, QQI heard from many institutions that the trend towards online reviews necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic may be helpful in securing a greater number of international reviewers. On a related note, some institutions also commented that an unexpected benefit of conducting reviews online was the relative ease with which industry and sectoral experts could be sourced.

As detailed above at section 3a, QQI would also welcome an increase in the inclusion of **learners** on review and evaluation panels in future reporting periods to ensure that the learner voice is adequately represented during review and evaluation processes in line with the requirements of ESG 2015 and QQI's Statutory QA Guidelines.

While acknowledging the potential difficulty of achieving gender balance in the context of panel composition, it is nonetheless crucial that institutions take particular cognisance of this criterion to achieve appropriate gender representation on panels in line with the spirit of the *HEA Gender Equality Taskforce Action Plan 2018-2020*.

DUNDALK INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Fig. 7: Composition of internal evaluation and review panels during the reporting period

Composition of Internal Evaluation and Review Panels during the Reporting Period

Legend: Internal, National, UK, EU, Student, Other

Institutions (bottom to top): AIT, CIT, TU Dublin - City, DCU, TU Dublin - City, DkIT, GMIT, TU Dublin - Blanchardstown, IADT, TU Dublin - Blanchardstown, ITC, ITS, TU Dublin - Tallaght, IT Tralee, LIT, LYIT, MU, NUI Galway, RCSI, TCD, UCC, UCD, UL, WIT
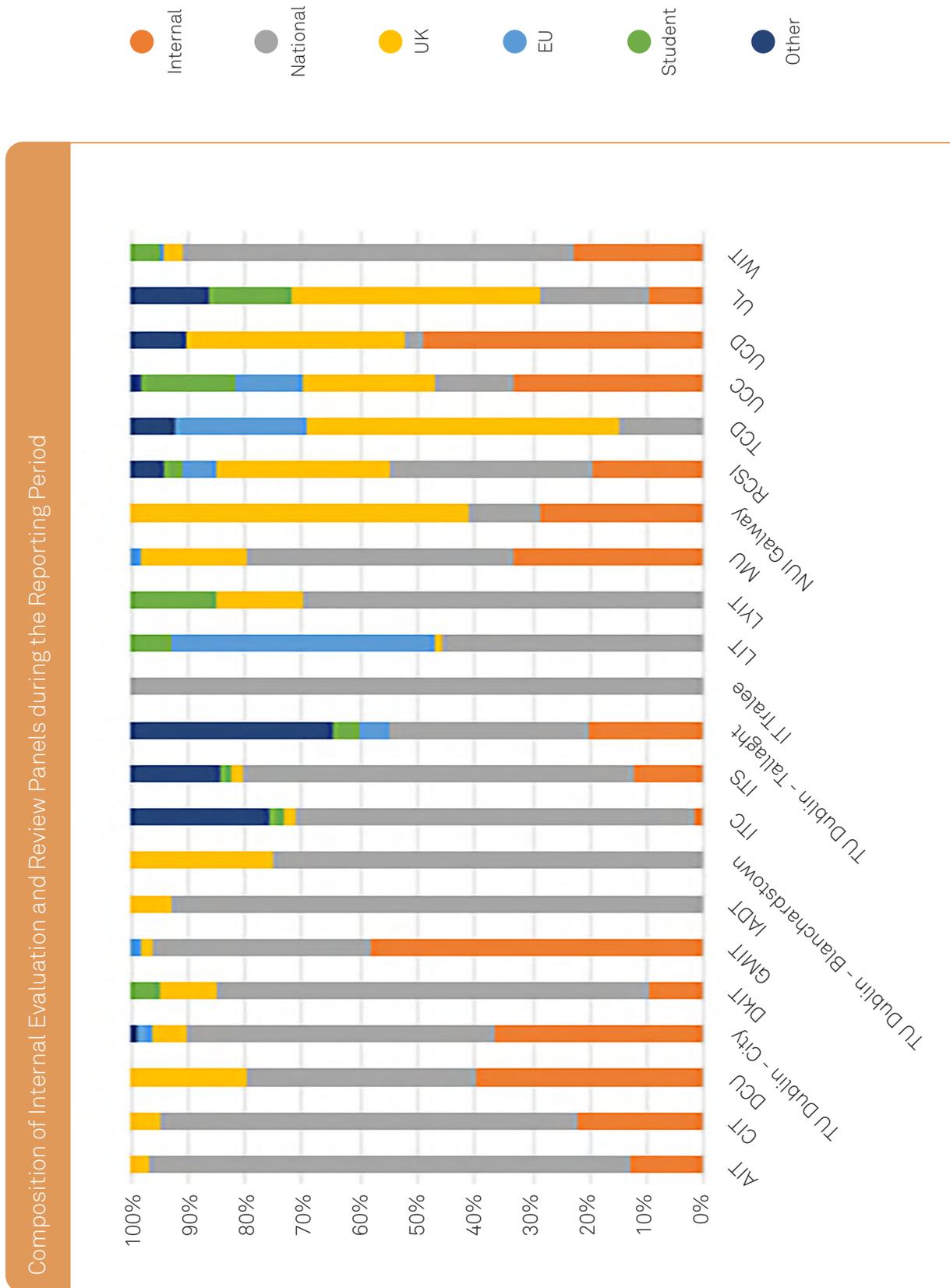
Fig. 8: Profile of chairs of internal evaluation and review panels during the reporting period
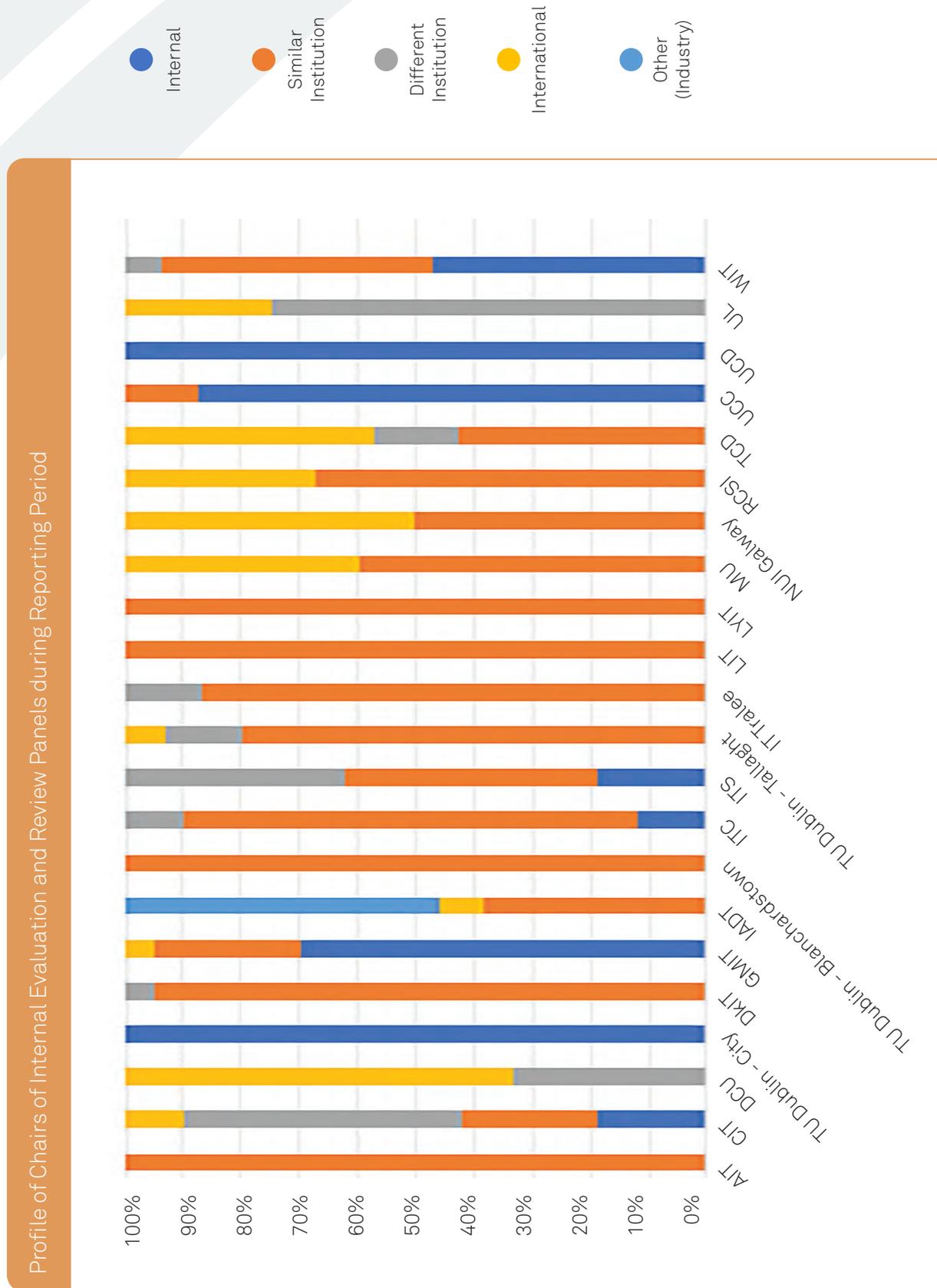
QQI CINNTE Review Process

