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Quality in Irish Higher Education 2024

A Thematic Analysis of the Higher Education Institution Annual Quality Reports for 2024

QQI INSIGHTS.



Dearbhú Cáilíochta
agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and
Qualifications Ireland

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Quality in Irish Higher Education Institutions

This report provides system-level and thematic analysis of quality assurance and quality enhancement in Irish higher education institutions (HEIs). It is based on the annual quality reports (AQRs) submitted by sixteen public and six private/independent higher education institutions in 2024 and published by QQI. The report and the analysis it contains was produced on behalf of QQI by ThreeSixtyInsights.

Generative artificial intelligence tools were not used by ThreeSixtyInsights in the analysis or drafting of this report.

FOREWORD

QQI's annual quality reporting (AQR) process in the higher education sector supports the documentation by higher education institutions (HEIs) of the establishment, implementation and monitoring of their internal quality assurance (QA) systems. The reporting structure is designed to demonstrate the alignment of institutions' quality assurance systems with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015) and QQI's statutory QA guidelines but to also offer the flexibility for reporting HEIs to reflect their own institutional contexts and priorities.

As the national agency responsible for the external quality assurance of higher education in Ireland, QQI is uniquely placed to identify developments within and across the sector. The purpose of this thematic analysis, published annually by QQI, is to highlight both institutional practices and emerging trends within our public and private/independent higher education sectors and the higher education system overall. The publication of data and analyses of this nature is a key strategic priority for QQI to support the development of policy, processes, and practice at multiple levels within the tertiary education system and continuous improvement in quality and qualifications.

This analysis relates to the AQRs submitted by HEIs in 2024 (for the 2022/23 reporting year). One of the most notable developments during this period was the release, in November 2022, of ChatGPT, ushering in a new era in the availability and use of generative artificial intelligence (AI). The increasing pervasiveness of these technologies has potentially profound implications for the delivery of education and training at all levels of our education system. It poses both opportunities for, and risks to, the currency, quality and integrity of our educational programmes, awards and research. This is evident in the span of reporting in the 2024 AQRs, which encompasses the adaptation of policies, procedures and resources to support academic and assessment integrity, as well as the adoption of AI tools by institutions to enhance operations and increase efficiency. Ireland's HEIs will need to remain attentive and responsive to developments in this space, ensuring that their quality assurance systems are appropriate and sufficiently dynamic to support the continued delivery of high-quality education, training, research and awards.

A welcome theme observed across various domains in the 2024 AQRs was on activity intended to advance equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). QQI's [Equality, diversity and inclusion policy](#), published during this reporting period, recognises that as "a regulatory body, we play a critical role in fostering an equitable and inclusive society, where diversity is recognised, appreciated and harnessed for the collective good". The [Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines](#) that underpin the Irish tertiary education system provide a systematic framework for institutions in considering how EDI can be embedded across their operations and within their quality assurance systems in support of strategic goals: through institutional structures, policies and procedures; in programme design, teaching, learning and assessment; in the provision of learner supports; in staff recruitment and development; and the use of appropriate data to support monitoring and periodic review of progress. QQI will continue to encourage and support all stakeholders in advancing EDI as it relates to quality and qualifications within a tertiary education system that is rooted in the principles of fairness, respect and dignity for all.

Dr Pdraig Walsh

Chief Executive Officer

INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT: THE ANNUAL QUALITY REPORT

The annual quality report (AQR) prepared each year by Irish higher education institutions (HEIs) is a well-established feature of QQI's quality assurance (QA) monitoring and review framework. The AQR offers documentary evidence of the development and evolution of a HEI's QA system and provides transparency on activities supporting the assurance and enhancement of quality for external stakeholders.

The AQRs provide QQI and other stakeholders with updates on the progress HEIs have made toward objectives set out the previous year and indicate priorities and planned activities for the subsequent reporting period. Where priorities have shifted or changed during the reporting period, for example, due to changes in the wider operating environment, this is indicated.

Reports are prepared using a template provided by QQI that maps to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and QQI's statutory quality assurance guidelines. HEIs also use the AQR to report on strategic priorities as well as enhancement activities that permeate multiple dimensions of QA. Alongside the report itself, HEIs are invited each year to submit case studies showcasing examples of best practice.

QQI INSIGHTS: THEMATIC AND SYSTEM-LEVEL ANALYSIS OF THE ANNUAL QUALITY REPORTS

Thematic and system-level analysis based on AQR submissions presented in this report is relevant to the three broad categories of HEI in the Irish higher education system. These are:

- Seven universities listed in the Universities Act, 1997 and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI).
- Five technological universities (TUs), established under the Technological Universities Act, 2018 and two institutes of technology (IoTs).
- Private/independent providers. HEIs within this category vary substantially in scale, focus and learner cohorts¹.

¹ Not all private/independent HEIs were required to submit an AQR for this period. The AQR was a requirement for those private/independent that have formally expressed an interest in attaining delegation of authority to make awards when it becomes available. Consequently, Chapter 3 of this report, which sets out a thematic analysis of reports from the private/independent sector, is based on the AQRs required from four such HEIs within that sector and an additional two voluntary submissions.



CHAPTER

1.

CHAPTER 1: A SYSTEM-LEVEL ANALYSIS OF QUALITY IN IRISH HIGHER EDUCATION IN 2024

1.1 ANALYSING QUALITY IN IRISH HIGHER EDUCATION

In this chapter, a system-level lens is applied to an analysis of quality in Irish higher education as it is reflected in the 2024 AQR submissions, which pertain to the reporting period 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023.

As noted in the previous year's system and sector-level analysis of the AQRs, although a report template is provided by QQI, HEIs make independent judgements regarding what to include under various headings. They also exercise a high level of discretion regarding the granularity of that reporting for specific activities in part B of the AQR, which is focused on enhancement and impact activity. As such, although the AQRs provide significant insights into key developments and activities within institutions and across the system, they constitute an example and do not offer a definitive and readily comparable catalogue of all activity underway within Ireland's HEIs. An absence of reporting on a strand of activity by a particular HEI does not necessarily equate to an absence of activity: it may instead reflect an intentional focus on other activities considered more relevant or pertinent to the institutional context for a particular reporting period. Although variability across the reports presents challenges for analysis, the relative freedom the reporting format affords HEIs also offers benefits. HEIs are able to draw upon internal reporting to include



quantifiable indicators of activities, outputs and outcomes. However, they are also enabled to include richer narratives, with descriptive or reflective reporting offering usefully contextualised insights of a more qualitative nature.

Although particular trends emerge in reporting by some categories of HEI more strongly than others, applying a system-level lens to analysis remains a valuable exercise. At a system level, discussion is able to take broader account of developments in government policy, regulatory processes and the operating environment during the reporting period. The discussion in this chapter therefore builds upon the outcomes of thematic analysis of the sixteen AQRs submitted by Ireland's public HEIs (set out in Chapter 2) and the six AQRs submitted by private/independent HEIs (set out in Chapter 3).

1.2 ONGOING ENHANCEMENT AND IMPACT ACTIVITY

In the AQRs submitted by public HEIs in 2024, direct references to the COVID-19 pandemic have largely receded from view. This may indicate that while the COVID-19 pandemic increased the pace and priority given to developing capacity in particular areas, it is no longer perceived to be the main driver of those developments. The impacts of the pandemic are slightly more prominent in reporting by private/independent HEIs. For example, the AQRs submitted by NCI, Griffith College and DBS set out arrangements surrounding a return to in-person teaching and assessment, as well as hybrid options, where relevant.

In the 2024 AQRs, an ongoing focus on staff wellbeing, engagement and development is visible. Several HEIs, including (but not limited to) UL, UCC and DBS reported on staff culture, wellbeing and engagement initiatives with audits, surveys, working groups and future plans indicated. The reported development of staff policies within HEIs also reflected an emphasis on staff wellbeing across the sector. Examples of this include policies on menopause (RCSI), bereavement (TCD) and dignity and respect (Griffith College). Updates pertaining to embedding remote, flexible and hybrid working practices in QA policies and procedures were reported by both public and private/independent HEIs, including TU Dublin, University of Galway and Griffith College. The AQRs for 2024 reported on learning and development (L&D) programmes, indicating training is being provided to support more inclusive learning environments. For example, UCD reported on gender identity, expression and diversity training for staff, while RCSI reported on training in areas including gender identity, race equality, autism and disability awareness. L&D activities focused on leadership development were reported by MTU, UCC and University of Galway.

A number of institutions, including UCC, UL and University of Galway reported work to enhance existing Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) or transition to new platforms. Ongoing work to facilitate inclusive, hybrid and technology-enabled teaching and learning in physical classrooms and library spaces was also reported by public HEIs, including RCSI, TUS, TCD and UCD. Across the technological universities, a significant volume of activity was unsurprisingly reported pertaining to the integration or replacement of legacy systems. The augmentation of facilities and substantial investments in digital infrastructure suggest that investments to enable technology-enhanced practice are an ongoing strategic priority for the sector.

In 2024, a significant number of digitalisation focused case studies were submitted by HEIs, with reporting on individual service and process enhancements through digitalisation also reported throughout the AQRs. These activities spanned a breadth of institutional functions, including, for

example, self-service library borrowing technology at MTU, staff recruitment activity and quality review group processes at UL and the implementation of a customer relationship management system at Hibernia College. Although the volume of reporting in this domain suggests that digital transformation is underway and continuing apace within the higher education sector, few AQRs refer to the development, governance or implementation of whole-of-institution IT/digital strategies and plans.

A number of HEIs reported on the implementation or continued development of systems and tools specifically designed to facilitate data-informed decision-making. For example, UCC, DCU and Griffith College reported on the use of dashboards to inform activities ranging from recruitment and admissions through to learner support and programme delivery. A focus on collecting, utilising and closing the loop on student feedback continued to be visible, having also been prominent in the AQRs submitted for the previous two reporting periods. The 2024 AQRs indicated that effectively harnessing student feedback remains a priority for HEIs, including MU, ATU, UL and NCI.

1.3 RESPONDING TO THE DEVELOPMENTS IN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

The release of ChatGPT in November 2022 generated much discussion across the higher education sector internationally² and occurred less than three months after the reporting period commenced. A particular focus of concern during this period was the potential negative impacts generative AI might have on the integrity and credibility of several well-established forms of assessment³, as reflected in the National Artificial Intelligence Network (NAIN) Guidelines for Educators, published by QQI at the conclusion of the reporting period.

Academic integrity has been a prominent theme in the AQRs submitted for at least the two previous reporting periods. As might be expected, academic integrity continued to be prominent in the 2024 AQRs, with evidence that HEIs were working to mitigate the threats posed by AI during the period. The reported responses were multifaceted, spanning the provision of interim guidance and policy updates, increased resourcing, awareness-raising and exploration of technical solutions. However, given the emerging nature of knowledge about generative AI tools during the reporting period and the further experimentation needed, for example, to understand whether technological detection capabilities would be viable, institutional responses were typically reported as interim. Plans to continue development in this area in subsequent reporting periods were indicated. As per previous reporting periods, engagement with the NAIN was ubiquitous, suggesting that the network continues to serve as an important forum for the collaboration and sharing of resources across Irish higher education.

A number of reports also provided evidence that institutions are actively seeking to harness the opportunities AI presents. UCD, UL, UCC and Griffith College reported on the use of chatbots and AI tools to enhance service provision and enable significant efficiencies. Case studies outlining the use of these tools to augment student-facing services were submitted. Funding calls were also reported for projects exploring the potential for use of AI tools in higher education. This

² Early responses to the release of ChatGPT were captured in, UNESCO's [ChatGPT and Artificial Intelligence in higher education quick guide](#), published in April 2023.

³ Reporting and commentary on generative AI proliferated across higher education focused news sites and blogs a the reporting period (e.g. [Lee, 2023](#); [Zaphir & Lodge, 2023](#); [Costello 2023](#)) as well as early [symposia](#).

suggests that the posture of Ireland's HEIs toward AI is not limited to the defensive. As AI tools become more integrated to operations within HEIs, it can be anticipated that the development of associated QA will be an increasing focus for the sector.

1.4 EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

The outward looking stance of the Irish higher education sector was again prominent in the AQRs submitted in 2024. In previous years, the AQRs of public and some private/independent HEIs reported on external partnerships and industry collaborations informing research and practice. Work to increase capacity surrounding external engagement (via new appointments and offices) was highlighted in the analysis of AQRs submitted in 2023.

In the AQRs submitted in 2024, the breadth of activity in this domain is particularly pronounced. The reports offer further insights to the importance of industry and external partnerships for Irish HEIs across research, programme development and community engagement activity. Many reported partnerships occur in STEM domains, for example, an innovation partnership with a MedTech company at the University of Galway and the collaboration by RCSI with a consortium of national and multinational biopharma companies to establish a new advanced therapeutic technologies programme. Others support broader sustainability objectives, such as the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between UL and the ESB, which commits both organisations to collaboration that will support Ireland's transition to renewable sources of energy. Reporting also highlights collaborations intended to facilitate industry-aligned upskilling initiatives, such as the collaboration between IADT, RTÉ and Virgin Media to co-design and co-deliver a micro-credential in live studio broadcasting. Although the importance and breadth of these initiatives is well conveyed in reporting, associated developments in governance and QA to support this work are less discernible. It may be useful in future reporting to provide indications of the QA implications of such engagements to facilitate greater insight and peer learning across the sector.

Reporting in the 2024 AQRs also reflected that Ireland's public HEIs and at least one private HEI are continuing to engage in European university alliances and projects. Reporting indicated this work includes the development of micro-credentials and new taught programmes. This suggests that QQI's [Policy on Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes Based on the European Approach](#), released in June 2024, may be an important reference point for designated awarding bodies (DABs) and providers with delegated authority in subsequent reporting periods.

Perhaps linked to the prominence of external relationships, some of the AQRs submitted by public sector HEIs in 2024 also indicated a visible focus on branding and reputation, with brand refresh, brand identity, reputation audits and reputation campaigns indicated as areas of activity by UCC, University of Galway and RCSI.

1.5 PEER REVIEW

The AQR template elicits an overview of the composition of expert panels involved in quality assurance reviews of academic or professional units as well as the programme validation or approval processes, with breakdowns indicating the internal, national or international profile of members as well as gender breakdowns by role (e.g. chair, secretary). In the two previous reporting periods it was noted that a relatively small number of international experts were included

in the membership of these panels. Given the emphasis on EU integration and international collaborations in other areas of reporting, this was noted to warrant reflection. For 2024, both the public and private/independent AQRs submitted indicate that there is a marked variance between HEIs within the same subsector in relation to the inclusion (or otherwise) of international members on expert panels. Given that a number of institutions have reported that reviews and programme validation or approval panel processes continue to be managed effectively online post the COVID-19 pandemic, it may be useful to understand why an international perspective is not more commonly sought.

It is acknowledged that this section of the AQR template may not be adequately capturing the breadth of processes in operation within Ireland's HEIs, and that there is substantial diversity in how such processes are managed across sectors⁴. Data on programme review and approval activity is not always easily identifiable in this section of the report (which could provide a degree of quantification of activity in this domain). Given the centrality of informed peer review to quality assurance activity, it may be useful for QQI to explore with HEIs how a clearer perspective on activity across the sector could be gleaned from annual reporting. In particular, and in the context of the emphasis placed on developing industry-aligned programmes and the ongoing development of European university consortia in the AQRs, it may be particularly useful to ascertain to what extent both industry and international representatives are included in these activities.

1.6 PROGRAMME PORTFOLIOS

During this reporting period a number of institutions reported on new programmes developed (or planned for development in collaboration with industry partners). Among those reports that offered more granular detail in this area, a continued increase of programme offerings (including micro-credentials) at postgraduate level and offered part-time was discernible. New programme profiles, where provided, are most commonly situated within STEM disciplines, but also reflect cross-cutting themes and priorities for industry, with innovation, sustainability and EDI visible threads in portfolio development.

Ireland's public HEIs are [designated awarding bodies](#) under legislation, enabling these institutions to make awards that are included in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)⁵. Private/independent providers currently offer programmes leading to awards that are made by QQI and included in the NFQ via QQI's validation process⁶.

A number of initiatives reported in the 2024 AQRs reflect a realisation of the potential of the NFQ to facilitate seamless progression for learners. Some HEIs reported an early response to a government [policy announcement](#) pertaining to a unified tertiary sector in late 2022. The announcement focused on enabling students to commence a tertiary programme in a further education and training setting and progress to a higher education institution to achieve a degree award. A new National Tertiary Office (NTO), jointly managed by the HEA and SOLAS, was

⁴ This is exemplified in a relevant QQI publication: [A thematic analysis of reports on the approval and review of programmes of higher education in the universities, RCSI and DIT in the period 2015-2018](#).

⁵ Section 43(4) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (as amended) provides that "Each designated awarding body shall ensure, in so far as is reasonably practicable, that each award that it makes is an award that is included within the Framework".

⁶ Four of the six providers that submitted an AQR in 2024 have expressed ambitions to attain the authority to make awards under delegated authority from QQI in the future.

subsequently established to progress work in this area. QQI particularly sought case studies relating to ATP innovation and pathways from further to higher education alongside the 2024 AQR submissions.

Both public and private/independent providers reported on joint activities, some of which pre-dated the establishment of the NTO and are longstanding, including, for example, MTU's work with further education colleges in its region to offer supported progression pathways between linked programmes/courses and NCI's progression route into a Higher Certificate in Business. Other providers, including SETU, IADT and TUS, also reported on new or pilot initiatives of this nature.

During the reporting period, the OECD published a significant report outlining its assessment of Ireland's skills strategy. That report included the recommendation that Ireland should promote greater flexibility in lifelong learning, with specific actions including provision of online, modular and 'bite-size' micro-credentials as well as strengthening the recognition, accreditation and stackability of lifelong learning opportunities in line with the NFAQ (OECD, 2023, p.34). The diversity of offerings reported by HEIs in the 2024 AQRs would appear to contribute to that recommendation.

1.7 INCLUSIVE, AUTHENTIC AND INDUSTRY-ALIGNED TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

In the previous reporting period, system-level analysis highlighted a continuing trend in the AQRs toward industry-aligned, employability focused programme provision and associated pedagogies. This was consistent with, and further amplified in, the AQRs submitted in 2024. HEIs including DCU and TUS included updates on intentions to increase the use of placement within the formal curriculum. Ongoing work was reported on the enhancement of supporting processes, for example, fitness to practise policies at TU Dublin and ATU. Further case study submissions outlined, for example, the use of innovative simulation-based assessments at RCSI and industry-focused authentic assessment strategies at TU Dublin. Co-curricular employability tools, awards and supports were also reported to be in use by institutions including UCC, Griffith College and DkIT.

It is noteworthy that although a dominant media narrative during this period centred on the threats to assessment posed by generative AI, HEIs typically devoted greater space within the AQRs to reporting on more broadly focused assessment initiatives. These included continuing work to develop policies for reasonable accommodation and resources supporting inclusive assessment practice, as well as initiatives to engage the learner voice in assessment and feedback design and enhance the provision of feedback to learners. Within this, universal design for learning continued to be a strong theme, reported on by ATU, University of Galway and TUS (among others) as well as an emphasis on feedback and assessment as and for learning. The AQRs submitted by public HEIs outlined work to fully leverage the contribution of external examiners to assessment quality alongside more general process improvements

1.8 CROSS-CUTTING THEMES: THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

As with the previous reporting year, the AQRs submitted by Irish HEIs continued to demonstrate leadership, ambition and commitment to progressing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as promoting and realising Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

(EDI). Although the themes of reducing inequality and gender equality are represented within the SDGs, there is a significant volume of reporting specific to EDI within the 2024 AQRs, particularly among Ireland's public HEIs. For this reason, EDI is set out separately to the SDGs within the thematic analysis in chapter 2.

In the 2024 AQRs, it is evident that the focus on sustainability continues to impact the development of strategic plans and priorities within HEIs, influencing industry partnerships, resource allocation, research funding, the built environment and programme design, among other areas. EDI is similarly prominent in institutional strategies and is visibly impacting the composition of governance committees, the development of new and review of existing policies, the implementation of inclusive learning design and assessment practices, the accessibility of websites and platforms and the range of supports available to staff and learners. Although the scale and comparability of initiatives reported is significantly greater in the public sector AQRs, a continued thread of relevant reporting is also visible in the AQR submissions from private/independent HEIs.

Despite the high visibility of these cross-cutting themes throughout the AQRs, there is much variability in approaches to reporting on the SDGs and EDI. This means that it can be difficult to ascertain, for example, commonalities in the impact of the SDGs or EDI on institutional QA across the sector.

The AQR template enables HEIs to report under subheadings mapped to QQI's statutory quality assurance guidelines and the ESG. Both the QQI guidelines and the ESG provide conceptual frameworks for QA, setting out dimensions of QA which are by their nature interdependent. Those frameworks, and the areas or dimensions of QA provided within them, frame the monitoring and review work undertaken by QQI, and inform approaches to compliance and reporting activity within HEIs. As such, they provide an important heuristic for communicating expectations and evidencing acceptable thresholds for QA across the higher education sector.

However, HEIs make choices about what and how to report on the SDGs and EDI, sometimes integrating reporting across different subheadings and at other times presenting the activity as a standalone project or work area. As a result, although it is apparent that there are substantive programmes of enhancement activity underway (which permeate multiple dimensions of QA) sectoral impacts cannot be easily summarised.

QQI could usefully consider how, in future, it might gain a clearer view of the implications of these broad agendas for QA systems in the future. Future work could also valuably be directed toward investigating how comparable or otherwise the impacts of these agendas on institutional QA systems have been across the sector, enabling valuable peer learning opportunities.

1.9 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Cumulatively, the 2024 AQRs reflect a dynamic year for the Irish higher education sector. New strategic plans were launched across a number of HEIs, the TU sector continued work to integrate legacy institutional structures and practices, a number of industry partnerships and collaborations were initiated and work to progress the ambitions of European university consortia was ongoing.

Collaboration resonates as an important enabling factor for many of the significant achievements reported and planned. Examples of collaboration with students, across disciplines, across

professional and academic departments, with further education providers, with industry partners, with community organisations, with European consortia and with international HEIs are indicated throughout the reports and in multiple case study submissions.

As a whole, the AQRs provide substantive evidence that HEIs have largely emerged from the system shock of the COVID-19 pandemic. They reflect an ongoing emphasis on inclusive approaches to teaching, learning and assessment and the digitalisation of processes and services. They also indicate increasingly flexible approaches to staff management.

Challenges in the external environment, including the release and rapid adoption of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT during the reporting period continued to demand responsive management from HEIs. However, this analysis indicates that Irish HEIs are not operating solely on a reactive footing. Indeed, Ireland's HEIs appear to be working actively to meet the future. The 2024 AQRs highlight work across the sector to anticipate and respond to developing needs across enterprise and industry in programme development, research partnerships and knowledge transfer activities. They also reflect the significant leadership the sector continues to provide surrounding climate action and a commitment to evolving social norms surrounding access, inclusion and equity.



CHAPTER 2.

CHAPTER 2: QUALITY IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

This chapter provides a thematic analysis of reported developments and enhancements related to quality assurance in Irish public higher education institutions (HEIs) for the period from September 2022 to August 2023. The analysis is based on the Annual Quality Reports (AQRs) submitted by HEIs in February 2024. This analysis reflects both the headings under which HEIs report and additional key areas of focus emerging in the AQRs submitted. The chapter also features and provides links to case studies submitted by public HEIs that demonstrate the breadth of activity taking place within Irish public higher education.

The AQRs informing this analysis were submitted by HEIs that are designated awarding bodies (DABs), meaning they have the authority to make their own qualifications. Except for the technological universities, all of the public HEIs had also completed an external institutional review by QQI (CINNTE review) prior to the reporting period. The annual quality reporting model is an important part of this larger accountability framework.

This chapter represents the eighth thematic analysis by QQI of annual quality reports submitted by public HEIs. It is based on 16 AQRs from the following public HEIs:

No.	Institution
1	Atlantic Technological University (ATU)
2	Dublin City University (DCU)
3	Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT)
4	Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT)
5	Maynooth University (MU)
6	Munster Technological University (MTU)
7	National University of Ireland (NUI)
8	Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI)
9	South East Technological University (SETU) ⁷
10	Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin)
11	Technological University of the Shannon (TUS)
12	Trinity College Dublin (TCD)
13	University College Cork (UCC)
14	University College Dublin (UCD)
15	University of Galway
16	University of Limerick (UL)

Table 1: List of Public Higher Education Institutions that Submitted Annual Quality Reports in 2024

⁷ The AQR submitted by SETU was for a truncated reporting period (Jan 1st 2023 to August 31st 2023) to bring the reporting period for SETU into alignment with other Irish HEIs.

2.1 QUALITY ASSURANCE IMPLEMENTATION AND RELATED DEVELOPMENTS

As a whole, the 2024 AQRs reflect that for 2022/23, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on work and practice across public HEIs were beginning to be absorbed into 'business as usual'. In thematic and system-level analyses of the 2020/21 AQRs, the immediate impacts of the pandemic were focal. Greater variability in the level of reporting on COVID-19 effects in the AQRs was visible for 2021/22. However, impacts on increased provision of blended and online teaching and learning, opportunities for remote or hybrid working and an increase in digital supports were discernible across the sector. In 2022/23, direct references to the COVID-19 pandemic have receded further from view. As a result, the impact of COVID-19 is not highlighted in a specific subsection in this year's analysis. However, there is substantial evidence in the AQRs of ongoing development of policy and practice surrounding remote and hybrid working, augmentation of facilities to enable this and substantial investments in digital infrastructure. This suggests that Ireland's HEIs are leveraging the benefits of technology-enhanced practice and digital transformation, while also positioning themselves to be increasingly resilient to future system shocks.

During this reporting period much public and sectoral discourse focused on the threats posed by artificial intelligence (AI) to the credibility and integrity of assessment in higher education. There is evidence in this year's AQR submissions that those threats are being actively responded to via ongoing updates to policy, procedure and guidance surrounding academic integrity. Additionally, a number of AQRs provide evidence that institutions are actively seeking to harness the opportunities AI presents. Case studies outlining the use of chatbots to augment student facing services and funding calls for projects exploring the potential for use of AI tools for higher education are examples of this. Accordingly, while academic integrity continues to be a focus in this year's analysis, an additional subsection has been included that considers work in institutions surrounding AI from a broader perspective.

The outward looking stance of the sector was again prominent in the AQRs of 2024. Ongoing engagement in European alliances remains prominent. In previous years, the AQRs submitted by public HEIs have also reported on external partnerships and industry collaborations informing research and practice. Work to increase capacity surrounding external engagement was noted in the analysis of AQRs submitted in 2023. In the AQRs submitted in 2024, the breadth of activity in this domain is particularly prominent. This year's analysis therefore includes a subsection devoted specifically to this increasingly important area of activity.

Finally, it was evident in the two previous reporting periods that the cross-cutting themes of sustainability and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) continue to drive significant work across multiple dimensions of strategic development and QA in Ireland's public HEIs. Accordingly, activities in both domains are highlighted within specific subsections in this chapter but noted to resonate throughout reporting under other domains of QA, including (but not limited to) updates on work in the built environment, teaching and learning, learner supports and staff recruitment management and development.

2.1.1 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY ACT 2022

Within the 2024 AQRs, a number of public HEIs reported on work to bring the size of their governing bodies in line with the provisions of the [Higher Education Authority Act 2022](#). For example:

- UCD reported that a Review Group was established by the Governing Authority to recommend the process and regulations by which the university's seventh Governing Authority members would be appointed. Elections took place in June 2023, with formal commencement of the new Governing Authority scheduled within the subsequent reporting period.
- University of Galway reported on work undertaken during the reporting period to support the reconstitution of *Údarás na hOllscoile*. A nominations committee was established, and a competency and skills matrix agreed. Regulations and procedures were developed and approved by the Governing Authority and the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.
- TCD reported on work to implement the changes required by the Higher Education Authority Act, 2022 and Trinity's Supplemental Charter of 2022. The TCD Board approved the timeline for holding elections for internal Board members and a Board skills and experience matrix. The number of external representatives on the TCD Board has now increased and the positions of Chair and Deputy Chair are filled by external members.
- In the technological university sector, TU Dublin reported that the university's new Governing Body had been formed following a comprehensive selection process. MTU reported that compliance with the HEA Act was achieved by reducing external membership of its Governing Body from 13 to 10, including the Chair.

2.1.2 EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCES AND COLLABORATIONS

The 2024 AQRs reflected that Ireland's public HEIs continue to engage actively in European university alliances, and in some instances are taking leadership or coordination roles at a pivotal time in the development of these entities. For example:

- TCD reported that the university's Provost, Dr Linda Doyle, was elected Chair of the League of European Research Universities (LERU) during the reporting period. The CHARM-EU Alliance, of which TCD is a member, increased to nine partners and is part of two cross-alliance projects being run by the European Commission exploring the topics of (i) Legal Entity and (ii) European Degree.
- TUS reported that it is coordinator for Phase 2 of the Regional University Network-European University (RUN-EU). The alliance will strive to secure the sustainable economic, social, cultural, and environmental progress of its regions and stakeholders. Participation and leadership of RUN-EU is considered to greatly enhance mobility opportunities for TUS students. TUS is additionally participating in the Horizon Europe RUN-EU PLUS project, which supports RUN-EU development goals by focusing on strengthening of regional business and society partnerships in research and innovation across the network.

A number of public HEIs indicated that first cycles of activity had been completed within the alliances and funding had subsequently been renewed to support ongoing work. Within this, priorities indicated include the development of new taught programmes and micro-credentials. Examples of reported activity in this area include:

- University of Galway reported that the ENLIGHT alliance had been funded for a second phase to commence in the subsequent reporting period. A joint ENLIGHT Competence Framework and Quality Approach was developed, assuring comparable quality, mutually accepted institutional practices and similar degree and learning path value. The university also reported on the approval of an ENLIGHT proposal to create a new postgraduate taught course.
- DCU reported that the ECIU network secured Erasmus+ funds for a second phase project (ECIU+) which will run from November 2022 to October 2026, with the possibility of a two-year extension. The new project will aim to strengthen three concepts in the ECIU University ecosystem: challenge-based approaches, micro-credentials and flexible learning pathways. DCU has established an ECIU Strategic Oversight Committee, reporting to the Education Committee on the initiative on a regular basis.
- TU Dublin reported that the first phase of the European University of Technology (EUt+) initiative drew to a close and has been funded for a further four years. Groundwork undertaken over the first three years will form the basis of future engagement and is expected to lead to a confederation.
- ATU reported on its membership of the EUGREEN – European University Alliance with eight other universities located in peripheral regions of Europe, focused on responsible growth,



inclusive education and environment. The alliance launched in January 2023 with funding of over €4m over its first four years.

- UL reported that its Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences faculty developed the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master of Arts in Teaching Foreign Languages in a Multicultural Environment (TELME) with five other universities. UL additionally reported hosting the Young European Research University Network General Assembly, bringing together presidents and network coordinators from the 23 member universities to facilitate discussions, promote collaboration and showcase achievements.
- MTU reported that the INGENIUM Alliance, comprised of 10 partnering universities, launched in the reporting period. INGENIUM is working to develop fully accredited and recognised higher education degrees, applying an integrated QA Policy framework. MTU is leading the work package 'Entrepreneurial INGENIUM'.

SETU submitted a case study outlining its participation in the EU-CONEXUS European University, which includes the Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability initiative. The four key areas of focus for improving the lives of coastal inhabitants are coastal engineering; environmental sciences and biodiversity; life sciences and biotechnology; and the social, cultural and human sciences. The full case study is available [here](#).

The progress reported within the alliances suggests that QQI's [Policy on Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes Based on the European Approach](#), released in June 2024, may be an important reference point for Designated Awarding Bodies (DABs) and providers with delegated authority in subsequent reporting periods.

2.1.3 EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

In the 2021/22 analysis, it was observed that a number of AQRs submitted by Ireland's public HEIs reported on the allocation of additional resources to support external engagement activities. The AQRs submitted in 2024 offer further insights into the importance of industry and external partnerships for research, programme development and community engagement. Many of the reported partnerships occur in STEM domains or support broader sustainability objectives.

Examples of new and established partnerships that will directly inform programme and curriculum development reported in the AQRs include:

- UL reported that along with ESB, Shannon Foynes Port Company and Clare County Council, the university is a stakeholder in the Dutch-Irish research project HybridLabs, focused on accelerating deployment of offshore renewable technologies. The university will develop educational programmes in Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) format. UL's Bernal Institute will also contribute via research in materials circularity.
- RCSI reported that its new Advanced Therapeutic Technologies programme was achieved in collaboration with a strong consortium of national and multinational biopharma companies who provided their expertise to support the development of the curriculum which addresses critical skill gaps and maximises future biopharma related opportunities.
- University of Galway reported on the announcement with the Galway International Arts Festival of a five-year partnership (renewing 13 years of pre-existing partnership). The new partnership will facilitate the introduction of a new course in creative arts management and

a professional development programme for emerging artists, theatre makers, curators and producers studying at the university.

- TU Dublin outlined multiple examples of engagements with enterprise enabled through HCI Pillar 3 – Innovation and Agility funding. These include Convene, Dublin-UCD collaborative project and GROWTHhub. The projects have led to the development of programmes for industry and opportunities for TU Dublin students to engage more directly in industry activities.
- IADT submitted a case study outlining a collaboration with RTÉ and Virgin Media Television and Creative Futures Academy to co-design and co-deliver an NFQ Level 9 Certificate: Live Studio Broadcasting. The innovative micro-credential was delivered at the National Film School at IADT and focused on addressing the skills deficits identified by broadcasters. The full case study is presented below.



Case Study

Live Studio Broadcasting Module

Theme: Details of Arrangements with Third Parties

The collaboration between IADT, VMTV, and RTÉ, co-designed and co-delivered a Level 9 Certificate: Live Studio Broadcasting. The Certificate met a central goal of CFA to support workplace learning through the design and delivery of micro-credentials tailored for the creative industries. A dedicated working group, comprised of cross-industry and academic experts, addressed module structure, tutor and tutorial support, learner profiles and numbers, academic calendar, admission criteria, work placements, risk assessment, eligibility (including Recognised Prior Learning or RPL processes), fees and scholarships, curriculum design, teaching methodologies, learning and assessment strategies, briefing content, and quality assurance measures. Identified skill gaps by VMTV and RTÉ included Studio Camera Operators, Sound and Vision Mixing professionals, Production Assistants/Broadcast Coordinators, CCU/Vision Engineers, and Floor Management personnel.

