QUALITY IN IRISH PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

QQI
Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

QQI
Insights

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Mapping of Report Sections to ESG 2015 and QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines (QAG)

AQR Part A Section	QQI QAG Core Sub-section No.	QAG Core Sub-section Title	ESG Standard No.	ESG Standard Title
1.0 – Internal QA Framework	2.1	Governance and Management of Quality	1.1	Policy for Quality Assurance
	2.2	Documented Approach to Quality Assurance		
2.0 – Programme Development and Delivery	2.3	Programmes of Education and Training	1.2	Design and Approval of Programmes
4.0 – QA of Research Activities and Programmes				
8.0 – Monitoring and Periodic Review			1.9	On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes
5.0 – Staff Recruitment, Development and Support	2.4	Staff Recruitment, Management and Development	1.5	Teaching Staff
2.3 – Teaching, Learning and Assessment	2.5	Teaching and Learning	1.3	Student-centred Teaching, Learning and Assessment
	2.6	Assessment of Learners		
3.0 – Learner Resources and Supports	2.7	Supports for learners	1.6	Learning Resources and Student Support
6.0 – Information and Data Management	2.8	Information and Data Management	1.7	Information Management
7.0 – Public Information and Communication	2.9	Public Information and Communication	1.8	Public Information
2.0 – Programme Delivery and Development	2.10	Other Parties Involved in Education and Training	1.9	On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes
8.0 – Monitoring and Periodic Review				
9.0 – Details of Arrangements with Third Parties			1.2	Design and Approval of Programmes
2.0 – Programme Development and Delivery	2.11	Self-evaluation, Monitoring and Review	1.9	On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes
8.0 – Monitoring and Periodic Review			1.10	Cyclical External Quality Assurance
4.0 – QA of Research Activities and Programmes	QAG for Providers of Research Degree Programmes			

Figure 1: AQR's role in internal and external QA

Quality in Irish Public Higher Education Institutions

This is a synthesis report of quality assurance and quality enhancement within Irish public higher education institutions. It is based on the Annual Quality Reports submitted by the 20 public higher education institutions and the National University of Ireland in 2021.

Foreword

The Annual Quality Report (AQR) is a crucial element of QQI's quality assurance (QA) framework of engagement with and monitoring of higher education institutions (HEIs). Submitted and published annually, it provides documentary evidence of the establishment, implementation and monitoring of an institution's internal quality assurance system consistent with European Standards and Guidelines (2015) and with QQI's QA guidelines. Within QQI's external Quality Review process - CINNTE - the AQR is an important source of information for the institutions in developing their institutional self-evaluation report (ISER) and for external review teams.

This synthesis report is the fifth synthesis by QQI of the AQRs of Irish public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This report provides an insight into the internal governance of quality assurance and the infrastructures in place in the institutions, and the main topics and themes arising across the suite of AQRs submitted in 2021 by the 20 publicly regulated HEIs and the National University of Ireland (NUI).

The synthesis report provides evidence of a wide breadth of activities illustrating the strategic commitment of the public higher education sector to the quality assurance and quality enhancement of its teaching, learning, assessment, and research activities. Within the challenging context of COVID-19, the learner-centred approach and focus of the institutions on the learner experience was evident across the institutions.

QQI's Insights report on *Quality in Irish Public Higher Education Institutions 2021* is directed primarily at the institutions themselves; it is a mechanism to disseminate good practice in quality assurance and quality enhancement and support a culture of continuous improvement in the sector. This Insights report will also be of interest to other national and international stakeholders, it provides transparency on QA within the system and contributes to enhancing public trust and confidence in the quality and integrity of education and training in the public higher education sector.

Dr Padraig Walsh
Chief Executive Officer

Background and Context: The Annual Quality Report

The Annual Quality Report (AQR) is an important element of QQI's quality assurance monitoring and review framework. It provides assurance to QQI that requisite quality assurance (QA) procedures are being implemented and regulatory requirements are being met by higher education institutions (HEI).

The AQRs are published on QQI's website and provide transparency on, and enhance public confidence in, quality assurance in Irish higher education institutions.

In addition, QQI invites institutions to submit case studies of practice pertinent to specific themes in quality assurance and quality enhancement for the reporting period. The theme identified by QQI for this reporting period was: IQA Response to Emergency Situations/Covid-19 Pandemic. A collection of the unabridged case studies is published separately on QQI's website.

2021 marks the fifth year in which Irish, publicly regulated HEIs submitted an annual quality report, but the first in which a new template, explicitly aligned to QQI's Core Statutory [QA Guidelines](#) and the [European Standards and Guidelines for QA](#) (2015) has been used. The AQRs submitted by public HEIs are published on QQI's website. They provide a contemporary record of quality and its development in Irish higher education.

The AQR provides assurance to QQI that requisite QA procedures are being implemented and regulatory requirements met. Information contained in the AQR informs QQI's biennial, quality dialogue meeting with each public 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.

This synthesis report is the fifth to be published by QQI and is based on the 21 AQRs submitted in 2021 by public HEIs and the NUI. The synthesis is a qualitative analysis of quality assurance developments and enhancements within Irish public higher education institutions as reported on by the HEIs in their AQRs. Themes were identified using qualitative analysis software[1], with the aim of highlighting and disseminating good practice and identifying key areas of focus for the public higher education sector.

QQI acknowledges the challenging context and background against which the 2021 AQRs were compiled and submitted. During and beyond the reporting period, HEIs were impacted by public health restrictions imposed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This is, not surprisingly, reflected as a core theme within the reports.

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[1]   [MAXQDA](#)

This synthesis report is based on the Annual Quality Reports submitted by the following institutions:

No.	Institution
1.	Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT)
2.	Cork Institute of Technology (CIT)[2]
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 (IT Carlow)
8.	Institute of Technology, Sligo (IT Sligo)
9.	Institute of Technology, Tralee (IT Tralee)[3]
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)

Figure 2: List of Public HEIs that submitted AQRs in 2021

Figure 3: Word cloud comprising common words arising in the AQRs

Section 1: Strategic Updates: QA Implementation and Related Developments

1.1   Contextual factors impacting on QA

1.1.1 Covid-19

During this reporting period, the single contextual factor which impacted most on QA across the public HEIs was the public-health restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic. While the HEIs had established internal quality assurance (IQA) systems to support blended learning, the pivot to fully online learning presented a significant and unprecedented challenge to the IQA systems in all HEIs. This was initially more acute in the areas of teaching, learning, and assessment.[4]

All HEIs have reported on processes for quickly developing contingency plans and managing and mitigating risk to ensure that the quality of the learner experience was retained. The AQRs evidence a culture across the HEIs of supporting learners and staff, and a commitment to quality of teaching, learning and assessment activities and outcomes. This can be seen through the range of enhancement initiatives, activities and impact evaluation undertaken by the institutions and noted in this synthesis report. Covid-19 is a universal theme, which has affected all elements of HEIs' internal QA system over the reporting period.

The financial impact on institutions of the pandemic was also reported on. Institutions reported on the impact of the loss of fee income caused by the disruption of the pandemic, as illustrated in the excerpt from WIT report.

Financial Impact of Covid-19 - WIT

The Institute has not been insulated from the negative impact on finances caused by Covid-19's business disruption and uncertainty. The full financial effect on the Institute is still under scrutiny, complicated by the evolving expectations for operating in a compliant and safe manner.

Naturally there was also an income reduction during the academic year 2019/20, triggered by the closure of the Institute buildings during the national lockdown, the need to conclude the second semester online, reductions in income due to a ceasing of trading activity associated with student services, a requirement to offer refunds or deferrals and the decision to waive fees for some normal activity, such as repeat examinations. There has also been an increase in unpaid fees, much of which may not be recoverable in the current economic climate.

The preparation for the new academic year (2020-21) has created a need for a re-orientation of activity to online and blended modes for academic delivery along with a blend of remote and on-site working for the majority of staff members. Extra financial support and commitments from the Exchequer have been crucial in the successful pivoting of provision. This move has been underpinned through the acquisition on a large scale of additional ICT and network infrastructure, changes to the physical environment required to enable the delivery of the academic programmes via remote learning and face-to-face with social distancing and related health and safety costs, e.g., PPE, cleaning materials and extra cleaning staff.

(WIT AQR pp.58-59)

Figure 4: Financial Impact of Covid-19 - WIT

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4   The impact of Covid-19 modifications to teaching, learning and assessment within the public independent higher education sector has been researched and reported on by QQI, and the outcomes and findings are available in The Impact of COVID-19 Modifications to Teaching, Learning and Assessment in Irish Further Education and Training and Higher Education. This report provides detailed analysis of adaptations made by institutions to their QA governance, policies and procedures, assessment, teaching and learning activities, and programmes, as well as the contingency plans approved by QQI. Further detail in respect of these areas is provided in the institutions' individual AQR submissions.

1.1.2   Developments in the technological higher education sector

Institutes of technology as designated awarding bodies

Two institutes of technology (IoTs) reported on achieving designated awarding body status during the reporting period:

- LIT noted that, in preparation for its designation as an awarding body up to level 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), it adopted QQI award standards at its academic council meeting in December 2019. The institution also established a new subcommittee on quality and academic standards that will take responsibility for advising LIT's academic council on matters relating to its new designated awarding body (DAB) status.

- AIT reported that, following its achievement of DAB-status, QQI award standards were formally adopted as an interim measure until its own award standards have been developed.

Designation of technological universities

Whilst no further technological universities (TUs) were formally designated during the reporting period, several institutes of technology consortia began preparing, or submitted applications, for designation under the Technological Universities Act, 2018, and for two institutions, this AQR is the final to be submitted for the institution.

The final AQR of Cork Institute of Technology was prepared and submitted by MTU Cork for the final, extended reporting period of 1 September 2019 to 31 December 2020. The final AQR for Institute of Technology Tralee was also submitted for the extended reporting period, 1 September 2019 to 31 December 2020.

On 1 January 2021, Cork Institute of Technology together with Institute of Technology Tralee became constituent parts of the new Munster Technological University (MTU) under the Technological Universities Act 2018. Both CIT and IT Tralee (Munster Technological University (MTU) partners) provided comprehensive detail of the intensive work undertaken to establish new policies, procedures, and governance structures in advance of the designation of the second Irish technological university on 1 January 2021. The importance of ensuring awareness amongst key stakeholders of progress in the new TU's development is emphasised in both partners' reports.

The following are some of the activities undertaken in preparation for designation as technological universities reported on by the IoTs:

- CIT reported that a joint steering group comprising representatives from the governing bodies of ITT and CIT was established in October 2019 and met monthly up until the designation of MTU. This group, which included the presidents of the respective students' unions of ITT and CIT, worked to develop an integrated, coherent and effective approach to establishing the technological university and considered how this work should be continued beyond designation. An MTU Joint Executive was established in early November 2019. The hosting and chairing of these meetings alternated between the two partner HEIs. This group addressed key strategic initiatives, including processes for programme mapping and new programme development, budget planning, and resource allocation.

- IT Tralee provided detail of the working groups formed in a number of key areas prior to MTU's establishment to ensure preparedness for dissolution of the two IoTs and designation of the new technological university. These groups considered inter alia corporate affairs (including human resources), governance and management of quality assurance, and research, innovation and engagement.

- AIT detailed the joint creation of an outline, quality assurance framework plan with LIT for the initial phase of their application for designation as a TU. This was followed by formal establishment of the AIT-LIT consortium. This framework will control the management of any work on the institutions' quality assurance and

enhancement policies and procedures during the transition period. AIT also noted that strategic plans developed for functional areas within the institution during the reporting period were developed in the context of its TU ambitions.

- LIT reported that sustainability and sustainable development are integrated into the new TU's framework and that the UN's Sustainable Development Goals have been identified as a key principle that will inform the TU's activities and strategic direction. LIT further noted the extensive self-evaluation of its QA and enhancement system, which was undertaken with the intention of informing the development of systems in the new TU.

- WIT noted significant development with IT Carlow in the process leading to their establishment as a technological university. A number of projects were initiated, co-chaired by senior management from both IoTs. The TU project included the development of a merge-change programme, along with an audit of current institute numbers, processes and practices.