The **CINNTE cycle of institutional quality reviews**, which began in 2017, continued during the reporting period. Those institutions who were reviewed early on in the cycle reflected on their progress in implementing recommendations, while institutions yet to undergo review detailed preparatory work, including the identification of key themes, the conducting of internal audits and the undertaking of self-evaluation processes.

The move towards the establishment of technological universities impacted QQI's review schedule during the reporting period, with IT Tralee detailing the postponement of its review in accordance with QQI policy not to conduct institutional review once an application for designation as a technological university has been made. QQI policy also sets out that review of new technological universities will commence 18 months after designation, and – in line with this – TU Dublin provided details of its preparations in advance of its own review.

- DkIT, whose CINNTE review was completed during the reporting period, confirmed in its submission that an overarching institutional review implementation group is being established to oversee implementation of CINNTE recommendations. The group's work will continue until the next review. DkIT commented positively on the review process as a facilitator of full reflection on institutional activities in respect of QA and QE and noted the shift within the institution from a culture of quality compliance to quality enhancement since the last review.
- IT Carlow undertook its self-evaluation process during the reporting period – details are provided in the case study below.
- As part of its preparations for its CINNTE review, LIT commissioned an internal audit, conducted by an external auditing

agency, of its quality assurance system, including a benchmarking exercise in respect of the ESG and QQI QA Guidelines.
- LYIT included some detail of its progress on implementing the recommendations arising from its CINNTE review in its quality improvement plan, which it has incorporated into its AIQR submission.
- MU noted that its CINNTE implementation plan incorporates detail of synergy between existing university strategic objectives and CINNTE recommendations, which should serve to bring strategic planning and the institutional review process closer together.
- TCD outlined the preparations undertaken to date for its review. These include *inter alia* planning for an institution-wide communications strategy to raise awareness of the review at all levels of the institution.
- TU Dublin detailed its preparations for its review, which is planned for 2021. As the first technological university to undergo review, TU Dublin noted that the process will be conducted in accordance with an enabling framework provided within an addendum to the CINNTE terms of reference for the review of designated awarding bodies. This framework should serve to facilitate and further enhance the review process in the technological university context and ensure a forward-looking focus in the review, as well as an emphasis on progress towards a unitary quality assurance system, and the maintenance of interim arrangements in the new institution.
- UL provided a comprehensive overview of its self-evaluation process in its AIQR. The institution noted that its 21-member self-evaluation team includes 16 staff members and five students (including an international student), supported by the office of Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Student Engagement, members of the Quality Support Unit and

a technical writer. Gender balance was considered in the composition of the team. Staff representatives on the team were chosen on the basis of their demonstrable interest and expertise in quality

improvement, and include representation from across the faculties, support departments and associated companies, and Governing Authority.

Case Study 20

The CINNTE Self-evaluation Process

IT Carlow

Mindful of the CINNTE Institutional Reviews' schedule, Institute of Technology Carlow began the process of preparing for Institutional Review in January 2019. Following consultation with Academic Council in the form of briefings and workshops, the Senior Executive Team and Management teams, an Institutional Review Steering Committee, chaired by the Vice-President for Academic Affairs, was established in February 2019 to plan for the Institutional Review. The Steering Committee comprised members of management, key staff members and Students' Union representatives, and met on a regular basis throughout the project.

As the project progressed, Governing Body, Academic Council and its committees, the management team, staff representative bodies and the wider staff grouping have been briefed on an ongoing basis.

Following workshops which gave consideration to the objectives set out in the CINNTE Institutional Review guidelines and the Institute's Strategic Plan 2019-2023, the Steering Committee decided on seven themes for the Institutional Review as follows:

- The Learner Experience
- Collaboration and Engagement
- Learning and Teaching
- Research, Innovation and Enterprise
- Management and Governance
- Quality Assurance and Enhancement
- Communication and Information.

The Steering Committee selected a group to examine each theme and set out terms of reference. Each group prepared a chapter for the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report and a more detailed report to lead other quality enhancement work in Institute of Technology Carlow.

The Institutional Review was discussed regularly at Senior Executive Team meetings and Management meetings. The Vice-President for Academic Affairs presented progress updates to Academic Council several times throughout the project. At staff briefings at Institution, faculty, department, and function level the progress and recommendations were outlined and discussed. Briefings were also provided to the Students' Union and Class Representative Council. The Institutional Self Evaluation Report and the Institutional Profile will be submitted to QQI in the first half of the next reporting period.

h. Quality Assurance of Research

Research continued to be a key area of focus for Irish HEIs during the reporting period, with some institutions having included research as a pillar of new strategic plans. Others provided details of research benchmarking exercises reviews, both conducted and in the pipeline. As noted above, research was one of the key themes evident among the new and revised policies approved during the period. A particular trend towards the development and promotion of open access facilities for research outputs was also evident in many submissions.

For those consortia of, and individual, institutes of technology aiming for designation as technological universities, increasing research capacity was a key theme for the reporting period, and many IoTs provided details of the ways in which they were working towards meeting the research-related eligibility criteria for designation[22], in particular by increasing the proportion of students engaged in research degrees at master's and doctoral level, as well as the proportion of staff with master's or doctoral qualifications. Activities highlighted included time release for academic staff to permit their increased engagement in research, as well as the provision of CPD for both nascent and experienced supervisors; and research integrity training for staff and students.

Impactful research was encouraged throughout the sector by the provision of awards, and the facilitation of events, with one institution (UL) piloting a 'research week', which will become an annual event.

The desire to ensure clarity for postgraduate research students in respect of their studies also drove the revision of existing – or publication of new – postgraduate research handbooks in a number of institutions, which should serve to ensure that postgraduate research students are kept well informed throughout their studies.

Some reports placed particular emphasis on the creation of linkages and opportunities for cross-fertilisation between teaching and learning and research, and this is to be welcomed (see case study below).

Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes[23] was launched in June 2019, and it is likely that the document will influence development, and lead to further reflection, in this area. QQI expects that the document will be referenced in future AQR submissions.

- UCD launched a new Research Services Portal, which has as its focal point a graphical destination of the researcher journey, including the key stages and steps, with associated supports and services available to researchers.
- TCD launched a new Research Charter, listing seven key principles underpinning its approach to research, as well as a Research Excellence Strategy.
- DkIT planned to have formally trained 95 research supervisors through the institution's structured research supervisory programme by the end of the reporting period, and outlined its progress on growing the number of staff in the institution with level 10 qualifications (DkIT anticipates that a further six academic staff will be supported to complete their PhDs by 31 May 2020, with assistance from the landscape funding secured during the reporting period, which will assist in ensuring that the institution increases the number of staff with level 10 qualifications beyond 45% FTE).

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22   Technological Universities Act 2018, s. 28. Accessible at: http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2018/act/3/section/28/enacted/en/html#sec28.

23   Accessible at: https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Ireland%E2%80%99s%20Framework%20of%20Good%20Practice%20Research%20Degree%20Programmes.pdf.

- CIT, as part of the development of its Researcher Career Framework, focused on novel mechanisms to encourage higher research impact without compromising on quality, such as the pilot of a microcredentials platform for non-credit-bearing learning by PhD students, which may be enhanced over time to include the award of credits through a generic external learning module recognised by multiple institutions.