By May 2023, 14 places were offered and accepted, including learners admitted through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process. This process evaluated equivalencies derived from various life skills, work experiences, and industry connections—a vital component in making lifelong learning more accessible and integral to the micro-credential approach in industry/education collaborations.

Delivered at the National Film School, IADT, the Certificate focused on addressing the skill deficits identified by broadcasters. The curriculum blended intensive in-studio training within a simulated 'live broadcast' professional work environment at IADT, work placements for on-the-job training with industry partners, and classroom tuition in Reflective Practice. Professional trainers from RTÉ and VMTV, overseen by the studio lecturer at IADT, facilitated the learning process.

Unique and innovative, the curriculum fostered collaborative learning, role-specific training, and real-world application. Through small group interactions with technical experts, learners tested their roles and skills in both simulated and live studio production settings, applying knowledge to real-life scenarios and enhancing creativity and problem-solving skills. The small group approach resulted in high student engagement, evidenced by active participation, excellent attendance, active learning, and enthusiasm during group projects. A key success of the Certificate was in IADT's collaboration with industry, strengthening relationships and exemplifying how industry and education can collaborate. Anonymous feedback from learners underscored the Certificate's effectiveness in enhancing their knowledge, interest, and motivation. Tutors praised the positive atmosphere at IADT, highlighting the support in curriculum design, teaching, and learning for assessment. Despite challenges, the use of interactive methods, practical projects, and industry professionals significantly contributed to fostering a profound understanding of production methods in a live studio environment among students. A high percentage of learners were immediately offered work with one of our industry partners. This case study highlights the importance of creative and interactive teaching and learning approaches for creating a vibrant learning environment and enriching students' overall educational experience.

Testimonials

“This course has been a wonderful experience due to the highly experienced teachers and great studio equipment, but also the creative, collaborative atmosphere and fantastic networking opportunities.”

“CFA provided the education and resources necessary to allow me to further my skills/abilities with hands on practical experience.”

“I had a great experience with CFA, great practical course with very helpful tutors.”
“Learning from industry professionals provides real world experience in a setting that allows you to learn from your mistakes.”

Figure 1 - Case Study from IADT on Live Studio Broadcasting Module

A number of new partnerships were also announced in the 2024 AQRs. Examples of reporting include:

- University of Galway reported:
 - On a new Institute for Clinical Trials, which is to be established within the university with healthcare partner Saolta Healthcare and will focus on developing sustained, mutually beneficial partnerships with industry and academic partners.
 - On a signature innovation partnership with Medtronic, enabling significant expansion of the University’s MedTech ecosystem and offering early-stage seed funding for collaborative research projects.
- UL reported:
 - On the launch of the Irish World Aviation Academy, a strategic partnership between AIR Nav and the University. The Academy is intended to serve as a gateway for collaboration with the international aviation industry on programmes of learning, research and knowledge exchange.
 - On the launch of a partnership between the Kemmy Business School and the HSE Mid-West Community Healthcare organisation. The partnership is designed to support the Community Healthcare Network structure adopt a multi-stakeholder perspective and to identify a framework of factors contributing to good practices in interprofessional and multiprofessional collaboration.
 - On the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with ESB, which commits both organisations to collaborate across a range of areas and support Ireland’s transition to renewable sources of energy. A portfolio of projects includes opportunities for co-operative placements and internships for UL students.
- RCSI reported on annual growth in knowledge transfer performance, which continued with RCSI exceeding targets independently set by Knowledge Transfer Ireland for spin-out formation, licensing and industry collaboration. Industry engagement, as measured by number of agreements, exceeded targets by 40% and industry funding grew to €4m.

The focus being placed on external engagement by Ireland's public HEIs is also reflected in the establishment of new partnership offices and units as well as partnership focused events. Examples of reporting of this nature include:

- MU reported that within its new strategic plan, one of four pillars was engagement & partnerships. A specific initiative in the implementation of the plan will be the establishment of a new partnership office.
- TU Dublin reported on the establishment of a Strategic Partnerships Unit, noting the importance of partnerships with industry and enterprise to foster experiential learning opportunities for students, such as internships and industry projects. TU Dublin is currently working with partners including Workday and AWS and plans to grow partnerships across all economically prominent sectors.
- IADT reported on an IADT + Industry event hosted during the reporting period, which saw close to 100 attendees from industry. IADT staff showcased a diverse range of industry and research collaborations at the event, which included talks on 3D modelling, augmented reality & virtual reality case studies, animation and the psychology of online behaviour.

2.1.4 PROGRESS TOWARD THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

The sustainability agenda, climate action and progress toward the SDGs has continued to drive strategic development, new appointments, new curricula and research agendas across the sector. As a cross-cutting theme, sustainability and work to progress the SDGs resonates throughout reporting on external engagement, programmes of education and training, research and investments in the built environment. Cumulatively, the activity in this domain reflects that Ireland's public HEIs are providing thought leadership on climate action and nurturing innovation in this sphere.

To appropriately capture the breadth of activity reported, an appendix has been included in this report that sets out in greater detail examples of work toward the SDGs in Irish HEIs in 2022/23, including:

- How the SDGs have been formalised, tracked and reported by HEIs across the reporting period;
- How a focus on the SDGs has been reflected in senior appointments;
- How the SDGs have influenced curriculum development activity and external partnerships (including research partnerships);
- How the SDGs have influenced campus and student life.

2.1.5 PROGRESS TOWARD EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (EDI)

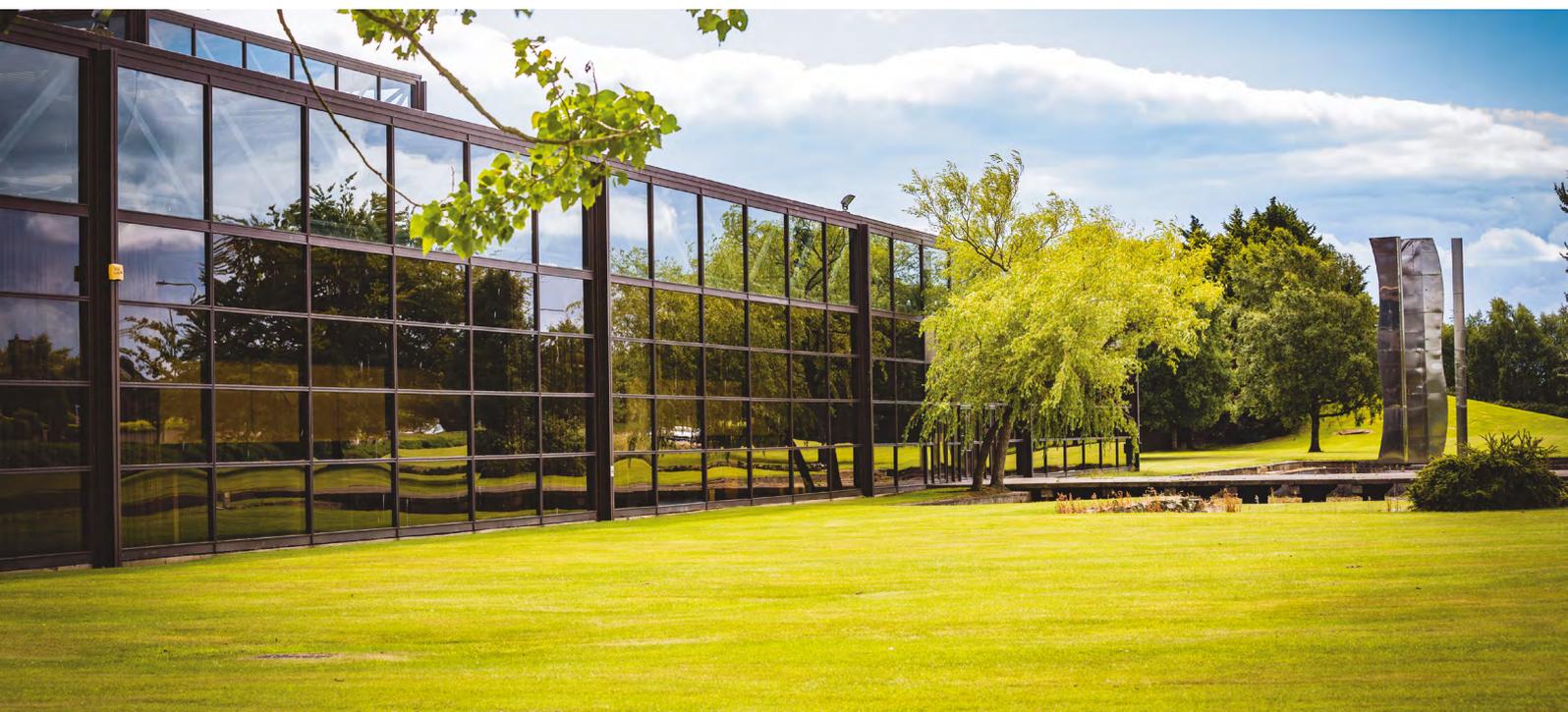
Although EDI can be discussed under the broader umbrella of the SDGs, the prominence of EDI activity reported by public HEIs in the 2024 AQRs warrants independent discussion. As per the previous reporting period, there is evidence that public HEIs have made deep commitments in this area, exceeding their compliance and funding driven obligations. As a cross-cutting theme, the EDI activity visible in the AQRs is not limited to the specific focus activities discussed in this section. EDI-aligned activities reported in the 2024 AQRs are additionally identified in this chapter under numerous other subheadings. EDI is particularly resonant in the 2024 submissions in the

domains of teaching and learning; learner support; access and transition; and staff recruitment, management and development.

The embedding of EDI in strategic plans and within formal governance structures was reported by a number of public HEIs. For example, MU reported that EDI is identified as a key enabler in the university's new five-year strategic plan. University of Galway reported on the formation of a Race Equality Committee to oversee implementation of the university's Race Equality Framework and associated Action Plan and TU Dublin reported that EDI was a consideration within the development of the University Education Model, which places inclusion at the centre.

UL and TCD reported on the achievement of Silver Athena Swan awards and the progress of associated gender equality plans. MU, RCSI, IADT and TUS also reported ongoing work to renew Bronze Athena Swan awards. Some AQRs provided insights into the substantial work (which includes data collection, review of institutional processes and self-assessment reporting) that this entails.

A small number of AQRs reported on the publication of the first or second Gender Pay Gap Reports published by the institutions, in line with the Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021. UCD noted a downward trend in the mean and median for core employees and noted that a significant contributor to the current gender pay gap was the lower number of women than men in senior academic roles. For professional and support staff, an area where more women are employed than men, the current gap is attributed to the greater proportion of men occupying senior positions. It is noted that the Athena Swan process has expanded to professional units of the university and will allow for a detailed review of gender inequalities. TCD reported on the second year of gender pay gap reporting at the university. The gender pay gap of 8.8% in 2023 represented a reduction of 2.2% on the previous year.



Reporting on EDI included references to events held to celebrate or raise awareness of EDI relevant themes and the role of networks in supporting diversity within HEIs. For example, at MU, an event was held in March 2023 hosting all female university presidents to mark International Women's Day. Other examples of reporting in this area included:

- At RCSI, three student and staff forums and five staff networks were active. Implementation of the Race Equality Action Plan continued, and an online event by the VisABILITY Forum to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities was hosted. Work by the Ending Sexual Violence, Supporting Survivors and Promoting Consent forum in areas including consent, bystander intervention and reporting was also noted. The EDI unit ran a weeklong sexual health campaign at the start of the academic year and events including Pride month and International Women's Day were marked.
- At ATU, LGBTQ+ History month, Transgender Visibility Day and International Day against Homophobia were celebrated. The ATU Race Equality Network was established for staff, graduates and research students.
- At DkIT, a Traveller and Roma Culture Celebration Day was held, with highlights including the Meath Travellers Living History Exhibition in the Civic Square, a performance by Musicantia, musical sessions led by the Mulligan family using uilleann pipes and a Cant workshop and book-readings.
- At IADT, International Women's Day and International Men's Day were marked. Additionally, IADT reported on Race Equality Training, the launch of the IADT Queer Staff Network and a Menopause in the Workplace Colloquium.

A number of EDI-specific appointments were reported across the sector:

- MU recruited a data analyst to examine EDI and widening participation data to ensure that work in the area is grounded in up-to-date evidence.
- UL reported appointment of an Assistant Dean, EDI for Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.
- ATU appointed a Senior Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Manager.

2.1.6 DEVELOPMENT OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

A number of the AQRs for this reporting period indicated that work continued on the development and augmentation of the built environment during this reporting period. Although projects vary, commonalities in this area include work to increase availability of student accommodation, enhance the provision of health and support services and upgrade sports facilities.

- UCD reported that a number of campus development projects were underway, including the Centre for Future Learning, Science Phase 3, a UCD Residence Masterplan, Lyons Farm, Newman and James Joyce Library Projects. Additionally, development of a Sports and Student Amenity Precinct was reported, within which a new 400 metre, eight lane athletics track was officially opened at UCD.
- MTU reported that a new multi-purpose arena opened during the reporting period. The 3,600m² arena supports three main strands of activity: Sports/Fitness, Societies/Social and Academic/Educational. It has been designed to achieve a very low energy usage and NZEB

(Nearly Zero Energy Building) standards. Construction on a STEM building on the Kerry North campus and a Learning Resource Centre on the Bishopstown Campus continued during the reporting period.

- University of Galway reported the completion of Dunlin Village, a project on the North Campus made up of four buildings with 674 bedrooms.
- TCD reported that Printing House Square opened in the reporting period. The building hosts the Disability Service, College Health, amenities for Trinity Sport and 250 student accommodation beds.
- UCC reported that a new state-of-the-art Student Health Medical Centre and an Elite Athlete and Team High Performance Strength and Conditioning Gym were opened in July 2023.
- TU Dublin reported that construction of the Sports Building on the Tallaght Campus reached completion at the end of 2022 and the building is now in use. Additionally, construction of the Academic Hub and Library, which will provide a range of student supports including the Career Development Service and the Maths Learning Centre, progressed on the Grangegorman campus. Construction also commenced on general teaching buildings at the Blanchardstown and Tallaght campus locations.
- TUS reported that a new, state-of-the-art special purpose apprenticeship facility was opened at the East Campus in Athlone, creating an active learning space for up to 1,000 apprentices per year and almost doubling the campus capacity. A new Coonagh Engineering campus is due for completion in the subsequent reporting period and will form a new hub for apprenticeships in the midwest.

Future developments were also indicated in the AQRs for 2024:

- University of Galway reported that an Integrated Project Design Team was appointed to lead the design of a new Library and Learning Commons, which will provide a shared space for individual and collaborative study, creativity and innovation as well as an exhibition area and event space. Sustainability is a core underlying principle of the design, which ensures accessibility throughout. The design was approved toward the end of the reporting period.
- UL reported that UL Global, in conjunction with Buildings and Estates, had agreed on a design and layout proposal for the establishment of a Global Lounge, with tender documentation under preparation.
- IADT reported that a contract was signed for the construction of a new Digital Media Building, which is the largest capital project made in the institute's history. Due to open in 2025, the building is over 7,000m² and will accommodate over 900 students across various disciplines, enabling IADT to grow its student numbers. The building will contain 19 digital design studios, advanced computer laboratories and classrooms with five seminar rooms and a 600-seat capacity restaurant. Additionally, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between IADT and Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council for IADT to occupy the Carnegie Library in Dún Laoghaire town centre.

2.2 STRATEGY, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

A number of institutions approved or launched new strategic plans during the reporting period. These include DCU's new DCU Strategy 2023-2028, which was approved by DCU's Governing Authority and formally launched in August 2023, and NUI's new Strategic Plan 2023-2027,

which was launched in May 2023. Some public HEIs reported in detail on the consultation and development processes undertaken to support strategic planning. For example:

- MU reported that in-depth internal and external consultation was conducted to inform the development of its new strategic plan. This included 'deep dives' with industry, enterprise, NGOs, civic and civil society partners and organisations. MU launched its *University Strategic Plan 2023-2028*, with a five-year focus on research and impact; students and learning; internationalisation; engagement and partnerships. The plan was approved by MU's Governing Authority in June 2023.
- RCSI reported that its new strategic plan, *Innovating for a Healthier Future 2023-2027*, was developed over a 12-month period and due for launch in September of the subsequent reporting period. The strategic plan will encompass four core themes: health and societal wellbeing; education and student success; research and innovation; and foundations for sustainable impact. RCSI submitted a case study outlining the consultation and engagement process undertaken to develop the strategy. The full case study is available [here](#).
- MTU reported on the launch of *Our Shared Vision Strategic Plan 2022-2027* during the reporting period, which was developed following broad-based stakeholder engagement. The five strategic themes will be: outstanding learner education and experience to produce work-ready graduates; increased investment in MTU's staff and the communities within which it is embedded; significant growth and impact across MTU's research, innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem; leading regional development; and adopting a global outlook across all of MTU's activities. An implementation plan was developed early in the reporting period.
- UCC reported on the development and publication of the *UCC Strategic Plan 2023-2028: Securing our Future*. Consultation included two special town hall meetings and four consultation café events. The strategic plan has five goals related to: research and innovation; student success; global engagement; our staff and culture; and our place and footprint.
- SETU reported that the university launched its first strategic plan *Connecting for Impact*. It was noted that this would see the creation of a number of new management positions to deliver the university's goals, such as those pertaining to sustainability.
- TUS reported that the first *TUS Strategic Plan 2023-2026* was launched in early 2023. The strategic priorities within the plan are education; research; people and organisation; and connecting communities. The plan sets out TUS Value Statements relating to the specified themes of being inclusive, supportive, ambitious, innovative, sustainable and collaborative.

Some AQRs reported on strategic plans in development and key drivers informing the development work.

- IADT reported that the changing landscape had required an acceleration of the completion of its current strategic plan (2019-2023) to create favourable conditions to fully explore future strategic opportunities and develop a new strategy. Management consultants have been contracted to support the planning process for the development of the subsequent strategic plan, which it is noted may propel the institute toward the establishment of IADT as a University for the Creative Industries.
- ATU reported that following an extensive period of consultation within the institution and among external stakeholders, vision and mission statements had been drafted for the new university. The university is nearing completion of its first strategic plan, developed using a

methodology known as 17 Rooms and involving extensive consultation on all campuses with staff and students. Five themes, known as Guiding Lights (see Fig. 2), form the backbone of the plan. The full plan is expected to be published in the subsequent reporting period.



Figure 2 - Five Guiding Lights in the Draft ATU Strategic Plan

A number of public HEIs reported on the development, approval or implementation of area-specific strategies, plans and initiatives. Reporting in this area often provides further insight into how specific priority areas are developing in public HEIs. Indicative examples include:

- UCD reported that the university's Human Resources Strategy 2022-2024 – The Revolution of Work – was supported by the publication of HR policies and processes.
- TUS reported on the development and approval by Academic Council of a TUS Transitions and Student Success Strategy, based on identifying causes of attrition and providing mitigation through a combination of institutional and localised interventions.
- UL reported officially signing a Healthy Campus Charter with the Higher Education Authority during the reporting period, as well as the development of a University Research Strategy. UL additionally reported that it had completed the development of a University Teaching, Learning and Assessment strategy that aligned with the university strategy, approved by both the Executive Committee and Governing Authority. Implementation will be monitored by UL's Academic Council.
- RCSI submitted a case study outlining the development of the new RCSI Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, commenced in March 2023. Following a consultative process, the strategy was completed and due for launch by Academic Council at the commencement of the subsequent reporting period. The full case study outlining the development process and expected benefits is available [here](#).
- TU Dublin reported on work to engage with staff across the university to support their

implementation of the University Education Model, a central component of the TU Dublin Strategic Intent. The engagement process included bespoke multimodal workshops, support for Faculty Executives and work to embed the learner voice.

- SETU reported that a new Strategic Plan for Global Partnerships and Internationalisation was commissioned, which will be completed in 2024.

2.2.1 GOVERNANCE AND INTEGRATION ACTIVITY IN THE TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY SECTOR

Some of Ireland's newer technological universities reported on developments in governance relevant to ongoing integration activity. Examples of this included:

- SETU reported that in the previous reporting period its Governing Body had ratified an interim Academic Council to meet the legislative requirement to have an Academic Council in place from Establishment Day. This ratification is pending the establishment of a permanent Council to meet long-term needs.
- MTU reported that the Institute of Public Administration undertook an external effectiveness review of the MTU Governing Body in 2023. A draft implementation plan in relation to the recommendations contained in the report will be implemented in the subsequent reporting period. Recruitment was underway for the Executive, projected to be completed in the subsequent reporting period.
- MTU additionally reported on the approval of membership regulations for a new Academic Council, to replace the current transitional Academic Council, the membership of which was agreed following the university's establishment. MTU outlined work to appoint ex-officio members and facilitate elections for elected constituencies. Following this, the newly constituted Academic Council will be established in the subsequent reporting period. Initial discussions took place on the establishment of Interim Academic Domain Boards of Study. MTU also reported that following the conclusion of the first two-year term of office for the Governing Body, a newly constituted Governing Body commenced in July 2023.

Further progress was also reported by the technological universities in relation to the development of operating models and organisational design activity. This reflected ongoing progress in the substantial programme of work entailed in merging the predecessor institutes.

- TU Dublin reported on the establishment of five academic faculties and associated schools and faculty boards following the completion of its organisational design.
- MTU reported that a high-level design of the Academic Operating Model was completed in the reporting period, following facilitation of a highly consultative process and supported by a working group of diverse cross-institutional membership. Five academic domains were decided upon, and existing academic departments aligned to these. Faculties will span multiple campuses and faculty leadership roles will be cross-organisational. The implementation of the model will be a multi-year project, completed by faculties on a phased basis.
- MTU additionally reported that a high-level design of the Professional Services Operating Model was completed, and implementation work was underway. MTU notes that the intersection of the Academic Operating Model and the Professional Services Operating Model will be key to establishing effective support for academic structures. Notably, two

management-level posts for Change Management Integration Facilitators (academic and administrative) have been allocated to the work.

- SETU reported that it commissioned an external review of its organisational structures, to which all SETU staff were invited to contribute suggestions. The implementation of the university's management structure is planned for the subsequent reporting period.
- ATU reported on the joint application for incorporation of St Angela's submitted to the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in November 2022. Following an advisory panel site visit, the signing of the legal agreement and the progression of the order by DFHERIS, the Statutory Order was signed in July 2023, with the appointed day for incorporation of St Angela's to take place in November 2023.

Detailed reporting on continued integration activity reflects that work is ongoing to progress the establishment of common frameworks and policies across the technological university sector. Examples of reporting include:

- SETU reported that the ongoing merger of its two predecessor institutes (Waterford Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Carlow) had dominated quality implementation and development during the reporting period. The university's Student Charter was launched and stated to serve as a formal testament to the shared values and guiding principles embraced by both the university and its student body. Areas noted to require further work on convergence include external examining; Marks & Standards; assuring the quality of teaching and learning; student membership of programme boards; merging and reporting on the student feedback process; reporting on the impact of Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement (SATLE) funding; and the expansion of staff training. In this reporting period, the Academic Council approved the terms of reference and membership for a working group to create a new academic delivery framework. This will be reported on further in the subsequent AQR.
- MTU reported that development of integrated policies and procedures continued across a breadth of areas, including Marks and Standards, external examiners, assessment and student affairs. Implementation of new operating models and the new executive structure will also continue. A substantial number of common MTU policies and procedures were finalised and approved by the Academic Council during the reporting period and are listed in the AQR. These span student policies and academic taught provision as well as research, innovation and postgraduate study. Other legacy procedures were approved for adoption as interim procedures pending finalisation of common MTU policy.
- ATU reported that following its establishment as a university a Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team had been established under the Vice President for Quality Assurance & Registrar. Policies developed by the team and approved during the reporting period include those relevant to the framework for the development of academic quality assurance and the development and validation of new programmes. A number of additional policies were listed as approved and coming into effect at the outset of the subsequent reporting period, including the Academic Integrity Policy, Micro-credentials Policy, and Institutional Review Policy. Policies of the predecessor institutes (Galway Mayo Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Sligo and Letterkenny Institute of Technology) apply until superseded by a policy approved by the Academic Council.

2.2.2 INSTITUTES OF TECHNOLOGY

Ireland's two remaining institutes of technology both reported on developments in governance and work focused on facilitating provision of NFQ Level 10 awards (doctoral degrees). Examples include:

- IADT reported that a review of the effectiveness of the Academic Council and its sub-committees was undertaken as part of the CINNTE review process. Key findings reported indicated that the Academic Council and sub-committees were operating effectively and consistently with their terms of reference. A survey of members indicated overall satisfaction, with areas for potential improvement including increasing awareness of the roles and responsibilities of the Academic Council and confidence to contribute at meetings. IADT additionally submitted a case study outlining how the administration of its Academic Council and sub-committee meetings was enhanced during the reporting period. The full case study is available [here](#).
- DkIT reported that the Academic Development and Planning sub-committee of the Academic Council was dissolved as the function of making decisions regarding Stage 1 programme proposals reverted to the Executive Board during the reporting period.
- IADT reported that work commenced with MU to explore research and PhD pathway opportunities for both staff and students. This work will continue in the subsequent reporting period.
- DkIT reported that work was ongoing to review and update its current Quality Manual and QA processes to ensure they are sufficiently robust for a Designated Awarding Body. Information sessions were provided for various stakeholders on the implications of DAB status. DkIT indicated that planned work to engage with QQI or an existing Technological University pertaining to capacity to make NFQ Level 10 awards was not actioned as other strategic options are under exploration.

2.2.3 QUALITY ASSURANCE SUPPORTING STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The AQRs for 2024 indicated that the introduction of new QA (and revision of existing) policies and procedures was ongoing across the sector. Specific examples of enhancements and impacts, often pertaining to inclusion and digitalisation, are highlighted throughout relevant sections of this chapter.

Notably, a number of initiatives to promote the shared ownership of QA across institutions and improve access to policies, procedures and associated QA documentation were also reported. For example:

- TCD reported that development work has been progressed on a new centralised policy website following on from the approval of a new policy management framework in the previous reporting period. As an interim step, the current institutional policies site was reorganised to facilitate access to all policies via a single webpage.
- RCSI submitted a case study outlining the establishment of a Quality Forum in response to an internal quality review of the Quality Enhancement Office. The Quality Forum was held as part of RCSI's annual International Education Forum (IEF). The full case study outlining the preparation for and outcomes of the event is available [here](#).

- NUI revised the core quality assurance document pertaining to its recognised colleges in 2022- 23. The new Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework was approved by the NUI Senate in January 2023. Additionally, NUI revised and published a document relating to institutional review of linked providers.
- ATU reported on the three-stage process agreed for development of academic policies under a unified Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework, which entails substantive consultation via the circulation of drafts and webinars. A staff portal has been developed as a repository for all ATU policies and procedures, with ongoing enhancement work to improve accessibility and user experience.
- TU Dublin reported that a search engine has been designed to provide staff and students with access to policies, procedures, forms and terms of reference within its Quality Framework. Each document has an approval status and implementation status which is updated accordingly.
- SETU reported that the Academic Council commissioned a new Quality Framework, which was published in the reporting period. The new Quality Framework links the university strategy to its quality policy and procedures, providing an overview and guiding principles for areas of operation including (but not limited to) the governance framework; teaching, learning and research; on-going monitoring and review; the learner voice; and the design, development and validation of new programmes.
- TUS reported on facilitating consultation for the development of a complete Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook for TUS. Consultation was facilitated through working groups established for particular policy areas, including collaborative provision, research ethics, programme development and validation, blended and online learning and fitness to study/practise.

2.3 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM ENHANCEMENT AND IMPACTS

Public HEIs reported on a breadth of enhancement work undertaken during the reporting period, often providing a clear view of the quantifiable outputs and intended impacts of those activities. Some of this work, such as activities responding to the release of generative AI in the form of ChatGPT in November 2022, was in part reactive. Other activities reflect the ongoing implementation of priority programmes or multi-annual projects of a more strategic nature that are contributing to the longer-term ambitions, sustainability and resilience of the institutions.

2.3.1 GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

A number of the 2024 AQRs provide evidence that institutions are actively harnessing the opportunities generative AI presents.

Two public HEIs reported on the use of AI Chatbots to augment capacity and responsiveness in student services.

- UCD submitted a case study outlining the use of its Rua Chatbot by Registry, which had bolstered capacity to provide support for students beyond the conventional hours of operation of the Student Desk. A total of 6,648 conversations were facilitated by the Chatbot. The full case study is available [here](#).

Which hours do students message the bot?

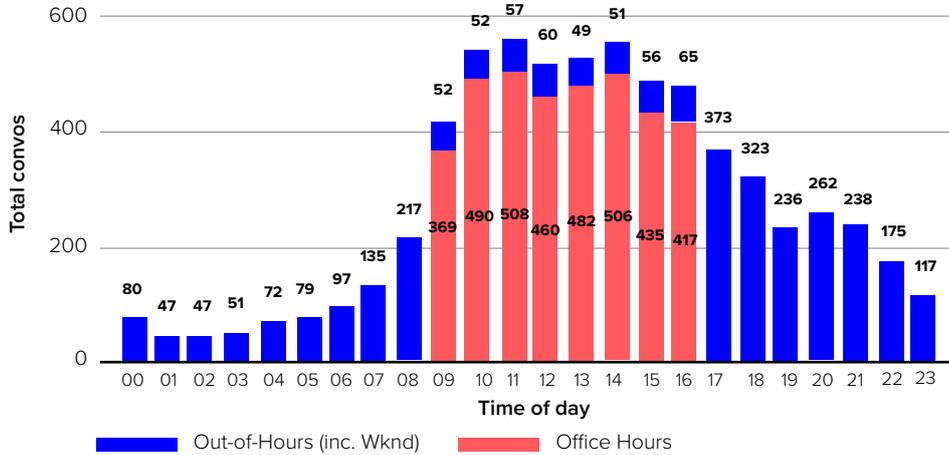


Figure 3 - Rua the UCD Registry Chatbot - Sample of Hours Students Message the RUA Chatbot

- University of Galway also submitted a case study on the use of analytics from its Cara Chatbot, which responded to over 15,000 questions on everyday student life during the reporting period. The full case study is available [here](#).

Additional AQR reports outline how AI tools are being used to augment student facing services. For example, UCC reported that the Graduate Attributes Programme, which had supported the rollout of an AI CV review tool in the previous reporting period, supported the acquisition of AI Interview preparation software in October 2022. UCC reported that 3,104 students had utilised the CV review tool and 3,736 students had utilised the interview preparation software since its acquisition.

Public HEIs also reported on the initiation of projects that will facilitate ongoing learning and explore additional potential applications of generative AI in higher education.

- DCU reported on an open call for enhancement-focused proposals from across the university community, with the theme of ‘Transitioning AI from a Threat to a Tool: Empowering and Supporting a 21st Century University’. A total of 19 applications were made with 11 projects being approved for funding.
- DkIT reported on webinars and face-to-face sessions focused on how AI can be embraced to support assessment and enhance idea generation/stimulate innovation in different fields.
- UCC reported that SATLE funding was awarded to the (AI)² - Artificial Intelligence and Academic Integrity project, which takes a students-as-partners approach and pairs students and staff across four colleges to experiment with ChatGPT and assessment in particular disciplinary contexts. The project aims to develop guidance in the form of a toolkit focused on the ethical use of generative AI in learning and teaching.

Additional relevant case studies on the use of generative AI in teaching and assessment and the use of machine learning to enhance information management/data analysis are included in Sections 2.3.3.1 and 2.3.8.4.1 of this chapter.

2.3.2 ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

As per previous reporting periods, all public sector HEIs reported ongoing engagement, collaboration and sharing of resources across the sector via the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN). This suggests NAIN continues to serve as an important forum for sectoral engagement in this arena.

The release of ChatGPT in November 2022 brought the potential negative impacts of generative AI on academic integrity to the fore across higher education nationally and internationally. The 2024 AQRs indicate that the response from Ireland's public HEIs has been multifaceted, spanning the provision of interim guidance and policy updates, increased resourcing, awareness raising and exploration of technical solutions.

A number of public HEIs reported on the establishment of working groups and designated roles, for example:

- UCD reported on the establishment of a Working Group on Academic Integrity and Ethical Practice in 2022 tasked with identifying a number of areas to be addressed, including plagiarism, the impact of AI, inclusive of ChatGPT 4, Bard and other tools.
- RCSI reported that during the reporting period the Head of the Quality Enhancement Office and the Convenor of the Academic Integrity Working Group provided updates to governance committees including the RCSI Council and Academic Council on the development of generative AI and the potential impact on academic integrity.
- MTU's Academic Council approved the establishment of an Academic Integrity Working Group with membership drawn from a wide range of stakeholders. The working group is chaired by a member of the Regulations, Quality Assurance & Enhancement Integration & Development Committee, which it sits under.
- UCC reported that the SATLE-funded Research Support Officer for a 2020 academic integrity project transitioned to the new SATLE-funded role of Academic Integrity Education Officer, based in the UCC Skills Centre. A counterpart role, Academic Integrity Assessment Officer, will be based in the Student Records and Exams office and commence in the subsequent reporting period.
- TU Dublin reported the appointment of an Academic Integrity Manager and established an Academic Integrity Policy Group. The group will review and approve related policies, guidelines and frameworks prior to adoption and monitor compliance with established processes.
- University of Galway reported that an Academic Integrity Officer was appointed during this reporting period, commencing investigatory work on breaches, support staff training and awareness raising of policy and issues in this area. Agreement was reached to appoint an Academic Integrity Support Officer.

A number of AQRs submitted by public HEIs reported on resources that were quickly made available to both staff and students:

- UCD reported that UCD Teaching and Learning developed a Quick Guide on Generative Artificial Intelligence in Learning and Assessment.
- DkIT reported on guidance provided for both staff and students. A progressive approach

was taken in which lecturers could adopt one of three generative AI usage options (unrestricted, restricted or prohibited) as appropriate. Ten student interns were recruited to contribute to a SATLE-funded Assessment for All project and created a range of guides and resources by students, for students.

- MU reported the development of staff and student-facing resources on academic integrity and AI, made available via the university's Assessment and Feedback Hub.
- UCC reported on activities to support awareness raising during national academic integrity week and social media campaigns to raise student awareness of the risks of contract cheating.
- IADT reported on a Generative AI and Academic Integrity Forum, which informed the subsequent provision of Guidelines for Academic Staff Teams for Generative AI and Assessment.
- DCU reported that its Teaching Enhancement Unit worked with partner universities on the INTEGRITY project. As part of the collaboration, a resource toolkit was developed for academics including a literature review publication, set of 12 principles, interactive glossary, checklists, animated scenarios and collection of case studies.
- ATU reported that a staff resource kit providing information on generative AI and higher education was developed. The Teaching and Learning Centre additionally developed an Academic Integrity Hub available to all academic staff. N-TUTORR sponsored an Academic Integrity Digital Badge for students, introducing them to the concept and providing guidance on how to demonstrate academic integrity in their work.
- DCU reported that following the release of generative AI, the university acted quickly to provide guidance to academics in relation to assessment and offered workshops to support implementation of that guidance.