- IT Sligo confirmed that it will align developments in governance, mission, academic strategy, planning, research and corporate services with GMIT and LYIT (the Connaught Ulster Alliance) in preparation for TU designation. The Technological University (TU) for the West and North-West of Ireland will be one of the largest multi-campus universities on the island. The work of the CUA is undertaken by a steering group, four working groups and 19 sub-groups, directly involving over 150 staff and students from across the CUA.

- IT Carlow noted that preparations for the Technological University of the South East of Ireland (TUSEI)[5] include ongoing, jointly-funded and managed projects. There are 28 projects funded through this initiative, including network-building projects involving science, health, engineering, design, business and humanities academic and research staff, human resource staff, student support personnel, academic managers and finance departments. There are also a number of projects to promote higher education connections with industry and community groups across the South East. Other projects take a regional approach to teaching, learning and assessment, programme alignment and examining ways for higher education to contribute to sustainable development in the region.

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5   TUSEI was the working name through the amalgamation process, the new university will be known as South East Technological University

TU Dublin Strategic Planning Process

TU Dublin was formally established on the 1st of January 2019, under the Technological Universities Act 2018 (TU Act). Designation as a technological university was a substantial achievement providing us with the opportunity to make significant contributions as a new type of university within the Irish higher education landscape. In line with the University's mission and the functions of a technological university set out in the TU Act, a process to develop the University's first strategic development plan commenced in 2019. Given the foundational nature of this plan, a focus was placed on preparing a three year plan within a longer, visionary, ten year timeframe. The **TU Dublin Strategic Intent 2030**[1] was created over a 12 month development period and was formally launched in January 2020.

In addition to detailed analysis of external drivers and internal capabilities, a significant consultation process was undertaken in the creation of the plan with the aim of maximising stakeholder engagement. The interactive and collaborative planning sessions invited contributions from over 2,500 stakeholders including staff and students, alumni, community and industry. It also included feedback through surveys of staff and students. Stakeholders were tasked to *Think Big – Think Bold* and to consider future strategy through the lens of the **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** so we can contribute to making the world a better place in which to live.

In compiling the input from 2,500 stakeholders, some clear areas of focus and shared concerns emerged. We crafted the ambitious vision to *Create a Better World, Together* shaping our plan through three interrelated themes – *People, Planet and Partnership* https://www.tudublin.ie/explore/about-the-university/strategicplan/2030/. Our ambitions are outlined below.

- **PEOPLE** – Fostering Individual Talents in an Ever Changing World
- **PLANET** – A Powerhouse for Living & Breathing Sustainability
- **PARTNERSHIP** – Delivering Shared Impact.

To achieve our TU Dublin Strategic Intent 2030 a three year Strategic Plan to 2023 has been developed and the implementation framework adopted to ensure its delivery is summarised below. Key TU Dublin objectives, have also been mapped to the National System Performance Framework.

Figure 5: TU Dublin Strategic Planning Process

1.2　Facilities

HEIs provided updates on the development and / or enhancement of their physical facilities. Whilst there were delays to a number of construction projects as a result of Covid-19 related restrictions, many projects nonetheless commenced, and some were completed within the reporting period.

- UCD described how two, major buildings comprising phase 1 of the Future Campus Masterplan – the Centre for Creativity and the Centre for Future Learning - were approved to go to tender for construction works. The enabling works for the site were approved to go ahead by the UCD Governing Authority in December 2020. The Governing Authority also approved the signing of the contract for the construction of phase 2 of the Student Residence Masterplan.

- TCD updated on a number of developments; the Printing House Square development was due to open in 2020, but was delayed due to Covid-19. The development will provide on-campus student accommodation for up to 250 students, along with upgraded student services. Work on phase 1 of the Trinity St. James' Cancer Institute progressed during the summer of 2020. The Rubrics and Chief Steward's House underwent significant work during the summer of 2020 and planning permission for the Old Library Redevelopment Project was granted in October 2020. In January 2020, the Government formally endorsed the plan for the Trinity Technology and Enterprise Campus (TTEC).

- NUI Galway was successful in a bid for €15 million under the Government's Higher Education Strategic Infrastructure Fund (HESIF) in August 2019. The university has committed to funding a €39M project for a new library incorporating a 'learning commons'. Planning and design are under way with construction planned to commence in 2022.

- TU Dublin reported that the relocation of many sites to Grangegorman for the start of the 2020 / 21 academic year was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Construction work commenced at the end of August 2020 on a 3,186m2 Sports Science, Health and Recreation Building and Sports Facility on the Tallaght campus.

- Maynooth University reported that its facilities and buildings for teaching and learning received significant investments with the addition of 21,700 m2 to the building stock at a cost of €62.4m. This includes the EOLAS building and the School of Education. Construction of a new, academic building commenced in August 2019. Planning consent for the redevelopment of the existing Arts building was secured in early 2019 and planning consent was also secured in late 2019 for the construction of a new Student Centre. A campus master plan guides the capital development of the university over the coming decade.

- GMIT reported that significant progress was made during 2019 to 2020 across a number of large and small-scale projects managed via the Buildings and Estates function.

  » Planning permission was received for a new €25m PPP STEM building which was progressed from client briefing stage through statutory certification stage through to tender preparation stage.

  » A €4.25 million Enterprise Ireland iHub extension was started in 2019 and safely and successfully completed in Q4 2020.

  » Approximately €0.8m was spent in 2019 and again in 2020 on minor works improvements across the Galway, CCAM, Mayo and Letterfrack campuses.

1.3 European universities and other international collaborations

Many HEIs reported on their internationalisation plans and on their involvement in partnerships and collaborations with other European universities.

- Global Galway Project: NUI Galway reported on its objective to create a new and sustainable, internationalisation structure. The project aims to: 1) establish adaptable structures and collaborative ways of working to encourage a culture of internationalisation across the whole of the university, 2) build a strong international future for NUI Galway with robust processes and collaborative ways of working that will position the university for global growth.

- UCC (through OVPLT) participated in the 2017, 2018, and 2020 EUA Learning & Teaching Thematic Peer Groups (TPGs) around the themes of "Improving the link between research and teaching", "Promoting active learning in universities", and "Meeting skills and employability demands". UCC (through OVPLT) has also been selected as one of 29 HEIs to participate in the EUA's Leadership and Organisation for Teaching and Learning at European Universities (LOTUS) programme.

- TCD updated on its participation in European discussions on QA as part of the CHARM- EU Alliance. For example, in December 2020, the Quality Officer participated in the European Universities Association 'ImPEA Project final conference event' to consider the lessons learned from the application of the European Approach to Quality for Joint Programmes that could inform the development of the CHARM EU model of quality assurance.

- AIT and LIT both updated on their involvement in RUN-EU (Regional University Network - European Union). The Network is intended to enable greater staff and student mobility; provide a network of learning and innovation through European Innovation Hubs; and develop Future Advanced Skills Academies (FASAs), Short Advanced Programmes, Structured Professional Doctorates, and Joint Programme Delivery from Level 6 to Level 9. Students will be able to obtain a degree by combining studies in multiple EU countries. Several virtual events were held with international partners during the reporting period.

ENLIGHT Consortium of European Universities (NUI Galway)

ENLIGHT: In July 2020 the ENLIGHT consortium of nine European universities, including NUI Galway, was selected in the framework of the second call for "European Universities", the European Commission's pilot program for new multilateral networks. ENLIGHT, the European university Network to promote equitable quality of Life, sustainability and Global engagement through Higher education Transformation and will receive start-up funding of €5 million. ENLIGHT unites nine universities of Galway, Ireland; the Basque Country, Spain; Bordeaux, France; Bratislava, Slovakia; Göttingen, Germany; Groningen, The Netherlands; Tartu, Estonia; Uppsala, Sweden; and Ghent, Belgium.

The nine ENLIGHT universities have set a common goal to fundamentally transform higher education and to empower existing and prospective students with the right knowledge and skills to become engaged professionals and respond to the major, complex societal challenges of the 21st century. The ENLIGHT network embodies the geographical, cultural and linguistic diversity of Europe, and aims to make full use of this wealth and diversity to offer new, flexible international study opportunities tailored to individual's needs.

Over the next three years, ENLIGHT will pilot new learning formats across five focus themes: Climate Change, Health and Well-Being, Inequalities, Digital revolution, Energy and Circularity. In the long term ENLIGHT wants to create an open space between the nine universities without barriers for learning, teaching and working together. The ENLIGHT project was realised in close co-operation with the student representatives of all ENLIGHT universities, with the student network continuing to play a central role in addressing the needs of current and future student generations.

Figure 6: ENLIGHT consortium of European Universities [NUI Galway]

1.4 Strategy, governance and management of quality

The development and progression of strategic objectives was severely impeded by the public restrictions imposed with the arrival of Covid-19 in March 2020. Without exception, all HEIs were forced to implement emergency measures to ensure that teaching and learning processes could be adapted as appropriate and transitioned online when necessary. Notwithstanding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, some key strategic objectives of individual HEIs continued to be fulfilled, and enhancements to QA governance and management made. Some examples include:

- DCU confirmed that it has developed a comprehensive briefing programme for incoming student representatives on Governing Authority. This initiative was led by the Office of the Chief Operations Officer in response to recommendations made at its CINNTE Institutional Review.

- Following an Equality Impact Assessment, NUI Galway reported that it has committed to providing an inclusive environment for the university community in line with the values supporting the strategic plan.

- RCSI implemented a decision of its quality committee to include student/learner representatives in all Peer Review Groups for internal QA reviews, and now recruits students external to the university with experience of QA process roles in higher education for these roles.

- University of Limerick reported that its new "UL@50 Strategic Plan" was launched in November 2019. Four key themes shaped the development of UL@50 and are embedded with the plan: 1) Transforming learning; 2) Digital transformation; 3) City and culture; 4) Health and wellbeing. The five goals of the new strategic plan are: 1) Transforming Education; 2) Research Excellence; 3) Internationalisation; 4) City and Region; 5) Operating Model. Recognising 13 grounds of equality and built around 10 themes, the strategy will be implemented through the academic and support structures of the university.

- Within WIT the Academic Council normally meets once per month on average during an academic year. However, the complexity posed by Covid-19 meant that Council chose to meet more frequently and made a number of key decisions to enable the institute to continue to offer a high-quality experience to all students.

- WIT also detailed the central importance of the institute's regulatory framework in the successful response to Covid-19.

- DkIT reported that a new Governing Body had been constituted. Significantly, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the authority of Academic Council was delegated to the Academic Contingency Planning (ACP) sub- group (established as a temporary subcommittee of Academic Council) to deal exclusively with academic operational matters that could not have been dealt with under the existing governance/academic structures (see Figure 4 below).