- AIT awarded time release from teaching duties to 11 academic staff under the 2018/19 President's Seed Fund to enable them to actively engage in research;

- IT Sligo provided writing bootcamps for staff members engaged in PhD research, with participants provided with four hours of dedicated writing time five times per semester, alongside one-to-one writing support and advice from the tutor. The institution also revised its master's programme structure to allow for deeper

engagement by students with research.

- UL undertook a compliance assessment against QQI's *Statutory QA Guidelines for the Providers of Research Degree Programmes*, which gave rise to a quality improvement plan that will assist in improving UL's alignment with the guidelines.

- NUI conducted a benchmarking exercise that compared its regulations on higher doctorates with those of nine leading universities internationally. It is using the findings generated by the exercise to enhance NUI practice in this area.

- IADT validated a new 10 ECTS Postgraduate Certificate in Research Methods for the Creative Practices.

- WIT approved a new Open Research Policy in order to improve the visibility of research produced by WIT, and to align the institution with national and European policy and infrastructural objectives.

Case Study 21

Research-based Teaching[24]

UCC

University College Cork has a long tradition of research-led teaching whereby teaching staff draw connections between the cutting-edge research in their area and their teaching. Furthermore, learning through research and enquiry, a practice known as research-based teaching and learning, is a cornerstone of a UCC education and this has been reaffirmed in UCC's new Academic Strategy (2018-2022).

The Connected Curriculum pillar of UCC's Academic Strategy provides a framework for the relationship between research and teaching, and supports the development of connections between researchers, students, and wider communities. UCC is the first HEI in Ireland to implement a Connected Curriculum approach to support students to become engaged learners and to prepare them for the future world of work. Staff are also bringing this inquiring mindset to bear in the development of the curriculum and are encouraged to problematise and critique the other elements of the Connected Curriculum, and how these intersect with their discipline or profession.

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24   Note: This is an abridged version of the case study submitted by UCC; the unabridged case study is available in *Quality in Action in Higher Education 2020 – Collection of Case Studies.*

Case Study 21 (continued)

Student involvement in research-based learning is largely shaped by the discipline or area of study. However, there are generic approaches that can optimize student learning and are more effective in terms of teaching. These include the following six approaches:

1. ensuring learning through inquiry and research is a design feature of the curriculum;

2. taking a whole programme approach to the incremental development of students' capacity to engage in research;

3. providing opportunities for students to work collaboratively with staff and peers to introduce them to the wider research community;

4. providing authentic learning experiences in the curriculum which mirror research in practice, including work beyond disciplinary boundaries to tackle common or global challenges;

5. enabling students to work/study beyond the walls of the university, in keeping with the driving purpose of research to make a difference in the world;

6. providing opportunities for students to communicate the outcomes of research to diverse audiences which might include other students, academics, external partners, local communities, and employers.

A self-evaluation tool has been developed to provide guidance to staff on how to integrate the various elements of the Connected Curriculum. Figure 1 describes approaches for integrating research-based teaching in a module or programme. While the six elements are separated out in the full self-evaluation tool to provide greater clarity, many modules and programmes combine these elements in a range of different approaches and activities.

	Introductory element	Structured inclusion	Main focus of learning activity	Main focus of assessment	Element is a design feature
Research based teaching	Staff reference their own research and cutting-edge research in the discipline as part of the curriculum. Students engage in final year projects or produce dissertations.	Research methods training for students incorporated into study programme from first year on. Research integrity discussed and developed.	Students engaged in research and inquiry from first year on.	Assessments are designed to model authentic research outputs in the area.	Learning through inquiry is structured throughout the programme culminating in students engaging in open-enquiry projects to advance knowledge in the area.

Figure 1: Draft self-evaluation tool

Case Study 21 (continued)

There are many examples of good-practice in research-based teaching, such as the BSc Medical & Health Sciences on which students are taught by academic who are research leaders in the medical and translational sciences and are given hands-on opportunities to undertake research projects in world-class research laboratories. UCC's Research Centres and Institutes are also instrumental in advancing the Connected Curriculum and staff within the Research Centres and Institutes lecture on programmes across several disciplines.

A curriculum review was carried out in UCC in 2015/2016 and subsequently in 2019/20 to identify the extent to which learning through research and inquiry is evident in undergraduate programmes. It was found that 63% of undergraduate programmes in 2015/16 and 71% of undergraduate programmes 2019/20 had evidence of research-based learning.
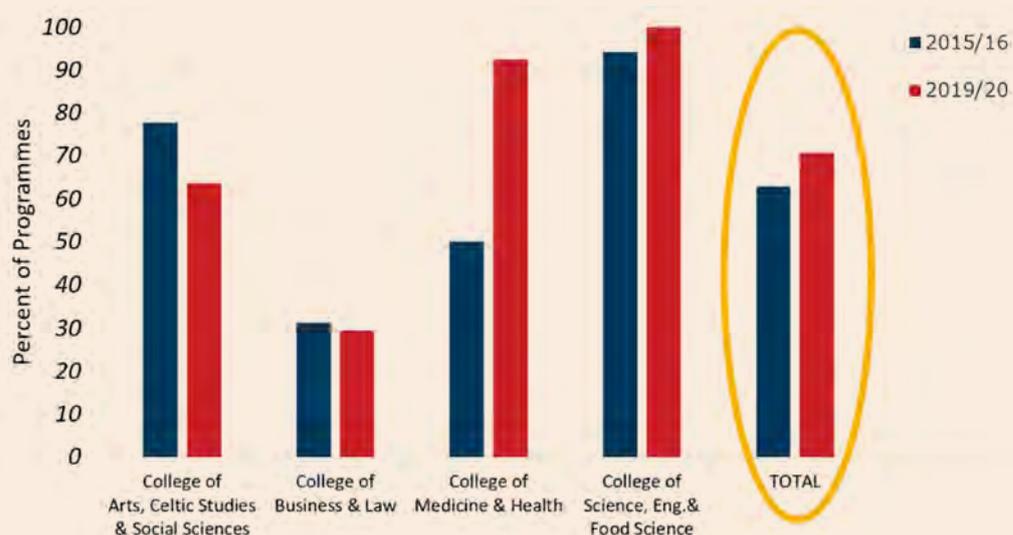
Figure 2: Review of undergraduate programme Learning Outcomes relating to research-based learning in 2015/16 (n=54) and 2019/20 (n=58)