A recognition of the need to embed consideration of generative AI within relevant frameworks and policies was also evident across the AQRs. Given the rapidly emerging nature of knowledge about generative AI tools across higher education and the further experimentation needed, for example, to understand whether technological detection capabilities would be viable, much of this activity was framed as interim guidance or planned for subsequent reporting periods within public HEIs.

- UL reported on plans to develop an academic integrity unit focused in the short to mid-term on revision of current policy and procedures and provision of guidance to staff and students. These will be developed to address challenges arising from generative large language models of AI and will better reflect recently published NAIN guidance.
- UCD reported that consultation with school teaching and learning committees was undertaken and a further consultation with students about academic integrity and ethical practice was planned for the subsequent reporting period. The objective of the consultation was to develop a solid policy approach over the longer term.
- MTU reported that an MTU-wide Academic Integrity Policy informed by the outputs of NAIN was approved by the Academic Council during the reporting period, with publication deferred until corresponding implementation procedures were finalised and approved.
- UCC reported plans for the subsequent reporting period to put in place a coherent framework of strong policies, standard processes and clear communication to ensure that

approaches to the identification, penalisation and recording of academic misconduct are consistent.

- SETU's Academic Development, Learning and Teaching (ADLT) Committee of Academic Council established a generative AI working group to inform the Academic Council on developments and advise on a suitable university-wide response. The Academic Council issued Guidelines on the use of Generative AI in the reporting period as a live document due to the fast pace of development, with a view to issuing further guidelines in the subsequent reporting period. AI-specific workshops were facilitated in addition to the continued availability of third-party online modules for academic integrity training.
- MU reported updates to the plagiarism policy to encompass other breaches of academic integrity.
- TCD reported that the university's Framework for Academic Misconduct Investigation and Case Management, based on the NAIN framework, was approved in June 2023. Following approval of a new Statement of Principles on Integrity in the previous reporting period, new regulations on academic integrity were published in the college calendar for undergraduate and graduate studies/higher degrees respectively. A flow chart to visually represent the new procedure and an interactive rubric for staff was also produced.

Several public HEIs reported ongoing work to utilise and test the viability of technical solutions in detecting the use of AI tools. For example, both MU and UL reported that AI writing indicators and detectors had been introduced to the academic integrity software in use. UCD reported that a review of its originality checking software was underway; UCC reported that a technical assessment of its software for browser lockdown was undertaken to determine the viability of its use for in-person invigilated digital exams; and DkIT reported that guidance was provided to staff on AI detection in its similarity checking software.

Some HEIs indicated that awareness raising and training activities were facilitated for both staff and students during the reporting period. For example:

- MU reported facilitation of a staff forum on 'Exploring ChatGPT – challenges and opportunities' focused on learning, discussion and enabling staff contributions to how the university will address the challenges and embrace the opportunities presented by the technology. Additionally, three teaching and learning fellowships have been awarded on AI in teaching, learning and assessment.
- TCD's Centre for Academic Practice provided a series of faculty-based assessment integrity clinics to raise awareness of the challenges and opportunities posed by tools such as ChatGPT, showcase potential modifications to assessment practices used in cognate disciplines and provide a forum for concerns and challenges.
- UCC reported on a range of opportunities provided for both staff and student audiences. This included academic integrity awareness training for its skills centre tutors and class representatives, an academic integrity workshop for students made available by request to specific cohorts, an academic integrity symposium and a workshop on academic integrity and assessment design. A digital badge in Fostering Academic Integrity in Learning and Teaching was made available, with 84 participants and 17 badges awarded during the reporting period.
- TUS reported that a variety of workshops were hosted for staff and students during academic integrity week. The Students' Union included a session in their class

representative training day providing an overview of academic integrity in TUS for students. Other academic integrity awareness raising activities, including a table quiz and a quiz shared by social media and email, were also conducted.

- DkIT reported that it opted to include an academic integrity question module in StudentSurvey.ie during the reporting period. Analysis of the results indicated that some additional support is needed for students around academic integrity. An annual action plan is being finalised by the institute’s Student.Survey.ie working group that will focus on assessment and support for academic integrity.

2.3.3 TEACHING AND LEARNING

Relative to the submissions for the two previous reporting periods, teaching and learning was a somewhat less prominent theme in the 2024 AQRs. As the reporting in Part B of the AQRs is focused primarily on updates or new initiatives, this may reflect a degree of stabilisation in the online, blended and inclusive practices that have featured prominently in previous years.

2.3.3.1 Development of the Virtual Learning Environment

A number of institutions reported on work to enhance existing Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) or transition to new platforms. For example:

- UCC submitted a case study reporting on a universal design-focused project to assess and remediate course content on the VLE for accessibility that was completed over the summer period by a team of 18 Inclusive UCC interns. Ninety modules were reviewed and updated with an average 27% improvement in accessibility overall, impacting 4,600 students. The full case study is available [here](#).

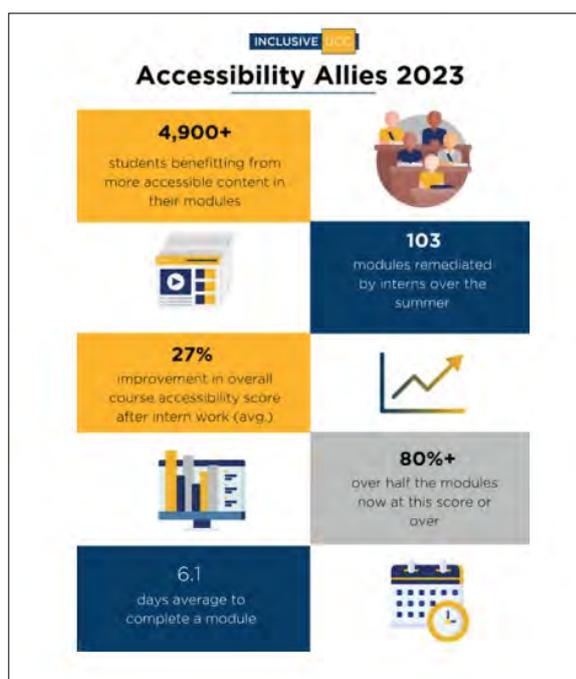


Figure 4 - Infographic for Empowering Learners with Universal Design at UCC

- UL reported adoption of a new VLE, which replaced two existing platforms and will support ambitions for UL to grow and improve national and international offerings with greater functionality and collaboration across courses and modules. The VLE project is outlined in full in a case study available [here](#).
- University of Galway reported on the transition to a new VLE, involving the conversion of all existing content and integration of the new VLE with student records, curriculum management and other IT systems. Staff and students were provided with training and support and the Learning Technologies team developed a programme of workshops, video walk-throughs and office hours support throughout the transition.
- RCSI reported the launch of the hybrid/remote pilot programme for the Physician Associate Studies programme, consistent with many educational approaches to “train students where they live”. RCSI reports that the popularity of the programme has grown; for the subsequent academic year, 16 of the 30 students were enrolled in the hybrid option.
- RCSI additionally reported on new systems introduced to support the provision of real time assessment information and multi-format platform delivery as well as the rollout of an examination system through which all undergraduate exams (both in person and online) are run. A case study submitted by RCSI outlines the introduction of closed captions for lecture recordings, which enabled 9,000 minutes of recordings to be captioned. The full case study is available [here](#).
- TCD reported on the initiation of a VLE review. A steering committee and associated sub-committees were established to consider any changes or addition of functionality that will benefit the university from a pedagogic and learner perspective. A review of the VLE policy will be conducted as part of the wider project.
- ATU reported on the adoption of Azure Virtual Labs, replacing other remote access and virtual solutions and providing a dynamic, scalable environment for accessing pre-configured virtual machines for lab scenarios.
- TU Dublin submitted a case study outlining the establishment of a Digital Education Policy Working Group, inclusive of academic staff and managers, student representatives, professional services staff from Teaching and Learning, Technology Services, Library Services, Disability Services and the Quality Framework Team. The group were tasked with writing an enabling policy that would support staff and students as they engage with digital education and offer modules via flexible delivery modes. The full case study is available [here](#).

Ongoing work to facilitate inclusive, hybrid and technology-enabled teaching and learning in physical classrooms and library spaces was also reported by public HEIs.

- University of Galway reported that following a successful application to the HEA for capital projects funding, 80 teaching venues were upgraded with new lecterns, PCs, displays and ancillary equipment.
- RCSI reported that the first virtual classroom was installed in Sandyford, Dublin. The immersive virtual environment emulates a traditional classroom, allowing eye movements, verbal and non-verbal cues to be visible and responded to.
- UL reported that its library makerspace opened during the reporting period, enabling students, faculty and staff to experiment with emerging technologies including 3D printers, 3D scanners, Arduino and PCs enabled with various software applications.
- TCD reported that its Inclusive Library page went live, highlighting the location of sensory

spaces with photographs and QR codes on the library's 3D floor maps. In partnership with the Disability Service, the discipline of occupational therapy and the Students' Union, the library continued a refurbishment project to expand and develop environments to ensure students and staff with different sensory preferences can flourish.

- TUS reported that using a proof-of-concept approach, the Centre for Pedagogical Innovative Development engaged collaboratively in the redesign and upgrade of computer laboratories to enhance the student and staff learning and teaching experience. The process has become a template for further enhancements and informed further developments funded under N-TUTORR.
- UCD submitted a case study outlining the enhancements made to the student experience through refurbishment of the James Joyce Library Level 3. These include additional study spaces, including silent zones and group work areas as well as online meeting rooms and spaces tailored to students with sensory needs. The full case study is available [here](#).

TCD submitted a case study on the focused use of ChatGPT in a learning and assessment activity within a biopharmaceutics workshop. A truncated version of the case study is presented below. The full case study is available [here](#).

Case Study

Introducing use of ChatGPT for pharmacy students - Teaching and assessment perspectives.

Theme: Development and Use of Learner Assessment/ Introduction of a Generative artificial intelligence (AI) to Pharmacy Curriculum

Introduction

Since the launch of ChatGPT from OpenAI (<https://openai.com/>) in November 2022 there has been understandable concern from the academic community about the use and abuse of such GAI tools by students, in particular in assessment integrity. However, there is also great interest in exploiting the potential of GAI tools in healthcare and education (Sallam, M., 2023, <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11060887>), with suggestions for its use in higher education including stimulating critical thinking (Riley, S., and Cramblet Alvarez, L., 2023 <https://otl.du.edu/chatgpt-friendor-foe-in-the-classroom/>). The current case study describes a biopharmaceutics workshop introduced to the pharmacy curriculum, which focused on use of ChatGPT as a GAI tool, requiring critical reflection analysis of outputs and consideration of prompt engineering to optimize its use.

The Exercise

A new biopharmaceutics workshop was introduced which considered specific technical methods investigating drug release, especially supporting efficient development of generic medicinal products. Part 2 of the workshop focused on use of ChatGPT in providing information on regulatory requirements for some specific technical criteria for gaining a “biowaiver”, or waiver of clinical studies for a medicinal product, depending on demonstration of certain biopharmaceutical properties. At the time of the workshop there was some media focus on academic integrity and use of GAI tools such as ChatGPT, with university policies on their use still in their infancy. Therefore, in order to ensure that students would not be concerned about being registered users with OpenAI, they were not at any point required to directly engage with the platform. To overcome this challenge, students were provided with three ChatGPT input queries (prompts) generated by the academic and the ChatGPT (v 3.5) outputs to each prompt. The regulatory guidance documents with the correct information were also provided to the students. It was emphasized to students in the workshop guidance that pharmacists in all professional roles are responsible for interpreting, generating and providing information, and therefore the importance of being familiar with these GAI tools to ensure their safe use.

Assessment

The relevant assessment was in two sections: In section 1, students were provided with two critical reflection statements, requiring selection of the statement which best reflected each ChatGPT output. Whereas each of the ChatGPT outputs provided was well-structured with some correct information, each contained either some erroneous information or information that was too vague to address the information

requirements. Due to these clear shortcomings, for this particular example, the attribution of the “correct” critical reflection statement was unambiguous once the source regulatory material was consulted.

Feedback

An optional, anonymous feedback survey on workshop quality was conducted after the workshop. Of 27 (ex 66) responses received, 24 ‘agreed/strongly agreed’ with the statement “The ChatGPT exercise was helpful in prompting me to critically reflect on using an artificial intelligence/natural language processing tool in practice”. In terms of workshop design going forward, 24 respondents also considered that it would be ‘somewhat/very beneficial’ to include an opportunity in the workshop to input their prompt to ChatGPT and reflect on their generated output. Comments concerning the ChatGPT element of the workshop included positive feedback on providing an opportunity to learn about these tools rather than being advised against their use.

Conclusion

Overall, the workshop was a very positive experience, enabling an applied introduction to use of the GAI tool ChatGPT. This assignment was given to a relatively large class size, was of a low-stakes nature and at a very busy time of year for these year 4 students (and academics). It was therefore essential that the assessment method employed would be suitably concise, while being of an appropriate (QQI level 8) standard. The provision of critical reflection statements could be the subject of debate, however, given the novel nature of the exercise it was considered a valuable teaching and learning aid to scaffold such critical thinking. The use of prompt design as an assessment approach was a particularly efficient method of assessing knowledge application and reasoning. Going forward, given the rapidly evolving field of use of GAI in education, theoretical concepts in the nascent field of prompt engineering will be included (e.g. Lo, L.S., 2023 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2023.102720>).

Figure 5 - Case Study from TCD on Development and Use of Learner Assessment/ Introduction of a Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) to Pharmacy Curriculum

2.3.3.2 Work-integrated Learning and Employability

An emphasis on work-integrated, industry-aligned learning and employability skills continued to be a focus in this reporting period. This was visible in a number of reports in updates on the current and planned embedding of placement within programmes. Examples include:

- DkIT reported that in 2022/2023 the Placement Office carried out a survey to obtain feedback from both host sites and students regarding their work placement experience. Ninety-four percent of host site respondents said that DkIT placement students added value to their service, citing motivated and enthusiastic undergraduates who are willing and eager to learn and that students are an extra resource to start/complete specialised projects as the main added value.
- DCU reported on its future ambition to reposition placement as a core value proposition for DCU students, staff and programmes and the current emphasis on transversal skills within each of the ten DCU Futures programmes.
- TUS reported that it has set a target within its strategic plan of 100% of programmes having a work placement component. Additionally, an external consultancy was engaged to conduct a review of the Careers and Employability services. The report commended the service provision and identified opportunities for development. Establishment of a TUS-wide Careers and Employability service was recommended and is considered critical to achieve the work placement goal for undergraduate provision.
- TU Dublin submitted a case study focused on the Learn+Work NQF Level 6 higher certificate programme in networking technologies, which follows a structure alternating between 5-month academic study blocks and 7 month placements of 4 days per week. The full case study is available [here](#).

An important area of QA supporting placement pertains to fitness to practise. Some public HEIs reported on updates to policy and procedure in this area. Examples of reporting include:

- ATU reported that a Student Fitness to Practise Policy had been developed in recognition of the university's duty of care to the public, as well as to support students in fulfilling programme requirements and helping to prepare them for future professional practice. Many programmes at ATU leading to professional qualifications and/or licensure require students to engage in work placement or practical training, which may involve working in professional settings with patients, clients, children, and other service users.
- TU Dublin reported on revisions to its Fitness to Practise Policy during the reporting period, which enables the university to assess learners' ability, conduct and health in the context of clinical, educational or vocational placements to ensure the learner can adhere to specific standards of conduct and competence. During the reporting period, 40 members of the university drawn from academic and professional services received a two-day training programme on fitness to practise. The 40 trained members comprise the panel that boards of three members can be drawn from to support Fitness to Practise hearings. A further 12 investigators were trained over a two-day period in methods to gather evidence, interview witnesses and document findings for Fitness to Practise Boards.

In the previous reporting period, a number of AQRs included a focus on inclusive practice surrounding work placements for learners with disabilities or specific learning differences. In its 2024 AQR submission, SETU submitted a case study on shaping education for success

and inclusion, encompassing the pilot WorkAbility Programme to support autistic students undertaking placements or graduate roles and a collaboration with Specialisterne Ireland to assist neurodivergent individuals with interview skills. The full case study is available for review [here](#).

In addition to the focus on placement, the AQRs also reflected that alternative and innovative forms of work-integrated learning and industry-aligned practice, including simulation and authentic assessment strategies, are being implemented in public HEIs. Examples of reporting include:

- RCSI submitted a case study outlining the development a Digital Educational Escape Room, which used an online design-thinking process to develop, test and iterate prototypes. The resulting escape room simulation is intended to facilitate medical students' learning around uncertainty management. The full case study is available for review [here](#).
- RCSI additionally reported that a PhD scholarship programme was initiated to strategically incorporate simulation as part of the School of Physiotherapy's practice education programme. The school continues to actively involve patients and the public in teaching and learning activities with new contributors including people living with long-term conditions and disability.
- TU Dublin additionally submitted two case studies outlining approaches to work-integrated learning. These included:
 - A case study focused on the management of assessment feedback for students on placement for an entire academic year in the Bachelor of Science in Ophthalmic Dispensing, which also serves to ensure university mentor knowledge is kept up to date. The full case study is available for review [here](#).
 - A case study focused on the authentic assessment strategy used for a five-month supervised practice placement undertaken by final year students on the Bachelor of Science (Hons) Optometry programme, which entails students being assessed by a university tutor carrying out an eye examination during a visit to the placement site, and management of associated challenges. The full case study is available for review [here](#).

The importance of industry-aligned curricula for learners was reinforced in reporting by TU Dublin. Key themes arising from a survey of 3,943 TU Dublin students undertaken during the reporting period included the high value students attached to programmes that were industry relevant, that work placement is valued by students and that students requested more industry/community engagement, site visits and 'real-world' practical tasks in their programmes.

Notably, co-curricular teaching and learning focused on developing employability and work to promote the development of transversal graduate attributes was also visible.

- UCC reported on its Graduate Attributes and Values Compass, launched in September 2022. This flagship initiative offers a self-assessment tool against UCC's core graduate attributes, with graduates intended to be: creators, evaluators and communicators of knowledge; independent and creative thinkers; digitally fluent; socially responsible; and effective global citizens who recognise and challenge inequality. The Compass provides learning experiences curated by a team of 20 professional services and academic staff. Fifteen hundred students were reported to have taken the self-assessment and engaged with 5,351 learning experiences.

- DkIT reported that the DkIT Graduate Attributes and Employability statement was incorporated into the Programmatic Review Handbook and Design and Approval of Programmes Policy. DkIT additionally reported on the Elevate Awards, which are given to students who through their engagement with DkIT life (a minimum of 45 hours) have contributed significantly to the DkIT community and who have evidenced a range of impressive employability skills through their engagement. There were 13 awardees for 2022/2023.

2.3.3.3 Development and Enhancement of Teaching and Learning

A range of activities to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment remains strategically aligned and is continually enhanced through continuing professional development were also reported. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) continued to be a strong theme across work in this area.

- University of Galway and MTU reported on the roll-out of the Universal Design for Learning Digital Badge, a 10-week 25-hour course which introduces participants to the UDL framework and provides them with an opportunity to implement a UDL approach within teaching activities.
- ATU reported that a new university-wide UDL Centre of Excellence had been established and a UDL lecturer with responsibility for managing and reporting the centre's activities had been appointed. During the reporting period a Level 9 Postgraduate Certificate and Master's Degree in UDL were developed and validated. ATU submitted a case study outlining inclusive practice in assessment on the Postgraduate Certificate (available [here](#)). Additionally, digital resources were developed and three inclusive programme audits were undertaken. A diversity of accredited and non-accredited continuing professional development initiatives were delivered by the Teaching and Learning Centre, including activities focused on UDL, assessment and ChatGPT.
- TUS submitted a case study on embedding the principles of UDL for learning, teaching and assessment across the university. The case study outlines activities including the creation of a comprehensive set of resources, provision of professional development workshops and facilitation of the Digital Badge. The full case study is available [here](#).
- TCD reported on participation in formal accredited professional development opportunities offered by the Centre for Academic Practice. During the reporting period 138 staff engaged in modules leading toward the Special Purpose Certificate in Academic Practice.
- TUS reported that 754 participants engaged in a range of professional development opportunities including workshops, seminars, themed events and an international symposium. A total of 84 participants completed Special Purpose Awards at Level 9 and 8 were awarded a Postgraduate Diploma in Learning, Teaching and Assessment. During the reporting period, TUS validated an MA in Academic Practice.

2.3.3.4 Recognition of Achievements in Teaching and Learning

The 2024 AQRs also provided updates reflecting that recognition and sharing of good practice and celebrations of achievement in the domain of teaching and learning continued during the reporting period. Examples included:

- UCD reported that teaching and learning awards for the previous reporting period concluded in Spring 2023 with the announcement of awardees. A total of 3,040 nominations were submitted by students, faculty and staff. There were 87 awardees at college level, and, following a competitive process, 12 at university level.
- UL reported on the inaugural conference on Transforming Higher Education organised by Graduate and Professional Studies. The focus of the conference was to “showcase excellence in professional and workplace-based education” (p.60).
- IADT reported on hosting an annual celebration of Teaching and Research: ‘IADT 2023: A Celebration of Inspirational Teaching, Pioneering Research and Creative Innovation’.

Notably, some institutions reported on engagement with the AdvanceHE Fellowship scheme. Examples include:

- MTU reported on progress toward the development of an MTU Advance HE Fellowship Programme, with two staff members appointed as leads and 52 staff enrolling on a pilot support programme following a call for expressions of interest.
- ATU reported on the establishment of the ENGAGE fellowship scheme, which saw 25 staff members achieve AdvanceHE fellow status at various levels during the reporting period.

2.3.4 ASSESSMENT

In addition to assessment-related activity undertaken in direct response to the release of generative AI and discussed in this chapter under Academic Integrity (see Section 2.3.2), a number of institutions reported on broader development of policies and resources to support inclusive assessment practices and the enhancement of feedback to learners (assessment as and for learning). Examples included:

- University of Galway reported initiation or revision of policies pertaining to assessment, including Alternative Assessment and Extenuating Circumstances.
- UCD reported on the publication of a new resource focused on approaches to technology-enhanced feedback. The strategies highlighted reflect changes in the UCD Academic Regulations and associated changes in module descriptors as well as functionality available in the VLE.
- RCSI reported on the rollout by the School of Medicine of Year 1 of the new medical curriculum, incorporating a new programme of assessment, including progress testing and a grade point average (GPA); a new learning community structure; and a revised personal tutor programme. This is intended to leverage assessment as and for learning, and to incorporate student personalised feedback across all years as a core principle.
- TU Dublin reported on a Compendium of Assessment Methods written by students and including a rich variety of alternative assessment methods. The compendium is designed to accompany the new TU Dublin Assessment Handbook and to provide the student voice within the assessment design process. It includes Universal Design for Learning, EDI and Employability ratings and the implications of this in assessment design.
- TUS reported on publication of a Compendium of Active Learning and Assessment involving contributions from 43 staff across the TUS community. The compendium reflects a commitment to authentic assessment design.

- MTU reported on the allocation of Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement funding. Funding is allocated to Learning Enhancement Projects; the development of Open Educational Resources; and a year-long project led by the Teaching and Learning unit that engages 23 staff in identifying and working on an assessment and feedback challenge in collaboration with their students. Additionally, an open call was made for a national seminar series.
- ATU submitted a case study on the continuation of the Re-imagining Assessment and Feedback for Student Success project. During the reporting period, the focus of the project was the assessment practices on three ATU programmes. Data was gathered from students and staff and preliminary findings shared through showcase events and a project symposium. An A-Z of assessment types was adapted to make a deck of playing cards and used to support an assessment hackathon. Outputs were further disseminated at external conference events. The full case study is available [here](#).
- TUS submitted a case study on Supporting Student Success with Repeat Assessments through the 'TUS Second Shot' project. The case study outlines the use of data and consultation to inform activities to support students who had failed modules. The full case study is available [here](#).

2.3.4.1 External Examiners

A number of public HEIs reported on the role of external examiners in the assessment process in the 2024 AQRs. Reporting on this indicated that work to ensure the contribution to assessment quality that external examiners can make is fully leveraged is underway alongside more general process improvements. Examples of this include:

- DkIT reported on its analysis of qualitative comments provided within external examiner reports, noting that external examiners commended the overall fairness and quality of assessment processes and were impressed by the use of innovative and engaging assessment methods that effectively measured student learning.
- UCC indicated it will review and revise as appropriate policies and procedures for external examiners, including guidance to schools, in the subsequent reporting period in response to a recommendation arising from the CINNTE process that examination papers submitted for review by external examiners should be accompanied by sample answers where feasible or appropriate.
- NUI reported that the institution has a statutory function to appoint external examiners for research degrees in the constituent universities and the recognised colleges: a new policy on the appointment of external examiners for research degree programmes in the recognised colleges was published in November 2022.
- IADT reported that a review of the external examining system was undertaken to establish its effectiveness and benchmark against similar processes at other institutions. Data and feedback was collected from surveys issued to current external examiners as well as IADT staff. Findings indicate satisfaction with the process on the part of external examiners, including with the communication and information provided by IADT.
- University of Galway provided a thematic summary of recommendations made by external examiners, which included (but were not limited to) feedback, assessment load and academic integrity. Comments by external examiners were noted on the need for greater

clarity in relation to their role and the information provided to them by programme directors and access to materials to support their work.

- ATU reported that a review of practices with regard to the relationship with external examiners in the three legacy institutes had been carried out and consolidation work was ongoing. The terms of reference for a Standards & Policy Committee with responsibility for the approval of external examiner nominations was approved by the Academic Council.
- TCD reported that work is ongoing to enhance the external examiner system and processes. Following feedback from schools on the difficulties faced in sourcing external examiners a review of external examiner policies was conducted. An External Examiner Working Group met on eight occasions during the reporting period with key activities/ outputs from the review including:
 - A benchmarking exercise was conducted across national universities and UK universities;
 - A profiling exercise was conducted to identify the regions from which TCD sources external examiners (linked to the Sustainability Policy and ambitions to reduce carbon imprint);
 - Lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic and technology-enabled process enhancements.

New external examiner policies were approved at TCD for both taught and research programmes during this reporting period, removing the requirement for mandatory attendance at Courts of Examiners sessions but recommending physical attendance once in a three-year term; delegating decision-making on mode and frequency of attendance to Directors of Teaching and Learning; and reducing some restrictions on appointments. The impact of these changes will be monitored in the subsequent reporting period.

2.3.5 STUDENT WELLBEING AND SUPPORT

Public HEIs reported a range of support initiatives, indicative of a proactive stance across the sector in identifying and responding to general and emergent student wellbeing and support needs. Examples of reporting include:

- RCSI reported on proactive measures to address the accommodation shortage for students in Dublin, including investing in resources to establish an accommodation database and the introduction by Student Services of a tailored accommodation service.
- TCD reported on the restructuring and consolidation of three internal funding of PhD Award schemes in response to feedback by TCD students via the National Postgraduate Student Survey regarding the cost-of-living crisis and the level of stipend. The restructuring creates a single stipend for four years full-time. TCD also reported on the expansion of a postgraduate orientation programme during the reporting period, with the addition of 21 new workshops and information sessions. Engagement by postgraduate students during the week doubled to 7,501 contacts from approximately 3,500 in the previous two reporting periods. Additionally, a research postgraduate transition programme was introduced to provide training at three critical phases: on entrance, on confirmation to the research register and during the final year.

- UL submitted a case study outlining the promotion of IT supports to learners during orientation and throughout the semester. The full case study is available [here](#).
- IADT submitted a case study outlining how a cross-institute working group enabled improvements to the registration and onboarding process. The full case study is available [here](#).

A continued focus on mental health and counselling services across public HEIs was evident in the 2024 AQRs. Examples of reporting include:

- TUS reported on the recruitment of additional posts to core counselling teams and development of new posts including Assistant Psychologist, Mental Health & Wellbeing Project Officer and Frameworks Implementation Manager. This allowed for expansion of services and critically supported the implementation of the National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework and the Framework for Consent in HEIs. As a result of additional funding, there was an expansion in counselling provision to students and engagement with students across all campuses.
- MTU reported on the rollout by MTU Library of the Self-Care Collection, which features hundreds of titles in e-format on mental health, well-being and mindfulness. Students and staff have free 24/7 access to the resources.
- IADT reported that students engaging with the Student Counselling service were invited to complete a brief survey, with positive outcomes showing a consistent service provision. Funding was allocated to acquire the service of an external Student Assistance Provider. SafeTALK training, a model for responding to suicidal distress, was offered to staff during the reporting period.

2.3.5.1 Inclusion-Focused Policies and Collaborations

A focus on inclusion was reflected in reporting on new policies drafted relevant to student support. Examples of this include:

- University of Galway established a working party to draft the university's Student Reasonable Accommodation Policy.
- UCC reported that a Policy on Reasonable Accommodations was approved by its Academic Council during the reporting period. A new suite of Student Service Delivery Principles was also launched.
- TCD reported on revisions to the Student Parents, Student Carers and Students Experiencing Pregnancy Supports Policy and the Reasonable Accommodations Policy and Code of Practice for Students with Disabilities.
- DCU reported that it launched a Sexual Misconduct Policy with the goal of ensuring that all students and staff maintained their right to enjoy work or study in a safe environment. DCU additionally reported that a webinar on cultural norms had been added to its pre-arrival supports for international students.
- TUS reported on a draft Gender Identity and Expression Policy and Procedure as well as a draft Policy and Procedure to Address Sexual Misconduct. Both were being revised based on consultation and anticipated to be finalised in the next reporting period.

A number of public HEIs reported on collaborations between internal divisions or with external organisations/third parties to enhance support services focused on inclusion and academic supports. Indicative examples of this include:

- UL submitted a case study outlining the effectiveness of a safeguarding process between the university counselling and wellbeing service and a third-party provider. The full case study is available [here](#).
- UCD reported that the university's library launched new services in the reporting period, including lending students noise cancelling headphones and free charging facilities for laptops and mobile phones. The UCD library also removed the applications of fines accrued because of the late return of books to remove barriers to students accessing library facilities and services and made a suite of digital literacy resources available to students, created as open education resources with Creative Commons licenses.
- A new guide to the TCD Library's Assistive Technology Information Centre was created, and a collaboration with 'Bookshare Ireland' allows all TCD students access to a global database of over 1.2 million e-books that can be transformed into accessible formats. The Library's Teaching and Research Support team published a series of thematic resource lists to support the university's strategic aim to enhance diversity, including A-Z guides on race and ethnicity, LGBTQIA+, climate literacy, inclusive practices and coping strategies for exam success.
- University of Galway reported on collaborations between the Access Centre and the Academic Writing Centre, SUMS Mathematics Support Centre and Student Health Unit to provide targeted supports for students accessing disability support.
- MTU reported that 54 bespoke learning and study skills-based workshops were designed and delivered for students through partnering of the Navigate Learning Development project and departments and programmes across disciplines. The workshops address areas including academic and technical writing, presentation skills, group work and university readiness.
- University of Galway also reported on a collaborative initiative with ATU to appoint a Traveller Education Officer to deliver its Mincéirs Misl'd in Education (MMIE) Project. The Access Centre was also allocated PATH 5 HEA funding to support Irish Traveller and Roma students in higher education across three further initiatives.
- DkIT reported that an application to AsIAm (<https://asiam.ie/>) for inclusion in their Autism Friendly HEI Award was made and approved and DkIT is now an Autism Friendly HEI Award Candidate. DkIT additionally reported that Turas was invited onto the DkIT campus on three occasions as part of induction and semester end in order to raise awareness of their local service, which offers individuals a tailored pathway towards personal recovery from drugs and alcohol.

2.3.5.2 Students as Partners and Learner Voice

Emphasis was also placed in reporting by public HEIs on continued and new initiatives to amplify the learner voice in decision-making and in transforming the student experience.

- University of Galway reported on a formal partnership with the university's Students' Union. The aim of the agreement is for staff and students to collaborate to deliver positive change, increase the student voice in decision making, bring about greater student representation

on committees and enhance student participation and engagement. Training will be offered to students who elect to participate as well as for staff.

- RCSI reported that following the launch of its student engagement and partnership (StEP) programme in a previous reporting period, 23 projects to enhance the overall student experience were funded. Outputs from StEP project initiatives were presented by RCSI representatives at events in Thailand and Dublin. Fifty-five staff and fifty students received Student Partnership Champion Awards during the reporting period. RCSI additionally reported that a bespoke 6-week Student Leadership Development Programme took place in early 2023, developed in partnership with students in the StEP programme.
- ATU reported that three ATU Students' Union presidents are represented on the CINNTE Institutional Review Steering Group, with ATU Students' Unions also consulted on all proposed new academic policies.
- ATU also reported that under N-TUTORR Stream 1 – Empower Students, ATU developed a student champion network of 22 students and engaged in 28 fellowship projects across 9 campuses aligned to the N-TUTORR themes.
- TUS also reported on activities enabled by the N-TUTORR programme to engage students as partners through Innovation & Change Fellowships. Teams of students and staff collaborate in programmes related to six N-TUTORR themes. A total of 18 fellowships were awarded on topics ranging from assessment transformation, outdoor collaborative spaces, agile teamwork, postgraduate community of practice and improving search engine optimisation using AI.

2.3.6 PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

A significant volume of reporting in the 2024 AQRs indicated that work is being progressed across public HEIs to develop and review programmes and access pathways. Reporting under this dimension of QA reflects efforts to reorient provision to meet new and emerging demands associated with lifelong learning, a rapidly changing labour market and widened participation.

2.3.6.1 Programme Portfolio Development

During this reporting period a number of institutions reported on programme portfolio development. Among those reporting in detail in this area, a continued increase of programme offerings (including short courses leading to micro-credentials) at postgraduate level is readily visible. This may owe to the continued focus on lifelong learning and upskilling by government. Some reporting includes reference to professional awards and credentials. The following examples of new programme development in public HEIs are indicative:

- UCD reported that 26 new programmes were approved by the University Programmes Board, including 14 postgraduate level programmes and a number of professional certificates and diplomas. UCD further reported that its Policy on the Academic Governance of non-ECTS CPD provision came into effect during the reporting period, which assists the university to plan and support CPD provision as part of its overall portfolio.
- DCU reported that it awarded the first digital credential issued throughout participation in the ECIU Alliance during the reporting period using the newly revised European Learning Model and through the European Digital Credential Platform. DCU further reported ongoing participation in working groups, initiatives and peer-learning networks focused on the

development of policy, knowledge exchange and collaboration activities surrounding micro-credentials. Processes at DCU for the internal and external quality assurance of micro-credentials were reported to be continuing to evolve.