- UCD outlined the development of a new Education and Student Success Strategy for 2021-24, led by the Registrar, Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Deputy President. It encompasses four themes that will provide a student-centred educational experience: technology enhanced learning; student engagement; diversity and well-being; and pedagogy for inclusivity for student success. The Education Strategy was to be considered by the Governing Authority in March 2021.
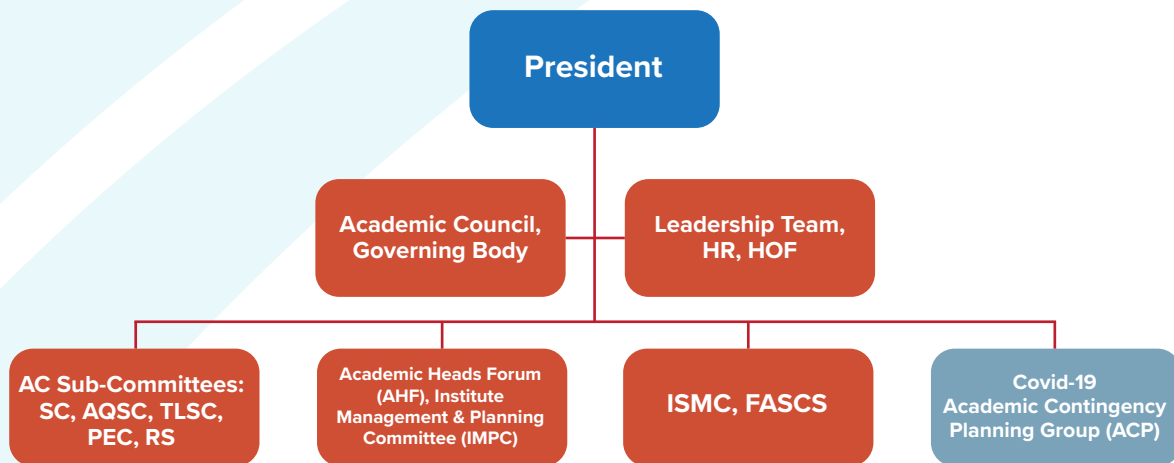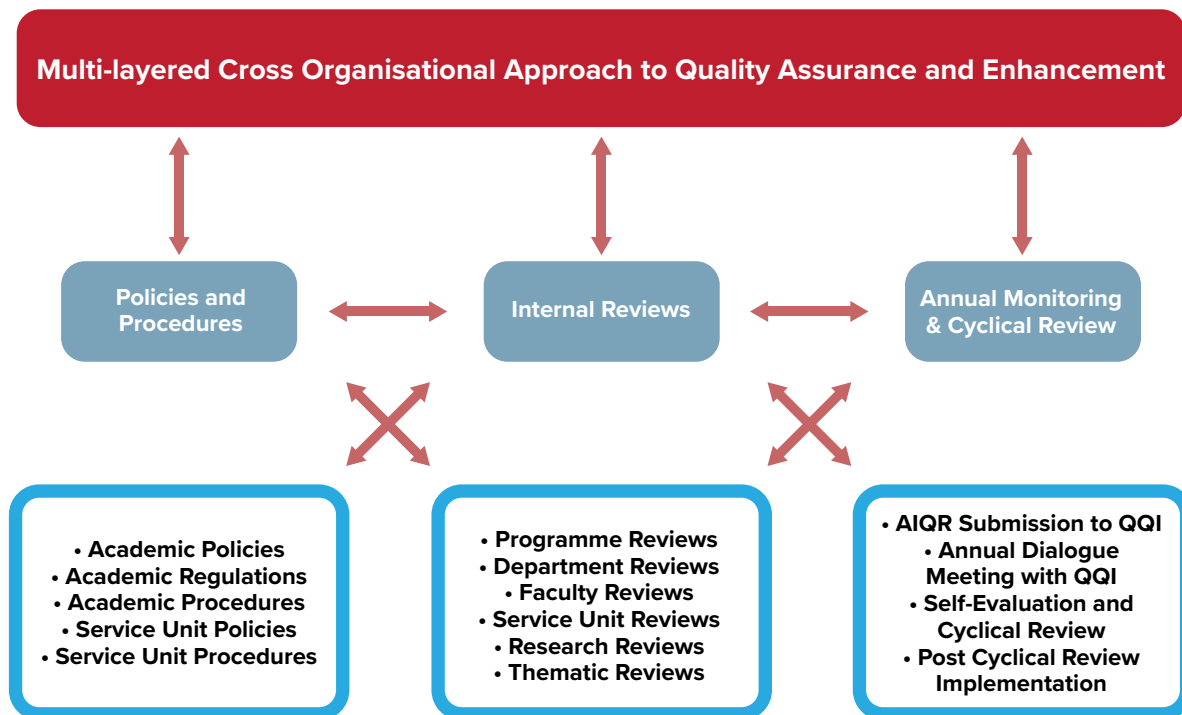
Figure 7: Covid-19 Governance Structure in Dundalk IT

Figure 8: Overview of multi-layered cross Organisational Approach to QA and QE at Limerick IT

1.4.1   QA supporting strategic objectives

The AQRs continue to show clear connections between institutions' missions and strategic priorities and their quality assurance and enhancement activities. This is evident throughout the reports and examples are provided below:

- Letterkenny IoT planned a significant rewrite of parts of its QA Handbook to include new sections specific to Level 10 on the NFQ to support achievement of its strategic objective to develop QA for Professional Doctorates as part of the introduction of a DBA.

- GMIT outlined plans to develop a range of programmes in response to Springboard and HCI and to develop a policy on microcredentials to support the responsiveness of academic planning to environmental demands. It also plans to provide additional mental health supports for students; expand activities to promote access and participation; and develop a Consent Framework Action Plan in support of its objective to enhance the protections and supports available to students.

- UCC will conduct a thematic review of teaching and assessing with technology. This will be an international peer review and is intended to identify options for maximising the organisational, governance and decision-making structures required for strategic steering and overall coordination for teaching and assessing with technology. This review links to wider strategic developments being led by the VP for Learning & Teaching to develop UCC's digital education strategy.

- The RCSI Student Engagement & Partnership (StEP) Agreement identified closing the feedback loop as one of the priority areas of focus for student engagement. In October 2020, the RCSI Quality Enhancement Office (QEO) launched the RCSI Student Pulse Poll, a mechanism for gathering feedback on students' learning experience.

- DCU took a number of steps as part of ongoing implementation of recommendations arising from its 2018 CINNTE review including:

  » continued progress on the development of data analytics to support the quality framework and strategic decision-making at DCU;

  » planned development of CORE Recruit for staff recruitment, with further automation of the recruitment tracking and;

  » planned roll-out of the University Performance Review and Development (PRD) Scheme.

Age-Friendly University Network

In December 2019, RCSI endorsed the 10 principles of the Age-Friendly University Initiative and joined the international network of higher education institutions led by Dublin City University (DCU) dedicated to addressing the needs of older people and focusing on the challenges and opportunities presented by a rapidly ageing population. Launched in 2012, the Ten Principles of an Age-Friendly University (AFU) were developed by DCU as a framework to identify the distinctive contributions institutions of higher education can make in responding to the interests and the needs of an aging population. In becoming an age-friendly university, RCSI officially endorses the 10 principles that provide guidance for evaluating programmes, policies and identifying opportunities for serving people of all ages.

Figure 9: Age Friendly University Initiative at RCSI

1.4.2   Leadership and management

There were a number of new leadership and management appointments made by the HEIs during the reporting period. Examples include:

- DCU appointed a new President in 2020. With a renewed leadership team, it undertook a significant review of the existing DCU strategic plan and progress to date on current initiatives and priorities. The current plan was updated to reflect a "transitional strategy" prioritising the university's people and a focus on the activities that are aligned to the mission until a new strategic plan is developed in 2022.

- A number of college management structural changes took place in NUI Galway, and new appointments were made; these include; arising from the merger of the Colleges of Science and Engineering, a new College Office structure was put in place and staff roles aligned to support Undergraduate Affairs, Graduate Affairs and International matters; the school of Humanities was split into two new schools: (i) the School of English and Creative Arts, and (ii) School of History and Philosophy; a new Director of Strategy Implementation was appointed, to implement, monitor and review targets / actions of the strategic plan.

- IT Carlow appointed a new Director for People and EDI to the senior management team.

- With the support of the HEA funded Senior Academic Leadership Initiative, IT Carlow also appointed a new Director of Engineering Research and Innovation. Application for this post was made within the context of the Institution's EDI Policy, Gender Equality Action Plan and Institutional Athena SWAN Award (Extended Charter) 2019.

- A new post was created in the SMT of RCSI, with the appointment of a new Director of International Engagement and External Relations, and the university also made a number of key academic appointments during the reporting period.

1.4.3   Sustainable development goals

A growing number of HEIs explicitly referenced the importance of sustainable development and many reported on how they have formally sought to incorporate and address the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Some examples include:

- Sustainable development is identified as one of the five pillars of the Carlow IT Strategic Plan. Under Pillar 5: The report notes that the college will "educate for sustainable development locally, nationally and globally, and we will lead by example".

- In IT Tralee, it was reported that the SDGs are increasingly considered in programme development and research across all schools in the institute. A number of departments have mapped their activities against the SDGs and advocate for individual goals in their academic, active citizenship and strategic research activities.

- NUI Galway stated that sustainable development is central to its new strategic plan, and is one of four pillars across the university mission. NUI Galway has signed the SDG Accord. Through its Sustainability Strategy and using its Learn-Live-Lead model, sustainability is addressed from environmental, social and economic perspectives and is promoted by embedding it in operations and investments and by building sustainable partnerships with communities.

- Within LIT, the UN SDGs came to the fore across a range of activities and initiatives in 2019/2020. Specifically, the BSc in Environment Science and Climate and BSc in Community Development and Addiction Studies integrate the SDGs within foundation modules focused on sustainable development and community development. Graduates from these programmes emerge with a thorough understanding of the SDGs and their relevance to their particular field of study and future work.

- In January 2020, strategic planning process was commenced for the LIT Thurles Campus, the strategic direction for which centres the SDGs as the framework underpinning all campus activities. The LIT Thurles campus will

become the focal point upon which specific expertise and knowledge of SDGs and sustainable development will be radiate out to the entire organisation, and ultimately to the proposed Technological University.

- Emerging from the LIT Thurles Strategy and the work of the LIT Development Unit, a new Sustainable Development Research Institute (SDRI) is being established to deliver on LIT and TU's ambition to be at the forefront of sustainable development in the TU Region, by delivering inter-disciplinary research and building new knowledge and delivering positive impacts for and outcomes for society. Focused around the themes of Nature; Economy; Society and Wellbeing, SDRI will deliver a step change in LIT/TUs contribution to the sustainable development agenda.

- GMIT agreed to include sustainable development principles and ethos as one of the parameters by which it reviews and develops programmes. This will allow programme boards to consider the SDGs when reviewing programme and module learning outcomes and syllabi, and where appropriate, to highlight relevant skills, knowledge and competencies required by graduates.

- In 2019, the University of Limerick Research Impact Committee oversaw a benchmarking exercise of their case study programme. In response to this exercise, the committee implemented a number of improvement actions to bring it in line with best practice and build in the UN SDGs. The SDGs have been embedded within the research impact case study templates and all new case studies published in 2020 have articulated their contribution towards the SDGs. In addition, the SDGs have been incorporated into training programmes for research impact under the remit of the University Research Committee.

- RCSI reported that it has made good progress towards realising the UN's SDGs: In April 2020, the Times Higher Education University Impact Rankings 2020 placed RCSI first in the world for 'Good Health and Well-Being' (UNSDG #3). Based upon data submitted for six of the seventeen UNSDGs, RCSI was placed in the overall rank of 101-200. In relation to UNSDG #8, 'Decent Work and Economic Growth', RCSI ranked 62nd out of 479 universities.

- One of the four themes of the UCD Strategy 2020-2024: Rising to the Future, is "Creating a Sustainable Global Society". Over the course of 2019, UCD held an SDG Seminar Series for staff, students and other stakeholders. In April 2020, UCD ranked 34th in the world in the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings against the 17 UN SDGs. UCD is ranked number one in Ireland in three of the individual rankings:

  » Partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17);

  » Decent work and Economic Growth (Goal 8); and

  » Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (Goal 9).

- In TCD, a Sustainable Procurement Policy was approved by the Board in 2019. Sustainable procurement guidelines are available for all staff involved in the procurement of services and goods for Trinity, thereby supporting the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals – 'reduce our environmental footprint' and 'affect market change by increasing demand for fairly priced and socially responsible product'. Within the previous three years, student engagement expanded significantly, with a number of programmes and tools used to enrol students in more sustainable lifestyle habits.

Embedding sustainability at UCC

Sustainability is embedded in UCC's Strategic Plan 2017-2022, and the Academic Strategy 2018-2022. UCC is a member of the EAUC, Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Higher Education and is a signatory of the SDG Accord, higher education's collective response to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In the academic year 2019-2020, UCC celebrated 10 years since becoming the first university in the world to be awarded a Green Flag from the Foundation for Environmental Education. In 2019, UCC successfully renewed its Green Flag for the 4th time. Core to the Green Flag process is the active participation of all elements of the university in sustainable development.

In 2019-2020, UCC ranked 9th globally in the UI Green Metric. The UI Green Metric ranks over 900 HEIs according to their performance in environmental sustainability, incorporating metrics relating to twelve of the 17 UN SDGs. In 2019-2020, UCC was ranked 32nd globally out of 768 universities in the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings. UCC was the highest-ranking university in Europe for impact on SDG 1 and SDG 12.

Through the Connected Curriculum and Graduate Attributes Programme (Priorities One and Four respectively of the Academic Strategy 2018-2022), UCC is championing the development of values, skills and aptitudes that promote civic participation, social inclusion, sustainability, and impactful, global citizenship in all academic courses. All 17 SDGs are covered within the formal curriculum at UCC, with 6% of the university's modules including direct sustainable development teachings.

