

ANNUAL REPORT

Quality Enhancement Committee

2023-24

 **UCC**
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh



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Context

UCC is an autonomous degree-awarding body under the terms of the Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education & Training) (Amendment) Act 2019¹ and is responsible for assuring and enhancing the quality of education, research and allied services offered by the University through its internal quality assurance and enhancement procedures. The Quality Enhancement Unit, working through the Quality Enhancement Committee, is responsible for developing and enabling the University's processes for external peer review of its activities in accordance with prevailing national Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines², published Codes of Practice for quality in higher education and the European Standards Guidelines (2015). The Universities Act (1997) section 35 sets out the obligations for the establishment of quality procedures and the functions of the Governing Authority in respect of the application and outcomes of quality procedures.

This report of the Quality Enhancement Committee serves to:

- Provide assurance to the Governing Authority on the effectiveness of the scope and application of the University's quality procedures as required under the relevant Acts
- Demonstrate that the quality assurance and enhancement process supports and maintains the University's reputation through dissemination, exchange and adoption of good practice arising from peer review.

Recommendation

That the Governing Authority approves this report and its publication on the University website.

That the Governing Authority refers this report for discussion and consideration of any actions to be taken to the Academic Council and other University bodies.

¹ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2019/act/32/enacted/en/html>

² Quality & Qualifications Ireland is responsible for the development of national Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines which Universities must have regard to <https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/QA-Guidelines.aspx>

Executive Summary

This report provides a comprehensive account of internal quality enhancement activities in the University for the period 2023/24.

Section 1 Internal Periodic Quality Reviews 2023/24

This section outlines the reviews undertaken during this time period, full texts of the Peer Review Panel Reports are provided, including links to each published report on the University website. This meets the requirements of current QQI Core Statutory Guidelines. Some summary information is provided on the overall composition of peer review panels which demonstrates that over time EDI principles are addressed.

Section 2 National Institutional Quality Review (CINNTE)

UCC underwent its Institutional Review site visit by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) in March 2023, and has since developed an Action Plan to address the recommendations made in the Review Report.

Section 3 Student Feedback Ecosystem Project

This section outlines the developments of the UCC-wide Student Feedback Ecosystem Project (SFEP) which was co-designed and led by the Quality Enhancement Unit and CIRTIL. The initiative was piloted in 2022-23 to develop a consistent university wide process for student feedback. Following an independent evaluation, the project will now scale up to establish a sustainable university wide feedback system, informed by the pilot's recommendations.

Section 4 QEU Activities

This section highlights key achievements in 2024, including the successful second Good Practice Symposium held in May, the progress of the Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) Strategic Quality Enhancement Project, external engagements by Quality Enhancement Unit staff, various external appointments, and participation in Erasmus+ visits.

Section 5 QQI Matters

This section details relevant QQI matters, including the UCC Annual Institutional Report which is a statutory submission to QQI and a link to the published report is provided. It also details UCC's progress on key QQI initiatives, including the International Education Mark (IEM) application, the Honours Classification Project, and UCC's contributions to the new Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended and Fully Online Programmes.

Section 6 Looking forward to 2024/25

This provides a short summary of the areas of activity for the coming academic session, foremost amongst is the conclusion of third cycle of Periodic Quality Reviews. A re-calibration of the Periodic Quality Review methodology is planned in preparation for the fourth cycle starting in 2025/26. Additionally this section outlines plans for the development of the Institutional Action Plan arising from CINNTE Institutional Review, progressing the International Education Mark (IEM) application process and advancing the Student Feedback Project.

Section 1 Internal Quality Reviews 2023/24

Internal Quality Review Reports

In accordance with the requirements of the Universities Act (1997), the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education & Training) Act 2012 (revised 2019) and the Higher Education Authority Act (2022), the Governing Authority is required to provide for and maintain a system of quality assurance (HEA Act, section 76) achieved through the conduct of quality reviews of its research, education and training on a cyclical basis of at least once every 7 years. The process of quality review involves: self-assessment, appointment of a peer panel; site visit and a Quality Review Report which is published on the university's website as part of the public information about the quality of higher education. Following publication of the Quality Review Report, a Quality Enhancement Plan is developed and once approved by the Quality Enhancement Committee is published on the university website. The table below details the reviews conducted in academic year 2023/24 with links to the published reports.