- TCD reported that it continued to develop micro-credentials allowing for flexible and inclusive professional learning. During the reporting period, TCD offered 27 micro-credentials that can be used towards the achievement of a qualification at NFQ Level 9 in the future. Six proposals for new micro-credentials were considered and four approved for launch in the subsequent reporting period. TCD also reported on the commencement of a Postgraduate Certificate in Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Tangent, TCD’s Ideas Workspace.
- RCSI reported that several new postgraduate programmes ranging from Postgraduate Certificates to Professional Doctorates were approved during the reporting period, along with a Professional Diploma in Global Health Systems. RCSI further reported that a suite of postgraduate programmes in population health leadership is under development.
- TUS reported on the significant growth in flexible learners undertaking part-time programmes with awards of fewer than 60 ECTS, noting that research on skills needs had been a core component of the development of new programmes and expansion of delivery.

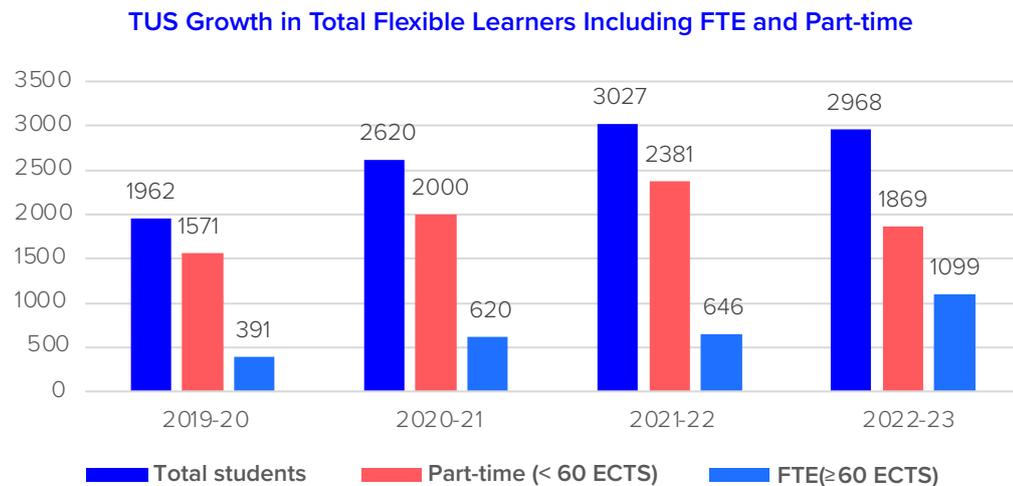


Figure 6 - TUS Growth in Total Flexible Learners Including FTE and Part-time

- ATU reported on the validation of a suite of new programmes, with 23 out of 34 at NFQ Level 9. These were dominated by the STEM disciplines but included Postgraduate Diplomas and Masters in EDI and a number of qualifications in domains of sustainability. ATU also reported on the Higher Education 4.0 project, which works with employers and employees who want to upskill or reskill, those who want to return to the workforce and those who are at risk of leaving education early. The project encompasses minor and major awards as well as micro-credentials, MOOCs, digital credentials and reusable learning modules.
- DCU reported ongoing development of the DCU Futures project, with a tenth programme, a BSc in Global Challenges, launching in 2022. During the reporting period staff engaged in a

collaborative process to identify 16 key transversal skills for DCU, definitions of which were refined through collaboration with international experts. Six transversal skills are prioritised within each of the DCU Futures programmes and have been embedded within the learning outcomes of modules.

2.3.6.2 Programme Review, Approval and Monitoring Processes

Some public HEIs reported on ongoing enhancements to programme review, development, monitoring and approval.

- DkIT reported that programme reviews and validations continued to operate effectively remotely during the reporting period. The Registrar’s Office observed better availability of panel members, including academic and industry representatives and particularly international panel members when operating remotely. A further review of the effectiveness of online validation events will be conducted in the subsequent reporting period.
- TCD reported a review of best practice for the cyclical review of postgraduate taught programmes was expected to inform new guidelines supporting thresholds for changes to programmes post-approval. TCD additionally reported on the development and implementation of a new two-stage approach to postgraduate programme development and approval. The process is supported by new proposal templates. These include a proof-of-concept template setting out the business case and a curriculum plan template. The process was approved in May 2023 and is due for pilot in the subsequent reporting period.

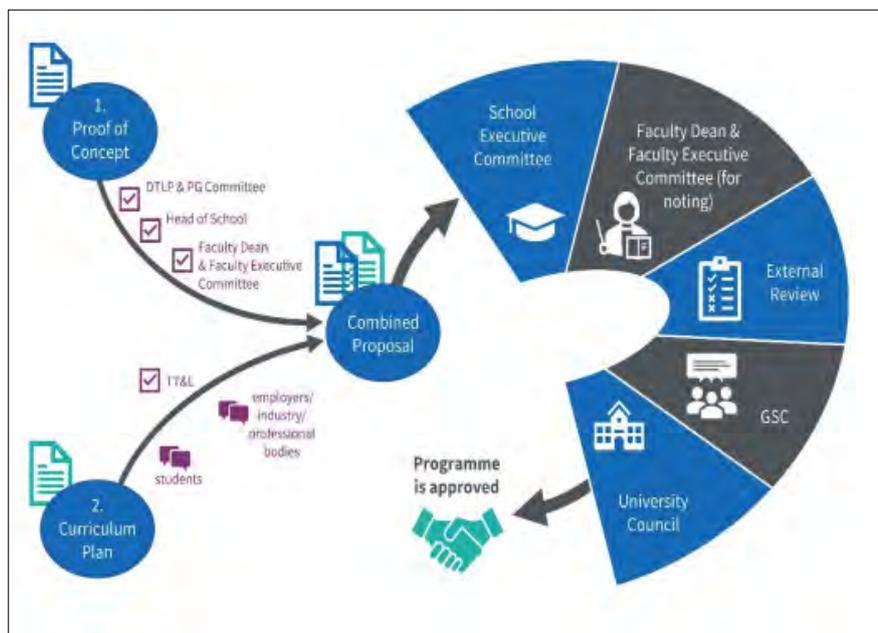


Figure 7 - Overview of New Two-stage Postgraduate Programme Proposal Process at TCD

- UCC additionally reported that a pilot programme review was undertaken during the reporting period. The outcomes of this process are being considered and will form the basis for systematic programme review.
- TUS reported that in May 2023, TUS Academic Council approved the TUS Policy and Procedures for Collaborative Provision (National and Transnational). This policy governs all aspects of development of collaborative programmes nationally and transnationally, including joint awards. At the time of reporting, TUS was in the process of undertaking a review of its collaborative provision as a DAB and in light of its Linked Provider Framework.
- UL reported that a working group had been assigned to undertake a review of current policies and practices in relation to collaborative agreements.
- NUI reported a revision and publication of Policy, Regulations and Procedures for the Approval of Research Degrees in Recognised Colleges. The policy document was approved by the NUI Senate during the reporting period.
- SETU reported that although its antecedent institutes operated their original programme development procedures during the reporting period, the university made significant progress on a new process with strong overlaps in approach to both original processes. The Academic Council additionally approved Academic Regulations for taught programmes during this period, which address entry requirements, the academic delivery frameworks, assessment, progression and awards.

2.3.6.3 Access and Transition to Higher Education

In 2022 the Higher Education Authority released the fourth National Access Plan (2022-2028) following widespread consultation with stakeholders across the sector, government and society. Reporting within the AQRs indicates that efforts to promote and enable not only access and widened participation, but inclusion and success, continued apace in Ireland's public HEIs. Examples of reporting in this area include:

- UCD reported on its University for All Symposium, hosted in May 2023. Marking the ten-year anniversary of the UCD widening participation committee, the event examined how access and inclusion had evolved over the past decade and what the future might look like.
- TCD reported on the approval of a proposal for pilot projects for non-traditional course delivery. This will include partnerships to provide healthcare education to staff, improving diversity through a review of access routes and adjusting the teaching day/week to allow for more flexibility, more opportunities, and be more inclusive of adjunct staff.
- University of Galway submitted a case study outlining widening participation at the university and noting the publication of its first annual Widening Participation Committee Report, coinciding with the launch of the new Access Centre in Áras Uí Chathail. The full case study is available [here](#).
- University of Galway additionally reported that the Access Centre has accessed HEA PATH 3 funding to deliver a community mentoring programme with prospective science and engineering students in collaboration with Galway Community College and Galway Technical Institute. The programme aims to increase progression to higher education from the further education and training sector.
- UCC reported on the Nurturing Bright Futures (NBF) six-module online course, designed to equip second-level students with skills to transition successfully to third-level and make

the right choice of programme. A pilot project is underway to support local DEIS secondary schools to embed NBF in the Transition Year curriculum. Current UCC students will facilitate NBF workshops in the classroom and act as role models for participating students.

- MTU reported on the continuation of its Traveller Graduate Network, which provides networking, progression and career advancement opportunities through mentoring sessions and workshops. A successful proposal was made to the HEA for funding to employ an administrator for the network in the reporting period. Additionally, three virtual workshops were held as part of a cross-institutional collaboration to inspire, inform and increase Traveller and Roma student participation in higher education.
- TU Dublin indicated that in the subsequent reporting period, Access Foundation Programmes would be developed and validated, aimed at preparing students, both personally and academically, to pursue undergraduate programmes at TU Dublin.
- SETU submitted a series of case studies outlining work focused on widened participation, access and transition to higher education. This included:
 - A case study on the multifaceted approach the institution takes to addressing educational disadvantage, encompassing provision of tailored higher education programmes, participatory action research and a PhD study. The full case study is available [here](#).
 - A case study on the plan for integration of Lifelong Learning activity across SETU and actions progressed to date. The full case study is available [here](#).
 - A case study on empowering students through HEA PATH Funding, encompassing two initiatives. The first is ATTAINS, which introduced students with specific learning disabilities from under-represented groups to assistive technology, tools and strategies to support independent learning. The second is Brighter Futures, which fosters a welcoming environment for Traveller children, offering weekly workshops covering identity, schoolwork, cultural pride, reading and role models. The full case study is available [here](#).

2.3.6.3.1 Progression from Further Education & Training to Higher Education

During this reporting period, a specific emphasis was placed on better enabling progression from further education and training to higher education, with the establishment by DFHERIS of a new National Tertiary Office. A number of AQRs reflected the continuation of pre-existing work in this area as well as the formalisation or piloting of new initiatives. Examples included:

- MTU reported on the regional collaboration *New Horizons* involving MTU, UCC, Cork ETB and Kerry ETB. All four organisations are focused on building upon the already significant collaborations in place and making existing arrangements explicit.
- IADT reported on the development of a new programme with two colleges of further education. The BA (Hons) Immersive Media Production was validated in the reporting period and commenced at the outset of the subsequent academic year.
- TUS submitted a case study on a tertiary education initiative, for which a Steering Group and Working Group have been established between TUS and Limerick and Clare ETB (LCETB) to scope opportunities for integrated further education and higher education programme offerings. In February 2023, two programmes were selected for the pilot stage of the project, the Level 8 BBs in Business and the Level 8 BSc Mobile and Web Computing. The opportunities were promoted by TUS and LCETB and featured in local and regional media and the courses commenced in the subsequent reporting period. The full case study is

available [here](#).

- ATU submitted a case study on a project exploring barriers to progression from Further Education. The project led to development of a Framework to address barriers and support transition and has led to publication of an academic article. The full case study is available [here](#).
- IADT submitted a narrative case study outlining the lived experience of a learner progressing from a community education programme. The full case study is available [here](#).

SETU submitted the case study featured below outlining current and potential future collaborations that expand education opportunities for learners wishing to progress from Further Education to Higher Education.

Case Study

Championing Collaboration and Expanding Educational Opportunities Building Bridges and Bolstering the Region

SETU understands the immense value of collaboration and is actively strengthening its partnerships within the region. This focus has three key objectives: maximising regional cohesion and impact, dynamically responding to emerging skill needs, and ultimately boosting regional productivity, growth, and sustainability

One crucial aspect of this approach involves addressing equity and access to higher education. By partnering with Further Education (FE) institutions, SETU offers degree programmes at a local level. This initiative tackles various barriers typically hindering participation, such as high CAO points, financial constraints, and limited support systems. By starting their journey in familiar surroundings and receiving personalised guidance, students build confidence and are better equipped for long-term success. This initiative aligns seamlessly with SETU's core values of diversity and equity, and its strategic goal to address student migration trends from the region. Building on the initial success of the partnership with the Laois and Offaly ETB, offering Bachelor of Business (Hons) and Bachelor of Science in Software Development (Hons) programmes, SETU plans to expand its reach to other ETBs in the southeast. This partnership saw 29 students embark on their academic journeys in 2023, marking a promising start. The interest expressed by four additional ETBs for 2024 collaborations paves the way for wider access to higher education within the region. In addition to the two 2023 existing programmes in Business and Software Development, mentioned earlier, the following programmes are being explored for 2024 provision:

- Bachelor of Science in Biosciences & Biopharmaceutical – Abbeyleix FET to SETU Carlow
- Bachelor of Business in Hospitality and Tourism – Carlow Institute to SETU Waterford
- Bachelor of Science in IT Management– Ormonde College Kilkenny to SETU Carlow

Other programmes are at discussion stage, but if running, are more likely to be from September 2025.

Figure 8 - Case Study from SETU on Championing Collaboration and Expanding Educational Opportunities

2.3.6.4 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Work to advance and support practice related to the recognition of prior learning was visible in the sector during the reporting period, with a HCI Pillar 3-funded project on National Recognition of RPL providing a central focus point for public HEIs. The 2024 AQRs included a number of updates reflective of work to formalise, embed and resource RPL activity. For example:

- University of Galway reported on development of a new RPL website and the update of the RPL policy during the reporting period. RPL has been added to the course webpage template to enable courses to specifically highlight their provision of RPL. A data collection exercise has commenced to capture the level of RPL activity currently taking place and create a baseline dataset for the university.
- TCD submitted a case study outlining use of an RPL approach to the evaluation of experiential learning for access to a postgraduate programme.
- ATU reported that it had established an RPL Implementation Group to oversee the implementation of an RPL Action Plan. The university has set targets for the establishment of an RPL Unit to coordinate and manage a substantial increase in RPL activities.
- DkIT reported that a manual system was implemented to record RPL applications at institute level. The structured, standard format will allow for the development of an RPL precedence database. In the next reporting period work will continue to investigate incorporation into the customer relationship management (CRM) system. Work to ensure RPL information was updated and available via easily accessible channels was completed and a number of RPL-enterprise collaborations were explored.
- UCC reported that a Policy for RPL was approved by its Academic Council during the reporting period.

2.3.7 STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

2.3.7.1 Culture

A focus on staff management and development, sometimes framed as ‘people and culture’, was evident in reporting across multiple institutions, often closely linked with EDI initiatives. Indicative examples include:

- MU reported that a commitment to a people-first culture would be fundamental to the implementation of the newly launched University Strategic Plan 2023 – 2028. A transformation of the HR function is planned to provide a focus on strategic HR, effective business partnering and internal customer service.
- UL reported that the Culture & Engagement Working Group had conducted a university-wide culture audit with the objective of proposing a series of recommendations to enhance the culture of the university over time. The process drew upon findings from the UL @50 Consultation, the Athena Swan-EDI Culture Survey and the 2023 Culture audit.
- RCSI reported on a new ‘Positive RCSI’ survey undertaken during the reporting period, in addition to quarterly pulse surveys. This was developed in partnership with the Centre for Positive Health Sciences and was designed to measure positive culture at RCSI.

- UCC reported an ambition to implement a progressive and inclusive People and Culture Plan under the auspices of the university's new strategic plan. A Staff Wellbeing Week was hosted and brought 475 attendees across 17 events. A survey focused on the future of work was implemented at the start of the subsequent reporting period.

2.3.7.2 Performance Management

Some public HEIs reported on the introduction of performance management activities and associated resources and training.

- University of Galway introduced a new Performance Management and Development Framework toward the end of the reporting period. The introduction of the process has been accompanied by information sessions and a suite of resources has been made available to staff along with ongoing reviewer/reviewee training.
- UCD reported on the commencement of a Performance for Growth cycle in March 2023. The initiative is an opportunity for staff to have conversations with managers, focus on contributions made, achievements and supports needed. Training sessions for both reviewers and reviewees as well as support resource were made available.

2.3.7.3 Staff and Work Environment Policies

Public HEIs reported on the approval and revision of policies encompassing a breadth of dimensions of employee experience. Many of these are indicative of the embedding of new norms in the workplace associated with EDI standards and hybrid/remote working.

- UL reported approval of a number of policies relevant to this dimension of QA, including a Grievance Policy, Staff Dis/Ability Policy, Policy and Procedure for Blended Working and additional policies pertaining to promotion and tenure.
- TU Dublin reported on the approval and implementation of a TU Dublin Blended Working Policy. The policy reflects the university's recognition that blended working arrangements can enable a better work/life balance for staff, reduce stress, improve employee motivation, performance and productivity and enhance the attractiveness of the university as a place to work.
- RCSI reported development of a Domestic Violence and Abuse Leave policy, the launch of a Menopause Policy and a broadened range of supports available to new parents to include online pre-leave modules, maternity and paternity returners workshops and new parents coaching for 12 months after return to work. Additionally, RCSI reported on the development of a Hybrid Leaders Toolkit to support the move to hybrid working. The toolkit includes a framework for a team agreement capturing "When, Where and How we do our best work".
- TCD reported development of a new Bereavement Leave Policy and the revision of procedures pertaining to Senior Academic Promotions, Senior Academic and Academic Consultant Promotions and Progression with Assistant Professor Grade.
- University of Galway reported initiation or revision of policies including Performance for Growth, Workload Allocation Model, Hybrid Working, Probation and Academic Promotions.

2.3.7.4 Staff Learning and Development

As per previous reporting periods, the AQRs for 2024 reflected a recognition across the sector that the provision of learning and development opportunities is crucial. A breadth of activities to enable staff to work effectively in rapidly changing environments were outlined. Examples of reporting in this area included:

- RCSI reported on delivery of EDI training to almost 300 students and staff, attending training on topics including race equality, autism awareness, disability awareness, gender identity, and handling disclosures of domestic violence or sexual violence, as well as the provision of specialist menopause training for all staff and specific manager training and the creation of a Menopause Champions group to provide support and guidance to any staff impacted by the menopause transition.
- UCD reported on the launch of two training programmes:
 - A new eLearning course, Supporting the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Employees, to help people managers and colleagues have conversations on mental health and signpost to supports.
 - Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Diversity Training for staff, with a focus on how to create more inclusive spaces for gender diversity in the higher education space.
- UCD also reported an announcement by UCD Access and Lifelong Learning of a pilot programme to support the implementation of universal design through student supports and services, the cornerstone of which will be a new digital badge for Universal Design Beyond the Classroom.
- TCD reported that the university conducted four citizen's assemblies, attended by over 400 staff, to discuss reward, recognition and career planning for professional staff. Additionally, three large scale consultation sessions were held to gather feedback on the Senior Academic Promotions process.
- IADT reported that 108 programmes and events were offered for staff during the reporting period, focused variously on technical skills and competence specific to roles, legislative and governance requirements, generic competencies (for example, communication skills and problem solving) and wellbeing.
- University of Galway reported on a breadth of professional development workshops facilitated for staff, representing almost double the number offered by the university the previous year. These included workshops on IT and digital skills, Irish language, leadership development, health and cultural awareness. Additional policy information sessions were facilitated in areas including hybrid working, probation and performance for growth.
- MTU reported on a number of initiatives focused on staff development. These included:
 - MTU becoming an institution accredited to award fellowships internally.
 - The HEA-funded Elevate Leadership Development programme, a bespoke programme aimed at staff in non-senior management roles.
 - The HEA-funded LEAD@MTU programme, geared initially toward the senior management team but open to managers in all areas. The programme also aligns with a newly developed MTU Certificate in Higher Education Leadership currently being undertaken by 24 senior managers.

- University of Galway reported on participation in the Collaborate Programme, an inter-institutional peer mentoring programme with eight other institutions. The first two programmes catered for staff who were new to management roles and researchers.
- UCC reported on plans to establish a community of practice for School Managers, following identification by the CINNTE review panel that School Managers were a staff group that could benefit from enhanced opportunities to engage in peer learning for career development. The community of practice will be established with the sponsorship of the Quality Enhancement Committee.

2.3.8 INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

A significant breadth of activity was reported in this domain of QA by Ireland's public HEIs, with data-informed decision-making, ongoing investments in IT infrastructure and an analysis of student feedback data particularly prominent.

2.3.8.1 IT/Data Strategy and Governance

Few AQRs made reference to the development, governance or implementation of whole of institution IT/digital strategies and plans. Two exceptions to this include:

- UL reported on its current Enable Stage-2 IT Strategy, noting that a Digital Governance Steering Committee had been formed to support the strategic prioritisation of the university's investment in its IT and digital infrastructure and play a key role in implementing the UL Enable IT Strategy.
- TCD reported on developing its Digital Strategy, due for finalisation in 2024 to align with the teaching and research strategy. TCD reported that it has established a governance group to oversee the establishment of the new multi-year digital strategy and appointed a Digital Transformation Programme Manager.

However, it should be noted that the lack of visibility of whole of institution strategies or plans in this area does not mean that they are not in existence or operation. The AQR reporting template allows institutions to exercise a degree of discretion in those elements of activity they bring to the fore.

Nonetheless, a breadth of digitalisation-focused case studies and individual process enhancements were reported across the AQRs, suggesting that digital transformation is continuing apace within the sector.

An important event relevant to this domain of QA was the cyberattack on the Cork campuses of MTU experienced in February 2023. MTU submitted a detailed case study outlining the detection, management and impact of the cyberattack, providing a valuable insight into the degree of disruption caused and the role that emergency plans played in this process. The full case study is available [here](#). ATU also reported on a focus on improving cybersecurity measures during this reporting period, including the adoption of a new Security Information and Management Service to provide real-time monitoring, analysis and response to security events and cybersecurity training for staff to establish a culture of cyber resilience.

2.3.8.2 Data-informed Decision-making

A number of institutions reported on the implementation or development of systems and tools designed to facilitate data-informed decision-making. Examples include:

- UL reported that it had completed the introduction and implementation of a new Information Management System for the university's Governing Authority, facilitating more effective and secure distribution of confidential documentation and simplified data management.
- DCU reported that a range of user-focused Power BI reports had been developed to enhance evidence-informed evaluation and decision-making at DCU. The rollout of Power BI across the university is planned to continue into subsequent reporting periods.
- UCC reported that its In-Touch data visualisation dashboard underwent a complete redesign during the reporting period. Impact sessions to encourage use of the tool and gain the most value from available data are planned for the subsequent reporting period.
- TCD reported on the establishment of a Data Analytics and Strategic Initiative unit during the reporting period. The unit will focus on building data governance, a data culture, improved communication around data and a data strategy. A Data Integration Group has been established of representatives with accountability as system owners.
- ATU reported that despite continuing to operate on separate legacy Student Record Management Systems during the reporting period, progress had been made on analysis and reporting of ATU-wide student data sets to support decision-making. An area on the staff hub was dedicated to making reports and dashboards available to staff across ATU.

2.3.8.3 IT and Systems Infrastructure

Progress on significant IT infrastructure development projects was also reported on in some of the AQRs:

- University of Galway reported that its delivery of a Student Digital Pathways (SDP) programme had been delayed, although significant work had progressed on programme deliverables during the reporting period by the in-house SDP team. Work was continuing with partners on a new re-baselined delivery plan. University of Galway also reported that it had established an IT solution to facilitate the sharing of recommended reasonable accommodations with key stakeholders.
- DCU reported that work on the university's new operating framework is continuing to ensure alignment with a new Student Information System, due to go live in a subsequent reporting period.

Across the technological universities, a significant volume of activity was reported pertaining to the merging of legacy systems. Examples of this include:

- MTU reported that a substantial programme of work was underway during the reporting period to replace legacy systems and support the merging of legacy functionality. The implementation of system processes relating to online payments and registration was reported to be complete and intensive work underway to implement curriculum advising and programme planning compliance for processing examination results and graduation.

- ATU submitted a case study outlining a project to merge three separate financial management systems, which was commenced in the previous reporting period and completed in June 2023, when the system successfully went live following extensive user acceptance testing. The full case study is available [here](#). A project to implement a merged Student Records Management System was underway. A project to roll out a CRM previously in use in ATU Sligo was in progress.
- TU Dublin reported that following a tender exercise the HEI entered a client services agreement that provides for the design of a modern cloud-based Student Records Management System. The system will be configured to support the core business requirements of TU Dublin and to enable students to have greater agency in defining their own learning pathways. The system is due to go live in September 2025, with interim solutions implemented across current legacy systems to place them in a secure and stable environment.
- TU Dublin additionally reported on the completion of a project to integrate the library management system to facilitate an integrated and standardised service on all TU Dublin campuses. Students and other library users can now easily borrow from any of the university's five libraries across three campuses.

Systems development included work undertaken to enhance research support and enable an enhanced user experience for researchers and included the following examples:

- UCC reported on the launch of a cloud-based end-to-end research information system that provides a single integrated platform for researchers and research managers to capture, manage and report on key research life-cycle activities and associated metrics. Benefits of the system include streamlining of administration, strengthened reporting capabilities and enhanced researcher visibility.
- TCD reported on enhancements made to the Research Support System interface to enable easier updating and an improved user experience. Additionally, phase 1 of the Research Ethics Management System project and the next iteration of the Research Contracts Management System were implemented.

A number of case studies and reported activities were focused on upgrades to services and process improvements. Two case studies outlining the use of chatbots to augment capacity to service inquiries were submitted by UCD and UL respectively (see Section 2.3.1 Generative AI). Further examples include:

- MU submitted a case study outlining the upgrade of its existing library technology to facilitate self-service borrowing using Radio Frequency Identification. The full case study is available [here](#).
- UL reported that the internal documentation and processes associated with staff recruitment moved online during the reporting period, facilitating time saving and approvals tracking and contributing to sustainability. UL also submitted a number of case studies focused on the digitalisation of specific functions within the institution. These include:
 - A UL case study outlining the digitalisation of the Quality Review Group process for Nomination, Approvals and Records management. A number of project outcomes observed are categorised as enhancements, reduced workload practices and sustainability. The full case study is available [here](#).

- A UL case study focused on the digitalisation of its customer relation management system through implementation of a CRM system by Graduate and Professional Studies. The benefits of the project include service improvements, support for increased conversion rates and efficiencies allowing UL to scale to a large number of applicants.
- Additional UL case studies focused on the rollout of the Digital User Access Project ensuring that access is linked to a person's terms of employment, the refit of 61 meeting rooms to enable hybrid working, the redesign of a teaching lab to promote collaboration in pods, and a cybersecurity education campaign to raise awareness among staff.

2.3.8.4 Analysis and Reporting of Student Feedback Data

A focus on collecting, utilising and closing the loop on student feedback was visible and noted in the AQRs submitted for the previous two reporting periods. The 2024 AQRs indicated that this remains a priority for public sector HEIs.

2.3.8.4.1 StudentSurvey.ie

Reporting indicates that deriving school, college and programme-level reports from StudentSurvey.ie data is an important focus. Examples included:

- MU created three data dashboards using 2022 StudentSurvey.ie response data to support timely and informed decision-making. The project used Power BI to facilitate institutional, faculty, department and programme-level information and is outlined fully in a case study, available [here](#).
- University of Galway reported on analysis of StudentSurvey.ie data, which indicated that a dip in student satisfaction at the institution during the COVID-19 pandemic was being addressed, with a strong upward trend across 2022 and 2023. College-level reports have been made available and schools asked to identify key actions to improve student engagement in areas where they are below average.
- UCC reported on the preparation of StudentSurvey.ie data reports by college, programme and cohort. Heads of College and learning and teaching representatives are invited to discuss and reflect on key outcomes and provide a summary of planned actions to the University Surveys Board. Data is available and can be accessed via a Power BI-driven dashboard to facilitate analysis of the data.
- ATU reported that a second phase of its UNLOCK initiative, focused on the use of learning analytics, student-staff partnership and co-designed interventions to improve teaching, learning and engagement. Recurrent themes chosen in partnership from relevant analytics such as StudentSurvey.ie and PGR StudentSurvey.ie will form the basis of initiatives.

UL submitted a case study outlining how machine learning has been applied to the analysis and visualisation of StudentSurvey.ie response data, which has incorporated techniques for summarising, visualising and interpreting open-text qualitative feedback. A truncated version of the case study is presented below. The full case study is available [here](#).

Case Study**Application of Machine Learning for Analysis and Visualisation of Student Feedback at StudentSurvey.ie****Theme: Use of Data Analytics in QA and QE****Keywords: Digitisation, Research funding applications****Short Abstract**

The Application of Machine Learning for Analysis and Visualisation of Student Feedback at StudentSurvey.ie for qualitative data from 2016 - 2022. A notable contribution of this work is the introduction of a completely automated process that incorporates various techniques for summarizing, visualizing, and interpreting open-text student feedback obtained from surveys conducted on StudentSurvey.ie. This research project was part of a collaboration between the Department of Electronic and Computer Engineering and the Quality Support Unit, and was awarded a bursary in December 2022 by the StudentSurvey.ie Analysis and Impact Group to analyse the rich body of qualitative data emerging from StudentSurvey.ie and PGR StudentSurvey.ie.

Case Study

This funded research project focussed on the Application of Machine Learning for Analysis and Visualisation of Student Feedback at StudentSurvey.ie. Analysis of open-ended question responses cannot be performed quantitatively and requires qualitative analysis. A variety of approaches to qualitative analysis are used in StudentSurvey reports, none of which were automated or used Deep Learning. This highlighted an opportunity for the automatic qualitative analysis of open-ended feedback for the University of Limerick's data in the StudentSurvey.ie dataset. This was the focus of the research project. The research project highlighted the importance and value of collaboration between academic research colleagues and those with a quality role in harnessing the latest advances in Machine learning and AI models to enhance quality using data analytics.

Deep Learning models were compared for Topic Modelling, Named Entity Recognition and Sentiment Analysis using UL's 2016-2022 StudentSurvey.ie data. The evidence suggests that Deep Learning models are suitable for experimentation to implement an automated system for the qualitative analysis of student feedback.

The following Research Questions (RQs) were addressed for the project:

1. How do various open-source DL models compare for topic extraction from open-ended responses in student feedback?
2. How do various open-source DL models compare for named entity extraction from open-ended responses in student feedback?
3. How do various open-source DL models compare for sentiment analysis in open-ended responses in student feedback?
4. Which visualisation methods allow for meaningful interpretation of identified topics, named entities and sentiments?
5. What parts of the analysis of open-ended student feedback can be fully automated?
6. What parts of the analysis of open-ended student feedback can be semi-automated (human in the loop)?
7. Does dynamic filtering by different data attributes allow for better interpretation of identified topics, named entities and sentiments?

Different experimental setups were employed to effectively analyze and interpret the gathered data. These setups were carefully designed to suit the specific requirements of each question type, ensuring that the data collected is appropriately analyzed and compared within the context of the study.

One significant contribution of this work is the deployment of both classical and deep learning models for the extraction of topics from the corpora, and a comprehensive analysis of the student responses. Based on the experiments which we ran on Q1 responses, it is evident that BTM model is more effective for our corpus which consists of short texts while LDA (Latent Dirichlet Allocation) can be used to identify the general themes in the corpus. BERTopic, on the other hand is more powerful when it comes to the semantically 96 related topic extraction task.

Another notable contribution of this work is the introduction of a completely automated process that incorporates various techniques for summarizing, visualizing, and interpreting open-text student feedback obtained from surveys conducted on StudentSurvey.ie. Importantly, this process does not rely on sentiment analysis and effectively handles feedback, even when it consists of short text entries. These techniques are topic modelling, named entity recognition, n-gram analysis, and bigram networks. Such analysis can be performed by any researcher with access to StudentSurvey.ie data, without requiring a detailed understanding of the developed code. Consequently, even when dealing with extensive amounts of open-text data from StudentSurvey.ie, it becomes effortless to make rapid comparisons and draw meaningful conclusions from the data. The visualizations techniques developed in this work act as a solid basis for topic analysis, offering a concise summary and overview of the full dataset. The availability of these visuals enables prompt and rational decision-making processes aimed at enhancing the university experience for students.

The outputs of the Research Project were published on the StudentSurvey.ie website

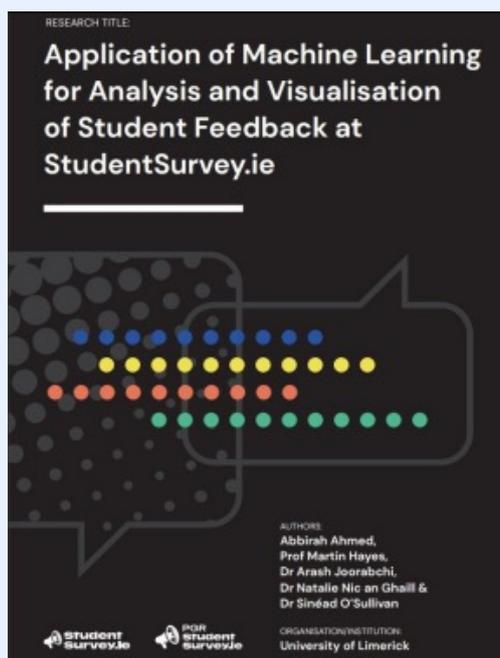


Figure 9 - Case Study from UL on Application of Machine Learning for Analysis and Visualisation of Student Feedback at StudentSurvey.ie

2.3.8.4.2 Additional Student Feedback Surveys

Some HEIs reported on supplementary surveys that are being utilised that provide more granular, module-level and service area feedback. Examples included:

- RCSI reported that 339 student feedback surveys were run and processed during the reporting period, with a response rate of 25% on core undergraduate end-of-semester surveys. During the reporting period, an evaluation was undertaken of activities implemented to increase engagement in survey data collection. A paper prepared for the Quality Committee concluded that the promotion of survey participation required a multi-faceted approach along with active engagement from staff in schools and professional service departments.
- UCD reported on the piloting of a new system to support the university's Student Feedback Project during the reporting period. The purpose of the new system is to provide functionality that will enable the feedback loop to students to be closed, capture individual feedback on teaching for the purposes of development and promotion, and enable schools to gain deeper insights into their students' perceptions of their learning.