 In 2019-2020, UCC commenced a new project funded by the National Forum for Teaching and Learning, designed to enable educators to integrate the SDGs further into the curriculum. Each year, the university-wide Module in Sustainability is offered annually as a Digital Badge to all staff or as additional University Credit to all students.

Figure 10: Embedding sustainability at UCC, extract from UCC AQR

Case Study: Research Impact and UN Sustainable Development Goals

The University of Limerick has championed the area of research impact since 2014, impact has been highlighted as a goal within successive research and organisational strategies. The Research Impact Committee (RIC), a standing sub-committee of the University Research Strategy Board (URSB) (now University Research Committee or URC, was established in late 2018 with responsibility for strategy and policy, skills development and external engagement in support of the research impact agenda. Chaired by Prof Helena Lenihan, the RIC includes senior academics from across all faculties, the Head of Learning and Development, HR, and the Research Strategy and Policy Manager. In 2019, the University of Limerick Research Impact Committee oversaw a benchmarking exercise of their case study programme. The benchmarking examined updates to the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF) in REF2021 and recommendations from the 2016 independent review of REF (Stern Report)[1], the rollout of the *Excellence in Research for Australian (ERA)* national research evaluation, *Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research* national research evaluation and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS) Programme. In response to this exercise, the committee implemented a number of improvement actions to bring it in line with best practice and build in the UN SDGS:

1. Inclusion of UN Sustainable Development Goals section within the case study template.

2. Internationalisation of the case study programme by opening up to inclusion (and encouragement) of international co-authors on the case study and listing of countries (including and beyond Ireland) where impacts occurred.

3. Eligibility criteria defined broadly to ensure no perceived barriers for any disciplines, particularly in the area of outputs. Inclusion of the REF 2021 glossary on output types. It is hoped that this level of detail will support the development of case studies across all disciplines.

4. The case study guide now includes a wide list of types of research outputs which can be submitted as part of a case study to bring it in line with the REF standard. In all cases demonstration of rigour in terms of research excellence is a pre-condition to the development of a subsequent case study. The imperative is for case study authors to demonstrate a clear link between the impact of their research and the underpinning research outputs.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals have been embedded within the research impact case study templates and all new case studies published in 2020 have articulated their contribution towards the SDGS. In addition, the SDGS have been incorporated into training programmes for research impact under the remit of the University Research Committee. Find out more at www.ul.ie/researchimpact

Figure 11: Research impact and Sustainable Development Goals at UL

[1] Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (2016)Building on success and learning from experience, an independent review of the Research Excellence Framework, [Online] Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/541338/ind-16-9-ref-stern-review.pdf, [Accessed 07/07/20[

Section 2: IQA System Enhancement and Impacts

2.1 Academic integrity

The theme of academic integrity was reported on in a dedicated section of the AQR for the first time in 2021. Most HEIs referred to their involvement in the sector-led National Academic Integrity Network, and engagement with the valuable resources and supports developed by that network. An increased focus on the prevention of academic misconduct during Covid-19 related to the move to online assessment was evident across reports, with many HEIs reporting the provision of professional development workshops and guidance for staff in this area. Several HEIs noted the invaluable input of students and students' union representatives to their endeavours to develop and maintain awareness of students' rights and responsibilities in relation to academic integrity and the risks inherent in engaging in plagiarism or with academic assignment writing services.

- CIT, in partnership with its students' union, issued academic integrity guidance for students in the online context. The AQR notes that CIT Students' Union took a proactive approach to increasing students' awareness of the risks of engaging in academic misconduct and emphasises that partnership is seen as key to safeguarding academic integrity.

- AIT developed an academic integrity, virtual resource pack for students. During the reporting period, workshops on use of the pack were offered to staff as pilot sessions and, following evaluation of feedback, these workshops were further refined. Staff feedback also led to the development of an additional, professional development workshop for staff on recognising plagiarism. The AQR notes that student input to the pack's development was an essential element for the developers. Postgraduate students contributed to the resource pack's design, which was further amended following feedback.

Figure 12: Academic Resource Pack at AIT

- The RCSI established an Academic Integrity Working Group (AIWG) as a formal structure to monitor and respond to national initiatives in this area. The working group is a sub-committee of the Quality Committee and will have responsibility for the annual review of all policies and procedures relevant to academic integrity to ensure that they take account of national policy and guidance, and of developments in the prevention and detection of academic misconduct.

- The RCSI also reported that it took steps to ensure that the principles of academic integrity were embedded in the design of alternative assessment processes in response to public-health restrictions. In all assessments, students signed a revised academic integrity statement, reminding them of the code of conduct commitment that they sign at the start of each academic year, and of the recently enacted Irish legislation in relation to examination fraud.

- DCU outlined how it promoted shared responsibility and a holistic approach to promoting academic integrity. This is highlighted through the 'Promoting Academic Integrity Week', hosted by the university in October 2019. The week-long initiative comprised a range of online events for students and staff to prompt them to think about academic integrity, understand its importance, and learn about how they can uphold it.

- IT Tralee reported that it requires all students, on registering for each stage of an academic programme, to pledge that they will adhere to their responsibilities in the conduct of all examinations, continuous assessment, project work, presentations, and other assignments. To assist in this, the institution's library has developed a guide on referencing and avoiding plagiarism. The institution has developed an academic integrity checklist for lecturers to use in respect of assessment and examinations.

- Limerick IT outlined the work undertaken to upskill and enhance staff capacity in assessment design through various initiatives. These included the provision of workshops on re-designing assessment, which included one-to-one support for staff, including in relation to the use of online assessment tools; the development of a best practice rubrics guide; the provision of workshops on using open-book exams and development of an open-book exam guide; and the development of an accredited 10-ECTS special purpose award in assessment for engaged learning.

- NUI noted the introduction by its linked provider, IPA, of new anti-plagiarism software, with positive feedback from staff and students to date.

- TCD reported the establishment of a working group that will conduct a review of current processes and practices in respect of plagiarism, consider the institution's response to the emerging threat of essay mills and implications of online assessment and assessment design when it comes to plagiarism. The group will also consider the use of e-proctoring software and supporting policies and procedures, as well as record-keeping in relation to academic misconduct and penalties attached to same. TCD also noted that all students must complete the Ready Steady Write plagiarism tutorial, a resource developed by the Centre for Academic Practice and eLearning (CAPSL) to help them understand and avoid plagiarism and develop their academic writing skills and academic integrity.

- Maynooth University reported that the acceleration of blended or online teaching and learning necessitated an increase in staff and student awareness of, and engagement with, academic integrity. The Enhancing Digital Teaching and Learning (EDTL) project was particularly effective. Maynooth EDTL Interns developed various, social-media resources and arranged, or contributed to, many online events aimed at promoting and supporting academic integrity in 2020.

Figure 13: Promotion of the National Academic Integrity Week by The Enhancing Digital Teaching and Learning (EDTL) project, at Maynooth University

2.2 Teaching, learning and assessment

Within the public HEIs, enhancements to teaching, learning and assessments during the reporting period focused in the main on actions and activities to support the transition to online learning and to mitigate the impact of Covid-19.

The crucial role of a range of professional service units in supporting students and academic staff moving to online teaching, learning and assessment during the reporting period was highlighted across reports. These included *inter alia* teaching and learning centres, technology-enhanced learning units and academic writing centres. In many cases, HEIs reported building on foundations that these units and their collaborators had already set in place pre-pandemic to facilitate increasingly flexible modes of delivery in response to the needs of industry and learners.

- TCD's CAPSL held a summer programme, which included workshops on adapting teaching, fostering student engagement, and assessment. TCD also provided a module for students, developed collaboratively by CAPSL, Student Learning Development, Trinity Disability Service, the Transition to Trinity Officer and the IUA Enhancing Digital Capacity Project. The pedagogically led module provided resources to help prepare students for hybrid learning.

- CIT reported that the existing mainstream and research work of the Institute's TEL function put the institution in an excellent position to conduct a strategic selection of key ERT approaches when moving to online teaching, learning and assessment. This work was underpinned by in-house expertise in online-learning pedagogy and tried-and-tested in-house systems for the management and support of online programme delivery.

- AIT established its Faculty for Continuing, Professional, Online and Distance Learning during the reporting period. AIT also noted a huge increase in demand by students for support from the institution's Academic Writing Centre following the move to online delivery. It attributed this increase primarily to the change in focus from end-of-year terminal assessments to written assignments.

- IT Tralee noted that its E-Learning Development Support Unit modified its CPD plan to focus almost entirely on the training and support of staff and students to transfer completely to remote and hybrid learning. The institution provided a series of training workshops during semester one 2020/21 to address remote learning, study skills and academic writing skills development. All elements incorporated the use of technologies to enhance performance. Students were also offered one-to-one sessions to support their adaptation to remote learning.

- In line with QQI's Guiding Principles for Alternative Assessments document, LIT reported its focus on learning outcomes in developing alternative assessments during the period of online / remote provision. In doing so, "learning outcomes were the constant and everything was directed and guided by these."

- NUI reported the support it provided to its linked provider, IPA, in adapting assessment methodologies to suit the fully online environment during the pandemic.

- GMIT's involvement in the CUA iNote6 project was reported as being instrumental in the upskilling of staff in relation to pedagogic and technological approaches, particularly through the www.digitaled.ie platform. Here, staff can assess their digital capabilities and access a range of resources and courses to support their online teaching. GMIT developed a customised version of the OSCQR Course Design Review scorecard to provide a course-level, quality rubric for reviewing and improving the instructional design and accessibility of online courses based on online best practices.

- Also at GMIT, the Teaching & Learning Office established a Digital Academic Champion network. The Digital Champions undertook a digital training programme to enable them to mentor their colleagues in online delivery in each academic department. 18 champions across 14 academic departments were established and were currently funded under the iNOTE project.

- IADT reported that the move online was more challenging for practice-based programmes, i.e., those that

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6   The Innovative Opportunities Transforming Education (iNOTE) Project, established by the Connacht-Ulster Alliance (CUA), is funded under the Higher Education Innovation and Transformation Fund to develop new flexible learning options in the west and northwest. The iNOTE Project was aligned with the key system objectives for the Higher Education System 2018 -2020 in meeting criteria to become a Technological University.

required the use of studios, and / or technical and practical equipment, as students were unable to access campus in order to complete their final pieces of work. In order to support these students to complete their work, the academic calendar was rescheduled from early May into July.

- The RCSI reported that, despite the impact of Covid-19 restrictions, some on-site simulation training continued. For example, a training course on conducting emergency laparoscopic ('keyhole') surgical procedures while wearing personal respirators and full PPE equipment took place at No. 26 York Street in early April 2020.

- The RCSI's Institute of Leadership (now RCSI Graduate School of Healthcare Management) continued to develop online, postgraduate programmes offering flexibility for postgraduate diplomas, masters degrees and short or bespoke professional development programmes across its three international campuses. Of note was the online Professional Diploma in Clinical Leadership which is offered to students in Dublin and in Dubai (in collaboration with Dubai Healthcare City Authority). This Professional Diploma was nominated for the Best Online Learning Experience at The Education Awards 2020.