A further module-level review in 2015/2016 showed that 44% of undergraduate programmes exposed students to research-based teaching across the duration of their programme. This provides an important baseline of existing research in the undergraduate curriculum, it uncovers exemplar activities across a range of subject areas and disciplines, and extends the vocabulary around research and inquiry to include discipline-specific approaches and understandings.

4. Additional Themes Arising During Quality Dialogue Meetings

As part of its monitoring function, QQI conducts a quality dialogue meeting with each publicly-regulated HEI on a biennial basis. Discussions provide an opportunity for both QQI and the institution in question to consider a range of issues relating to the Irish QA infrastructure, including the impact and effectiveness of the institution's own quality assurance and enhancement activities as set out in the AIQR. Quality dialogue meetings had been scheduled to take place in April 2020; however, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the cancellation of the originally scheduled meetings. Ultimately, the meetings were rescheduled as online meetings for July 2020.

Occurring at the end of the academic year, the meetings facilitated a timely discussion of the experiences of the institutions, their learners and staff of the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on research, teaching, learning and assessment and the institutions' internal quality assurance systems. A summary of the primary themes emerging from the dialogue meetings is set out below.[25]

- The importance of **collaboration** across the sector during the crisis was highlighted throughout the series of dialogue meetings – this encompassed shared work on guiding principles and sectoral approaches to crisis management; the revision of modes of provision and assessment; and the adaptation of internal quality assurance

procedures and processes. Collaboration occurred between institutions, often facilitated by representative bodies, regional clusters, and technological university partners. Institutions noted with appreciation the coordination of a national response by the Department for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, and state agencies under its auspices, including QQI and the HEA, which guided work to maintain the quality, integrity and reputation of the Irish higher education system through various working groups.

- Institutions noted during the dialogue meetings the importance of ensuring that the **operation of their governance systems was as flexible, agile, and responsive** as possible to facilitate a smooth and swift transition to online teaching, learning and assessment. QQI heard that, to achieve this, many institutions chose to devolve temporarily responsibility for approving changes to processes and procedures to standing committees – changes included adjustments to assessment modes, appeals and deferral processes. Many institutions emphasised that preparations for the crisis had begun weeks, or even months, prior to 12 March 2020, with many having convened working groups as early as January 2020, which generally involved, or had direct lines of communication to, executive management.

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25   For a full evaluation of the impact of COVID-19, see QQI publication *The Impact of COVID-19, Modifications to Teaching, Learning and Assessment in Irish Further Education and Training and Higher Education - A QQI Evaluation, 2020*

Fig. 9: TCD adaptations to its management and governance structures during the COVID-19 pandemic (QQI quality dialogue meeting with TCD, July 2020)
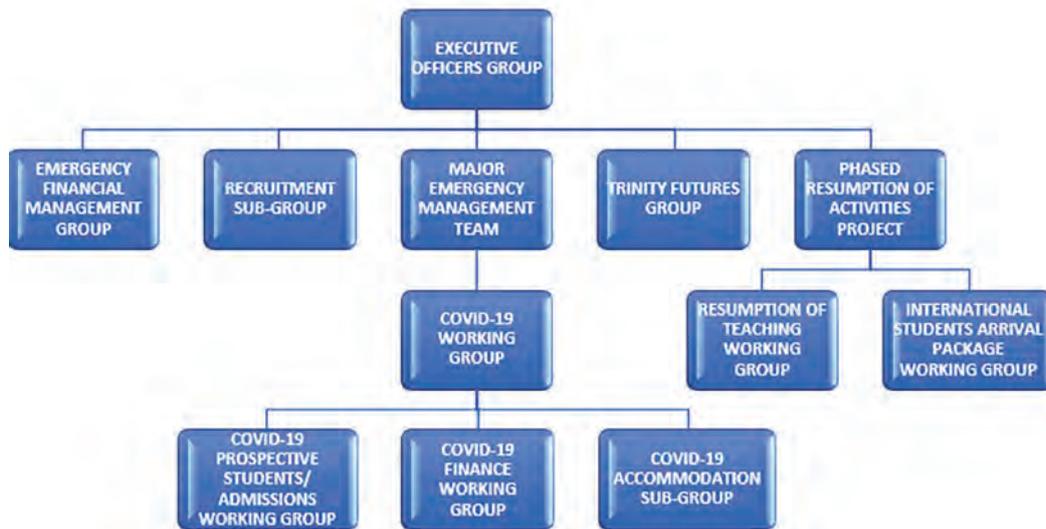
- With regard to **assessment and its adaptation**, institutions confirmed that their focus throughout the process was on maintaining the validity of assessments, with consideration given to confirming that adapted assessments remained proportionate, reliable, transparent, clear, and secure, and a keen focus on ensuring that all requisite learning outcomes were incorporated, irrespective of assessment mode. Adaptations to traditional on-site written examinations included: continuous assessment; the conversion of final examinations into written assignments; take-home open-book exams (both offline and online); and online invigilated exams. Particular consideration was given to award-stage assessments. Institutions noted that particular provisions of procedures were revised or interpreted differently to ensure that students were not disadvantaged. These included *inter alia* provisions in respect of deferral, repeat, compensation and plagiarism.