- TU Dublin reported that building on the success of implementing a single survey for students across TU Dublin, the university undertook a procurement exercise to acquire a new software platform to support the evaluation of programmes by students. The survey was available for a pilot group in February and to all other major award programmes in May 2023.
- UCC reported on the rollout of the university-wide Student Feedback Ecosystem Project, co-designed and led by the Quality Enhancement Unit and the Centre for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning. Following development of a new integrated student module surveying tool a proof-of-concept student feedback survey was piloted across 21 modules, with an average submission rate of 50.9%. An independent, user-focused evaluation was carried out by a post-doctoral researcher from May to June 2023. UCC will deliberate on the future of module and programme surveying institution-wide.

2.3.9 PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

2.3.9.1 Branding and Platform Accessibility

A number of public HEIs reported on activity to refresh or update branding, enhance accessibility and communicate their activities to internal and external audiences effectively. Examples included:

- MU reported that the university's Digital Team in conjunction with IT Services completed scoping for a project to re-platform the MU website and was proceeding with a project specification document. The project, which is necessary to avoid end-of-life of the current platform, will pursue compliance with new accessibility standards, better enabling stakeholder access to information.
- UL submitted two case studies outlining activities focused on accessibility in communications. One of the [case studies](#) focused on activities undertaken during Global Accessibility Awareness week, including an Accessible Communications Workshop. The [other](#) set out improvements made to the accessibility of all websites under the UL web domain.
- ATU indicated that a full suite of marketing assets with new signage, stands & publications was completed. A Website Manager was appointed during the reporting period to drive the development of a new integrated website, replacing legacy websites and offering an enhanced user experience.
- University of Galway reported on the rebrand from its former identity as NUI Galway in September 2022. The rebrand, intended to strengthen the university's identity and clarify its university status to international audiences, was accompanied by a comprehensive communications, public affairs and marketing campaign.
- UCC reported a brand refresh was commenced during the reporting period and would roll out in the subsequent reporting period. The project will ensure a coherent and consistent approach to the UCC brand that maximises its global impact.
- RCSI submitted a case study outlining the move to open access publication of RCSI's student medical journal (RCSIsmj). The journal offers a platform for RCSI undergraduate students to highlight and publish their research at an early stage in their careers. The full case study is available [here](#).

2.3.9.2 Reputation Monitoring and Management

Some HEIs reported a focus on activities to understand and enhance reputation. For example:

- University of Galway reported that it will undertake a reputation audit in the subsequent reporting period to understand reputational strengths and weaknesses among internal and external, domestic and international academics, researchers and audiences.
- RCSI reported that the Communications team led the pillar reputation campaigns during the reporting period, specifically Discover for research; Educate for education and Engage for societal impact. RCSI noted that progress was made on diversifying the mix of channels used for the campaigns, that positive coverage in Ireland remained consistently high and the volume of international coverage increased.

2.3.10 Societal and Community Engagement Activities

Several HEIs reported on activities that reflected their broader engagement with the regional, national and international communities in which they operate. For example:

- UCD reported that it continues to publish a UCD Engagement Report annually which highlights and showcases a wide variety of community engagements. Highlighted examples from that report in the AQR include Healthy UCD, Helping Kids! Lab and an initiative focused on helping parents support youth mental health.
- RCSI reported on the continuation of its MyHealth lecture series as pre-recorded virtual events. The series delivered in the reporting period has had more than 10,000 views on YouTube and addressed mental health, positive ageing, obesity stigma, menopause, sexual health, and vaping. The RCSI MyHealth podcast version of the series was also launched, with more than 2,000 downloads.
- MU reported that the university is a member of the Universities in Exile Consortium and hosts the Scholars at Risk office on campus. MU offers a Scholars at Risk Fellowship for scholars who have had to flee their home country and awarded six students University of Sanctuary Scholarships during the reporting period.
- UL reported on regionally based engagement activities, including a UL Citizen's Assembly event in which 100 Limerick people select four projects proposed by UL academics and the Health Alliance for Practice-based Professional Education and Engagement, which brings together clinicians and staff from St Gabriel's Foundation and UL School of Allied Health to create community-based placements for students studying speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy.

Within the AQRs, some HEIs also reported on engagement with first and second-level students across a range of activities. For example:

- University of Galway reported on a Health Professional Taster Day held by the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences. The taster programme offered transition year students hands-on experience of how healthcare teams work together and was open to post-primary students in 41 schools in Galway city and county.
- RCSI reported that over 200 transition year students were welcomed to RCSI's Stephen's Green campus for the RCSI Transition Year MiniMed Programme. More than 3,600 students

from all over Ireland were also provided the opportunity to gain insight into a career in healthcare by logging on to the online programmes.

- RCSI additionally reported that over 500 local primary school children from RCSI's linked DEIS schools participated in health education activities supported by RCSI staff and student volunteers and that 80 first-year post-primary students participated in the REACH RCSI Junior Researcher Programme. Students worked in teams and took part in a series of workshops, presentations, and interactive lab sessions to experience what it's like to study and work in science and research and understand the real impact it has on society.
- The MTU Cork Libraries sponsored an initiative by Togher Community Garden Outreach Project to teach children how to cook healthy meals using the produce from the community garden. The library shared its expertise on copyright and was delighted to be able to digitally preserve and share the cookbook entitled *From the Garden: A Fun Cookery Book for Young Chefs* via the institutional repository SWORD.

2.3.11 SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

The AQRs submitted in 2024 indicated that substantive work was being undertaken in several institutions to enhance practices surrounding the self-evaluation, monitoring and review activities that are crucial to quality assurance frameworks. For example:

- UCC reported a focus on aligning Indicators of Quality with reference to the recently agreed HEA System Performance Framework KPIs and the metrics underpinning UCC's new strategic plan. The project will progress in the subsequent reporting period, identifying sample indicators to be used in a proof-of-concept Indicators of Quality dashboard. UCC also reported that prior to commencing a 4th cycle of periodic quality review, a re-calibration process would take place. This is intended to ensure that the methodology for quality review is strategically aligned and referenced to current and emergent good practice internationally and nationally.

Some of the AQRs submitted in 2024 indicated that thematic quality review was being utilised to focus on cross-cutting challenges. The examples of reporting below include a thematic review conducted retrospectively in one instance and by design in another.

- UCD submitted a case study outlining a project conducted by the university's Quality Office in conjunction with UCD Institutional Research. The project reviewed school review group reports from 35 academic schools during the period 2016 – 2022 and identified cross-institutional themes, areas of good practice and issues of common concern. A learning from the review was that there was a need to support schools in the area of strategic planning and ongoing monitoring. The full case study is available [here](#).
- TCD reported that its first ever thematic quality review of student mental health services was undertaken in the reporting period. The collaborative review encompassed Student Counselling Services, College Health Service and Disability services. The thematic approach was highly commended by the external review panel.

The AQRs provide an overview of the composition of expert panels involved in quality assurance and programme validation or approval processes. Reporting identifies the gender, nationality and internal versus external status of the reviewers. In the two previous reporting periods it was noted that a relatively small number of non-Irish review panel members were included in the membership of these panels. Given the emphasis on EU integration and international

collaboration, this was noted to be an interesting point for reflection. Analysis of this aspect of reporting for the AQRs submitted for 2024 reflects that there are significant differences between individual institutions in relation to panel composition.

Composition of Expert Review Teams/Panels involved in IQA (publicly-regulated HEIs): Internal, National, International (2024)

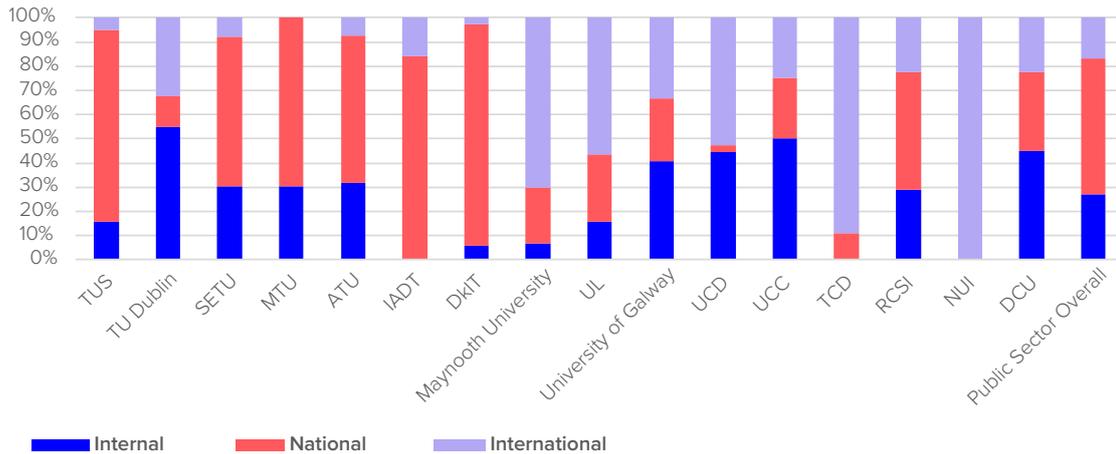


Figure 10 - Composition of Expert Review Teams/Panels Involved in IQA (Publicly-regulated HEIs): Internal, National, International (2024)

The gender balance on expert panels across public HEIs shows greater consistency between institutions. Overall analysis of gender for the roles of chair and secretary indicates that there is a slightly higher frequency of males serving as chairs and a significantly higher frequency of females serving in the role of secretary.

Composition of Expert Review Teams/Panels involved in IQA (publicly-regulated HEIs): Gender (2024)

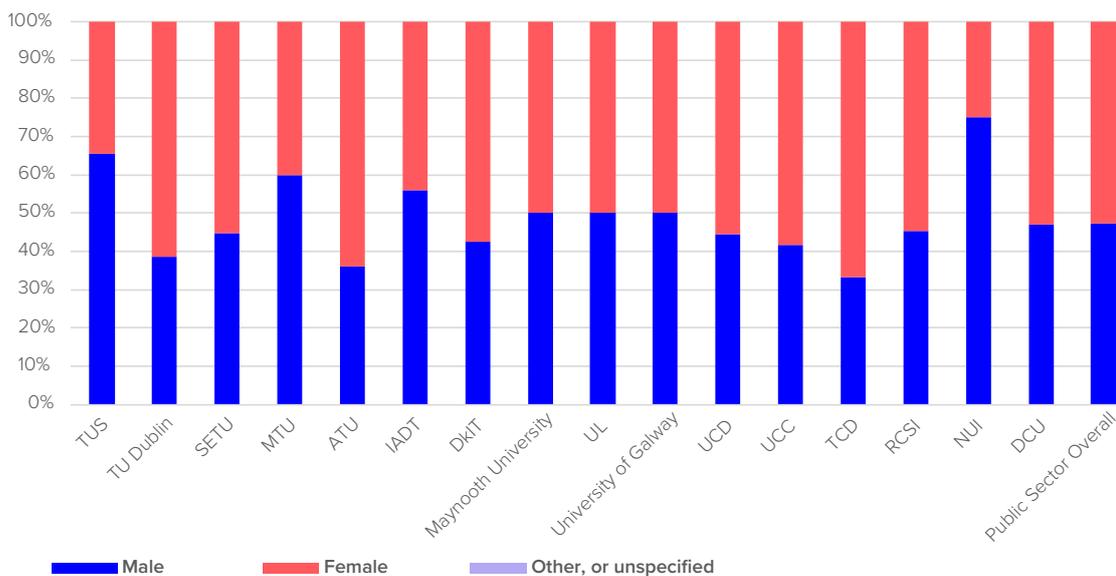


Figure 11 - Composition of Expert Review Teams /Panels involved in IQA (Publicly-regulated HEIs): Gender (2024)

**Gender Profile of Review Team/Panel Chairpersons:
Publicly-regulated HE Sector 2024**

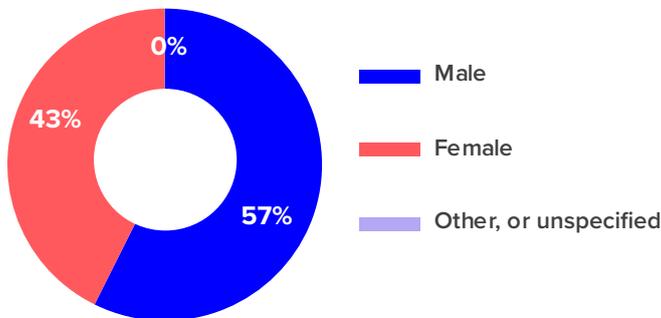


Figure 12 - Gender Profile of Review Team/Panel Chairpersons: Publicly-regulated HE Sector 2024

**Gender Profile of Review Team/Panel Secretary:
Publicly-regulated HE Sector 2024**

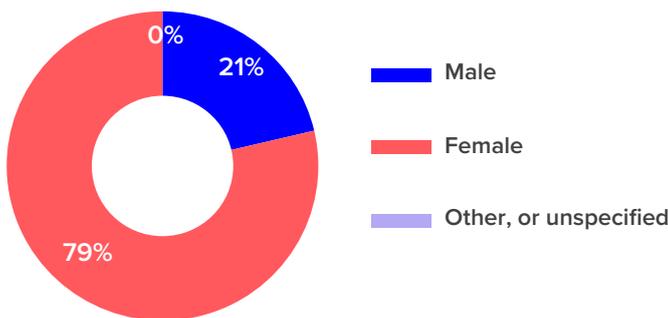


Figure 13 - Gender Profile of Review Team/Panel Secretary: Publicly-regulated HE Sector 2024

2.3.11.1 CINNTE

As per the previous year, a number of AQRs submitted by institutions that had completed the CINNTE institutional review process several years earlier acknowledged ongoing progress in relation to recommendations arising, typically absorbed into annual reporting processes and quality improvement plans. For example:

- UCD, which completed its CINNTE review in 2019, noted that ongoing annual reporting was provided to the Governing Authority within the Institutional Quality Improvement Plan. Indicators for the upcoming reporting period are mapped to review team recommendations. However, a number of these actions are now complete.
- TU Dublin, which completed its CINNTE review in 2021, reported that an Institutional Action Plan was submitted to QQI, with 22 of 32 actions identified completed to date. The actions within the plan are aligned to ten main actions from TU Dublin’s strategic plan.
- TCD, which completed its CINNTE review in 2022, reported that the implementation plan for the institutional review was submitted in April 2023.

Unsurprisingly, for institutions preparing for or which had completed the CINNTE institutional review process in more recent years, tracking of activities against CINNTE objectives was typically more prominent. For example, NUI, UCC and IADT reported as follows:

- UCC provided an update on planned QA objectives mapped to CINNTE recommendations and reported that the recommendations arising from institutional review would be addressed on an ongoing basis with reference to UCC's Strategic Plan.
- NUI reported that the review and reflection prompted by the review brought focused attention to the system of QA policy development and review. The Quality Team at NUI developed an action plan in response to the CINNTE review report in consultation with all staff.
- IADT reported that it hosted the main review visit in May 2023, following a process that utilised a variety of methodologies to inform the ISER.

Several technological universities also reported on preparations for their CINNTE institutional review processes following the reporting period:

- SETU reported that preparations began during the reporting period with the establishment of a steering group and formal agreement with QQI of the external panel dates. The formation of workgroups and the development of the ISER were planned for the subsequent reporting period.
- MTU reported that preparations commenced for the review and that submission of the ISER was planned for the subsequent reporting period.
- ATU reported that preparatory work had commenced and that the structure of a steering group was approved by the Academic Council, representative of the multi-campus network. A CINNTE coordinator was scheduled to be appointed early in the subsequent reporting period and representative committees to work on various sections of the ISER. Information and data will be gathered for inclusion in the Institutional Profile.
- TUS reported that background work on the Institutional Profile and self-evaluation was undertaken, with the ISER submission due to QQI in the subsequent reporting period.

2.3.12 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMES

In addition to work undertaken to enhance platforms and systems that support research in public HEIs (see Section 2.3.8.3), the AQRs submitted in 2024 indicate ongoing activity across a number of Ireland's public HEIs to review and assess research performance and the quality of associated institutional supports.

2.3.12.1 Research Assessment

A shift toward the adoption of qualitative methodologies in research assessment and a consideration of non-traditional research outputs is particularly visible in a number of submissions. For example:

- University of Galway reported that it was one of the first signatories to the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA), recognising the diversity of contributions to excellent research. CoARA members commit to primarily use qualitative methodologies in research assessment and to a process of critical self-reflection and learning around assessment.
- UCC reported that planning of the methodology for a Research Quality Review (RQR) was underway. Planning is building on experience from previous RQRs and cognisant of

significant changes in relation to what constitutes best practice in research assessment.

- TCD reported on its TORCH project, which identified and developed strategic policy areas to inform the research ecosystem of the CHARM-EU Alliance and TCD. This included working toward reforming research assessment, fostering EDI, championing Open Science, promoting inter/transdisciplinary research and intensifying research and innovation cooperation between universities.

2.3.12.2 Ongoing Review, Research Support and Research Training Activity

Activities to review and develop supporting QA and supports for researchers were also reported by a number of public HEIs. For example:

- University of Galway approved policy and guidelines for Institutional Review of Research Performance for implementation in the subsequent reporting period, along with the review schedule.
- MU reported that a report on the review of its Research Development Office (conducted in the previous reporting period) was published.
- TCD reported that the Research Committee is engaged in a full review of all research-related policies in the university.
- UL reported that the university had completed the development of a University Research Strategy and completed a thematic review of professional supports for research, for which the published report is now available.
- DkIT reported on an enhanced suite of both online and face-to-face researcher training modules for both staff and postgraduate research students and the rollout of a structured training programme for all researchers and staff through the Epigeum platform. A breadth of other activities were underway to enhance postgraduate research, including full adoption of the DCU postgraduate research forms and supporting policies.
- TCD reported that the Research Development Office and collaborators delivered 32 training events, covering specific call topics, funders' insights, inter or transdisciplinary research proposals, grant writing workshops, ERC training and early career researcher workshops. A total of 1,648 researchers participated. The Graduate Studies Committee also approved a set of detailed recommendations aimed at scaling the current range of supports offered to the doctoral research committee. These will be delivered in the subsequent reporting period.
- TUS reported on the positive impact increased funding and investment had had on research output, with data obtained in 2023 reflecting a 95% increase in scholarly output over the preceding 6-year period. A strategic focus for TUS is connecting relevant faculties to research institutes and groups within the university, to ensure that research, development and innovation activity is transferred to taught programmes.

2.3.13 Internationalisation Activity and TrustEd Ireland (International Education Mark)

The imminent introduction of the TrustEd Ireland scheme (previously known as the International Education Mark, or IEM) has implications for QA and will require all HEIs seeking authorisation from QQI to use the TrustEd Ireland mark to undergo an assessment of their compliance with the *Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners* (HE

Code). This involves a self-assessment of compliance with the HE Code that is submitted to QQI to be assessed by an external panel. The TrustEd Ireland scheme is a voluntary one but will be a requirement for HEIs seeking to recruit non-EU/EEA/Swiss learners who require study visas and permissions.

Reporting on preparation (undertaken and planned) for the IEM was variable across the AQRs, although a number of institutions indicated submission of an application within QA Improvement and Enhancement plans for the upcoming period. This may reflect a pause on earlier preparations made by institutions during the waiting period for legislation to be enacted and details of the application timelines and process to be announced. Reporting includes the following:

- UL provided a link to a document outlining compliance with the Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners authored in 2019 and indicates that it intends to apply to QQI for authorisation to use the IEM. A working group has been established to evaluate current policy and practice in reference to the revised HE Code of Practice to be published by QQI.
- RCSI reported that its CINNTE objective to determine compliance with the Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes to International Learners was completed during the reporting period. The institution's IEM Group was convened and undertook a self-evaluation against the draft HE Code of Practice in preparation for the introduction of the IEM. RCSI also reported that a Quality Forum event was held as part of the RCSI International Education Forum, providing staff with updates on new regulatory requirements, and opportunities to workshop enhancements to quality activity.
- TCD reported that policies in relation to international education partnerships will be reviewed in the subsequent reporting period, following publication by QQI of a revised Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes to International Learners and the policy on authorisation on the use of the IEM. TCD additionally reported that the English Language Policy was developed in advance of IEM implementation.
- DkIT reported that work to attain the IEM had commenced and an expression of interest had been submitted to QQI during the reporting period.

Additionally:

- UL reported that work and training to onboard as many aspects as possible of mobility for Erasmus+ Exchange and components of Study Abroad was ongoing. UL also indicated a plan to review its procedures on collaborative and transnational provision in the subsequent reporting period.
- IADT reported on a breadth of internationalisation activities undertaken during the reporting period. These included enhancing the direct application route for international (non-EU) students to facilitate earlier offers, facilitation of an International Student Focus Group by an external consultant to improve understandings of the student journey, visits by IADT representatives to partner and exchange locations and inward/outward Erasmus+ student exchanges.
- TUS reported on highlights from the university's international office outreach, including the successful conclusion of a collaborative effort with St Lawrence College, Canada, the launch of the TUS Africa Liaison Office in Lagos, Nigeria and the high approval rating for Ministry of Education-approved undergraduate level programmes in China. TUS recruited two International Experience Officers to assist students in every aspect of their journey.

- University of Galway reported on the final stages of the Global Galway Project, for which building regional expertise was a focus in the reporting period. The university has on-the-ground presence and expertise within each global region to service the needs of prospective students and increase understanding of recruitment across the different regions. The English Language Centre was moved into the university from commercial services during the reporting period and a focus in subsequent reporting periods will be expanding the proportion of students who receive language and academic skills support prior to and during their studies. Global Galway activities have now been embedded into business as usual in all areas.
- SETU reported that an external panel evaluated and approved the proposal to expand SETU's collaboration with NUIST China, which will see a number of dual degrees delivered in Nanjing. A Strategic Plan for Global Partnerships and Internationalisation has also been commissioned by the university.

2.4 QUALITY ASSURANCE IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT PLANS

As noted in previous reporting periods there is significant variation in the level of detail presented in the AQRs pertaining to QA improvement and enhancement plans for the upcoming reporting period. Information regarding plans for the upcoming period is additionally reported under a range of subheadings throughout the AQRs in the context of particular projects or initiatives. Some (but not all) institutions, for example RCSI and UCC, aligned plans for the upcoming reporting period with objectives or recommendations arising from the CINNTE review process.

Nonetheless, the AQRs provide a useful indicator of planning and priority areas for public HEIs for the 2023/24 academic year, albeit not in a directly comparable manner. Examples of reporting include the indicators set out in the following subsections.

2.4.1 STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

- University of Galway indicated that a Strategy Development Group had been established to develop the next University-wide strategy and that a Values Survey is planned to support work on values-led strategic planning. TUS indicated it planned completion of the TUS SDG strategy, with supporting activity in this area indicated including appointment of a Director of Sustainability and the establishment of a central resource hub on sustainable development, ESD and climate action. ATU and IADT both indicated the planned completion and approval of strategic plans in the next reporting period.
- MU indicated the development of an implementation plan for the new strategic plan would be a priority for the next reporting period. The work will be led by the President's Office in collaboration with the University Executive and stakeholders across the institution.
- UCC indicated that CINNTE review recommendations pertaining to income growth, budget allocations and the resourcing of the university's global strategy would be addressed by the President in alignment with the University's strategic plan.
- UL indicated an intention to develop a Global Engagement Strategy supporting objectives for research, learning and teaching and the sustainable development goals, and also a Human Rights EDI Strategy that will outline UL's commitments in this area for staff, students, visitors and service users.

2.4.2 ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND AI

UL indicated an intention to establish a new unit with responsibility for academic integrity to focus on both the education of students and staff and the investigation of cases. DCU indicated that it will continue to monitor developments in generative AI, considering the issues and opportunities. DkIT indicated that it will build capacity in assessment design to promote academic integrity and review and update the Assessment and Learning Policy.

2.4.3 RESEARCH

UL indicated an intention to conduct a thematic review of research ethics. University of Galway indicated a research assessment exercise will be carried out across six of the eighteen schools of the university. UCC indicated that a 'Thematic Review of the Doctoral Student Learning Experience' was scheduled for the subsequent reporting period, alongside progression of the Research Administration Project.

2.4.4 DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

- MU indicated plans to further develop data dashboards to support monitoring, planning and decision-making at institutional level. DCU also indicated that work will continue on developing a suite of Power BI Dashboards to inform strategic business intelligence.
- DCU indicated ongoing work toward implementation of the new Student Information System, due to go live in 2024. TU Dublin similarly indicated that work would progress on its Student Record Management System, due to go live in 2025.
- UL indicated that ongoing work is planned to digitalise key processes. University of Galway indicated that digital transformation activities will be progressed over the next several years via delivery of the Student Digital Pathways programme.
- UCC indicated that a user-focused evaluation of the current University Student Feedback Project would be undertaken to inform subsequent stages of development. DCU indicated that its Student Feedback on Teaching Subgroup is tasked with developing a new, institution-wide approach to student feedback.
- TUS indicated plans for the procurement and deployment of a proctored e-examination management system, a digitally enabled research ethics application management system and the specification, procurement and deployment of a digitally-enabled academic integrity software solution.

2.4.5 WORK TO MONITOR AND ENHANCE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS

- UCC indicated that work to develop and monitor the consistent implementation of policies and procedures recommended by the CINNTE review team would be addressed in alignment with the new strategic plan and led by the Deputy President and Registrar. RCSI indicated that it would respond to the CINNTE visit report and create an institutional action plan in preparation for submission of a follow-up report. IADT indicated that it would create an implementation plan in response to the CINNTE report and commence implementation of recommendations.
- UL indicated that it would conduct a review and evaluation of quality review activity, including review demographics, thematic analysis of outcomes and linking of recommendations to the UL strategic plan. MU indicated that a review and update of quality review materials and work to enhance student engagement in quality reviews would be undertaken in the upcoming period.

2.4.6 TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY INTEGRATION

- SETU indicated that the implementation of a new Academic Council design, including a new committee structure, would commence. Within this, terms of reference and membership for a Joint Quality Committee will be determined. This will be a joint committee of both the Academic Council and the Governing Body and will have oversight of the periodic review of academic and service areas. A working group will be established to develop a new academic delivery framework and the ongoing alignment of policies, procedures and processes will continue.
- TU Dublin indicated a range of activities to implement the University Education Model, including ongoing consultation, the launch of resources, engagement workshops, promotion and support for allied development work and initiatives.
- ATU indicated that the new Organisation Structure for the university will be developed, with design options discussed with key stakeholders and agreement anticipated on the new structure in the 2023/24 academic year. St Angela's College Sligo will also be incorporated. Work to continue the development and approval of ATU-wide policies and procedures will continue alongside the integration of key systems and functions.

2.5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has provided a thematic analysis of the AQRs submitted by public HEIs in 2024, which reported on activities across the sector during the 2022/23 academic year.

Much activity reported is responsive to changing external conditions, which included but was not limited to the release and rapid adoption of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT during the reporting period, developing needs across enterprise and industry, the growing urgency surrounding climate action and the evolution of social norms pertaining to EDI.

Strong additional themes include the further embedding of blended, hybrid and remote working practices in institutional life, which is reflected in initiatives to facilitate hybrid teaching and learning, enable hybrid meetings and remote work. Enabling those practices is the rapid digitalisation of processes, leading to greater efficiencies in registry offices, libraries, research support, policy management, QA activity and more.



CHAPTER 3.

CHAPTER 3: QUALITY IN PRIVATE/INDEPENDENT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

This chapter presents a thematic analysis of developments and enhancements in quality assurance in six Irish private/independent higher education institutions (HEIs) in the period September 2022 to August 2023. The analysis is based on their Annual Quality Reports (AQRs) submitted in February 2024. All HEIs in this cohort had their quality assurance procedures approved by QQI through reengagement or initial access to validation processes and offer QQI-validated programmes. Many also offer programmes leading to awards of other awarding and professional bodies. This is the fourth year that these six private/independent HEIs have submitted AQRs.

As was the case in 2023, not all private/independent HEIs were required to submit an AQR for this period. The AQR currently only is a requirement for HEIs with aspirations to attain delegated authority to make awards: other HEIs may also opt to do so. This is on account of QQI's work to develop a new monitoring framework in the context of its changing regulatory landscape and the variety of HEIs and other providers with which it is engaged.

The thematic analysis presented in this chapter is based on the annual quality reports submitted by the following six private/independent HEIs:

No	Higher Education Institution
1	College of Computing and Technology (CCT)
2	Dublin Business School (DBS)
3	Griffith College
4	Hibernia College
5	National College of Ireland (NCI)
6	Open Training College (OTC)

Table 2: List of Private/Independent HEIs that Submitted AQRs in 2024

Eight additional HEIs (listed in the table below) submitted case studies to highlight and illustrate specific QA developments despite not otherwise participating in the AQR process. This voluntary activity suggests that the promotion of a quality culture and opportunities for peer learning across the sector may be valued by these private/independent HEIs. This chapter of the thematic analysis is augmented by those case studies.

No	Higher Education Institution
1	Children’s Therapy Centre (CTC)
2	Galway Business School
3	Innopharma Education
4	Institute of Business and Technology (IBAT)
5	Institute of Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy (IICP)
6	Irish College of Humanities and Applied Sciences (ICHAS)
7	Setanta College
8	SQT Training Ltd.

Table 3: List of Private/Independent HEIs that Submitted Case Studies in 2024

3.1 QUALITY ASSURANCE IMPLEMENTATION AND RELATED DEVELOPMENTS

Private/independent providers reported on a number of factors that impacted on QA implementation in the reporting period.

3.1.1 IMPACTS OF COVID-19

There was more limited reference made in this year’s AQRs to the longer term or residual impacts of COVID-19 on HEI operations or changes to the teaching, learning and assessment environment on foot of changes adopted during the pandemic. Reporting reflected that in some private/independent HEIs a return to in-person teaching and assessment was implemented. However, it was also evident that the private/independent higher education sector is catering to ongoing demand for programmes delivered in hybrid and blended modes, particularly for part-time learners. This diversity of approach is unsurprising, given that the group of HEIs reporting in 2024 cater to a breadth of learner profiles including domestic/international, part/full-time and under/postgraduate students. Examples of reporting include:

- Griffith College reported that all exams for the reporting period were scheduled in-person/ on-campus reflecting the cessation of pandemic restrictions.
- NCI reported that all full-time undergraduate and postgraduate learners returned to campus in September 2022, while part-time learners continued or began their programmes in blended learning mode.
- Open Training College reported a full return to in-person delivery of the face-to-face elements (lectures and workshops) of blended learning programmes (with the exception of tutorials), as well as in-person exams.

- DBS reported that the College has adopted “hyflex” delivery, in which lectures are simultaneously conducted in the classroom and online. This approach applies to all classes except those requiring practical, face-to-face interaction.

Both Griffith College and Open Training College reported a return to in-person assessment, while NCI and DBS retained online exams for the 2022/23 academic year.

- Griffith College reported that all examinations returned to in-person/on-campus formats for the 2022/23. Some challenges were encountered, such as securing invigilators and managing COVID-19 cases among staff and learners. The pilot of an online alternative assessment system concluded, recommending it not be continued post-COVID, though integrated proctoring systems are being considered for future use. Additionally, learners accessed their results via MyThemis, a new portal in the college’s learner management system, which provided detailed marks and overall performance.
- NCI continued to deliver some online, remote-proctored assessments during this reporting period and began a review of deployment procedures for the college’s remote-proctoring platform. These procedures will be approved by the Academic Council during the 2023-24 year.
- DBS further reported that it continued to hold exams online for the duration of the academic year 2022/2023 to allow for planning and advance information on assessment to be given to incoming and continuing learners. This was supported by the Online Exams Policy which had been created and implemented from February 2021. An online invigilation platform was used to proctor all online exams.

The ongoing impact of the pandemic on learner wellbeing was noted by one private/independent HEI, whilst formalisation of hybrid working models for staff was reported by another.

- The Learning Support unit at Griffith College reported that pandemic-related restrictions had limited the social connections of younger learners with their peers. As a result, a question about social aspirations is now included in the learning needs analysis meeting. Learners are also given the opportunity to connect with other college departments, such as the Students’ Union, to help build their social networks.
- NCI evaluated staff experiences of hybrid working during the pandemic and commenced the formalisation of the College’s Hybrid Working Policy. The new policy was approved for implementation on a pilot basis in Autumn 2023 and will be assessed and reviewed in Autumn 2024.

In the previous year’s AQRs, some private/independent HEIs reported that they were reviewing and assessing the learnings from actions taken during the pandemic. Despite the valuable opportunity for peer learning arising from these evaluations, their outcomes have not been reported on in detail in the AQRs submitted in 2024.

3.1.2 DEVOLVED RESPONSIBILITY AND DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO MAKE AWARDS

Four of the six providers that submitted AQRs in 2024 have devolved responsibility (DR) from QQI for some aspects of the programme validation process, namely for arranging an independent evaluation of the proposed programme by a panel of experts approved by QQI. QQI retains decision-making responsibility on the outcomes of the validation process informed by the recommendation of the expert panel. Obtaining and maintaining DR indicates the maturity of the provider's QA system and the confidence QQI has in that system. Griffith College, DBS and NCI obtained approval for DR for elements of the validation process in previous reporting periods, whilst CCT obtained approval from QQI in April 2023. Griffith College provided an update on new developments in this area: the college obtained approval from QQI during the reporting period to complete a collaborative programme validation process under devolved responsibility in accordance with approved procedures.

In the previous reporting period, DBS, Griffith College and NCI indicated plans to progress applications for delegated authority (DA) to make awards from QQI. Providers with DA may make their own awards within the scope of the authority delegated by QQI, enabling greater autonomy in programme development. Providers with DA are not required to apply to QQI for validation of programmes within the approved scope of DA. The [Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act \(2012\) \(as amended\)](#) enables the extension of the range of providers that are eligible to request delegated authority.

- DBS reported that attaining DA from QQI remains a key strategic priority and will be the next major objective for the provider following completion of its institutional QA review by QQI in 2024. Preparation has included the creation of an Assistant Registrar for Audit and Compliance post. DBS reported it had established a dedicated sub-committee of the Board (the Delegated Authority Committee), populated by senior management and the Chair of the Academic Board to provide oversight and assurance to the Board of Directors on preparations for DA and to guide the Executive. The committee's activities were noted to have been temporarily suspended and will resume once institutional review has been completed.
- Griffith College reported that it had updated its Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) Manual during the reporting period as part of its preparation for institutional review and application for DA. Restructuring of the document follows a significant review of the QAE undertaken in the previous reporting period and is designed to align with national and international standards inclusive of those applied by QQI and the ESG.
- NCI recorded the establishment of a project team to assess college requirements prior to making an application for delegated authority to QQI under its enhancement plans for the upcoming reporting period. Obtaining DA to make awards is a strategic objective of the provider as outlined in its Strategic Plan 2022-2027, which was launched in November 2022.
- Open Training College also reported its objectives to obtain delegated authority to make awards following its institutional review. As part of its preparations, the provider will provide a paper for college governance committees on options around delegated authority (and the key issues and processes needed to support the new corporate fitness requirements) and create a related action plan for 2023/24.