- UCC reported that a Thematic Review of Work Placements was commissioned to provide a university-level view of current, good practice in the overall structure and co-ordination of placements, and to identify opportunities to enhance these practices into the future. It is intended that the findings of the review will also help to shape the implementation of the InPlace placement management software system which is being rolled out across the institution.
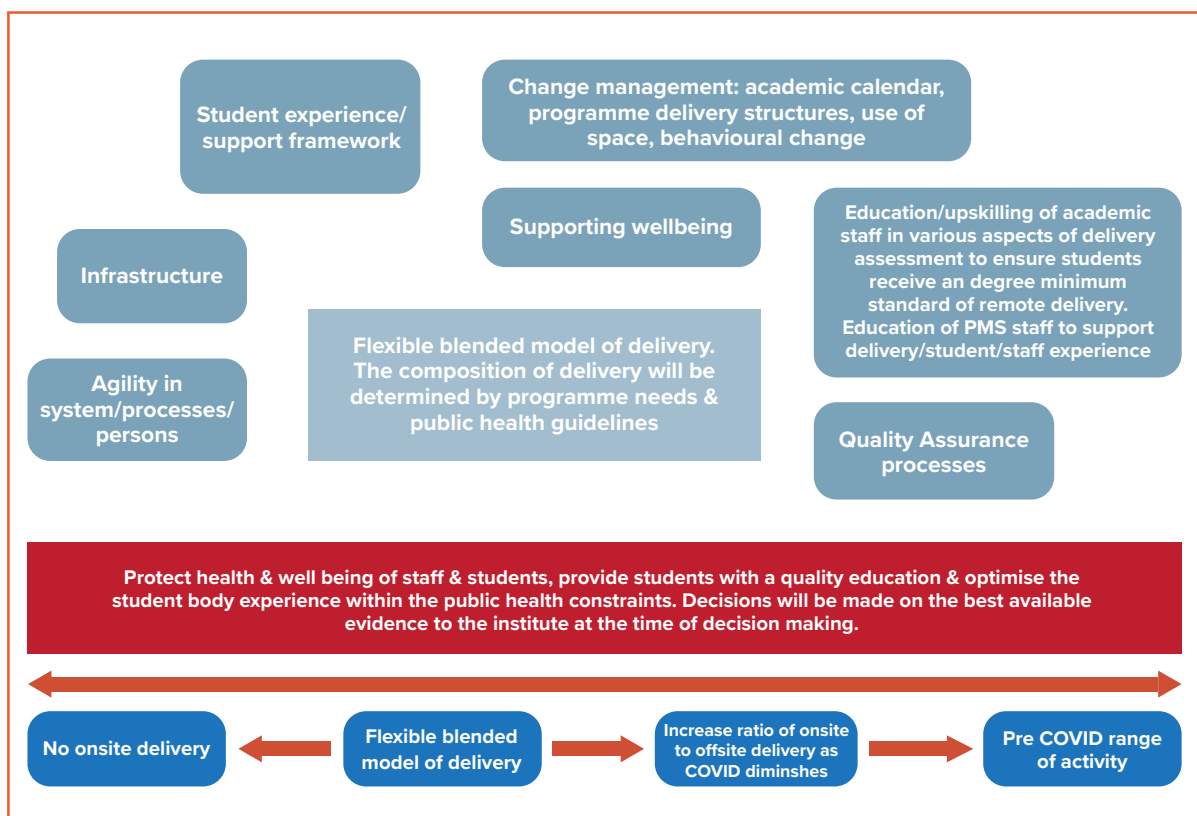
Figure 14: Conceptual Model of planning for the Academic Year at IT Sligo

Munster Technological University – Kerry Campus (Institute of Technology, Tralee for the reporting period)

The University of Limerick has championed the area of research impact since 2014, impact has been In November 2019, the MTU consortium established a Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Engagement (TLAE) Strategy group, tasked with providing proposals in relation to: MTU Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy (identification of core principles and goals); Student Engagement, Progression and Success; Flexible modes of delivery including Virtual Learning Environment;

Work-place and/or work-based learning; Staff CPD: Teaching and Learning; Digital be Default 2030; Work placement, internships, work-based projects; Universal Design for Learning; Enterprise involvement in programme design, delivery and assessment; MTU Graduate Attributes; Culture of Learning; Research informed teaching.

The WG held three meetings during the academic year with discussions informed by the Changing Context of Higher Education, National and International Policy, the MTU International Panel Report (TLAE perspective), MTU Graduate Formation/Development. It is envisaged that this work will continue after the establishment of the MTU.

Figure 15: Teaching, Learning and Assessment Planning for a new TU

2.3 Student wellbeing and support

A range of student supports were detailed in this year's AQRs. Many HEIs focused on the provision of support to students from a breadth of backgrounds to ensure effective engagement in online and hybrid learning environments and to prevent any loss of learning while off-campus. Professional support staff from library, disability and other services played a significant role. Student partnership was also crucial in ensuring that supports were tailored to students' specific circumstances. In some cases, supports were provided collaboratively with partners at a national or even international level.

- CIT noted the significant work of its library in developing supports for students using its services. Of particular note was the launch of an artificial intelligence support tool, 'Berkeley' the chatbot, which has enabled CIT to provide immediate responses to the most frequently asked library queries. Staff can regularly update conversation starter topics, which, CIT notes, was particularly useful during the rapidly evolving, pandemic crisis. CIT also noted the collaborative efforts of its student support services to provide a range of themed, student-support resources both through the institution's website and on social media. Student Services also distributed 'Covid Care Packs' to students who had signed up to weekly health and wellbeing communications.

- AIT provided details of its partnership with students to provide a peer-to-peer library ambassador service. AIT's library, student ambassadors assist new students in their first semester by giving them an overview of how to use the library and its facilities. They also help students to access further assistance if required from IT, the institution's academic writing centre, the students' union, and other support resources.

- IT Tralee established a wellness support group consisting of its students' union president, the institution's retention officer, and the manager of the Kerry Sports Academy. This group organised several, online, health and well-being initiatives for students during the pandemic. The institution also continued to work with the organisation Specialisterne. This organisation provides services to, and promotes employment of, students with ASD. During the first semester of academic year 2020 / 21, the organisation provided a six-week programme of one-to-one remote sessions to prepare seven students for work placement in semester 2.

- LIT maintained regular individual communication and support for students with disabilities during the pandemic. This included regular individual calls, texts and emails from the institution's educational support workers. The institution's Disability Service also offered Learning Support Unit tutors an online presentation on a study skills programme aimed at supporting students with learning difficulties and mature students.

- TCD provided details of its sport-led Mind, Body, Boost project, which was awarded over €391,000 in funding from the EU Commission's Erasmus+ Sport 2020 programme and is a collaboration with seven other European partners. The aim of the project is to encourage inclusivity and equality through sport by creating a safe health and fitness environment for third-level students who need physical and mental health support.

- Recognising the power of social media, at Maynooth University, representatives from the Students Union (MSU) and representatives from the IUA's Enhancing Digital Teaching and Learning project, developed a range of social media resources to support students.

In March 2020, shortly after the closure of Irish HEIs due to the COVID-19 pandemic, representatives from the Maynooth Students Union (MSU), members of the MSU student senate, and the Maynooth University EDTL project lead collaborated to develop a series of 'Top 10 Online Learning Hints and Tips' (Figure 1). These tips, based on the experiences and perspectives of students, were designed to support students in making the transition to remote learning, and were disseminated via the MSU Instagram and Facebook accounts.

Figure 16: Social media initiatives to support students at Maynooth University

The UCD Library publishes an annual statistics report on Key Facts such as resources, collection development, services, skills provision, and Heritage collections. It also engages in a broad range of Community Engagement activities, as outlined in Figure 8 below.

Schools Outreach
• A mixed annual programme
• Talks, tours and workshops

Community Training
• IT skills
• National Folklore Collection focus

Participatory Heritage
• Building on existing initiatives
• Crowd-sourced heritage information and transcriptions

Events
• An annual pre-planned programme
• A diverse range of event strands

Exhibitions
• A multi-year plan
• A range of in-Library, touring and virtual exhibitions

Partnerships
• Build our existing partnerships
• Create new collaborations

Community Engagement Marketing Plan
• An annual, multi-channel marketing plan
• A new community newsletter, attendance at more outside events

Figure 8 – UCD Library Community Engagement activities

The UCD Library is also subject to periodic quality review, with the most recent reviewing taking place in February 2015. The Review Group Report and the associated Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) from this review are published on the UCD Quality Office website under Reports and Publications. The Library also supports academic schools undergoing quality review through the provision of subject data and reports.

In relation to social activity, the UCD Student Centre offers the following:

▪ Venues – includes the Astra Hall, FitzGerald Debating Chamber, Seminar Rooms, Meeting Rooms, UCD Cinema and DramSoc Theatre

▪ Student Services & Support – includes Health Service, Student Support, Pharmacy, Students' Union Shop, The Clubhouse Bar, Poolside Café and UCD Sport and Fitness

▪ The UCD Student Experience – includes UCD Student Societies, UCD Students' Union, Sports Clubs, University Observer newspaper and Belfield FM radio

The University encourages co-curricular learning, and the UCD Student Centre collaborates with a number of other UCD units, including the UCD School of Public Health, Physiotherapy and Sports Science, UCD Institute of Sport and Health, UCD Institute for Food and Health, UCD People and Organisation Development, UCD Registry and the UCD Office of the Registrar and Deputy President.

Many of the activities delivered by the UCD Student Centre support the development of leadership and life skills for students, including leadership, teamwork, project management, and presentation and debating skills. The Student Centre, in consultation with students, seeks to explicitly identify the life skills developed through engagement with different activities and to communicate these to students and the broader University.

Figure 17: Community and social engagement activities, UCD Library and UCD Student Centre

2.4 Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP)

QA policies, procedures and initiatives relating to ATP are detailed in the AQRs. Year on year, the reports evidence continued developments and enhancements of ATP for learners.   Examples include enhanced collaborations with Education and Training Boards and their FET colleges, developments in student information services, and introduction of sanctuary scholarships.

- DkIT joined the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) scheme for intake in 2020. The institution anticipates that membership will lead to increased access rates in DkIT for those experiencing socio economic disadvantage.

- Also at DkIT, the Sanctuary Scholarship was implemented as a new initiative by the Access Office, the scheme was operational for the academic year 2020/21.

- Within IT Carlow, the Learner Engagement and Progression Framework (LEAP) provides a scaffolding document to support learners through their education journey, including educational and pastoral care and supports. The Teaching and Learning Centre within the institute, supports all learners and the AQR details the uptake and contribution of a range of supports during the reporting period.

Figure 18: IT Carlow Learner Engagement and Progression Framework (LEAP)

IADT + FETAC Colleges, Ireland

The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 sets out five priority goals. The outcome of Goal 4 is:

"To build coherent pathways from further education and to foster other entry routes to higher education".

Since its inception, IADT has fostered links with institutes of Further Education, both on a local and on a sectoral level. The Institute reserves up to 10% of places on undergraduate programmes for entrants from the FE sector. The numbers of such entrants vary from year to year and from programme to programme but, overall, the intake from the FE sector remains steadily above 15%.

In order to deepen these links, IADT has begun to establish more formal links with individual FE Institutes. To this end, six (6) Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) have been signed with a cluster of local colleges:

- Blackrock FEI
- Bray FEI
- Dundrum CFE
- Dun Laoghaire FEI
- Sallynoggin FEI
- Stillorgan FEI

The first stage of each MOU formalises the existing links between IADT and each FE institute. However, a mapping exercise is also carried out to establish pathways to advanced entry into year two of IADT programmes where cognate areas of learning can be found. This mapping also provides opportunities for alignment of modules so that obstacles to access can be eliminated or minimised. In this sense, each MOU is a collaborative document, which is open to input from all parties to the agreement.

At the time of writing, additional MOUs were in negotiation with Gorey Scholl or Art and Ballyfermot FE.

Figure 19: IADT and FET Colleges

2.5 Programmes of education and training

All HEIs were obliged to reconsider how programmes were delivered and assessed during the reporting period on account of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many of the adaptations made, including the move to online learning, have been discussed in detail elsewhere in this report. A number of HEIs outlined programmes reviewed and new programmes approved or validated during the reporting period, as well as the key themes arising from these evaluations. Other initiatives undertaken during the period include a greater focus on more diverse and flexible programme pathways, including the development of microcredentials, enhancing industry engagement and work placements, and enhancing HEI's digital teaching and learning capacities in the long term.

- The Covid-19 period saw WIT proposing more funded, flexible programmes and the adoption of microcredentials / digital badges to improve industry pathways for continuous professional development and up-skilling (ST-IF).

- The Trinity Strategic Plan 2020-25 (Goals 1.10 and 8.2) commits to 'Develop and enact strategies, policies and procedures to enable more diverse and more flexible learning and programme delivery in the areas of continuous professional development and micro-credentialing' in the life of the plan. Funding to support this strategy was received under the Human Capital Initiative (HCI Pillar 3) in concert with the Irish Universities Association. Four Trinity Schools will participate in the initiative.

- The TCD Strategic plan also commits to the development of a Digital Learning Strategy (Goal 3.8) that will provide a framework for using a full spectrum of digital learning tools, making them part of the mainstream pedagogical practice of the university. Funding under the Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement (SALTE) Fund is supporting this initiative.