- Continuity was provided in institutions by convening **online programme and exam boards**, and the interaction of **external examiners** remotely. Institutions also provided details of the **adaptation of validation and review panels to online environments**, noting that these had worked very well. As noted in section 3g above, many institutions observed that the move to online validation and review processes would be helpful in facilitating the inclusion on panels of a greater number of international evaluators and reviewers, and, in some cases, it was noted that the sourcing of industry and sectoral representatives for online processes was more straightforward than for on-site processes.

- Across the institutions, the crucial role played by regular **communication** with students and staff, and the provision of timely, accurate information to both internal and external stakeholders, was emphasised. Many institutions noted, however, that maintaining a line of communication with certain cohorts had proved challenging at times. Institutions also acknowledged that existing communication and collaboration platforms, such as Blackboard and Moodle, institution websites and social media, as well as

platforms put in place after the cessation of face-to-face teaching and learning, had helped enormously. QQI also heard many examples of how institutions conducted censuses to determine students' location, safety and needs – with particular care taken in securing responses from international students and other potentially vulnerable groups – as well as how institutions stayed in regular contact via email and phone calls, where necessary. Communication and feedback in respect of assessment results and appeals was also a key theme during dialogue meetings, and QQI heard of helplines and other communication hubs operated during and after the assessment period and the facilitation by staff of commendably swift feedback to students. By way of an example, CIT's AnSEO 'JustAsk! about…Results' campaign provided students with guidance on understanding and seeking feedback on results, as well as information on revisions to provisions in respect of repeats (see graphic below).

Fig. 10: CIT's 'JustAsk!' campaign (QQI quality dialogue meeting with CIT, July 2020)

- All institutions detailed the **development, training and supports** offered throughout the period to ensure that staff – both academic and those in professional service units – were confident using online platforms and resources. Many noted that work that had been ongoing prior to the arrival of COVID-19 in Ireland (see above at section 3b for examples of same) had paid dividends in ensuring a unified and confident response from staff in their endeavours to ensure as seamless as possible a transition to online teaching, learning and assessment. In particular, institutions commended the scaffolding provided to both staff and students by institutions' centres for teaching and learning and online and digital learning support services, including the work of learning technologists and instructional designers in areas such as the use of lecture-capture technology and pedagogical guidance for the adaptation of assessments into open-book exams or assignments.

- Many institutions noted with gratitude the flexibility and goodwill demonstrated by the majority of the **PSRBs** during the crisis – particularly in respect of adaptations to assessment modes and to placements – here, the majority of bodies confirmed that they would regard institutions to have complied with all requirements of accreditation/approval on the condition that the institutions confirmed that all requisite learning outcomes had been achieved by students. However, it was noted across meetings that a small minority of bodies showed particular rigidity during the crisis and were often slow to communicate their position to the institutions, which caused acute difficulty for students, particularly those in award stages.

- Institutions noted that the COVID crisis had had an impact not only on teaching and learning, but also on **research**. While many institutions encouraged research students to concentrate on writing up research carried out at the point of cessation of face-to-face provision, and on conducting literature reviews, institutions noted that this approach was only sustainable for a limited period of time, and that it was essential that research students were facilitated in returning to labs. Research students in the social sciences were also impacted by the pandemic, with many finding that they needed to adjust their research questions and areas of focus due to the difficulty in accessing research subjects. Finally, the institutions noted, research students were particularly concerned about the granting of extensions and additional funding to facilitate the continuation of their studies. Institutions provided details of the measures that they were taking to mitigate the impact of the crisis on research students, including the provision of extensions for research students.

- All institutions reported on the outcomes of **surveys conducted on both staff and students** in respect of their experience of the altered teaching, learning and research environments. While it was clear from the outcomes of most of these surveys that both staff and students would prefer to be working and learning on campus, institutions noted that the majority of respondents – staff and students – had not experienced any acute issues in respect of access to internet or technology, as might have been expected (here, some institutions outlined their provision of laptops to students who did not already possess same). The primary issues arising for respondents were in
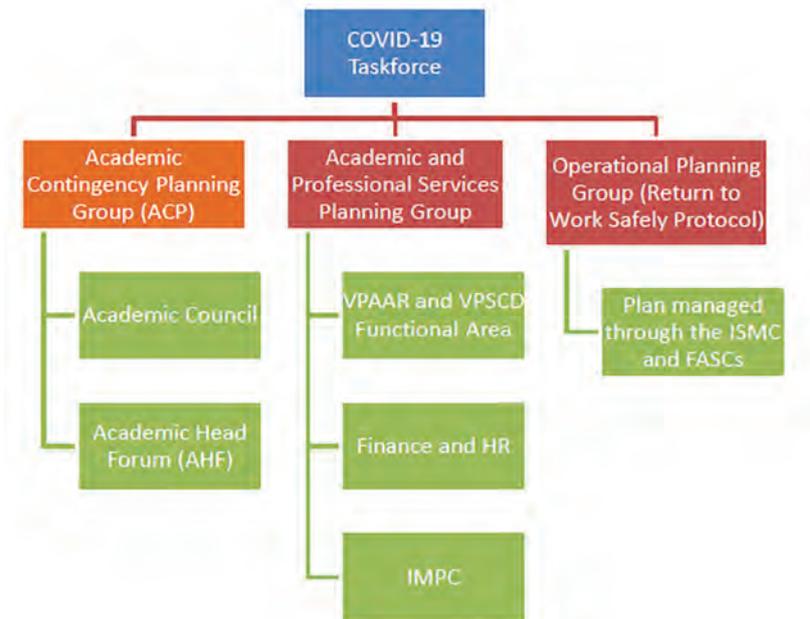
respect of caring responsibilities limiting time available to engage, as well as loneliness and isolation, both of which were particularly concerning for the institutions and were being taken into careful consideration in planning for the next academic year.