3.1.3 EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

As noted in last year's thematic analysis, there is considerable diversity in the types of external partnerships and collaborations reported by the six reporting private/independent HEIs. Although not a universal feature, the importance of industry advisory boards and industry-education partnerships in informing the development of new programmes is prominent in several of the reports submitted by some of the private/independent HEIs for 2024.

- Griffith College reported on programme development undertaken following a successful tender to the Construction Professionals Skillnet. A QQI-validated Certificate in Strategic Coordination and Collaboration for Modern Methods of Construction micro-credential programme was developed following engagement with industry to identify the key knowledge and skill gaps in the sector. The programme is intended to support delivery on the Government's Housing for All and Project Ireland 2040 targets. The college reported plans to continue engagement with the Construction Professionals Skillnet to facilitate additional programme development and provision.





Pictured (L-R) at the launch of the Certificate in Strategic Co-ordination and Collaboration for Modern Methods of Construction at Government Buildings are Paul Healy, Chief Executive, Skillnet Ireland; Professor Diarmuid Hegarty, President, Griffith College; Simon Harris, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research.

Figure 14 - Launch of the Griffith College and Skillnet Ireland Certificate in Strategic Co-ordination and Collaboration for Modern Methods of Construction

- CCT reported panel commendations on the excellent linkages and input from industry, especially the provider’s Industry Engagement Forum, in new computing programmes validated. A planned action to increase the number of industry field trips, guest lectures, industry-led webinars and feedback on typical industry-based problems for this reporting period will be continued into the subsequent reporting period. CCT additionally reported on a continued alliance with Microsoft Ireland, with a successful Springboard+ submission for a three-year funding award.
- NCI reported that it worked with research-intensive partners in universities in Rome, Vienna and Bucharest as well as with industry to develop new Master’s Postgraduate Diploma and Certificate programmes in Open Data Practice. NCI additionally reported on its P-TECH initiative, an education-industry collaboration promoting pathways to higher education among second level learners, discussed in this chapter under Section 3.3.6 (Programmes of Education and Training).
- DBS reported that Industry Advisory Boards were established in Arts and in Health Sciences and reconstituted in Accounting and Finance and Computing during the reporting period, with the appointment of new Chairs in each area and review of the purpose, mission and functioning of the Boards at strategic level planned for the subsequent reporting period. Industry-focused research is one of three pillars within a draft updated research strategy developed during the reporting period.

A subset of the reporting private/independent providers referenced current and planned activities in transnational provision and European-level engagements in research and innovation.

- DBS reported the validation by QQI during the reporting period of an MSc in Business Analytics and MSc in Digital Marketing & Analytics for transnational delivery with the University of New York in Prague (UNYP).

- Griffith College reported that it continues to progress the following EU-funded projects:
 - EU SMART4FUTURE, approved by the European Institute for Innovation and Technology – Climate KIC;
 - the EU ESCALATE project was submitted under ERASMUS with a consortium of EU partners for the development of ‘train the trainer’ modules for lecturers’ teaching innovation; and,
 - as part of EU COVE - the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE), the college is part of a tender under AI2Med in which the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) is identified as the medical practitioner partner.
- Griffith College also reported that in May 2023, it formally established a Computing Science partnership with Nanfang College, in Guangzhou, China. The college will welcome its first learners from Nanfang College to year two of the Griffith College programme in 2025.
- NCI reported that it engaged with QQI during the reporting period with regard to progressing QA arrangements for the inclusion of ERASMUS+ student mobility within validated programmes leading to QQI awards. To that end, NCI is developing a new QA policy and procedures on ERASMUS+ study mobility and will recommend these for Academic Council, and subsequent QQI approval, in 2023-24. A number of NCI’s collaborative programmes and articulation arrangements are scheduled for review in 2024.

Among those private/independent providers reporting on externally-focused partnerships and collaborations, the AQRs reflected ongoing work to review, update and enhance governance arrangements and supporting QA policy and processes.

- Griffith College reported that its standard collaborative agreement template was updated following feedback, and as a response to a special condition arising from a recent programme validation pertaining to Data Protection Policy. The college also completed a project to enhance the representation of collaborations on the website’s Collaborative Partner page and individual programme pages.
 - Griffith College further updated on its previously identified objective to review collaborative delivery arrangements. Amongst developments reported in that regard, *ex officio* membership of the college’s academic QAE committees was extended to include representatives of collaborative partners.
- Hibernia College reported that it has recently given conditional approval to a Framework for Collaborative and Transnational Provision, subject to approval by QQI, as part of a planned new programme validation for submission in 2024, which will include an application for extension of scope of provision for the college.
- DBS reported that the majority of the HEI’s seven collaborative programmes are scheduled for review in the upcoming reporting period.

None of the six private/independent providers reporting in 2024 are engaged in the delivery of joint awards, whilst CCT and OTC noted that they do not engage in any collaborative provision. As in previous reporting periods, membership of the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) and participation in its activities, including conferences, seminars and webinars, was a theme in some of the AQRs submitted by private/independent HEIs. The benefits in terms of peer learning of this participation were noted.

3.1.4 PROGRESS TOWARD THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

As noted in the 2023 thematic analysis report, Ireland's HEIs are not explicitly required in their annual quality reporting to report on activities to progress implementation of the SDGs or EDI. However, these cross-cutting themes observably impact multiple dimensions of QA in higher education. In 2024, one private/independent provider reported on integration of the SDGs and several on EDI priorities.

Griffith College singularly reported on steps taken to integrate the UN SDGs. Some notable achievements include upgrading of campus infrastructure to reduce energy usage and CO₂ emissions and increased use of renewable energy sources; efforts to reduce use of single-use plastics; and roll out of a pilot programme for staff to promote active and sustainable travel to campus. The college was recognised as an EU-certified Gold Standard Cycle Friendly Employer (CFE) from Cycling Solutions Ireland, in May 2023. Further promoting and supporting the development of greener, healthier and more sustainable campuses remains a strategic objective of Griffith College in the upcoming reporting period.

EDI continued to be prominent in a number of reports submitted in 2024, with updates particularly resonant in relation to staff-facing initiatives and activities; teaching and learning initiatives and student support or engagement services with a focus on inclusion. EDI-aligned activities are additionally identified in this chapter under those sub-headings. Examples of broad EDI updates, pertaining to strategic priorities, governance, resourcing, the built environment and programmes included:

- NCI reported that its Strategic Plan 2022-2027, which was published during the reporting period, reflects the college's strategic commitment to EDI. The HEI also submitted a case study on the UDL strategies for assessment at NFQ Level 9 employed by NCI, which is reproduced in Section 3.3.2 of this report.
- CCT reported that strategic objectives for the upcoming reporting period include developing the college's EDI capacity as part of strengthening student engagement, partnership and inclusion. CCT introduced a part-time Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer role in April 2023. The HEI also reported that it had collaborated with AsIAm to progress CCT's application for recognition as an autism-friendly campus during the reporting period. Actions taken include the creation of a new quiet area for staff and students as well as a full sensory audit of the physical site and online facilities which was conducted independently by AsIAm. A number of recommendations emerging from the review have been implemented.
- Griffith College reported on the establishment of a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Working Group, and the commissioning of an external report, College Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: Report on Progress, Challenges & Recommendations, which was submitted to Academic Council in July 2023. Ongoing activities in support of EDI include ensuring greater diversity on college committees; identifying and drafting policies to support EDI objectives; focusing on UDL in programme design and enhancing the learner support department to broaden the services available to learners with additional needs. The HEI outlined a further objective for the upcoming reporting period to continue to support, enhance and resource the development of the college's EDI considerations by expanding the HR team to support this work and by exploring the options for external review/ accreditation of the college's EDI activities.

- Hibernia College reported that, as part of programme revalidation processes, a revised Teaching Learning and Assessment Strategy was developed and UDL principles were more clearly embedded in programme content. The themes of inclusivity, global citizenship and cultural diversity were expanded across the curriculum.

Some private/independent HEIs reported on completed and planned updates to relevant policies. Examples of this included:

- Open Training College reported that it plans to benchmark policies and procedures in relation to CPD and EDI in the upcoming reporting period.
- CCT reported that it had undertaken an inclusive language policy review.
- Griffith College reported on the drafting of the college's new Learner Gender Identity and Expression Policy.

3.2 STRATEGY, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

All private/independent HEIs reported on progress made towards achieving strategic objectives and plans outlined in the previous reporting period. AQRs also highlighted ongoing strategy development both at institutional level and in targeted areas. Examples included:

- DBS approved a number of new strategies and plans in the reporting period, including an Academic Plan and published an updated research strategy. The college conducted a review of its Strategy for Learning, Assessment and Teaching Enhancement (SLATE) in 2023 in support of the development of a new three-year strategy that will help ensure alignment of approaches to teaching, learning and assessment with recent changes in delivery and student needs, including increased flexibility and enhanced use of technology, and responding to advances in AI technologies.
- Hibernia College reported that wide consultation was undertaken during July 2023 to inform the development of a new College Strategy. Development of the College Strategy is overseen by EMT and has been informed by changes in the overarching corporate structure of Hibernia College as part of the Folens Group. This approach will form part of the evidence base for external institutional review by QQI.
- NCI published its 2022-2027 Strategic Plan in November 2022. The new institutional strategy sets out NCI's aim to be an independent, HEA-designated institution with delegated awarding authority by the 2027/28 academic year. The six strategic priority areas of the plan are shown in figure 15 below:



Figure 15 - NCI Six Strategic Priority Areas

Ongoing enhancement to governance structures and decision-making processes were also reported:

- DBS approved and commenced implementation of an updated committee structure in April 2023. The college now has a new Academic Strategy, Planning and Performance Committee; Academic Programmes Committee; and a Student and Graduate Experience Committee. Additionally, the new Quality Assurance, Enhancement and Sustainability Committee replaced the former Quality Enhancement and Risk Management Committee, whilst the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Applied Research and Practice Committee have new terms of reference and membership. Finally, the functioning and membership of the Programme Approval Sub-Committee (PASC) is currently under review.
- Griffith College reported that the membership of the Academic and Professional Council (APC) was extended in February 2023 to include a representative of the Education, Learning and Development Group (ELDG). The college also commenced a review of its governance structure encompassing the range and scope of committees, their currency, terms of reference, membership, reporting responsibility, etc. Griffith College further updated on a previously planned objective to review and increase externality in academic decision making. To that end, the college reported on the involvement of industry representatives in programme development and review related processes and with learners' dissertations and projects.
- CCT reported that the College Board was expanded in summer 2023, with the appointment of two new independent non-executive members acting in an advisory capacity.

3.2.1 LEADERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND STRUCTURAL CHANGES

Private/independent HEIs reported a number of important updates to senior leadership and management aimed at enhancing overall institutional performance and quality. Some such updates were the culmination of activities commenced in previous reporting periods. Many of these developments were initiated in preparation for institutional review and/or application for delegated authority to make awards. Examples included:

- DBS reported the creation of a number of new leadership roles and the appointment of new personnel in existing roles. This included the appointment of a new Chair of the Academic Board in December 2023. The college was seeking to fill the independent member role on the Academic Board at the time of reporting.
 - The position of Assistant Registrar for Audit and Compliance was established in 2022. This new role emerged from the college's preparation for delegated authority.
 - The Quality Assurance Officer role at DBS was modified. Responsibility was divided into Academic Integrity and Assessment and Standards, Monitoring and Compliance.
 - Additional posts of Programme Level Managers, responsible for the day-to-day academic management of assigned programmes, were also introduced in 2022.
- Griffith College reported the creation of an additional post of Quality Assurance and Enhancement Project Manager in October 2022. The college also appointed a Director of Innovation and Programme Development (Graduate Business School) with responsibility for EU Project Management and tendering for future programmes.
- CCT reported that changes in personnel led to a review of roles and enhancements in the college's structure. Key changes include:
 - A Senior Faculty Coordinator role was established in August 2023 to support academic processes, especially in the Computing faculty.
 - A new Dean of Teaching and Learning role was created starting in October 2023.
- Hibernia College reported new post holders in several senior management roles, including Registrar, Quality, Enhancement and Registrations Manager and Academic Operations Manager.

3.2.2 QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Review activity, including programme review and revalidation led to the updating of existing policies and development of new policies and procedures across a number of the reporting HEIs. For example:

- CCT reported a number of updates to its QA Manual, including clarification of the President's right to attend all meetings of the Academic Council and its subcommittee; and the addition of a Risk Management Policy.
- Griffith College reported that an updated QAE Manual with particular focus on the college's governance structures was approved for publication at the start of the reporting period. Updates made included development and enhancement of the college's review processes and related reporting, e.g., annual programme reports and departmental/process reviews; ongoing engagement with collaborative partners; support of academic integrity; and relevant update of policies and procedures. The revised QAE Manual was approved for immediate use in the 2023/34 academic year.
- Hibernia College reported that it undertook a comprehensive review of its Quality Framework. The review strategy covered several areas including quality assurance; programme design; research; student-centred learning; admissions; staff recruitment; student support; data management; public information; transnational education; and online learning. The college introduced a new procedure, Appealing a College Admissions Decision Procedure, to clarify the distinct routes of appeal available to applicants and

registered learners. A revised conceptual framework and a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy were also developed.

- NCI reported that during the 2022-2024 period, the college is gradually reviewing its policies and procedures, updating certain provisions and introducing new policies to align with strategic priorities. In 2022/23, the college approved two new learner support policies in the areas of Student Fitness to Continue to Study and Student Mental Health and Wellbeing. Additionally, the Teaching and Learning Support Environment sub-committee reviewed a chapter of the QA Handbook, prompted by evolving experiences and practices since 2019, especially insights gained during the COVID-19 period when the college shifted all delivery fully online. In October 2022, an updated Policy and Procedures for Technology-Mediated Programmes was approved. NCI also undertook consultation to develop its new Research Strategy, aligned with the 2022-27 Strategic Plan.
- Open Training College reported that new policies referenced in the 2023 AQR were published and implemented. Steps to ensure alignment with the new statutory guidelines for online learning were commenced; the college's strategy was updated and its 'Pedagogical Framework' was published.

New or updated policies in the area of academic integrity and generative AI are discussed in more detail in Section 3.3.1 of this report.

3.3 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM ENHANCEMENT AND IMPACTS

3.3.1 ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

As in previous years, HEIs reported on their membership of the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN), with some noting the adoption or incorporation of NAIN Guidelines into local QA policies and procedures. Examples of reporting included:

- CCT reported the approval of a new Academic Integrity Policy and an Intellectual Property (IP) Created by Students Policy, as well as the appointment of a new Academic Integrity Committee early in the reporting period.
- At NCI a Policy on Assessments and Use of AI Generated Material such as Chat GPT was published during the reporting period. Collaborating support teams worked to produce guiding principles and supports for students and staff regarding the use of AI in assessment aligned with this policy, for publication at the outset of the subsequent reporting period.
- Open Training College reported that its Academic Integrity Policy and procedures were updated again for clarity and relevance during this reporting period, marking the second consecutive year of such updates. The college will review its measures against the NAIN's "Framework for Academic Misconduct Investigation" (August 2023) in the upcoming reporting period. A planned activity for the upcoming reporting period is ensuring that the college has up-to-date strategies to support and engage students in academic integrity.
- Hibernia College reported a review of relevant policy: The Academic Integrity and Good Practice Policy was updated, drawing on QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, the Irish Universities Association Policy Statement, and the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. The policy adopts language and definitions from the NAIN. The updated

policy emphasises proactive support for students to make good decisions and provides remediation for those involved in academic misconduct.

The extent of institutional commitment to academic integrity was further reflected in the creation of new dedicated roles and units within HEIs, often reflecting the development of holistic, institution-wide approaches. Initiatives focused on both staff and learners. The role played by libraries and support areas in providing training and resources was prominent.

- Open Training College reported that academic integrity is included in induction for both students and teaching staff. Learners participate in a specially designed module on this topic at the start of their studies, and teaching staff receive ongoing additional training.
- Griffith College held an Academic Writing Workshop for students covering topics such as deconstructing assignment briefs, articulating thoughts, structuring writing, academic integrity, and active writing. More generally, the library provides a range of training for faculty and learners on matters related to academic integrity, including generative AI. During National Academic Integrity Week 2022, Griffith College introduced a new resource entitled “Academic Integrity and Contract Cheating Orientation,” aimed at educating staff about issues related to contract cheating services.
- DBS reported that it extended its internal representation on NAIN. The following roles are represented on the Network: Educational Developer (Learning Unit); Quality Assurance Officer (Academic Integrity and Assessment, Registrar’s Office); Information Skills and Research Manager (DBS Library and Academic Hub); and Registrar. The HEI also established an Academic Integrity Task Force in September 2023, which has responsibility for promoting academic integrity among faculty and students, preventing and investigating misconduct, and developing strategies to prevent future incidents. Task Force members are drawn from across the college and include management, faculty and student representatives.
- The library at NCI continues to produce and host a variety of academic integrity resources for staff and learners, including an [Academic Integrity Newsletter](#) and an Academic Integrity Module for learners. The library also ran an academic integrity workshop for international learners, which will become a regular feature of its academic support services.
- Hibernia College also reported a number of collaborative initiatives including the establishment of a practical framework and a Community of Practice focused on academic integrity (see case study at Figure 16 below). This group led a policy review using a student co-creation model and developed principles for the acceptable use of generative AI in assessments. The college also created an Academic Integrity Homepage with resources for staff and students.

Case Study
Academic Integrity Community of Practice and Champions Network

Introduction

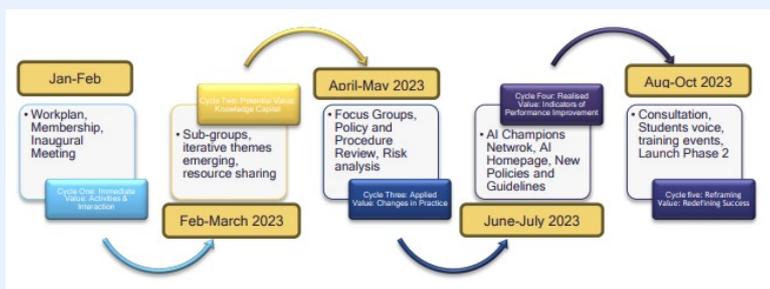
This case study charts the establishment of the Academic Integrity Community of Practice (CoP) and subsequent launching of the Academic Integrity Champions Network (AICN) from initial proposition through to consultation and enactment and into the review and redevelopment phases. The CoP was created in acknowledgement of rapid developments in Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) capabilities and the applicability of Large Language Models (LLMs), most notably heralded by the public launch of ChatGPT in November 2022. It was, however, more specifically guided by the context of the immediate concerns regarding assessment validity and assurance and, from inception, it was motivated by a shared desire to avoid a reactionary and reductionist response to GenAI. The CoP also represents a response to the European Commission’s stance that states two fundamental risks of AI are underuse and overuse (Digital Strategy: AI Act-Regulate the Use of AI in the EU, proposed by European Commission, 2021). This informs the decision to create a community with the purpose of keeping the conversation open, informed and progressive while enabling this to happen in a safe and participatory space (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The CoP also sits within the national context of considering how AI can be incorporated into (digital) learning and planning for the major role it will play in shaping the national economy, society and education (AI Here for Good: National Artificial Intelligence Strategy for Ireland, 2021).

Literature Review

While HEI policies are broadly aligned in their educative and punitive approaches to academic integrity, access to and supports around those policies are often less well developed (Möller, 2022). In acknowledgement of this, Möller (ibid.) calls for a continued internal review process to improve Academic Integrity cultures within institutions. Kaposi and Dell (2012) highlight the transitional nature of the HEI sector as focus starts to move away from punitively penalising academic misconduct and towards improving progressive supports. Bretag et al. (2013) find that while variances exist across student cohorts in levels of confidence on how to avoid academic misconduct, with students across all cohorts indicating a need to move beyond the basic provision of information and towards more holistic approaches that authentically engage students with Academic Integrity practices. Bretag et al. (2011) go on to identify five core elements of an exemplary policy: access, approach, responsibility, detail and support. Reedy et al. (2021) find that policy analysis and development is most effective when it involves a CoP approach.

Timeframe and Phases

The timeframe for the CoP is broadly outlined as followed (guided by the Value Creation Framework of Wenger et al. 2011):



Structure of the CoP

The CoP initially comprised staff and faculty across College departments, with the aim of including students for consultation purposes in Phase 1 and expanding student participation in Phase 2. Meetings are held online (via Zoom) every 6–8 weeks as a full group and more regularly in sub-working groups. The potential spectrum of interest in the area of Academic Integrity is vast and the establishment of knowledge capital for values to be realised at a later date subsequently emerged as a priority for the CoP. Consequently, sub-working groups were established on the following areas initially identified through an early review of National Academic Integrity Network resources (QQI and NAIN 2021a, 2021b):

- Upholding Academic Integrity
- Preventing Academic Misconduct
- Detecting Academic Misconduct
- Dealing with Academic Misconduct

Each sub-group conducted a literature review and presented their findings for discussion within the CoP, with the construction of iteratively emerging themes (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Key emerging themes included addressing the prevalence of punitive outcomes, supporting students authentically, collaborative policy review and improving accessibility. Preliminary findings indicated a specific gap in providing structured and aligned supports to students identified as engaging with academic misconduct to prevent re-occurrences. In tandem with this finding was a developing awareness of a need for more specific guidelines on what constitutes misconduct and how it can be ranked or classified at different levels.

Consultation

Focus groups were conducted with students across programmes to ensure a collaborative approach to identifying the priorities of the CoP, with further student involvement including direct participation in the CoP anticipated for Phase 2. Similar to the findings of Chan (2023), students expressed generally positive or neutral attitudes towards GenAI in teaching and learning but had some concerns regarding the potential for over-reliance, ethical implications and the potential for cheating.

Outputs and Learning

While a valid and primary purpose of the CoP is the facilitation of ongoing communication, key priorities for attaining tangible outcomes in Phase 1 were identified as collaborative policy review and development, establishing supports for students found to have engaged with academic misconduct and finally creating an accessible and shared space for all staff, faculty and students to access reliable information and supports.

Policies:

A sub-working group took special responsibility for reviewing the existing policies on Academic Integrity and developing a proposal (ratified by Academic Board) for an Academic Integrity and Good Practice amended policy, which includes the principle of support as fundamental to engagements with students found to have conducted misconduct and, specifically, notes the challenges of GenAI to sustainable assessment. A new policy outlining the principles for acceptable use of GenAI in an assessment response was also developed.

AI Homepage:

The need to provide simple, high quality, informative and accessible supports for students and staff alike was clearly identified by the CoP. This led to the creation of a

homepage on Academic Integrity that employed a UDL informed approach by including resources in a variety of formats (written, visual and audio): <https://home.hiberniacollege.com/registrars-office/academic-integrity/>

Academic Output:

The establishment of a collaborative space enabled faculty to engage in research in this area, including presentations at the European National Academic Integrity Conference, the Academic and Research Integrity Conference and HECA.

Academic Integrity Champions Network:

This network has the dual function of keeping GenAI training, challenges and assessment on the agenda at programme level and providing students found to have engaged in misconduct with a one-to-one mentoring service.

Training:

The CoP enabled participants to openly express their concerns regarding how to engage with students and faculty on the rapidly changing challenges of GenAI. It was felt that a centralised approach facilitated through Registry engagements with members of the extended college community (through webinars, conference presentations and tutorials) would ensure consistency and provide faculty with the confidence to further disperse accurate messaging at programme level. A number of such events have been facilitated across programmes.

Assessment Design Process (ADP):

A new ADP follows accepted best practice regarding addressing GenAI concerns by ensuring students are well informed of the terms with which they can engage with GenAI in assessments. The ADP includes a robust peer review of the assessments process.

The CoP's collective voice informed an institutional decision to conduct a comprehensive review of Academic Integrity policies and procedures, commencing with data generation through four student focus groups, aiming to include student voice. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021) was employed to identify themes and patterns from the focus groups

Conclusion

The last cycle of value creation occurs when social learning causes a reconsideration of the learning imperatives and the criteria by which success is defined (Wenger et al., 2011). This has resulted in some reframing of strategies, goals and values regarding academic integrity. Literature speaks to a situation whereby university policies are broadly aligned in their educative and punitive approaches to academic integrity, however, where scope exists for development in terms of policy access and supports (Möller, 2022). The next phase of the CoP is, thus, directed towards the need to co-create student supports, resulting in an in-depth review and redevelopment of the College AI Strategy.

References

- Bretag, T., Mahmud, S., Wallace, M., Walker, R., McGowan, U., East, J., Green, M., Partridge, L., & James, C. (2011). Academic Integrity Standards: A preliminary analysis of the academic integrity policies at Australian universities. Refereed paper presented at the Australian Quality Forum 29 June-1 July, Melbourne, Australia.
- Kaposi, D., & Dell, P. (2012). Discourses of plagiarism: moralist, proceduralist, developmental and intertextual approaches. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 33(6), 813–830. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2012.686897>

Figure 16 - Case Study from Hibernia College on Academic Integrity Community of Practice and Champions Network

The AQRs submitted by private/independent HEIs contained limited discussion the impact of, or response to, generative AI, which came on stream in a significant way with the launch of Chat GPT in November 2022. Reports indicate that HEIs were largely still considering appropriate responses to this new challenge and opportunity during the reporting period. For example:

- Griffith College hosted a well-attended continuous professional development (CPD) session titled “AI-ChatGPT – The Future for Learner Assessments” in January 2023. This event generated a number of resources, including a paper on “AI and Machine Learning in Education 2023” and an AI Resource page on Moodle. The college further reported distribution of an advisory statement to lecturers on generative AI; the delivery of CPD sessions; and the development of support materials and training for students on how to effectively use generative AI tools.
- NCI reported that the Learning Teaching and Assessment subcommittee, along with the Library and Digital Learning Design teams, developed guiding principles on AI use in assessment for students and staff. They complement the existing Policy on Assessments and AI-Generated Material, such as ChatGPT. The guidelines aim to promote ethical usage and provide clear instructions for both staff and students. Key points include the requirement for students to provide evidence of AI use, allowing staff to make informed decisions, and ensuring staff clearly define appropriate AI use in assignments.
- Hibernia College adopted a new policy, Principles for the Acceptable use of Generative AI in the Assessment Process, during the reporting period.
- ICHAS submitted a detailed case study on the provider’s work to explore challenges entailed in identifying unapproved use of generative AI using detection technology. The full case study is available [here](#).
- SQT Training Ltd. also submitted a case study outlining the issues to be considered by HEIs in relation to generative AI. The case study, entitled *Embracing Artificial Intelligence – Considerations for SQT*, is available [here](#).
- CCT reported that the emergence of generative artificial intelligence in early 2023 prompted a reassessment of its academic integrity and misconduct policies to address this new challenge. CCT submitted a case study on the use of reports in assessment practice, which outlines how this practice has become a less useful mode of authentic assessment since the advent of generative AI. The full case study is available [here](#).

3.3.2 TEACHING AND LEARNING

Updates provided by private/independent HEIs in the area of teaching and learning related to initiatives and activities centred on enhancing teaching staff capacity and performance, through both the provision of dedicated training courses (including micro-credentials) and one-off activities such as seminars. Examples include:

- DBS reported continuing to provide training to faculty to support blended learning delivery. Training covers the full learning experience, including pedagogy, delivery modalities and underpinning technologies. DBS additionally reported the early stage of implementation of a programme-based approach to improving the quality of the learning environment, encompassing customised training to address specific quality issues in programme delivery, and a peer-based teaching observation and feedback system overseen by the Academic Director. Currently, the peer-based teaching observation focuses on the quality of teaching

content, with assessment moderators reviewing both the teaching content and the layout of the Moodle pages. Observations of recordings and peer feedback on delivery are conducted only when issues are identified through learner feedback or content moderation.

- NCI's Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning (CELL) created additional new postgraduate micro-credential programmes for individuals in education development or teaching positions. The most recent addition to this collection is a certificate program in Digital Learning Design and Technology-Enhanced Learning at NFQ Level 9.
- CCT reported that its Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) provided a Teaching Excellence Seminar Series, with several staff members earning the AHEAD UDL badge. CCT further reported that the Dean of Teaching and Learning is leading the implementation of a new professional development schedule for faculty in 2023/24, in which there will be a particular focus on academic integrity.
- Griffith College reported that the 2022/23 CPD Schedule concluded with a Teaching Champion Showcase Event, featuring themes on Problem-Based Learning; Supporting the Learner Voice through Authentic Assessment; Process Re-engineering for Assessment and Feedback Uniformity; and Graduate Attributes. The current focus of the Teaching Champions is on work readiness and graduate attributes, with a report to be issued in the upcoming reporting period.

Some reports indicated an increased focus on provision of self-access resources, perhaps reflecting a focus on flexibility, scalability and sustainability in approaches to continuing professional development. Examples include:

- CCT reported the launch of a new library website, featuring a wide range of learning materials and serving as a central hub for accessing 'Teaching and Learning' resources. The website includes a dedicated section on Assistive Technology. During the 2022/23 academic year, a Teaching and Learning section was added, offering resources on accessibility, inclusion, assessment, curriculum design, pedagogical theory, universal design, and software tools. The librarian created new manuals, guides, and videos for the site, with more to be added. The CCT UDL Handbook and checklist were also created and peer-reviewed.
- DBS reported that the Learning Unit (LU) developed an eight-phase, on-demand module pathway, which takes faculty from the initial steps of taking on a new module through to reflecting on their teaching performance having taught the module. Staff can engage with the module individually or as a programme team. The module pathway will be mandatory for all new faculty during their probation period from the start of 2023.

As per previous reporting periods, an emphasis on UDL and inclusive pedagogies was evident across reporting under this dimension of QA, as well as assessment (see Section 3.3.3).

- At Griffith College, staff members undertook digital badges, including the AHEAD UDL (Universal Design for Learning) programme. The college arranged a CPD session led by the Dyslexia Association of Ireland to provide staff with training in disability awareness and inclusive teaching strategies.
- Children's Therapy Centre submitted a case study entitled *Developing UDL Guidance for Teaching, Learning and Assessment (Incorporating UDL principles into teaching and assessment planning)*, which is reproduced in Figure 17 below. The case study discusses the development of a framework for UDL and highlights the importance of sharing knowledge and reflecting on practice.

CASE STUDY

Title: Developing UDL Guidance for Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Theme: Incorporating UDL principles into teaching and assessment planning.

Keywords: (2-3 words): UDL; Assessment; Diversity

Introduction

In October – December 2022 three members of the CTC programme staff successfully completed the ‘Digital Badge for Universal Design in Teaching and Learning’ training provided by AHEAD and UCD Access & Lifelong Learning <https://www.ahead.ie/udldigitalbadge>

As well as increasing our own understanding of how to provide appropriate opportunities for learning and assessment in diverse populations of students, the training also provided us with a template for reflection on how UDL can influence CTC’s teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

Sharing our learning with the wider teaching team

The next step was to identify the most efficient way to share our learning with the other members of the CTC teaching and QA team, encourage high levels of self-reflection and find possible ways forward to enhance our teaching, learning and assessment strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners in synchronous and asynchronous learning environments. We knew there would not be an instant solution, and that this problem requires actions that can:

- Raise awareness of UDL principles for teaching and assessment.
- Incentivise incremental change.
- Provide a UDL framework that informs all aspects of our work with learners.

We have now developed a framework for UDL informed practice that applies specifically to the CTC context. This guidance draws inspiration from and adapts the “UDL Guidelines for Deep Self-Reflection” (AHEAD, 2022) for CTC purposes. Preparing this document allowed us opportunities to record principles that already informed our teaching and learning strategies, and also supported us in expanding our thinking in regard to UDL, responding to reasonable accommodation requests, and becoming more responsive to the cultural and social contexts that apply to our learner group, and potential future learners in Ireland and abroad.

The resulting “UDL Guidance - Discretionary Procedures” document is organised according to the three UDL themes and associated subthemes, and references existing good practice as well as indicating areas for improvement.

Next steps

- Our new “UDL Guidance: Discretionary Procedures” document will be circulated to all current teaching staff to provide them with a framework for reflection and adjustment of their teaching and assessment strategies to meet the needs of all their students.
- We are developing UDL Guidance staff training that will be delivered synchronously for staff who can attend in person, and also will be available asynchronously for self-study.
- We will incorporate the UDL Guidance: Discretionary Procedures document and training into induction for new staff.

Conclusion

Drafting the document was a powerful exercise that highlighted what we are already doing well, and also areas of work that could benefit from updates and amendments. There was a clear resonance with our work on considering the implications of artificial intelligence for Academic Integrity in assessment design, as the concept of “authentic assessment” encapsulates the three themes that also inform the UDL criteria i.e. providing learners with multiple means of engagement, representation and individual action and expression.

The UDL Guidance: Discretionary Procedures document is already making an impact, and is guiding revisions to related policy documents such as those pertaining to teaching, learning and assessment, and design and validation of new programmes.

Figure 17 - Case Study from Children’s Therapy Centre on Developing UDL Guidance for Teaching, Learning and Assessment

3.3.3 ASSESSMENT

Updates on assessment related to the ‘return to normal’ following the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions and challenges encountered in that regard are reported in section 3.11.

CCT reported that concerns around over-assessment resulted in the issuing of CCT Assessment Guidelines in 2022, which outline recommended workloads for various assessment types, benchmarked against other Irish HEIs. Each Programme Board audited their assessment workloads and made necessary adjustments to align with these guidelines. The results of this Assessment Audit, presented to the Academic Council in March 2023, concluded that there was no over-assessment.

A number of case studies on the topic of assessment were submitted by private/independent HEIs including:

- NCI: Universal Design For Learning (UDL) Strategies For Assessment At NFQ Level 9 (Development and use of Learner Assessment). (Available [here](#)).
- CCT: Incorporating the UDL framework in assessment feedback for students (Inclusive practice in assessment). (Available [here](#)).
- CCT: Enhancement of Learning through Development of Feedback Approaches (Assessment feedback as a means of enhancing student learning and teaching practice). (Available [here](#)).
- CCT: Enhancement of Learning through Integrated Assessment (Integrating learning outcomes from interrelated modules as an assessment strategy). (Available [here](#)).
- Children’s Therapy Centre: Developing UDL Guidance for Teaching, Learning and Assessment (Incorporating UDL principles into teaching and assessment planning). (Available [here](#)).