- IT Tralee reported on a key initiative, aligned to its strategic goal of Sustainability and Goal, to develop programmes to attract new students. This has resulted in development of new minor and special purpose award programmes, supported by Springboard+ initiative and the July stimulus which also led to further programme offerings being made by the institution during the reporting period.

- NUI Galway's new Academic Strategy focuses on curriculum and learning design - flexibility, assessment, crossover modules, additional micro qualifications, RPL, responsiveness to demand (processes for approval and withdrawal of courses) learning design, teaching approaches, etc.

Introducing Digital Badges to Recognise Non-Accredited Learning in AIT

The emergence of digital badges to offer micro-credentials in higher education is a relatively new phenomenon (Dowling-Hetherington & Glowatz, 2017). A key advantage of digital badges is that they incorporate meta-data associated with the award, can be time bound and are easily transferred to professional networks and job applications. A digital badge can provide motivation, status recognition and evidence of achievement (Gibson et al., 2015). A recent paper on micro-credentials outlined a system that looked at both accredited and nonaccredited credentials (Beirne, Nic Giolla Mhichil and Browne, 2020). The authors also note the confusion that can be caused by lack of understanding and awareness caused by the multitude of synonyms used in relation Badging/digital badging and micro-credentials.

Athlone Institute of Technology was keen to have a quality assured means of acknowledging learning that happens outside of classrooms that is non-accredited and would not normally be visible. However, AIT was very aware that providing unregulated digital badges had many pitfalls and wanted to ensure that it had a system in place to protect the AIT brand and ensure that a digital badge from AIT was quality assured and was something to be valued by the recipient. With support from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, a campaign to introduce digital badges in a systematic, controlled, and quality assured manner was established in early 2020.

This work initially started in 2019, with the delivery of targeted workshops aimed at education on digital badges and how they are created to the academic community. This was followed by a 4-hour workshop on digital badges, facilitated by Dr Wayne Gibbons from GMIT. A recognised expert in digital badges, Dr Gibbons offered insights into the impact of badging in terms of student motivation, and as a means of recognising and celebrating achievement. Subsequently, Tom O'Mara, Head of Digital Education in University College Cork (UCC) presented an overview of the UCC approach to digital badges quality assurance and application process used in UCC. Several AIT staff including academics, management and professional support staff attended this session indicating the level of interest across the campus.

On foot of these workshops the Digital Badge Working Group was formed with the aim of focusing on an institutional approach to embedding digital badges as part of the quality assurance and enhancement processes in AIT. The working group consisted of staff from each Faculty who met for the first time in May 2020. In line with the methodology adopted in UCC, terms of reference were specifically devised to:

- Develop a strategy for AIT badges
- Design guidance documents for AIT digital badge
- Approve the development and issuance of AIT badges
- Effectively manage and govern the use of AIT badges and to make any recommendations or provide feedback to badge proposers as required.

Proposed AIT Digital Badge Approval Process

It was agreed that digital badge guideline documents would be drawn up for approval by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee in September 2020. The diagram above outlines the potential badge approval process. The final phase of the Learning Enhancement Project in semester 1, 2020-2021 will see a call for applications to be reviewed for approval by the working group. It is hoped that the first round of digital Badges can be issued before the end of December 2020.

Figure 20: Case Study - Introduction of Digital Badges to Recognise Unaccredited Learning at AIT

Conclusion

The initial interest in this project and subsequent applications have demonstrated that already there is a strong interest in Digital Badges across all faculties and functional areas in the Institute. This highlights the value seen in the Institute in the role of digital badges as a way of recognising non-accredited learning.

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Figure 20: Case Study - Introduction of Digital Badges to Recognise Unaccredited Learning at AIT (continued)

2.6 Staff recruitment, management and development

HEIs reported on a range of initiates to support the continuing professional development of staff. These were in addition to the wide array of staff development initiatives implemented to ensure the quality and success of the move to online teaching and assessment necessitated by the pandemic, and which have been discussed elsewhere in this report.

- LIT developed a comprehensive strategy for CPD, aligned with the National Professional Development Framework, which aims to provide staff with flexible and accessible support. This includes both unaccredited and accredited CPD. A staff needs-analysis, followed by a staff presentation / seminar, and the outputs of both shaped the development of the CPD pathway. A number of NFQ level 9, 10-ECTS, special-purpose awards have already been developed, validated and made available to staff.

- AIT partnered with Legal Island to roll out an eLearning course to provide all staff with an understanding of diversity and inclusion in the workplace. The mandatory CPD-accredited course explains staff's legal obligations in respect of equality, diversity and inclusion and includes real-life scenarios.

- TCD noted the launch of a new scheme for professorial hiring as part of its Inspiring Generations philanthropic fundraising campaign.

- UCC supports a wide range of CPD activities for staff through the Centre for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (CIRTL), which provides support for all staff and postgraduate students in their teaching and learning roles. Credit bearing programmes in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education up to and including NFQ level 9 (Postgraduate Certificate/Postgraduate Diploma), are available online and free of charge to all categories of staff who support student learning, along with tailored modules for postgraduate students engaged in teaching. All newly appointed staff are required to enrol in and complete the Postgraduate Certificate programme. Participation rates in the programme are an institutional performance measure through the HEA Compact process.

2.7 Information and data management

In spite of the challenging circumstances during this reporting period, HEIs continued to ensure that information management and student record systems were prioritised and utilised to inform and better understand measures taken in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Prior to the Covid-19 public-health crisis, HEIs were focused on long-term, strategic goals to improve the quality of, and access to, different types and modes of data by securing funding to update libraries and associated facilities. Across the sector, HEIs gauged how students and staff were coping with adaptations to teaching, learning and assessment and other alternative arrangements by means of surveys, which included questionnaires devised by institutions for their own students and staff, as well as national surveys such as studentsurvey.ie. Some examples include:

- CIT reported on collaboration between the Registrar's Office and the Department of Mathematics on additional analysis of the data from the Student Survey, focusing on benchmarking with other HEIs and the technological HE sector, and on interrogation of the data at school / department level. The institution noted that, in relation to the latter, response rate is key to the reliability of the findings, which gave rise to a proactive campaign throughout the fieldwork period to monitor response rates and identify where specific encouragement may be needed.

- AIT achieved a response rate of 68% to studentsurvey.ie 2020, the highest across all HEIs. The institution noted that the data gathered through the survey is very valuable and is used institution-wide at faculty and programme-board level. Areas for improvement highlighted by students are acted upon throughout the institution.

- IT Tralee included a high-level analysis of the outcomes of studentsurvey.ie 2020 as compared with those arising from studentsurvey.ie 2019, noting both slight decreases (quality of interactions, higher-order learning and the provision of a supportive environment) and increases (collaborative learning, quantitative reasoning) in scoring. The institution noted that no obvious conclusions could be derived from the data.

- LIT reported a response rate of 51% to studentsurvey.ie 2020. Completion of the survey by students is a key strategic objective for LIT and the institution provided a detailed overview of its promotion strategy for the survey in the report, which included an email to all eligible students, an SMS from the institution's retention officer, official launch by LIT's president through an email, which included a short promotional clip with input from the president and the students' union. Students are facilitated to complete the survey in-class in LIT, which the institution views as instrumental to its success in achieving a high participation rate.

- TCD attained its highest participation rate (34%) in studentsurvey.ie since the survey was initiated. A report on the survey was approved by TCD's council in November 2020 and schools were provided with school and programme-specific reports, with the expectation that they will report on actions taken in response to the survey in the institution's annual faculty, quality report (which was due to be submitted in February 2021).

- DCU reported that the procurement phase of the new Student Information System (SIS) programme was completed in 2019/20. Programme delivery was mobilised following funding approval by the Governing Authority. Work across all SIS delivery streams is progressing with the first new project, CRM recruit, having gone live in November 2020.

- In NUI Galway, planning and design were under way at the time of reporting on a new library and 'learning commons', with construction intended to commence in 2022.

- Maynooth University reported that its student information system (ITS) was upgraded with enhanced reporting tools put in place. Work in transitioning existing report templates to new reporting tools also took place with options to improve on the reporting capacity explored. This included engaging with other units across the university, to develop capacity for using data from various university sources to inform decision making related to student success and engagement.

- UCC reported that it was in the midst of a multi-year investment in its core student and curriculum management systems as part of the Connected University programme of work. It is expected that this investment will further enhance how the university manages its information and data.

- UL's Graduate and Professional Studies (GPS) embarked on a weekly series of webinars for postgraduate researchers which sought to ensure that students would continue to receive high-quality instruction in skills relating not only to the research process, but also broader personal and professional training and development.

Case Study: Enhancement of Postgraduate Research Student Support arising from Studentsurvey.ie Feedback at the University of Limerick

The Irish Survey of Student Engagement for Postgraduate Research Students (PGRs) National Report of 2019 emphasised the importance of generic, transferable and research skills for PGRs in their ability to manage projects, as well as their capacity to communicate information effectively to diverse audiences while conducting their research.

Furthermore, the HEA's Higher Education System Performance Framework 2018-2020 notes that, the 'quality of provision in higher education is crucial to ensuring that graduates have the right skills, competences and experience in order to contribute fully to future economic, social and cultural development'.

With the onset of the pandemic and campus closure, Graduate and Professional Studies (GPS) embarked on a weekly series of webinars for PGRs which sought to ensure that students would continue to receive high-quality instruction in skills relating not only to the research process, but also broader personal and professional training and development.

A previous national student study survey in 20134 had highlighted how student engagement with 'college' life is important in enabling them to develop key capabilities such as critical thinking skills, analytical competencies and intellectual development. That report emphasised that students who engage in the life of the institution have a higher quality experience than those at institutions where engagement is not promoted. GPS is acutely aware of the need for greater engagement at a time when student isolation from the campus community is so prevalent.

Therefore, since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, GPS has been providing UL PGRs with weekly webinars dealing with aspects of doctoral studies and career preparedness. The webinars are conducted via Microsoft Teams and are frequently attended by over one hundred UL PGRs currently based in countries as diverse as Algeria, Australia, Uganda, Spain, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Malaysia, Luxembourg, India and France. The webinars provided to UL PGRs since March 2020 have included the following topics:

- Critical thinking for PGRs
- Dealing with Imposter Syndrome and Self-Doubt
- Demonstrating the 'Impact' of PhD Research
- Design of Experiments
- Disseminating Your Research
- Doing a Literature Review
- Doing Your PhD During a Pandemic: Challenges & Supports 4 The Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) 2013 summary report https://studentsurvey.ie/sites/default/files/201910/ISSE_summaryreport_2013.pdf
- Getting Published in Peer-Reviewed Journals - A Practical Guide
- National Framework for Doctoral Education: What it Means for You
- Plan Your Successful Career in 10 Steps

Figure 21: Case Study - Enhancement of Postgraduate Research Student Support arising from Studentsurvey.ie Feedback at the University of Limerick

- Planning for Life After Your PhD
- Project Managing Your Thesis • Research Integrity and Ethics
- Secrets to becoming a Successful Researcher
- Student Wellbeing
- Surviving The Viva
- The Importance of Data Management Planning
- Using the Researcher Development Framework (RDF)
- Working With Your Supervisor
- Writing a Successful Funding Proposal
- Writing in Academic Contexts

Furthermore, since mid-March, GPS has put together a parallel webinar series on Statistical Training for postgraduate researchers. These interactive, half-day workshops have provided UL PhD and Research Masters candidates with the opportunity to engage with the following topics:

- Research Questionnaire Design
- Introduction to Data Analysis in SPSS
- Statistical Inference with SPSS
- Multi-Variable Data Analysis in SPSS
- Correlation and Simple Linear Regression in SPSS
- Multiple Regression in SPSS

Figure 21: Case Study - Enhancement of Postgraduate Research Student Support arising from Studentsurvey.ie Feedback at the University of Limerick (continued)

2.8   Public communication and community engagement

Clear, timely and accurate communication with staff, students and other stakeholders was crucial during the reporting period, particularly in light of the often rapidly changing public health advice. HEIs noted in their AQRs a variety of platforms employed for providing information, including websites and social media. Beyond public health messaging, newly designated technological universities reported employing various modes of, and platforms for, communication to ensure visibility and awareness among internal and external stakeholders of the new institution and its branding. Some institutions also reported new strategies for communication that aim to encourage consistent communication both internally and externally, and to highlight particular elements of their provision.