- While all institutions expressed their satisfaction that staff and students had coped as well as could have been expected with the transition from March 2020 to the end of the 2019/20 academic year, many also noted that this had entailed a substantial additional workload for – and an enormous amount of goodwill from – staff members from all faculties and units. Institutions noted that this combined effort, while commendable, was not sustainable on a long-term basis and confirmed that consideration of how to move from the initial emergency response to a more sustainable approach was being incorporated into careful **planning for the academic year 2020/21**.

- Institutions detailed to QQI the meticulous **planning ongoing in advance of the new academic year**. Most institutions had drafted multiple plans and would be determining which plan to deploy based on how the pandemic progresses and related public health and safety guidance. In most institutions, it is planned that there will be a compressed first semester, with semester two to be of normal duration. For all institutions, the preference was to ensure as much face-to-face provision for students as possible, although approaches varied from institution to institution; many acknowledged that it would not be possible to conduct large lectures on site, and were planning for most of these to take place online; the majority of institutions planned for smaller laboratory and practical classes as well as tutorials to be prioritised for on-site provision.

- **First-year induction** was a key area of focus for institutions, with all conscious of the difficulties that transitioning to third-level education can involve for first-year students – and the potential compounding of these difficulties by online or hybrid modes of provision. On this note, some institutions noted that familiarity with technology does not necessarily guarantee its efficient use by students. Institutions voiced concerns that the college experience will be different for students commencing their studies during the academic year 2020/21, and that this may make engaging with students more challenging. However, in preparing for the new academic year, institutions proved themselves innovative in finding solutions for communicating with prospective students – among these were individualised communications from institutional staff, virtual open days, campus tours and education fairs, and webinars.

- Uncertainty in respect of **international student** numbers – and a consequent potential decrease in both diversity and funding – was noted by many institutions as a concern. For those international students commencing or continuing their studies in Irish institutions, detailed plans to facilitate a smoother transition process were provided by all institutions, including extensions to deadlines for applications from international students; acceptance of DuoLingo English Tests results as evidence of English language competence; provision of information aimed specifically at international students via website and social media; liaison with international students prior to their arrival to ensure that they had made arrangements for the requisite 14-day quarantine; and assistance from institutions to students quarantining.

- Other challenges noted by institutions included **uncertainty across several crucial areas**, including:

  » delays in the announcement of leaving certificate results and subsequent release of CAO offers (with consequent uncertainty in respect of first-year student numbers);

  » student accommodation;

  » requirements for institutions set out

in the then unpublished *Guidance for Further and Higher Education for returning to on-site activity in 2020: Roadmap and COVID-19 Adaptation Framework*[26], including in particular requirements in respect of physical distancing.

Fig. 11: DkIT structures[27] for planning for academic year 2020/21 (QQI quality dialogue meeting with DkIT, July 2020)

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26 The *Roadmap* was published on 22 July 2020 and is accessible at https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/fc7a0-guidance-for-further-and-higher-education-for-returning-to-on-site-activity-in-2020-roadmap-and-covid-19-adaptation-framework/.

27 Key: VPSCD: Vice-President for Strategic Planning, Communications and Development; IMPC: Institute Management and Planning Committee; ISMC: Institute Safety Monitoring Committee; FASC: Functional Areas Safety Committees

5.Conclusions

The AIQRs provide QQI with an important opportunity to monitor and remain abreast of institutions' QA and QE activities – as well as the institutions' evaluations of the effectiveness and impact of same – between institutional review cycles.

In their totality, the AIQRs provide QQI and other internal and external stakeholders of the institutions, including the general public, with confirmation that institutions have in place appropriate policies and procedures in accordance with ESG 2015 and QQI's suite of statutory QA guidelines, and that these are replaced and revised as needed.

The AIQRs provide a single and transparent repository of QA across the publicly-regulated HEIs in Ireland and it is hoped that enhancements in respect of both the AQR reporting template and submission form (to be completed in September 2020) will serve better to highlight continuing QA and QE activities across the public HE sector.

This year's AIQRs provided insight into an array of current themes, including:

- The evaluation and review of governance infrastructure within the HEIs;
- Progress by various consortia towards designation as technological universities;
- The advancement of goals in respect of equality, diversity, and inclusion;
- The shift evident towards flexible and blended modes of learning.

The reports confirm institutions' dedication to maintaining and enhancing quality of provision in the areas of research, teaching, learning and assessment, both individually and collaboratively, with sectoral, industry and community partners.

The institutions' commitment to maintaining the quality of teaching, learning, assessment, and research was also evident during QQI's quality dialogue meetings, held with the 20 publicly-regulated HEIs in July 2020. These meetings also highlighted the sector's dynamic response to maintaining the quality of the student learning experience, with institutions affirming how guidance and principles developed collectively by the sector ensured a consistent and effective national approach.

It is expected that the innovation and commitment evident in the institutional and sectoral initiatives undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as further evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of same, will be detailed in next year's AQR submissions.