- Innopharma Education: Development and Use of Learner Assessment (How Learning through making mistakes promotes stronger problem solving, student engagement and confidence at assessment). (Available [here](#)).
- Setanta College: Inclusive Practice in relation to Assessment Strategy (Development and Use of Learner Assessment). (Available [here](#)).

Griffith College submitted a case study outlining the Business Consultancy and Analysis module's practical assessment (work-based assessment as a means of enhancing student learning and teaching practice). This case study is reproduced in Figure 18 below.

Case Study

Title: Business Consultancy and Analysis module's practical assessment

Theme: Work-based assessment as a means of enhancing student learning and teaching practice

Keywords: Assessment, Community engagement, Work-based learning

Short Abstract (optional): This case study considers the continuous work-based assessment on the Business Consultancy and Analysis module, part of the Master of Science in Accounting and Finance Management programme, offered by the Graduate Business School, Griffith College. It examines the assignment which began in October 2022, and identifies its benefits to the learners, the college, and the community.

The Case Study

The Master of Science in Accounting and Finance Management is a 90 ECTS programme offered by the Graduate Business School in Griffith College, on both a full time and a part time basis.

This programme includes a mandatory Business Consultancy and Analysis (BCA) module (worth 5 ECTS). The module is intended to develop learners' strategic and critical thinking, integrating knowledge and skills from across the programme (including financial, legal, audit and taxation modules) within a broader organisational, strategic context.

The BCA module is designed to provide learners with the competencies needed to work in a professional environment, while developing soft skills, such as teamwork, oral and written communication, and IT skills. The BCA module is assessed entirely by continuous assessment, with 60% of the learner's grade allocated to a significant summative project, completed on an individual-basis at the end of the semester. This project requires the learners to engage with a real life case study.

During the period under review, the Graduate Business School identified a client company to work with the learners – with the learner taking on the role of a Business Consultant/Analyst. The company selected for this assignment was Irish Fibre Crafters, a small indigenous craft shop/company, based in Ardrahan, Co. Galway. The company comprises a café, provides classes and workshop for adults, camps for children, and spins, weaves, felts, makes and sells all sorts of wonderful creations with sustainable natural fibres, especially Irish wool and alpaca.

In October 2022, the college organised for learners to travel to the company location to meet with the client. They were accompanied by members of staff from the Graduate Business School.

During the site visit learners first had an opportunity to visit the client's shop in small groups to ask questions about the business to inform the task for the assignment. Once all learners had completed their client meetings, the class attended a client demonstration of the business (which was held in a nearby Community Hall to accommodate the full class group).

In completing the assignment, the learners identified and defined the client's problems, analysed financial and non-financial data, through which they developed their commercial awareness, exercised appropriate professional and ethical judgement, managed their consultancy, and developed reasoned conclusions and recommendations. Learners developed and presented a solution to the real-life client, in a professional presentation.

This assessment format, along with supporting the learners to achieve the learning outcomes of the module, also carries more wide-ranging benefits to the learners, the college, and the wider community.

The assessment provides learners with an opportunity to develop their professional skills, such as oral communication skills; presentation skills; team-working skills; commercial awareness; project management, and awareness of global and cultural issues in business, contributing to their graduate attributes. Through working with a real client, this assignment gives the learners an opportunity to realise the potential impact of their future career, as well as having a higher learning impact than a theoretical case study. The learners' feedback on the activity is overwhelmingly positive, and centres on the perceived value of working with a client in a work-based setting.

Additionally, this site visit is an opportunity for the international learners at Griffith College to learn about Ireland and Irish culture and appreciate cultural impact on business.

The client received extensive business analysis and consultative advice, which might not have been accessible to them otherwise. The founder of the Irish Fibre Crafters particularly stressed the benefit of the learners' input into the financial and marketing strategies of their business. They also commented on the learners' insightful questions and advice during the initial meeting.

And lastly, this activity benefits the college by enhancing the learning experience and graduate attributes, as well as reinforcing the institutional engagement with industry, which is key to the career-driven ethos of the institution.

An insight into how the field trip works is accessible here: https://youtu.be/8v8t_ad1yuY

Figure 18 - Case Study from Griffith College on a Business Consultancy and Analysis Module's Practical Assessment

3.3.4 LEARNER WELLBEING AND SUPPORTS

AQRs submitted in 2024 continued to document wide-ranging initiatives to support learners throughout their learner journey within HEIs and prepare them for next steps thereafter. Many of these changes highlight the embedding of a commitment to learner wellbeing in HEI governance and institutional structures and in QA policies and procedures.

Some private/independent providers highlighted ongoing enhancements to academic supports:

- DBS established an Academic Support Community (ASC) in 2023 to unify the various academic support services in the College. The ASC includes members from the Library, Student Engagement and Support Unit (SESU), Learning Unit, and student leader and mentor programmes. Its main goals are to collaborate with faculty to support students in key curriculum areas and to drive a retention plan after summer examinations to maximise student retention for the next academic year. The ASC has set and continually reviews objectives for staff-student interactions and involvement in student support.
- Griffith College provided extensive updates on a wide variety of student support initiatives. Highlights include the Learning Support Unit collaboration with other departments to strengthen the provision of academic writing supports to address challenges arising from generative AI. Retreat-style academic writing workshops were held in assignment week of semester one (November 2022) and two (March 2023) which were offered to all registered learners. Both workshops were well attended and over 220 learners accessed the online course materials. Online weekly learning support clinics for all learners needing help with assignments and coursework were facilitated. Common issues included assignment clarification, workload management, academic writing, and exam preparation, with assignment deconstruction being the most frequent request.
- CCT reported that a review of the Student Success Series in 2022/23 revealed low attendance, but high engagement with recordings. Consequently, for 2023/24, the series was replaced with “The Essential Series,” featuring shorter, focused recordings and resources on study, research, and career skills, supplemented with in-person workshops.

As in previous reporting periods, a focus on inclusion and belonging was prominent in the 2024 AQRs. A particular focus in some private/independent HEIs on learner induction/orientation supports was visible. Examples of reporting included:

- Griffith College reported on growth in the number of learners registered with the Learning Support Unit (see Fig 19). An additional staff member was appointed to the Learning Support Unit and the college developed and approved a number of learner-centred policy documents: a Learner Dignity and Respect Policy; Griffith College: EDI Statement of Commitment; Learner Gender Identity and Expression Policy; and the Policy for Responding to the Death of a Learner.

Number of learners registered with the college's Learning Support Unit

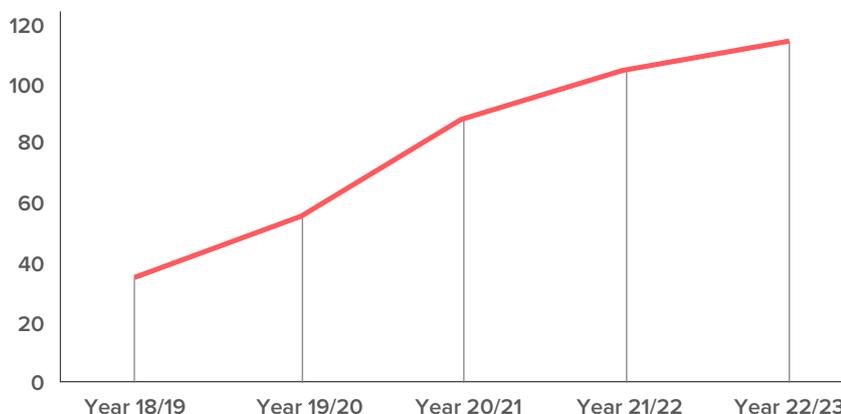


Figure 19 - Number of Learners Registered with Griffith College's Learning Support Unit 2018/19 – 2022/23

- Griffith College also reported that the Learning Support team developed connections with advocacy groups such as the Dyslexia Association of Ireland, ADHD Ireland and the Irish Autism charity, AslAm. The college is a member of the Association of Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) and the Disability Advisors Working Network (DAWN). Learning Support staff took measures to ensure its services are signposted to learners on the website. Implementing UDL for new and revalidated programmes was identified as a strategic objective for the upcoming reporting period. Several other Learning Support initiatives and enhancements were also implemented:
 - Learner Individual Need Notifications (LINN) were introduced to facilitate better communication between learners, the Learning Support Unit and faculty.
 - Enhanced processes for welcoming autistic learners included additional social supports and individual campus and exam venue tours.
 - Learning Support collaborated with the library to extend library loans for learners with disabilities, aligning with best practices in the sector.
- CCT reported that online student induction was revised in summer 2023 based on student feedback from surveys conducted after the previous induction. Feedback revealed that students wanted more information on living in Ireland, student leadership opportunities, and dealing with hardships. An internal review highlighted the need for centralised equity, diversity, and inclusion information. Consequently, the induction was restructured into nine self-paced modules to be completed over two weeks before the course starts. These modules cover topics such as living and studying in Ireland, life at the college, connecting with others, health and wellbeing, digital resources, student success tips, leadership opportunities, and handling unexpected challenges.
 - CCT additionally reported on the collation of resources on accessibility and inclusion on the Teaching and Learning page of the new CCT library website. The college also has Disability Access Certification and has induction hearing loops for use with hearing aids fitted throughout the building. CCT reported a number of enhancements to its campus facilities to support student success and inclusivity: notable developments include refurbishing campus spaces for music and podcasting, for student recreation and for meetings. Online learning facilities were also enhanced, culminating in the new "CCT Student Hub" for streamlined access to resources.

- DBS reported on supports for students transitioning to higher education which it provides through its Student Engagement and Success Unit (SESU). SESU offers various learning supports to both new and continuing students, including drop-in sessions like “Tea & Talk,” workshops on numerical skills, academic writing, economics, digital/IT skills, research skills, and referencing by the Library Team. The DBS Peer Mentor Programme, supported by SESU, trains students to mentor their peers by sharing their college experiences and help make the transition to DBS smoother. They organise informal meetings and social events and address new students’ concerns. There were over 100 peer mentors in 2022/23, divided by programme, region and year.

Specific support activities and initiatives for learners focused on mental health were highlighted by two HEIs.

- Griffith College reported that an increase in mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, was noted among learners. The Learning Support unit participated in discussions on student welfare and contributed to developing a fitness to study policy. Post-pandemic, some younger learners struggled with social connections, leading to a new initiative to help them connect with college departments and peers. The college also began creating policies and procedures to support learners during a mental health or welfare crisis.
- NCI approved two new policies in Learner Supports: Fitness to Continue to Study and Student Mental Health and Wellbeing.

A lesser emphasis was placed on employability in teaching and learning, assessment and learner support in the AQRs submitted by private/independent providers for 2024 than was evident across public HEIs. However, Griffith College reported that the college piloted an employability skills programme free-of-charge to all interested undergraduate learners. The college submitted a case study on the programme available [here](#).

Notably, Griffith College also reported on the assistance it provided learners following the sudden closure of Dublin Design Institute in June 2023. The HEI submitted a case study outlining how 40 learners associated with DDI programmes transferred to graphic communication design and interior design programmes at the college and were thereby facilitated to complete their studies. The full case study is available [here](#).

Some private/independent HEIs reported on initiatives to support student partnerships and enhance the learner voice in governance and decision-making. Examples of this include:

- Griffith College, in consultation with the Griffith College Student Union (GCSU), developed a Class Representative Handbook 2022/2023. The handbook provides guidance on how to be a class representative (meetings, dealing with class issues, boundaries, etc.), and how to make the most out of the opportunity. The college also evaluated its communication channels for learners and plans were made to create information and communication resource hubs for both staff and learners, serving as primary sources of information and support.
- CCT updated on a previously planned objective to strengthen student engagement, partnership and inclusion. The college continues to prioritise attendance and engagement monitoring while developing a Learning Analytics Policy. Increasing student membership of committees remains under review. Student co-chairing of the CCT Academic Integrity Committee was piloted and efforts were made in 2023 to ensure that class representatives

attended Programme Board meetings. Student Peer Mentors were all invited to attend Centre for Teaching and Learning Forum meetings in 2023.

3.3.5 Programmes of Education and Training

Private/independent HEIs reported significant activity in the areas of new programme development and revalidation of existing programmes. As indicated in Section 3.1.3, this activity was often informed by industry and external partnerships and collaborations. Examples of reporting include the following:

- CCT reported that in support of its strategic objectives, it developed and had validated a number of new programmes in business, computing and, in particular, in cybersecurity.
- Hibernia College reported the successful revalidation of its two key programmes — the PME in Primary and PME in Post-Primary Education. UDL principles were more clearly embedded in the programme content, whilst the themes of inclusivity, global citizenship and cultural diversity were expanded across the curricula.
- Open Training College reported that it conducted an overarching review of its programme offerings. A strategic decision was made to focus on revalidating core programmes over three years, reducing the total number of programmes from 32 to 21 in the first year. This focus will continue into the next reporting period, with a review of the viability of certain programmes.
- NCI reported on the successful validation and revalidation of 20 undergraduate and postgraduate business and computing degree, diploma, and certificate programmes. This process covered nearly a quarter of NCI's programme portfolio.
Documentation Quality, 20%

Some providers reported on how the analysis of QQI Panel Reports and learner feedback was informing decision-making relevant to programme delivery and supports.

- NCI undertook an analysis of recurrent themes and trends arising from QQI review panels between 2019/20 – 2022/23, covering 32 QQI panel reports and spanning 65 programmes. Conditions predominantly centred on learning outcomes, assessment methods and document quality, while commendations were predominantly focused on learner supports and faculty engagement/commitment.

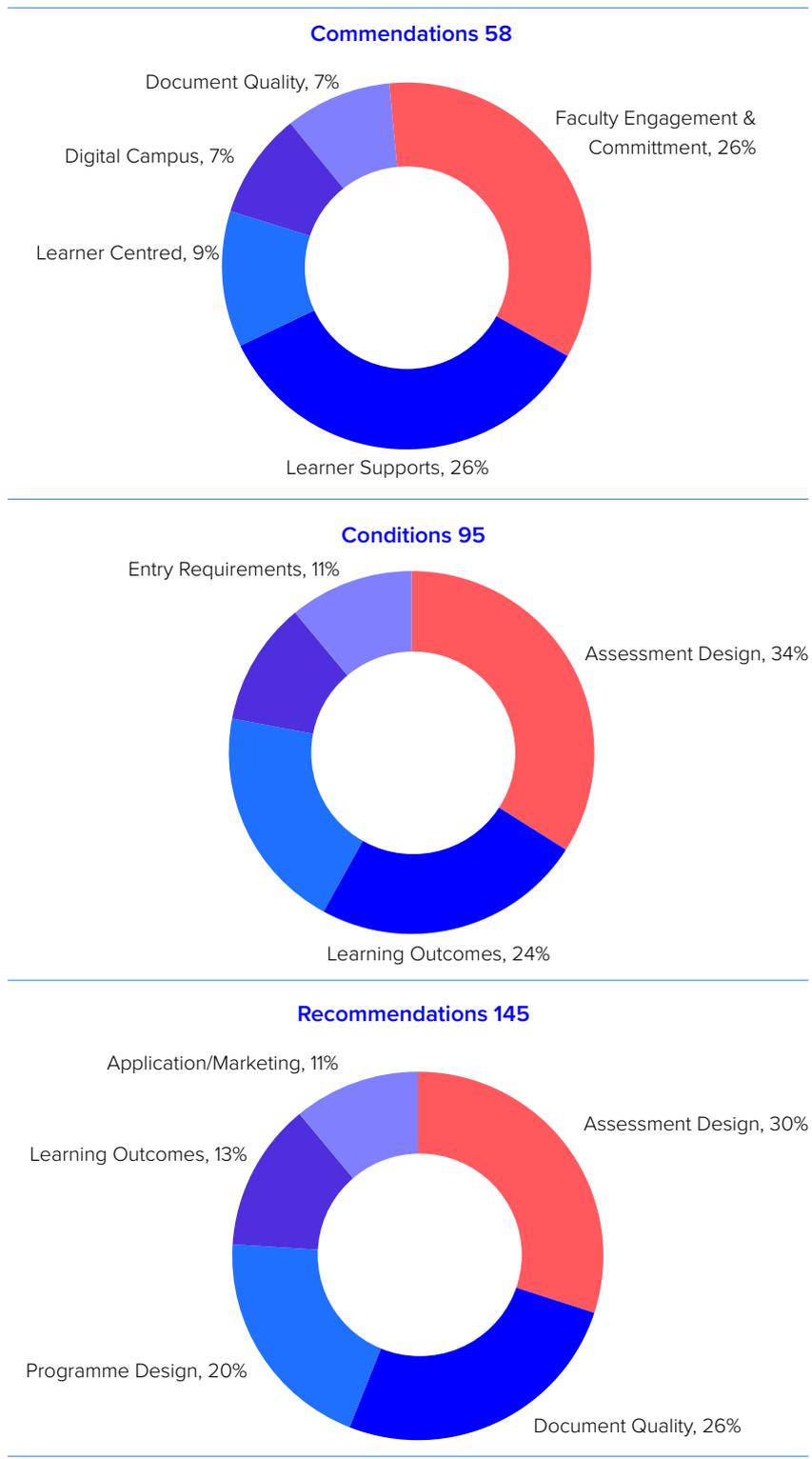


Figure 20 - NCI Analysis of Commendations, Conditions and Recommendations Arising from QQI Panels 2019/20 – 2022/23

Private/Independent HEIs also reported enhancements and revisions to the policies and procedures underpinning both programme approval and review processes. For example:

- Griffith College reported that a review of the development of its Certificate in Employability Skills and Workplace Culture was used to pilot its short programmes review process. The college also conducted and published a review of retention in its undergraduate multi-stage programmes. This data aids faculty and programme-level analysis and supports annual and periodic reviews.
- NCI reported that its Programme Lifecycle Management Executive Sub-Group (PLM-ESG) introduced several QA mechanisms for programmes and modules, including a pilot of the updated Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) process and revised QA processes for Programme Teams to propose Major or Minor Changes to existing programmes or modules in accordance with QQI policy.

QQI encouraged the submission of case studies relevant to access, transfer, progression (ATP) with regard to pathways from further education and training (FET) to higher education (HE) in this reporting period. A number of case studies were submitted, indicating that a breadth of activities focused on dimensions of widened participation are being undertaken in the private/independent higher education sector.

NCI reported that it is engaged in the development of a tertiary degree partnership with the City of Dublin ETB to provide progression opportunities to HE for Leaving Certificate students in Dublin's North-East Inner-City schools who have completed the P-TECH programme (Pathways to Technology). A truncated version of the case study is reproduced below. The full case study is available [here](#).



CASE STUDY

Building Reflective Skills to Support Learning and Transitioning to Education Beyond Post Primary: NCI Certificate in P-Tech Programme

Theme: 1. Access, Transfer and Progression: exploring pathways and innovations from FE – HE

Context

The P-TECH initiative was launched in 2021 in Dublin's North-East Inner City (NEIC), to provide secondary students in the area with an enriching, and early experience of Higher Education, aiming to help them to develop a range of skills, realise their potential as learners and connect to new learning and career pathways beyond school. P-TECH is an innovative model of education-industry collaboration that was developed in the USA by IBM and local educators to build technology skills. In Ireland, the model has been adapted within a partnership collaboration across Higher Education (HE), schools, government and industry partners. Supported by the Department of Education and Skills and in partnership with the NEIC and Industry partners, the National College of Ireland (NCI) as academic partner had the responsibility of designing, developing and supporting the delivery of a new Certificate in P-TECH programme.

The Certificate in P-TECH is a QQI Level 6 Special Purpose Award (10 ECTS) which is delivered in the senior cycle of schools offering a second transcript to students in addition to the Leaving Certificate. The programme has been designed to provide students with foundational skills and experiences to enhance their learning and to provide a 'bridge' to their future employability and learning. The programme comprises two modules which introduce students to digital skills, business knowledge, 21st Century skills and tools for their personal development.

Reflective Practice in the Programme

Among its programme objectives, the Certificate in P-TECH aims to embed important personal development learning opportunities that will help students to manage their learning, future career choices and personal development. The programme seeks to empower students and creates multiple opportunities for students to learn about collaboration, project working, problem-solving and also how to reflect on learning and experiences. From a pedagogical perspective, reflection is considered an important way for students to enhance their learning, to build greater autonomy and awareness of their role in learning, to build confidence in their abilities and achievements and to build a habit of identifying actions or solutions.

Students are introduced to reflection during Transition Year (TY) and learn how to write structured reflections using the What, So What, Now What model (Rolfe et al., 2001; O'Driscoll, 2007). Reflections are embedded within many assessments throughout the programme offering students an opportunity to write a reflective blog or to complete a reflection using a vlog within their ePortfolio. A list of required reflections is provided but students are also free to include additional reflections. The following graphic illustrates the learning pathways and assessments on the programme. Reflective tasks are embedded into assessments to encourage students to think about what they have learned and how to transfer this learning to other activities in the programme.



In addition to capturing reflections on learning, reflective practice serves as a tool for learning on the programme. Following their TY work placement, students work collaboratively to create a “Wisdom from Work Placement” video which is their reflection on what they did, what they learned and what they might do differently. The video is created as a useful resource for future TY students and provides an opportunity for students to share their learning. Reflection is also used as a tool to build confidence and self-awareness on the Certificate in P-TECH. At the end of the programme, 6th Year students complete a capstone reflection to identify the skills they have gained. The process of reflecting helps the development of a skills-based CV and provides a useful pause for students to acknowledge their achievements and to articulate their skills. The box below illustrates how reflection is embedded into assessment activities. As part of their learning about how to develop an ePortfolio, students are prompted to reflect.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Initially, student responses to reflective writing were not positive. Reflections were seen as quite onerous and many students did not see the value of writing reflections at all. Teachers reported that for certain students, the task was difficult and motivation was low. At the beginning of the pilot, two reflective frameworks were introduced and this proved confusing. Some explanations in the accompanying course book proved too difficult and there was a lack of exemplars to guide students and teachers. The feedback provided an opportunity to enhance the role of reflection in the programme rather than remove the opportunity of benefiting from it. In response to feedback, the reflection course book was amended and simplified. Instead of introducing two reflective frameworks to classes, this was reduced to one (What, So What, Now What) and the course book added resources such as videos, activities and examples of student reflections. The number of required reflections was reduced and the topic of reflection was introduced at a later stage in the programme so that students were more ready to engage with it. While reflective writing remained a feature of the programme, a choice of using vlog entries was also introduced to encourage wider engagement.

Impact from TY to 6th Year

A Dept. of Education interim evaluation of the programme pilot observed that the P-TECH students were “particularly articulate and confident in their discussions during the evaluation; this was notable. Very high levels of student confidence was something that was also common across the three schools.”(DOE, 2023).

While there are many other skills and areas of learning to account for student development in the programme, the ability to articulate their learning can be seen as connected to students’ ability to reflect on their learning. At the end of the first year of the pilot, an internal review of students’ reflective work was undertaken to explore students’ reflective practice.

Now, at the third year of the pilot, discussions with teachers in the P-TECH schools reveal that many students manage their reflections more seamlessly and that the current 6th Year students have an increased awareness of the purpose and benefits of reflection. Teachers have reported an elevated level of competence among 6th Year students in discussing their learning, their strengths and skills.

While there is a need to engage in more formal research, there is emerging evidence that the programme’s incremental and sustained approach to creating reflective habits has helped students to build greater confidence and awareness while also helping them to be more proactive and positive about their continuous development. The following excerpts from recent 6th Year reflections seem to indicate an understanding of what they have gained and how this can benefit them as they embark on their next steps.

Figure 21 - Case Study from NCI on Building Reflective Skills to Support Learning and Transitioning to Education Beyond Post Primary: NCI Certificate in P-Tech Programme

The following is a list of additional case studies submitted by private/independent providers under this theme:

- Galway Business School: Access, Transfer and Progression (available [here](#)).
- Griffith College: Enhancing Employability for All: A Case Study Analysis of a pilot course for undergraduates (available [here](#)).
- Hibernia College: Enabling Access to Nursing Training via a Mature Student Pathway (available [here](#)).
- ICHAS: Parity of treatment of NFQ Levels 5 and 6 Major Awards for Progression Purposes (available [here](#)).

As noted in last year’s thematic analysis, five of the six private/independent providers that submitted AQRs engage with professional, statutory, or regulatory bodies (PSRBs) for accreditation or recognition, in addition to having programmes validated programmes by QQI. These institutions include NCI, DBS, Open Training College, Hibernia College, and Griffith College. The profiles, requirements, and processes of the bodies these providers engage with differ significantly. Updates on new activity in this area included the following:

- Griffith College reported that two programmes received accreditation from the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS) in October 2022. The college additionally reported that a proposal to facilitate ACCA students' access to the Postgraduate Diploma in Accounting and Finance Management (PDAFM) with credited exemptions under the college's APEL policies was approved for a two-year pilot period, after which its continuation will be reviewed based on learner outcomes.
- Open Training College reported that it increased placement site agreements with agencies with regard to the CORU-approved B.A. in Social Care.
- NCI reported securing QQI validation for some of NCI's Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)-awarded diplomas and certificates in the professional HR and learning and development fields. NCI reports that this strategic move will serve to further strengthen the reputation of these programmes in the Irish (and wider EU) HR domain and make it easier for graduates of the programmes to progress further in the Irish HE sector, since their qualifications will be recognised as fully aligned with both the NFQ and CIPD's professional standards.
- DBS reported on the outcomes of the QQI focused review which evaluated the implementation and effectiveness of the institution's QA procedures in relation to the management of QQI validated programmes requiring professional recognition and accreditation. The expert panel appointed to conduct the review found favourably in terms of DBS's relevant QA structures but recommended that DBS augment certain processes pertaining to programmes seeking PSRB recognition, and risk management. The final report of the panel, and the institution's response, were published in September 2022. While many of the report's recommendations were addressed at the time of AQR submission, some require further work.

3.3.6 STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

A number of updates were reported by private/independent HEIs indicating that work to formalise and enhance processes around staff management and development is ongoing, and within this, that staff wellbeing and engagement is a visible consideration. For example:

- Hibernia College updated that work is ongoing to finalise a performance development plan. Work has been slowed by changes in the corporate structure of the college.
- Griffith College updated on a previously planned objective to develop the college's HR department, committee and related activities. Examples of ongoing developments include: the relaunch of the HR committee; an action plan to review and update existing HR policies and procedures; drafting of policies to support new HR objectives within the college; EDI activities across the college, and within functions and committees; enhanced resourcing of the HR department and further development of the management and staff training programme.
 - Additionally, the college's Remote Working Policy pilot ended and was replaced with an updated policy to continue remote working, seen as essential for staff recruitment and retention. It was also agreed that all HR policies will be accessible via a 'staff hub' on the college website. Key HR focus areas included updating procedures (such as the dignity and respect policy and new legislative requirements), training for line managers to enhance staff retention and engagement, establishing exit interview processes, providing staff training and support, developing onboarding, probation,

and performance review processes with training for line managers, and improving organisational culture.

- DBS reported on the use of the Global Kaplan Annual Survey to track staff engagement in areas including continuous improvement, diversity and inclusion, manager relationships, growth and development, intention to stay and teamwork and collaboration. Overall data on staff engagement to 2023 reported reflected an upward trend in staff engagement.

Year-on-year Comparison of Staff Engagement

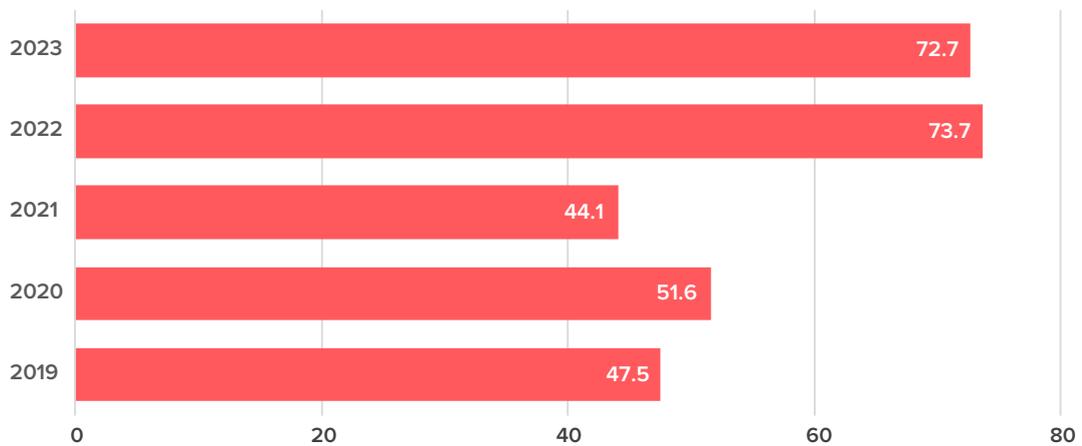


Figure 22 - DBS Year-on-year Comparison of Staff Engagement 2019/23

3.3.7 INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

Investment in, and development of, new information and data management systems and enhanced harnessing of learning analytics remained themes within this section of the annual quality reports of private/independent HEIs.

- Griffith College reported that it is developing a new academic information management system called Themis to handle all learner records from registration to graduation. The system is being gradually implemented in key academic areas, aiming for full completion by December 2024. To ensure data integrity during the transition, the existing system, Scholar, is running in parallel.
- Additionally, Griffith College reported that it has created a series of analytical reports, using Microsoft’s Power BI, which are presented in a unified dashboard. These reports are used for:
 - Enhancing annual programme reports (APRs) and QQI programmatic review submissions with visual data.
 - Analysing programme and module results during exam boards.
 - Identifying at-risk learners through activity and retention reports, enabling targeted interventions.
 - Highlighting operational issues to improve college functions and programme delivery.

- Providing the national marketing team with a visual overview of the recruitment admissions process for trend identification and detailed feedback.
- DBS outlined the process by which it produces Annual Retention Summary Reports for Arts, Business and Law programmes. Data collected is compared with HEA progression reports from 2010 and 2018. The data reports enable the college to engage with retention challenges for both traditional students and those on non-framework labour market activation programmes, and non-framework students. The reports are provided to academic leadership (Academic Dean, directors, faculty, programme boards) to inform initiatives aimed at improving quality of teaching and assessment. Anomalies arising in the data are addressed by tailored initiatives devised by Learner Support, academic directors and faculty.
- CCT updated on a previously planned objective to fully implement its Learning Analytics Policy. The college reported that a Learning Analytics Working Group was established in 2022/23 with an aim of developing a Learning Analytics Policy for CCT College. This working group will continue in 2023/24.

Three private/independent HEIs reported initiatives related to cybersecurity and enhanced data protection measures in 2023. Whilst a number of HEIs offer programmes in this space, the theme saw fewer updates in this reporting period.

- CCT updated on plans to avail of external expertise to evaluate the security and contingency arrangements in place to protect against potential cyberattacks or ensure continuity of service in the event of an attack.
- Griffith College reported that updates to the Data Protection Policy have been added to the revised Collaborative Agreement Template. The college renewed its incident response retainer with a specialised cybersecurity company and invested in a cyber training and awareness platform, CyberReady..
- Hibernia College reported that it undertook a project to implement a customer relationship management (CRM) system designed to record learner-college interactions throughout the entire student journey. The implementation of Microsoft Dynamics is currently in progress. Once completed, the system will allow any college staff member to access previous communications with any student, excluding confidential or sensitive information, to offer optimal support while maintaining the security of student data.

Some private/independent HEIs also reported on the use of learner feedback survey data to inform ongoing work and activities including preparation for institutional review. Examples include:

- NCI reported that its Student Module Survey Working Group created a new, shorter, standardised module evaluation survey for all registered learners in 2022/23. This survey was approved by the Academic Council in February 2024 and piloted across 270 modules. The full implementation occurred in Autumn 2023, and the resulting quantitative and qualitative student feedback on modules will be included in the NCI Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) for the 2024 institutional review.

The use of data analytics in QA and quality enhancement (QE) was one of the three themes for which QQI invited the submission of case studies. Case studies submitted by private/independent providers include:

- Innopharma: International Update in Numbers. The full case study is available [here](#).
- ICHAS: Educational Techno-ethical Decision Making and Learning Analytics, a truncated version of which has been reproduced in Figure 23 below. The full case study is available [here](#).

Case Study

Educational Techno-ethical Decision Making and Learning Analytics Theme: The use of data analytics in QA and QE

Case Description

In addition to more obvious primary functions, learning management systems offer a range of learning analytics that collect, measure and analyse learner data. Most incorporate the four basic forms of data analysis, namely, descriptive, predictive, diagnostic and prescriptive - with the purpose of analytics most often presented as having a supportive, quality enhancement and best practice orientation. In this instance, the focus is on descriptive and diagnostic analytics identifying patterns in engagement behaviour and the impact on learning performance. During the reporting period, one point of faculty discussion centred on student disengagement where it was posited that earlier and more systematic analysis might contribute to enhanced learner supports. This differed from existing practice where the lecturer or tutor, with the support of the educational technologist, was the primary proactive user of insight data that might indicate disengagement. The use of learner data in this context was used beyond this triad for a range of purposes but always reactively; where the information was anonymised and used statistically. The QAE Officer was tasked with assessing the suitability of these affordances for a more systemised approach in the context of existing policies and procedures. They were also tasked with establishing a pathway by which systemised data collection would be operationalised outlining clear processes how any intervention around disengagement would be managed and performed. In the interests of maintaining focus on the recommended thematic objectives, this latter aspect of the case does not feature in the following analysis.

Case Analysis

Case Analysis Technology affordances have been defined as “action possibilities and opportunities that emerge from actors engaging with a focal technology” (Faraj and Azad, 2012, p.238) and can give rise to important philosophical and ethical questions. In this case affordances can also be associated with “insights” derived from learning analytics. Insights are generated based on criteria or sets of criteria that can be defined by the administrator or lecturer. These criteria are linked to LMS data generated by all users in the course of their interaction with the platform. Data sources used in the generation of insights are highly customisable in order to create actionable insights. A non-exhaustive list of potential data sources includes the following:

- Has the student accessed the module before the start date?
- Has the student accessed the module since its start date?
- Has the student accessed files or pages associated with the module?
- Has the student accessed URLs on the module page?
- Has the student looked at assessment outlines?
- Has the student tracked discussion forums?
- Has the student used social functions of the module such as contacting another student, accessing a discussion forum, replying to another student's post, etc
- Has the student completed any scheduled tasks?

The use of analytic tools is by now well established. As an early adopter of Blended Learning, the College has been particularly focused on the philosophical and ethical implications of technological advancement on teaching and learning.