- CIT reported its use of various social media platforms to heighten awareness and share information about progress on designation as Munster Technological University. At the point of designation, the 'Succeeding Together' campaign was launched, which, it is reported, gained significant traction, both internally and externally.

- LIT launched a new website. It was designed with a view to being accessible to people of all abilities in the community and can be used on any device. LIT provided training to all staff in using the content management system behind the site, which should ensure that the website is kept relevant and up to date.

- TCD's Public Affairs and Communications Strategy launched in September 2020. It will underpin TCD's strategic plan to broaden the public's understanding of TCD as a research university.

- In February 2020, UL appointed its first Head of Community Engagement. It also publishes reports of its UL Engage initiative. The aim of the peer-reviewed UL Engage Reports is to provide evidence of impact and innovation in existing UL community-university initiatives; and to provide a practical resource for new and prospective partnership projects.

- NUI Galway reported that it has developed a social media policy to provide guidance and direction to NUI Galway members when using all types of social media sites on behalf of, or in association with, the university.

The Institute continues to engage and support many public, private and voluntary organisations locally, regionally, nationally and internationally through research, programme development, delivery and activities.

Some examples of local engagement during this reporting period include;

- The Department of Health and Leisure invites community groups to become active participants in many of the modules of its major awards. In addition, the Department offers modules in Community Service Initiative and Community Service Leadership, Adult Learning and others where the learners engage directly with community groups off-campus.

- The Department of Nursing and Healthcare Sciences partner allied healthcare providers facilitate half of the nursing programmes with clinical placement, where students actively engage directly in the provision of healthcare in the community.

- Staff and students of the Institute Department of Social Science participated in a collaboration with a local day care centre for older people and the Health Service Executive that involved reaching into homes of older people during Pandemic to increase appropriate activity stimulants for wholistic wellbeing and social connectivity between students, staff and older people

- Staff of the Department of Hotel, Catering and Tourism were active in preparing and providing meals to local organisations for delivery to vulnerable members of the community.

- Schools and Departments continue to host guest lecturers and industry speakers during the emergency remote teaching period to engage with students, informing their sectoral education, creating links and opportunities for work placement, projects and employment.   Many Final Year Projects across all Schools frequently involve collaborating community or societal groups.

Internationally, the Institute hosts the UNESCO Chair for "Transforming the lives of people with disabilities, their families, and community through Physical Education, Sport, Recreation and Fitness". The chair reinforces and internationalises institutional commitment to the fields of inclusive practice and universal access. The chair builds bridges between academia and civic society, policy makers and legislators. The chair leads a global partnership working in the domains of quality inclusive physical education, sport, recreation and fitness as part of a broader intersectional human rights agenda focused on the social inclusion of marginalised groups.

Figure 22: Third mission activities, societal and community engagement at IT Tralee

2.9 Professional/work placements and engagement with professional bodies

Many HEIs reported developments in the area of professional education during the reporting period. Enhancements reported upon included the creation of a programme for supervisors of students on placement, as well as adaptations of existing programmes aimed at enhancing students' capacity to engage in inter-professional learning and collaboration. Elsewhere in the AQRs, HEIs noted the importance of increasing collaboration between institutions and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies to the benefit of learners and future professionals. This point was stressed in particular in relation to the facilitation of alternative arrangements for placements, which in many cases could not occur in their traditional format during lockdown.

- CIT detailed its decision to cancel placement for students unless a remote working arrangement was feasible. Departments were asked to put replacement learning and assessment activities in place so that all impacted students could accumulate the total number of credits associated with the placement module. The institute liaised (through the relevant school / department) with professional and regulatory bodies in relation to any accreditation issues arising.

- TCD reported, as a case study, on developments in respect of its Inter-Professional Learning (IPL) programme. The institution's IPL programme was reconstructed for online delivery, underpinned by the Community of Inquiry theoretical framework. Developments include the facilitation of both asynchronous and synchronous participation by students, the development of facilitator and student resources and the facilitation of student collaboration through discussion boards. Success will be measured by student engagement with the content and feedback received from students and facilitators following each IPL activity.

Interprofessional Learning
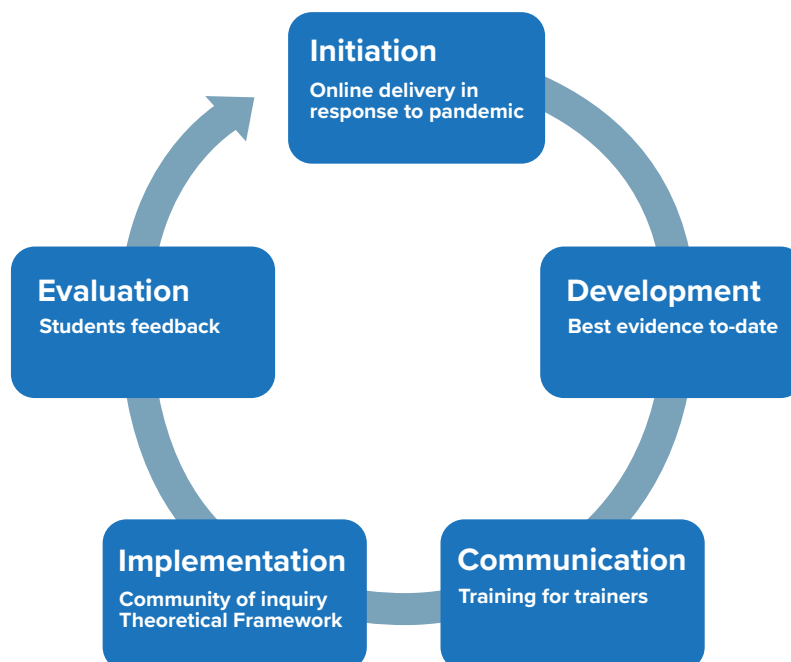
Faculty of Health Sciences

Figure 23: Inter-Professional Learning at TCD

- AIT reported the development of a fully asynchronous course (Training for Social Care Practice Educators) for agency supervisors of social care students on placement. The course was developed in collaboration with the Open Training College and aims to ensure that the governance of the institution's social care programmes' placements is fully compliant with the requirements of CORU. Learning materials are available to all IASCE (Irish Association of Social Care Educators) partners.

- AIT also reported the establishment of a centralised placement support office which provides administrative support to several of the institution's programmes. Plans to move the administration of further placements to this office were curtailed by Covid-19. AIT also noted that programme development activity on the inclusion of a substantial work-placement module in the design and development of the majority of undergraduate major award programmes.

- LIT established a new centralised function to provide central oversight and resources to individual departments responsible for placement. As of May 2020, this new centre had six staff members. LIT also noted that the proportion of LIT programmes offering work placement increased from 75% to 88% during the reporting period. The institution attributes this to academic faculty and departments integrating work-based learning as a core component of their academic offerings.

- GMIT reported that many new programmes have embedded professional practice through work placement or applied projects. GMIT has also developed an Employability Statement using the six key components set out by the HEA. The integration and embedding of the Institute's Employability Framework includes five key elements: career development learning, experience, degree subject knowledge, generic skills and emotional intelligence.

- The RCSI reported that despite Covid-19 restrictions, work placements in community pharmacies continued for the most part. In particular, final year pharmacy students continued their placements in community pharmacies across Ireland and made a significant contribution to front-line healthcare delivery. The students were acknowledged as core members of the Pharmacy Team by the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (the Pharmacy PRSB), and this position was endorsed by the Department of Health.

- A thematic review of work placements was commissioned in UCC, to provide a university-level view of current good practice in the overall structure and co-ordination of placements, and to identify opportunities to enhance these practices into the future. It is intended that the findings of the review will also help to shape the implementation of the InPlace placement management software system which is currently being rolled out across the institution.

GALWAY-MAYO INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

The Education and Work-Integrated Learning (eWIL) project utilises HEA multi-campus funding to to prepare the necessary pedagogic and infrastructural support systems to transition to year-long industry placements for students in stages 3 and 4 of furniture degree programmes (approx. 50 students per year) run from the Letterfrack campus, part of the School of Design & Creative Arts. During the industry placement, students will predominantly be based within partnering SMEs and be able to take any remaining modules through an online / blended format. The project aims to support staff in transitioning to blended learning, develop infrastructure to manage placements, develop strategies to monitor learning, develop strategic partnerships and provide mentor training with host companies. It is envisaged this will open new markets for life-long, flexible and work-based learning within the wood and furniture manufacturing industries.

In 2019-20 much progress was made on researching best practice, stakeholder engagement, staff training and adoption of tools. Formal links were established with the industry representative body, Irish Wood and Furniture Manufacturing Network (IWFMN). Following research, it was decided to adopt PebblePad for Higher Education ePortfolio platform to support students and supervisors in managing industry placement.

A tailor-made version of the platform for GMIT Letterfrack industry placement students called LEAFS (Learning, Experience and Assessment of Furniture Skills) is currently being developed by the project team. While COVID-19 impacted the progress of the eWIL Project, particularly from March-July 2020, the project team was ideally placed to support the necessary rapid transition to online delivery by GMIT. The Project Manager and Educational Technologist also supported the institute-wide transition project called the BOLT initiative (Blended Online Learning Transition) and provided a range of supports for academic staff across the school of Design and Creative Arts.

Figure 24: GMIT Education and Work-Integrated Learning (eWIC) Project

ALIGNMENT TO PROFESSIONAL BODY CORU

Institute of Technology Carlow, is committed to the highest standards of education and professional alignment of its programmes within all disciplines.

This commitment, by the Institute, to aligning programmes to Professional Body recognition and approval is at the heart of the Institute of Technology Carlow's Strategic Plan 2019-2023.

Alignment to Professional Body recognition and approval, is reflected with Social Care Education within the Institute and the accreditation of its suite of programmes on Social Care under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act, 2005, as amended.

The Act provides for the establishment of Registration Boards, specifically, the Social Care Workers Registration Board, to establish and maintain registers for a range of health and social care professions. CORU (Health and Social Care Professional Council and Registration Board) is the multi-profession health regulator for Ireland which includes the regulation of Social Care and the Social Care Workers Registration Board under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act, 2005, as amended. In order to ensure that graduates are recognised professionals in this space, Institute of Technology Carlow undertook a significant project to align its suite of Social Care programmes. A programme validation panel took place in the last reporting period (April 2019) and a CORU visit for Professional recognition is planned for late 2021.

Figure 25: IT Carlow Alignment to Professional Body CORU

2.10 Self-evaluation, monitoring and review

Though there were reports of delays and interim suspension of some review activities, HEIs adapted internal monitoring and review processes and continued to conduct internal reviews, despite the additional challenges and constraints imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Information was submitted on initiatives undertaken to increase institutions' ability to self-evaluate and enhance their offering, as well as on reviews that took place during the reporting period and on future planned reviews.

Many of the initiatives reported on were undertaken as a result of, and to enhance the response to, the pandemic and related public-health restrictions. Preparations for, and actions taken in response to, the current CINNTE review cycle were also frequent amongst the reports.

- Within RCSI, the campus shut-down and transition to remote-working as a result of the pandemic had an immediate and direct impact on the work plan of the Quality Enhancement Office and planned internal QA reviews. The internal calendar of reviews was paused for 6 months, a protocol for virtual reviews developed and new timelines/schedule agreed.

- The NUI agreed to postpone the external review site visit for the Institute of Public Administration from June 2021 to September 2021, as a result of the impact of the pandemic on the IPA.

- The Examinations Business Continuity Group (EBCG) at UCC was established as a high-level expert group in March 2020 to develop required policy and direct implementation activities for modified examinations arrangements arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. To assure the effectiveness of the EBCG, it was agreed that a self-evaluation and review (SER) process should be undertaken. The SER methodology was developed by the Quality Enhancement Unit with the following intended outcomes: to learn and understand what worked well; to identify what could be improved and detail any issues remaining to be resolved.

- As part of its self-evaluation processes and thematic approach, IT Carlow's quality system underwent a further review in 2019, which is informing the Quality Work Plan. The institution reported that the review enabled the extension of a robust self-assessment model to all professional services which compliments those undertaken by all academic units. The cyclic nature of these reviews will ensure that quality assurance is core to all activities and that a quality-focused culture is embedded.