Glossary of Terms

2012 Act	Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012
Academic council	The academic council of a HEI is appointed by that institution's governing body and typically assists in the planning, co-ordination, development and overseeing of the educational work of the institution – and protects, maintains and develops the academic standards of the courses and the activities of the institution.
AIQR	The *Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Report* is a report submitted annually to QQI in respect of the internal QA systems of Ireland's publicly-regulated higher education institutions (HEIs).
AQR	Annual Quality Report – the revised title of the AIQR (applicable from 2021).
Athena SWAN	A charter that recognises and celebrates good practice in higher education and research institutions towards the advancement of gender equality – representation, progression and success for all.
Blended learning	An approach to education that combines online educational materials and opportunities for interaction online with traditional classroom methods.
CAO	The Central Applications Office, which is responsible for processing applications for undergraduate courses in Irish HEIs.
CINNTE	The name given to the current cycle of QQI's external cyclical review process for evaluating the effectiveness of institution-wide QA policies and procedures.
Collaborative provision/delivery	Two or more providers being involved by formal agreement in provision of a programme of higher education and training.
CPD	Continuing/ Continuous Professional Development
DAB	Bodies that have authority in law to make awards in the NFQ. Until 1 January 2020, designated awarding bodies comprised the previously established universities, the National University of Ireland, Technological University Dublin, and The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. These institutions have the authority to make awards up to and including level 10 on the NFQ. As of 1 January 2020, all IoTs legally became DABs for awards up to and including level 9 on the NFQ.
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System – a system designed to facilitate students in moving between EU countries and having their academic qualifications and study periods abroad recognised.
ESG 2015	*The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, May 2015
ETB	Education and training board. Ireland's 16 ETBs have many responsibilities, including executing the training function of SOLAS, administering most adult education, some post-primary education, and a small amount of primary education within Ireland.

Experiential learning	The process of learning through experience.
External examiner	Examiners from other institutions appointed to provide an independent view to assure academic standards and advise on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
Governing body	Manages and controls the affairs of an institution and has authority established by law to govern the institution.
Guru	A student information platform with two core purposes: data presentation and graphical analysis, and sub-system development.
HEA	The Higher Education Authority – leads the strategic development of the Irish higher education and research system with the objective of creating a coherent system of diverse institutions with distinct missions.
HEI	Higher education institution
IEM	International Education Mark. The IEM will be administered and authorised by QQI to foster and strengthen Ireland's reputation for international education.
iNOTE	Innovative Opportunities Transforming Education – a project of the Connacht-Ulster Alliance partners (GMIT, ITS and LYIT)
IoT(s)	Institute(s) of technology
Institutional Review	External review of a providers' QA, undertaken on a periodic basis.
Internal Review	The quality review conducted by an HEI of a faculty/ department/ school, service area or by theme, undertaken on a routine, rolling or demand basis
ISER	The Institutional Self-Evaluation Report is a critical, self-reflective evaluation of the effectiveness of a HEI's QA processes and procedures and is a key component of the CINNTE review process.
ISSE	The Irish Survey of Student Engagement is the former title of studentsurvey.ie, a survey that is open to first and award-year undergraduates, and taught postgraduates in participating HEIs each February to March.
Learning analytics	The measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for purposes of understanding and optimising learning and the environments in which it occurs.
Linked provider	An institution that has formal arrangements with a DAB to offer a programme leading to an award of that DAB. DABs have responsibilities towards linked providers in relation to their QA reviews.
Mission-based Performance) Compact(s)	This is an agreement between the HEA and a HEI and is the outcome of a process of strategic dialogue between the two bodies.
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications is a 10-level single national entity framework through which all learning achievements underpinned by QA principles may be measured and related to each other.

NStEP	The National Student Engagement Programme – aims to enhance and embed student engagement in decision-making in participating Irish HEIs.
Policy	A documented statement of a provider's principles and approach to a particular activity.
Programme	A process by which a learner acquires knowledge, skill or competence and includes a course of study, a course of instruction or an apprenticeship.
Provider	A person or organisation that provides, organises or procures a programme of education and training.
PSRB	Professional, statutory and regulatory body
QA	Quality assurance is a term generally used to describe the processes that seek to ensure that the learning environment (including teaching and research) reaches an acceptable threshold of quality.
QA guidelines	Statutory guidance published by QQI to which providers must have due regard when developing, revising or updating their own internal QA system, policies and procedures.
QA procedures	Translated into practice, a policy must be broken down into clear and coherent procedures. Procedures are the means and methodologies that a provider uses to carry out the intention of a policy.
QA framework or system	A provider's QA framework or system refers to all of the provider's internal QA policies and procedures working together to form an integrated whole.
QE	Quality enhancement, which refers to both the improvement and enhancement of the student experience through specific quality initiatives.
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland is an independent state agency responsible for promoting quality and accountability in education and training services in Ireland.
Reporting period	In this report, the reporting period represents the academic year from 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2019.
SOLAS	SOLAS is the state agency with responsibility for developing policy and funding the Irish further education and training sector. SOLAS is also the coordinating provider for the pre-2016 craft apprenticeships.
Springboard+	An upskilling initiative whereby Irish HEIs offer courses free of charge in areas where there are employment opportunities.
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
THEA	Technological Higher Education Association represents the technological higher education sector, and advocates on behalf of their members (the IoT sector) and supports them in achieving their aims and objectives.
Transnational education	Transnational Education Provision. HE delivered fully or partially overseas from where the awarding body is based.
TU	Technological University
TURN	Technological University Research Network

Notes