The philosophical and ethical justification of the use of learning analytics appears to have rested largely on specificity of purpose. In the early stages of rollout in Ireland, the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning In Higher Education heralded LAs as “invaluable” adding “learner data can be used as an evidence base for proactively identifying students at risk of underperforming, for recommending services and courses of action that can enhance students experience and for targeting support resources to students with the greatest need” (NFETLHE, n.d., p.1). A recent “state of the art” review across sixteen HE institutions, indicates that student improvement and support remain foremost motivations for the use of learning analytics (Hernández-de-Menéndez, 2022). Critically, this study noted “poor information... regarding privacy issues” with only one of the sixteen institutions surveyed specifying “how the [LA] data collected will be treated” (Hernández-de-Menéndez, 2022, p. 1223). This was somewhat surprising - if not worrying. It appeared that ethical propriety has been folded into specific purpose based on the assumption that analytics are primarily used as tools to support student engagement and attainment. However, it also appears that precise communication of how analytics are and can be used remains somewhat opaque in HE Institutions. This was central to the QAE Officer's review in this instance. The College was also mindful that there is always potential for purpose to be perceived as diluted where an individualised process is systemised. In other words, it was important that the distinction between monitoring and support was preserved and that any potential for the use of learning analytics to be perceived or interpreted as invasive as opposed to supportive be avoided. The preservation of student autonomy and agency were related concerns. The review conducted by the QAE Officer was therefore guided by the following questions:

- Is the nature, purpose and extent of learning analytics clearly defined?
- Are students sufficiently informed of these technological capacities and their potential application?
- Could learning analytics related to student engagement be systemised proactively while preserving specificity of purpose including how that purpose is perceived by students.
- The precise statement of purpose and linkage to specific intention (supporting student engagement) was especially pertinent in this instance.

It was evident that relevant purposes of Learning Analytics were captured throughout the relevant suite of policies and procedures. It was also confirmed that the purpose and analytic scope of the LMS is communicated to all students at inductational and introductory sessions by the Educational Technologist and IT Manager as per the foregoing procedures. However, the QAE Officer believed the communication of the purpose of learning analytics could benefit from greater specificity, that is, the stated purpose of LMS analytics could be further consolidated around support for student engagement and attainment.

Case Outcome

While QAE documents were found to communicate how and why LA are used by the College, it was felt they would be enhanced by greater specificity before Learning Analytics were to be used systematically and proactively to ascertain student disengagement. This could be either achieved through the development of a specific policy and related procedures on the Learning Management System or through existing policies and procedures. Specifically, an expansion of the definition of “Learning Management System” in the Policy on Supporting Students to Engage with Blended Learning and an expansion of the policy and procedures on student engagement. The QAE report concluded that while it was possible and necessary to accommodate a more proactive systemised approach to student disengagement, it was not the role of QAE specialists to determine the primary capacity dilemma at the heart of technoethics succinctly captured in the idiom – “because you can, doesn’t mean you should”. This was a matter for college-wide decision making structures.

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Figure 23 - Case Study from ICHAS on Educational Techno-ethical Decision Making and Learning Analytics

3.3.8 PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

There was limited reporting or updates provided on wider engagements or in relation to public information and communication. HEIs described the variety of platforms and media by which they communicate with the public. Griffith College described a recent multi-media advertising campaign. The college reported that it piloted a new chatbot function on Graduate Business School course pages and overhauled the International Office and the Faculty of Journalism and Media Communications sections of the website. Griffith College also commenced renaming the International Office, with the website being changed from 'International Office' to 'Global Engagement' in March 2023. The update of the college's signage is planned for the upcoming reporting period.

3.3.9 SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

All six private/independent HEIs outlined the governance arrangements, policies and procedures in place to ensure that internal quality assurance, programme delivery and related systems within institutions are appropriately and regularly monitored and reviewed. As HEIs in this sector looked to imminent CINNTE institutional review by QQI, reports outlined plans for systematic review and evaluation activities being conducted in preparation for that external review process (see Section 3.4 for more detail).

- DBS confirmed that a series of mostly postgraduate programmes were reviewed during the reporting period. The college also commenced systemic self-evaluation in preparation for the submission of a self-evaluation report for institutional review by QQI in 2024.
- Griffith College reported that a review of the annual programme reporting (APR) process was undertaken, and an action plan was developed. One of the proposed future developments was the establishment of an 'APR Writing Day' – a facilitated interactive workshop to support programme teams in the timely completion of their APR completion for 2022/23.
- Griffith College also updated on a commitment made in its previous AQR to re-establish and publish a cycle of internal reviews. A number of reviews were conducted, including annual programme reports, programmatic reviews, and evaluations of facilities and services. Some reviews that began in the previous period, such as the review of the teaching champions initiative and the programme development process review, were completed and their results presented in this reporting period. This review process is now embedded in the college's QAE programme monitoring activities. Other reviews undertaken in the reporting period include a review of the appeals process which resulted in reconsideration of the timeframe for how appeals may be submitted and actioned and a review of the scale of, and process and outcomes for, academic misconduct in the college.
- Open Training College confirmed that a range of reviews had taken place of programmes; the college's Blended Learning and Online Learning Strategy; CPD policy; additional student support services and tutorial support.
- NCI reported that its Programme Lifecycle Management Executive Sub-Group (PLM-ESG) oversaw the introduction of a number of QA mechanisms focussed on programmes and modules, including a pilot refreshed Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) process. The college reviewed a number of programmes during the reporting period and conducted an (unpublished) review of the Central Timetabling Office.
- Hibernia College completed reviews of the Admissions Team, the outcomes of reasonable accommodation applications managed by the Student Support Team and of Erasmus+

programmes in 2022/23. The review of reasonable accommodation applications prompted the Academic Board to review all student support services. A comparison with two independent HEIs showed that while the services offered by the Student Support Team varied, they were generally similar, suggesting that the college’s services align with sector standards. Additionally, the proportion of reasonable accommodation applications, at 6%, matches the national and international sector averages. The college also undertook a review and update of its standard operating procedures for all units. A review of the School Placement Team was ongoing at the time of reporting.

The AQRs for private/independent HEIs also provide an overview of the composition of expert panels involved in quality assurance and programme validation or approval processes. Reporting identifies the gender, nationality and internal versus external status of the reviewers. A summary profile of panel member composition indicates that the vast majority were national across all HEIs.

Composition of Expert Review Teams/Panels involved in IQA (private/independent HEIs): Internal, National, International (2024)

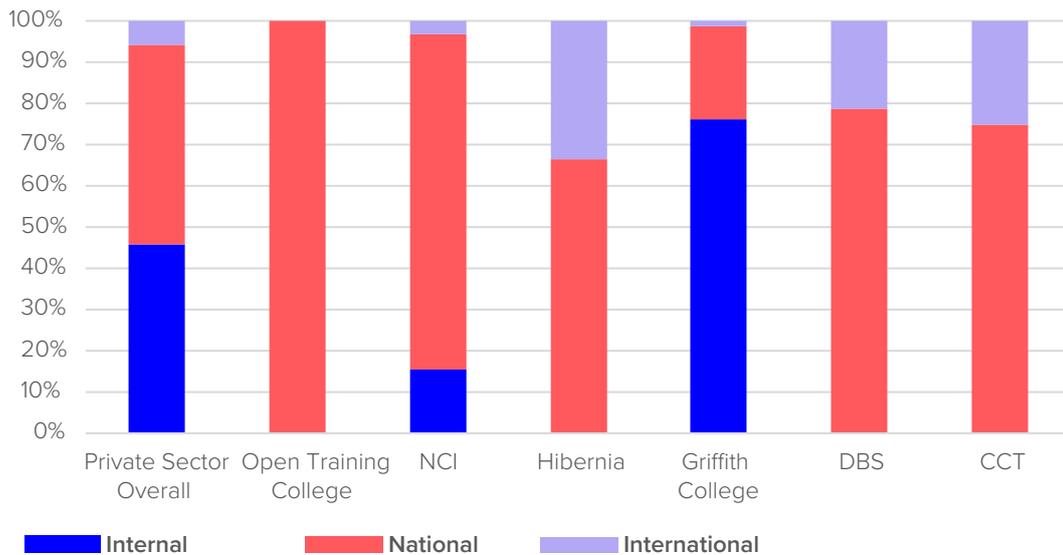


Figure 24 - Composition of Expert Review Teams/Panels Involved in IQA (Private/Independent HEIs): Internal, National, International (2024)

In terms of overall gender balance across all roles on expert panels, gender balance was comparatively even, both for all six providers as a whole, and for the majority of individual providers, with a slight majority of female panels members appointed across most HEIs.

Composition of Expert Review Teams/Panels involved in IQA (private/independent HEIs): Gender (2024)

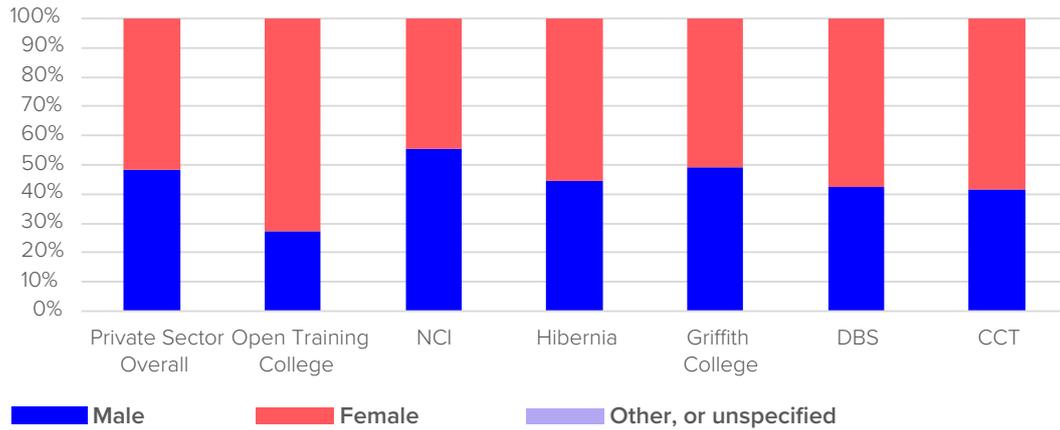


Figure 25 - Composition of Expert Review Teams/Panels involved in IQA (Private/Independent HEIs): Gender (2024)

The gender balance is less even when the role of chair is examined. The breakdown between male and female chairs across all six reporting HEIs is 68% and 32% respectively in 2024. However, there are also significant differences in the gender balance of chairs appointed both between HEIs and within individual HEIs.

Gender Profile of Review Team/Panel Chairpersons: Private/Independent HE Sector 2024

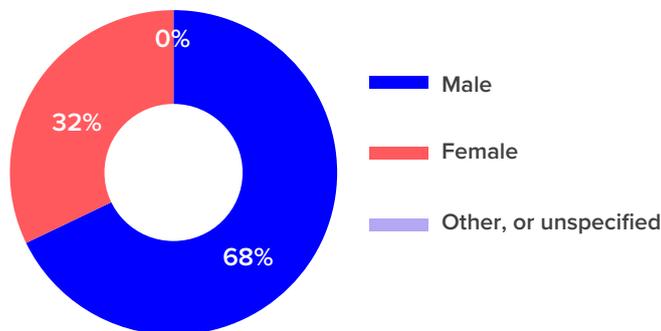


Figure 26 - Gender Profile of Review Team/Panel Chairpersons: Private/Independent HE Sector 2024

**Gender Profile of Review Team/Panel Secretary:
Private/Independent HE Sector 2024**

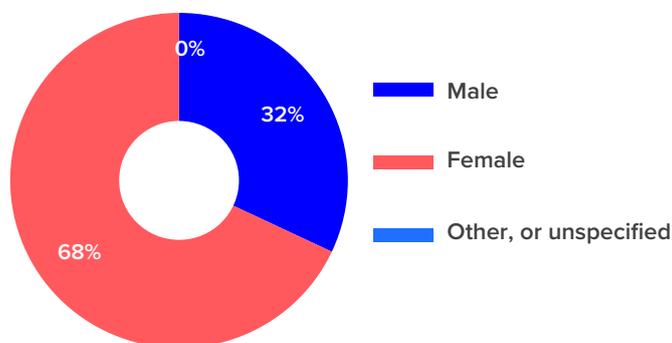


Figure 27 - Gender Profile of Review Team/Panel Secretary: Private/Independent HE Sector 2024

3.3.10 DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH CAPACITY

A focus on developing, formalising and expanding the research capacity of reporting private/independent HEIs has been a feature in recent reporting periods. This focus continued in 2024, with four HEIs reporting enhancement plans in this area, including the development or updating of research strategies in the upcoming reporting period (see Section 3.4 below), whilst DBS completed and published its research strategy in the reporting period. The larger HEIs among the six reporting have dedicated research committees within their governance structures and senior management roles dedicated to research. Examples reported included:

- The DBS research strategy published in the reporting period has three main pillars informing the research direction of the college: excellence - advancing research and innovation for societal impact (General Research); research-led teaching and staff enhancement and promoting research excellence and impactful outcome (Research-Led Teaching and Staff); and industry focused research: fostering innovation and driving enterprise success through research (Industry-Focused Research). The strategy envisions a further increase in DBS’s research activity over the three-year lifetime of this plan (January 2024-December 2026). DBS is also continuing to review its ethical approval process for student research and has already implemented some changes to ensure effectiveness.
- Griffith College outlined how both undergraduate and postgraduate dissertation supervisors can complete a ‘Supervision of Research’ module (5 ECTS, NFQ Level 9) as part of the MA in Education, Learning, and Development (MAELD). Additionally, the college participates in several EU-funded research projects, involving public universities, private higher education institutions and industry bodies to develop capacity for research, innovation, enterprise and entrepreneurship. The college submitted a case study outlining its promotion of research and innovation strategies through funded programmes (see Figure 28 below).
 - Griffith College further reported that a Research and Innovation Hub was established in the Graduate Business School. A Hub Director and senior and junior researchers were appointed. The college also appointed nominees to HECA’s Research Committee and hosted the HECA Research Conference on 15 November 2022. CPD activities and appropriate training are provided to staff to develop research capacity.
 - Griffith College also updated on its enhancement objective from 2023 to create

a European centre of excellence for research commercialisation and deep tech innovation. Developments in this reporting period include engagement of research-specific staff and the establishment of the Research and Innovation Hub, within the college's Graduate Business School, which is intended to leverage European University partner alliances and to support the successful marketisation of innovations.

- CCT reported that consultation took place during the reporting period on the college's research strategy planned for publication in 2024. Participation in conferences such as the HECA Research Conference highlights the college's emphasis on idea sharing and collaboration. CCT keeps a comprehensive record of all scholarly activities carried out by its staff to guide institutional research support and has over 900 entries currently logged. Additionally, several faculty members are pursuing master's and doctoral degrees with financial and other forms of support from CCT.
- Open Training College reported plans to establish a group to look at the strategy for and funding of research within the college.

Griffith College submitted a case study on work to promote research and innovation through funded programmes, reproduced below.

Case Study

Title: Promoting Griffith College's research and innovation strategies, through funded programmes

Theme: Developing research to enhance student learning, entrepreneurship, engagement with the business ecosystem and teaching practice

Keywords: Research support, EU Funding, Entrepreneurship

Horizon Europe provides substantial funding for research and innovation (R&I) projects within the EU, from a budget of 90.95 billion Euros. The European Commission's Strategy for Directorates-General (DG) Research and Innovation, for the period 2020-2024, identifies R&I as one of the 'most powerful' policies within the EU, in that it has consistently played a vital role in fostering economic growth and competitiveness, and generating new, highly-skilled employment opportunities within member states.

Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) actively participate in EU Research and Innovation (R&I) initiatives. Calls, such as the European Institute of Technology (EIT) under Horizon Europe, are crafted to tackle EU challenges, particularly sustainable economic growth, climate change, and security. In January 2023, the Graduate Business School (GBS) in Griffith College set-up a functional unit (entitled GBShub), to promote the college's R&I strategies, and to enable the college to participate in funded research, alongside our network of international partners, potential Irish partners, and the public universities already engaged in such activities.

Staff within the GBSHub manage EU research projects in the same way as those in research centres within any other institution throughout Europe, and this has been a new experience for the college. While multiple national R&I opportunities, such as the National Open Research Forum and Research Ireland, are often challenging if not impossible for Griffith College to participate in within the Irish landscape, GBSHub has thrived in the success of its tendering for EU R&I projects, and currently has a schedule of projects running at least up until 2027.

Through supported EU-research activity, and the provision of consulting and mentorship to start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), GBSHub provides a space where research, innovation, and business expansion may converge harmoniously. This reflects the core focus of the EIT Knowledge Triangle (European Commission) and bridges the gap between academia and industry.

GBSHub supports individuals and organisations with innovative business ideas to achieve their aspirations beyond conventional boundaries. At its core, GBSHub's mission is to support an entrepreneurial ecosystem through projects and partnerships, leveraging the expertise of the global team of PhD-qualified researchers and experienced industry professionals, in a range of fields, such as sustainability, procurement, artificial intelligence, education and innovative entrepreneurship.

GBSHub is actively leveraging the link between educational development and business growth. GBSHub plans to run its first student Innovation Bootcamp, called #GameOn, in October 2023. This EU-funded initiative, under the SMART4FUTURE R&I project, aims to support three student-led businesses (with total prize funding of €15,000). The college hopes that students who enter the competition possess an entrepreneurial spirit that can triumph in a supportive environment.

Hub staff are engaged in co-creating valuable resources, such as a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) package, aimed at guiding entrepreneurs to embrace setbacks as stepping stones to success and cutting-edge content centred around Artificial Intelligence (AI), cloud computing, the Internet of Things (IOT), big data, and robotics. As these technologies reshape the contours of our world, our MOOCs equip learners with essential knowledge to navigate these transformative trends.

The secret to the success is in the team and the partnerships. GBSHub supported eleven Irish companies, from Series A to established SMEs, in the academic year 2022/2023. This supports increasing SME numbers for Ireland. During the period under review, the GBSHub team has also grown (from one to five researchers).

Reference European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Hollanders, H., European Innovation Scoreboard 2023, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/119961>

Figure 28 - Case Study from Griffith College on Promoting Griffith College's Research and Innovation Strategies Through Funded Programmes

3.4 QUALITY ASSURANCE IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT PLANS

Private and independent HEIs outlined a wide range of planned initiatives to further enhance their quality assurance and provision in the upcoming reporting period. These initiatives include development of new institutional, teaching and learning and research strategies; enhanced support for students and staff; strategic, future-oriented approaches to validation and revalidation; and further development of online and blended learning programme delivery.

Engagement with QQI around upcoming regulatory developments, most notably preparation for institutional review, corporate fitness, delegated authority to make awards (DA) and the TrustEd Ireland scheme (formerly known as the International Education Mark or IEM), was a theme across all private/independent HEI AQRs.

- DBS, Hibernia College and NCI identified preparation for successful institutional reviews by QQI as an objective for the upcoming period and outlined a number of actions to be taken in that regard.
- DBS, Griffith College, NCI, CCT and Hibernia College reported on objectives around preparing for, or successfully achieving authorisation to use, the IEM, whilst DBS and Open Training College acknowledged the need to prepare for forthcoming requirements around corporate fitness and/or protection of enrolled learners.
- Griffith College, NCI and Open Training College outlined objectives to advance their readiness to apply for delegated authority (DA) to make awards.
- CCT reported plans to review its quality assurance processes and document management systems under the direction of the Dean of Academic Affairs and the QA Lead.
- Hibernia College also outlined plans to conduct phase 2 of the review of the college's Quality Framework. Final amendments to current policies and new policies will be published in the upcoming reporting period. This work will form part of the college's ISER for institutional review under the heading of Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review.

As may be anticipated, programme validation and revalidation ambitions and plans remained a focus for private/independent HEIs.

- DBS and CCT reported objectives around the successful revalidation of all relevant programmes in the reporting period.
- Open Training College outlined a plan to review all of its management programmes to determine market viability and identify alternative delivery options.
- Both Open Training College and Hibernia College reported plans for new programme validation. Open Training College further outlined plans to develop short courses in digital literacy (FE and HE), as well as develop its approach to Social Care registration.

Four providers outlined plans to seek permission to offer, or extend their current, online or blended programme delivery.

- Griffith College reported its plans to validate both fully online programmes and those supported by partner hubs. To achieve this, the college intends to develop appropriate, supplementary QA policies, procedures and guidelines.

- Open Training College reported its plans to develop a fully blended version of its NFQ Level 5 award in Intellectual Disability Practice by 2024.
- NCI outlined its plans to seek to extend its scope of QA approval to enable national and transnational online programme delivery. It also intends to agree a project plan for the development of transnational, online programmes.
- Hibernia College also reported that it intends to seek approval to extend its scope of QA approval to include delivery of fully online programmes to national and international learners. The college will conduct a gap analysis and self-assessment of its QA Framework to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses with regard to online provision, which will then be addressed.

Limited detail was provided on private/independent HEI enhancement plans related to teaching and learning. Two providers reported plans to revise and update their teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) strategies.

- CCT reported that it will review its teaching, learning and assessment processes at programme level as part of revalidation of relevant programmes. The college will develop a new teaching and learning strategy, aimed at strategically enhancing teaching, learning and assessment.
- Griffith College reported plans to further develop and enhance its Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, and related supports.

Further formalisation of institutional structures or processes to support academic integrity and the management of academic misconduct were outlined by three HEIs. Only one HEI, Griffith College, made reference to plans to respond to the growth of generative AI.

- DBS reported its plans to develop an Academic Integrity Task Force.
- Open Training College reported it would bring the minutes of discussion on academic integrity to its Academic Council.
- Hibernia College reported its plans to implement the NAIN Framework for Academic Misconduct Investigation and Case Management. A current community of practice and working group was implementing the NAIN Framework for Investigation and Case Management at the time of reporting. This group includes diverse representation from across the college and is actively engaging with learners. The working group plans to report its findings in the fourth quarter of the upcoming reporting period and will also contribute to the ISER for institutional review under the section on 'Assessment of Learners'.
- Griffith College reported plans to further develop and enhance the college's processes and strategies for engaging with generative AI. The college will develop and resource its policies, processes and supports around staff and learner practice in this area.
- CCT reported that its assessment practices are under review to address generative AI, including use of post-submission vivas and version control of documents.

A focus on enhancing student engagement and existing student supports and services was evident in the improvement and enhancement plans submitted by a number of private/independent HEIs.

- Hibernia College reported plans to review its Student Support Framework. The review will examine the underpinning policy and procedure, communications, associated standard operating procedures and outcomes and will aim to determine if the current framework remains fit for purpose. The review will be led by the Student Support Team supported by the QAE Team and is due to be completed in Q2 of the upcoming reporting period.
 - Hibernia College further reported that the annual student survey on perceptions of the college's Quality Framework will continue as part of its ongoing effort to enhance student engagement and ensure that college policies and procedures are accessible and fit for purpose. The outputs may form part of the ISER for institutional review, under the headings of 'Support for Learners' and 'Governance and Management of QA.'
 - Finally, Hibernia College reported plans to review the student complaints process. Again, the review outcomes will form part of the college's ISER for institutional review under the heading of 'Support for Learners.'
- DBS reported plans to initiate a learner retention/student journey project.
- CCT highlighted plans to strengthen student engagement, partnership and inclusion. The college outlined three main strands in support of this objective: developing the college's EDI capacity as part of the strategy development process; reviewing the recognition of prior learning and widening participation process; and continuing the work of the Learning Analytics Working Group to develop a Learning Analytics Policy.
- Griffith College reported on plans to further enhance its Learner Support Services (as previously outlined in Section 3.3.4) and its continuing focus on supporting enhanced employability and career development for learners in collaboration with partners. Options being considered include a focus on (restated) graduate attributes, work-based learning opportunities, undergraduate research, use of e-portfolios; development of certificates in workplace mentoring, employability, work skills, etc.

Four providers outlined ambitions to expand their research capacity and adopt a strategic approach to same:

- DBS reported its plans to formally launch a research strategy.
- CCT reported plans to update and align its Strategic Plan, Research Strategy and Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy from 2024. Consultation and development work on the research strategy will be led by the Dean of Development.
- Griffith College also reported plans to advance the college's research activities and related processes. The college outlined its commitment to enhancing, formalising and resourcing its framework and processes for research support, development and reporting. It will also seek to further leverage EU and national research, innovation, enterprise and entrepreneurship support funding and expertise to develop its research capacity. Finally, the college plans to provide appropriate researcher training and CPD opportunities.
- Open Training College outlined a commitment to exploring the development of a research function in the college.

Sustainability was only a notable element in the plans of two providers: NCI and Griffith College. NCI positioned sustainability as the lens through which all four major enhancement objectives are filtered. Two providers (Griffith College and CCT) outlined plans to advance capital projects to enhance HEI buildings, facilities and resources.

3.5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provides a thematic analysis of the AQRs submitted by six private and independent higher education institutions, and case studies submitted by an additional eight HEIs, in 2024. It details ongoing QA activities and new developments and initiatives carried out during the 2022/23 academic year. It also summarises the key QA enhancement planned for the upcoming reporting period in responding HEIs.

AQRs submitted for the 2022/23 academic year have a lesser focus on the impacts of COVID-19 than in recent reporting periods. A return to in-person teaching and a more limited return to in-person assessment during the reporting period is evident.

Preparation for, or commencement of, CINNTE institutional review by QQI was a significant feature of the AQRs submitted. Enhancement plans reported by independent/private HEIs indicate extensive and institution-wide preparations for institutional review by QQI, as well as other new regulatory instruments coming on stream in the near future such as delegated authority to make awards and TrustEd Ireland (the IEM).

EDI and academic integrity remain strong emerging themes across the AQRs submitted. EDI updates spanned a range of activities centred on staff, teaching and learning initiatives and support for learners as well as widened participation. A number of case studies pertaining to the latter were submitted on the theme of access, transfer and progression. Reported activities relating to academic integrity confirm the commitment of providers to make holistic, institution-wide measures to ensure that a culture of academic integrity is embedded amongst staff and students and that academic misconduct is managed effectively. The ongoing positive influence of the National Academic Integrity Network was apparent. The emergence of generative AI during the reporting period received less attention than may have been anticipated; it is likely that this will attract greater focus in subsequent reporting periods as HEIs consider and take appropriate steps to deal with this new challenge and opportunity within teaching, learning and assessment.

Overall, the reports of extensively updated QA policies and governance structures, expanding research ambitions and portfolios, plans to expand into or advance existing transnational provision, extensive and far-reaching initiatives to improve teaching, learning and assessment practices, as well as enhance the overall learning experience, indicate a suite of mature, confident HEIs within which established QA systems are nurturing quality cultures.

APPENDIX



APPENDIX I – WORK TOWARD THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN IRISH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN 2022/23

The sustainability agenda, climate action and progress toward the SDGs has continued to drive strategic development, new appointments, new curricula and research agendas across the sector. As a cross-cutting theme, sustainability and work to progress the SDGs resonates throughout reporting on external engagement, programmes of education and training, research and investments in the built environment. Cumulatively, the activity in this domain reflects that Ireland's public HEIs are providing thought leadership on climate action and nurturing innovation in this sphere.

The 2024 AQRs reflected that sustainability initiatives are formalised, tracked and reported on across public HEIs in a number of ways. For example:

- RCSI established a Sustainability and Climate Health Committee to oversee and embed sustainability and create further awareness of the SDGs at the core of all RCSI activity. RCSI additionally reported that it applied to join the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Ireland, an all-island network of universities and institutions focused on high quality education and research for the SDGs.
- UL included a link within its AQR to the university's Sustainability 2022 Report. UL also reported on the development and submission of a Climate Action Road Map setting out a programme of measures to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.
- ATU reported that it has signed up to the SDG Accord (representing a commitment to report on progress and share experiences and learning across higher education, both nationally and internationally) and the Race to Zero campaign (a global call to rally leadership and action across the education sector globally). ATU is a member of the Irish Chapter of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (led by UCC and Queen's University Belfast) and participated in Advance HE's Aligning Organisational Strategy to SDGs programme in 2023.
- University of Galway included key performance indicators for SDG rankings and Energy & Carbon reductions in its balanced scorecard within its AQR submission.

Sustainable University of Galway

SDG Rankings	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2025 Target
THE Impact Ranking overall score	-	68 (4/7)	82 (5/7)	47 (1/7)	34 (1/7)		Top University
Energy & Carbon	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2050 Target
Tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions	31,780 tonnes CO ₂ e	25,430 tonnes CO ₂ e	60,000 tonnes CO ₂ e	-			0 tonnes CO ₂ e
% reduction in energy usage since 2006	34%	40%	54%	52%			
Sustainability in Teaching	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	
% programmes with sustainability-focused module	-	9.9%	12%	20.5%			

Figure 29 - University of Galway Annual Performance for Sustainability on KPIs

- NUI reported that new codes of conduct for members of the NUI Senate and NUI employees both reference NUI’s commitment to the SDGs in services, activities and operations. Sustainability is also one of the four strategic pillars of NUI’s new Strategic Plan 2023-2027.
- UCC reported that a new Sustainability and Climate Action Plan was launched during the reporting period, containing 62 actions to ensure UCC continues to be a globally leading institution for sustainability. UCC additionally reported on the launch, in collaboration with QUB, of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network Ireland. The North-South cooperative is focused on developing context-specific solutions and mobilising local action for the SDGs.
- TU Dublin reported that the TU Dublin Strategic Intent is informed by the SDGs, with the University Education Model focused on SDG4 Quality Education. A performance objective that the university has committed to under the HEA System Performance Framework is to ensure that all staff and students engage in sustainability education and training, to equip them with the appropriate knowledge, skills and tools to help address the sustainability agenda effectively.
- TUS reported that an initial review of TUS policies had been completed alongside a mapping exercise against the SDGs across academic programmes and research activities at the Thurles campus. A new Green Campus Committee was established on its Athlone campus.

A number of senior appointments reported also reflect the embedding of sustainability within institutions. For example:

- UCD appointed the institution’s first Vice President for Sustainability to champion the sustainability agenda across the university.

- UCC appointed its first Associated Vice President for Sustainability, a Head of Sustainability and Climate Action Office, and within that office a Greenshoots Coordinator, Research Support Officer and Sustainable Development Solutions Network manager.
- University of Galway appointed a Director of Sustainability. The Director is charged with establishing a sustainability office and leading implementation of the sustainability strategy. Two sustainability lectureship posts are being funded to support the work of this office.

There was substantial evidence in the 2024 AQRs that sustainability is a focus in both the taught curriculum and research priorities across Ireland's public HEIs. Examples of reporting in this area included:

- University of Galway reported on sustainability in the taught curriculum via tracking of the percentage of modules with a focus on sustainability/SDGs on its balanced scorecard, with steady growth observable prior to this reporting period. During this reporting period, the university launched a new MSc in Sustainability Leadership, expanding the suite of sustainability-focused postgraduate courses.
- TU Dublin reported that all programmes will have sustainability as a learning outcome. During the reporting period, 34 workshops, seminars and webinars were delivered on the topic of embedding the SDGs in the curriculum, with 569 staff attending. A Sustainability Education Toolkit with resources for teaching staff was developed and launched. Programmes preparing for review are offered tailored workshops by the Sustainability Education unit.
- ATU reported the development of a Level 6 Certificate on the SDGs funded by the HCI Higher Education 4.0 project and facilitation of a Level 9 Certificate on Education for Sustainability for higher education staff. The SDGs are embedded in a number of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.
- TU Dublin reported on a collaborative HCI funded architecture education project involving TU Dublin, UCD, UL, SETU, ATU and the Cork Centre for Architecture Education (a joint UCC and MTU initiative). The project is focused on sustainability in the built environment, reconfiguring and revising curricula to enable graduates to help society address the challenges of sustainability.
- TCD reported that the CHARM-EU Masters in Global Challenges for Sustainability was in its 3rd cohort in the reporting period, with 201 students having registered since commencement of the programme. TCD additionally reported that a team of five Education for Sustainable Development Academic Fellows, led by the Centre of Academic Practice, were developing the implementation plan for a significant initiative across undergraduate and postgraduate education. An important aspect of this is professional development for staff relating to authentic assessment and feedback design to support the development and assessment of key competencies for sustainability.
- TUS reported on its ongoing leadership of a consortium to deliver the Digital Academy for Sustainable Built Environment (DASBE), with development of new programmes related to circular economy, energy infrastructure, digital tools and community energy systems. TUS is also leading a European Climate Leadership programme to help achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and has secured major Erasmus Innovation Action investigating new education and training approaches to sustainable agriculture.
- UCC reported on sustainability research, noting that three of UCC's research leaders in the Environmental Research Institute were the highest cited academics globally in areas of

offshore wind energy, energy modelling and electrofuels respectively. Thirty new academic posts have been created through UCC Futures: Sustainability to lead in areas of research including sustainable business, clean energy futures and environmental law. A report and website focused on the contribution of UCC research to the SDGs were launched, with almost 500 researchers across 27 schools engaging with a mapping project that identified over 5,000 SDG related publications over a three-year period.

Student and campus life activities reflect the visibility and prevalence of sustainability across multiple areas of operation during the reporting period. Examples of work in this area reported in the 2024 AQRs included:

- UL reported a range of activities, including an E-bikes research project funded by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland and Department of Transport; an inaugural Student Sustainability Challenge and a Green Library Campaign.
- UCC reported that in 2023 the university's total waste tonnage was 40% lower than pre-pandemic levels, with printing reduced from over 19 million pages in 2019 to just over 5 million in 2022. Scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions have reduced by 21%. UCC banned all disposable cups and plastic bottles from campus catering, restaurants, cafes and vending services during the reporting period, reducing the number of cups going to landfill by over one million units.
- TU Dublin reported on an interactive sustainability workshop delivered to all incoming students introducing the SDGs and outlining the resources and opportunities available on campus. Over 5,000 students attended 30 workshops. Additionally, an online sustainability course was made available to all incoming students in the VLE.
- University of Galway reported on its Student Sustainability Leadership Awards, which offer paid internships to students seeking to develop their sustainability knowledge and skills. University of Galway has also embedded an introduction of SDGs to the new staff induction programme.
- University of Galway reported on a student initiative to reduce household waste across campus accommodation residences. Donation points are set-up in student residences at the end of each semester for the donation of leftover household items, which are collected for redistribution to future students or local organisations. Other initiatives at the university include the installation of accessible bike shelters and new water fountains across the campus.
- TU Dublin reported on the approval by the Academic Council in June 2023 of Sustainability as one of three university level graduate attributes. Internal QA guidelines, systems, supports and resources are being developed to implement the sustainability graduate attribute.