- WIT prepared for its institutional review by QQI in the reporting period. The Institutional Self Evaluation Supplemental Report was completed in February 2020; however, the Panel Review was rescheduled to November 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. WIT reported that this delay presented a welcome opportunity to extend the terms of the review to include the institution's response to the national lockdown and its plans for the academic year 2020-21.

- In TU Dublin, the work of the Quality Framework Project Team continued in the reporting period. A survey of all staff was conducted in March 2020, the purpose of which was to elicit staff perceptions of the effectiveness of the current quality frameworks. Following the survey, a number of focus groups took place to explore particular policies and processes in more detail, including annual programme enhancement, student feedback mechanisms and the role of the external examiner. The findings from the survey and the focus groups have informed the development of policies and processes.

DEVELOPMENT OF REMOTE QUALITY REVIEWS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Central to the DCU quality review process, is the Quality Review Visit, conducted over 2.5 days by an externally-led peer review group. Working together, Peer Review Groups meet with staff, students, and external stakeholders to verify and discuss the findings of the self-assessment process, and develop recommendations to support quality improvement for the area under review. Given the current campus and travel restrictions since March 2020, DCU has been unable to host Peer Review Groups for the purposes of conducting on-campus quality review visits. In April 2020, the QPO, working with peer review groups, developed procedures for remote reviews, as an emergency measure, to facilitate scheduled quality reviews, particularly in cases where self-assessment had been completed prior to March 2020. The first of these was hosted for Human Resources in June 2020. Some features of the remote reviews included,

- Hosting the quality review over 4 half-day sessions, rather than 2.5 days

- Reducing the overall number of meetings within the review schedule, while maintaining the core stakeholder meetings with staff and students

- Note-taking support for peer review groups provided for all meetings

- Additional peer review group meeting time built-into daily schedules to facilitate peer review group deliberations on commendations and recommendations.

As of March 2021, 4 remote peer review visits have been completed across a range of areas. Feedback provided by staff, students and peer reviewers continues to inform the organization and conduct of these remote reviews until such time as in-person peer review group visits can be hosted.

Figure 26: Remote Quality Reviews at DCU

CINNTE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Institutional Review process was a very positive experience for NUI Galway. The Review Findings and Recommendations were welcomed and have been widely shared throughout the university community, from Údarás na hOllscoile, to University Management Team (UMT), Academic Council, Quality Enhancement Committee (QEC) and Academic Council Standing Committee and to all staff and students through the Quality Office website. In response to the report UMT agreed an implementation plan and members of the senior management team are now leading out on the implementation of recommendations and progressing them through relevant committee structures and support units including the Teaching and Learning Committee, Student Digital Pathways Group, Deputy President and Registrar's Executive Group and Academic Council.   UMT is monitoring progress periodically and Údarás na hOllscoile will be updated through Academic Council annually.

Since March of this year all efforts across the University have been focused on academic planning and delivery of education to our students. The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for our university community. It has caused major disruption to teaching, research, service delivery, the student experience, community engagement, recruitment and financial planning, and challenged our core mission to serve our students, our society and our planet. It has forced NUI Galway to fundamentally rethink and change how it delivers on its promise to students. It has rapidly accelerated innovation in some areas and required new ways to overcome disruption in others. The challenges of sustaining the University's mission has taken enormous collective effort, and has demonstrated our people's commitment, flexibility and creativity.

While implementation of some recommendations has been slower than planned due to unprecedented workloads and changing work patterns arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and travel restrictions, momentum has been maintained because in many instances the planned actions are also relevant to the University's response to the pandemic. NUI Galway will continue to prioritise the implementation of all recommendations agreed.

Figure 27: Continuing response to CINNTE Recommendations at NUI Galway

2.11 Quality assurance of research activities and programmes

A number of actions were undertaken by HEIs during the reporting period to ensure both the continuity and the undiminished quality of research activity and programmes, despite the difficulties faced by staff and learners in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic.

- UL provided a case study on how it managed the postgraduate research thesis submission process and the PhD viva voce examinations virtually, which proved highly beneficial during the pandemic. As part of the ongoing, continuous improvement of the quality processes within Graduate & Professional Studies (GPS), GPS and Arcane IT Solutions reviewed the postgraduate research forms which underpin the administrative processes for the research thesis submission and examination process and amended them for online submission.

- A key mechanism in the implementation and evaluation of quality research in NUI Galway is the Institutional Review of Research Performance (IRRP). Planning for IRRP 2023 was under way at the time of reporting. NUI Galway was also part of a national 3-year (2018- 2020) pilot in research integrity training, funded by the IUA, SFI, HRB, IRC, EI, DAFM, EPA, Teagasc and the Marine Institute and run by the National Forum on Research Integrity. Integrity training continues to be supported by the RDC using the Epigeum (Oxford University Press) online course materials – this training is mandatory for researchers working on most of the nationally-funded projects.

- Goal 3 of TCD's Strategic Plan (2020-2025) has a specific focus on the renewal of postgraduate education. It also commits to instituting a major and systemic renewal of all aspects of doctoral education in Trinity. A renewal plan was being developed at the time of reporting and the overall framework planned to go to the Board for approval before consultation across the college community.

- The UCD Strategy 2020-2024: Rising to the Future sets out an objective to "increase the quality, quantity, and impact of our research scholarship and innovation". Support for the research activities of the university is provided by the UCD Research team. This is enabled through the UCD Research & Innovation Services Portal, which provides an online portal of resources for UCD staff.

- The UCD Research Finance Office also provides support for the financial administration of, and quality review process for, research activities. The internal periodic review process for schools, managed by the UCD Quality Office, assists the university to assure itself of the quality of the research activity that is incorporated in its unit review process. It includes an assessment of the school's research strategy and management of research activity, research outputs, how research links with teaching activity; assessing the research performance with regard to research productivity, research income and recruiting and supporting doctoral students and research staff.

Strategic Development of Research at MTU Cork /CIT Research Office

With technological university designation, the institutions which now form MTU gained full awarding status for all award types and levels. The strategic development of research is supported and steered by the MTU Cork / CIT Research Office, led by the Head of Research. The Research Office has a leading role in developing the institutional Research & Innovation Strategy and also facilitates the implementation of the MTU Cork / CIT Researcher Career Framework. An Institutional Research and Innovation Steering Committee (IRIS), established by CIT to provide additional independent insight into research matters and consisting of senior academic and research managers from across the institution, continued to operate within MTU Cork and to report directly to the President.

MTU Cork / CIT operate a research entity designation process. This process determines whether clusters of individuals and the infrastructure they have access to meet the criteria to be designated as a Research Centre or a Research Group, providing QA at the point of establishment by examining whether all relevant governance, management and resources are available to researchers from postgraduate researcher level upwards. the CIT Academic Council introduced a separate research staff constituency. In addition to elected research staff members, Heads of designated Research Centres were entitled to sit on Council in an ex-officio capacity. This ensured representation of the research voice and key institutional research interests in institutional governance and academic quality assurance.

Figure 28: Strategic Development of Research at MTU Cork /CIT Research Office

Section 3: QA Improvement and Enhancement Plans

The QA improvement and enhancement plans included in the AQRs reflect the ongoing improvements arising from preparation for, and responses to, CINNTE cyclical reviews, some of which will have medium and / or long-term strategic impacts on HEI QA systems. The lessons learned from institutional responses to Covid-19 have also informed, and are reflected in, the HEIs' QA improvement plans within the AQRs.

During the reporting period, the HEIs were working within an emergency response context, with interim policies and contingency arrangements to support online and blended learning. As noted elsewhere in this report, many HEIs reported on their plans to further develop, formalise, and integrate these arrangements into their internal QA systems.

Other strategic objectives and plans include the enhancement of the student experience, further development of international collaborative partnerships, and embedding sustainable development goals within curricula and processes. All HEIs reported on upcoming, planned internal reviews.

Planned objectives and enhancements reported upon include:

- UCD reported that it plans to provide induction training to learners' representatives on Academic Council Quality Enhancement Committee;

- TCD outlined its plans to implement the CHARM-EU initiative and TORCH project. CHARM-EU alliance received complementary funding from the H2020 grant in July 2020 which aims to consolidate a common research and innovation agenda for the European universities. The proposal submitted by the alliance, TORCH (Transforming Open Responsible Research and Innovation through CHARM) will be funded with €2M euros for the next 3 years, with the project commencing at the end of 2020. Trinity has appointed a PI and Project Manager.

- TU Dublin reported on a number of planned initiatives, including its membership of the European University of Technology Alliance and its Strategic Plan to develop a dynamic new Educational Model for TU Dublin. This new model is planned to assist the university in meeting its objective of becoming the most accessible university in Ireland, with the largest number of diverse learners. Building on the work in relation to the 'CoCREATEd Curriculum', the development of the Educational Model will continue with the appointment of five Project Team Leaders in 2021 to support the work.

- NUI reported plans and internal consultations underway in as part of the process of the development of its Institutional Self-Evaluation Report and in preparation for its first QQI Cinnte Review.

- IADT launched a new Strategic Plan 2019-2023 "Better futures created together" in February 2019. The plan encompasses three main themes (excellence, growth and community) with eleven strategic priorities of equal significance aligned to these themes.

- IT Sligo reported on its plans to further use GURU to review planned continuous assessment and the use of GURU for nomination of external examiners. This will provide a single system for the management of all the communication and activities between the internal and external examiners.

- DkIT reported on a number of planned enhancements, including plans to develop and approve DkIT Graduate Attributes and the Institute Employability Statement for adoption into programme development. DkIT also identified a number of key objectives in its Professional Services Area aimed at improving learner access and the learner experience. These include:

  » Further enhance initiatives / activities in support of increasing access rates from under-represented groups, particularly with North-East Further and Higher Education Alliance (NEFHEA) and with the MEND Cluster (PATH 2 and PATH 3). Enhance webinar support for mature applicants and Further Education and Training (FET) applicants.

» Enhance the Disability Service by providing an assistive technology training room.

» Develop a peer-mentoring programme for first year student which will be coordinated by the Counselling Service.Develop a structured mentoring system for Sports Scholarship students and provide specialised training for committee members for societies and clubs.

» Provide 24/7 access to information on all students, full-time and part-time, on all student service supports using the Student Hub.

DCU Quality Review Schedule - 2020/21-2024/25

2020/21	Registry (Q4 2020- TBC)	Digital Learning (Q4 2020)	Finance Office (Q2 2021)	ISS (Q2 2021)
2021/22	Estates Office (Q1 2022)	DCU Institute of Education (Q2 2022)	Faculty of Science and Health (Q2 2022)	OVPAA (Q2 2021)
2022/23	DCU Library (Q4 2022) / NIDL/Open Education (Q1 2023)		DCU Business School (Q1 2023) / OVPR (Q2 2023)	Thematic (TBC) (Q2 2023)
2023/24	Faculty of Eng and Comp (Q4 2023)	Sport and Wellbeing (Q4 2023)	SVPEA (Q1 2023)	Presidents Office (Q2 2023)
2024/25	SS&D (Q4 2024)	OSL (Q1 2025)	Thematic (TBC) (Q2 2025)	OCOO (Q2 2025)

www.dcu.ie/ie/gpo/about-review-process-quality-promotion-office

Figure 29: A visual of the quality review schedule at DCU

Section 4: Conclusions

The annual reporting process is well-established within the Irish public higher education sector. This report represents a synthesis of the key themes and topics arising from the new Annual Quality Report template, submitted by the institutions in 2021. These AQRs provides assurance to QQI, and to internal and external, national and international stakeholders that Irish HEIs have robust and responsive quality assurance systems that reflect QQI's statutory quality assurance guidelines and the European Standards and Guidelines (2015).

The AQRs provide an insight into the impact of the CINNTE review process on the HEIs' QA systems, policies and procedures, programmes of education and training, teaching, learning, and assessment, research and support services for learners. It is evident across the reports that there has been ongoing enhancement of quality assurance within the sector, supported by the cyclical review process and the HEIs' commitment to the continuous development and enhancement of their internal quality systems and culture.

A ubiquitous feature across all AQRs submitted, by both public and private sector HEIs, was the strong, leaner-centred focus of Irish higher education institutions. This was particularly evident in the response taken during Covid-19 to meeting learner needs, and the provision of diverse and innovative learner resources and supports, both in the support of teaching and learning and learner health and wellbeing. The analysis and impacts of these enhancements will likely be reflected in the next iteration of the AQRs.