Quality Reviews 2023/24

Review of:	Dates:	Link to Peer Review Reports:
School of Applied Social Studies	4th - 5th October and 10th & 12th October 2023	Peer Review Panel Report
School of the Human Environment	25th & 26th October and 1st & 2nd November 2023	Peer Review Panel Report
School of Nursing & Midwifery	24th – 25th & 30th January, and 1st February 2024	Peer Review Panel Report
School of Medicine	14th - 15th February and 20th & 22nd February 2024	Peer Review Panel Report
Deputy President & Registrar (all Directorates)	6th - 7th March and 12th & 14th March 2024	Peer Review Panel Report
School of Public Health	10th – 11th and 16th & 18th April 2024	Peer Review Panel Report
Office of the Vice-President for Research & Innovation	24th - 25th April, 30th April and 2nd May	Peer Review Panel Report
School of Applied Psychology	2nd - 3rd and 7th & 10th October 2024	Site Visit will take place on 2nd - 3rd and 7th & 10th October 2024

Table 1.1

Thematic Analysis of Outcomes of Quality Review

The commendations and recommendations arising from the Quality Review process in 2023/24 have been analysed and are represented thematically below. From the seven quality reviews, a total of nine broad thematic areas were identified based on the reports made by the respective peer review panels.

- Strategy, Governance and Management
- Staffing
- Students
- Learning, Teaching and Assessment
- Academic Standards
- Infrastructure and Resources
- Research and Innovation

Of these, the themes of strategy, governance and management, staffing and students received the majority of recommendations. This is similar to what has been found in previous thematic analyses.

Equally, staffing received the majority of commendations highlighting the continued recognition from panels of the high-quality and commitment of staff at UCC. While recommendations in this area focus on staff workload allocation and staff planning.

When compared to similar thematic analyses of previous years, there was a notable increase in recommendations related to PhD students. While these acknowledged UCC's ambitious strategic goal in increasing PhD numbers they point to an inconsistency in the PhD student experience, specifically in the areas of supporting services and IT administration systems.

External Peer Panel Composition

The composition of peer panels includes normally at least two external peer reviewers, though this number may be increased in accordance with the size of the unit under review. The following table illustrates the institutional affiliation and gender of external peer panel members appointed during 2023/24. In addition, the overall profile of peer reviewers over the operation of 3 cycles of Quality Review is provided.

Analysis of Panel Composition

UCC is required to report the composition of its Peer Review Panels. While this is formally done through the Annual Quality Report (AQR) to QQI, the following tables provide a summary of key characteristics drawn from the 3rd cycle quality review.

The following table (1.2) presents the count of reviewers by 'institution country' for the Third Cycle, along with the percentage representation of each country relative to the total number of reviewers, both including and excluding UCC internal reviewers. The data highlights a significant reliance on external reviewers from Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Third Cycle (Table 1.2)						
Institution Country	Male	Female	Total	% Country Total (Incl. IE)	% Country Total (Excl. IE)	Count Country Total (Incl. IE, Excl. UCC)
Ireland	74	93	167	56	0	36
United Kingdom	43	32	75	25	75.76	75
France	2	-	2	1	2.02	2
Spain	-	-	-	0	-	-
United States	-	-	-	0	-	-
Germany	-	-	-	0	-	-
Canada	3	-	3	1	3.03	3
Belgium	1	2	3	1	3.03	3
Australia	-	-	-	0	-	-
Sweden	1	-	1	0	1.01	1
Czech Republic	-	-	-	0	-	-
Finland	-	-	-	0	-	-
Italy	-	-	-	0	-	-
Kosovo	-	-	-	0	-	-
Austria	-	1	1	0	1.01	1
Portugal	-	-	-	0	-	-
Denmark	2	1	3	1	3.03	3
Slovenia	-	1	1	0	1.01	1
Switzerland	2	1	3	1	3.03	3
New Zealand	-	1	1	0	1.01	1
Norway	2	-	2	1	2.02	2
The Netherlands	1	2	3	1	3.03	3
Total	131	134	265			134
% of Total	49.4	50.6				

Table 1.2

Table 1.3 shows the count of reviewers by gender, along with the percentage distribution based on the total count for each review cycle. Notably, there is a significant shift in gender balance from the Second Cycle, which had 63% male and 37% female reviewers, to the Third Cycle, where the balance changed to 44% male and 56% female. It is important to note that we have met the gender balance requirements set

by the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) standards for panels in Irish higher education institutions (HEIs).

Cycle	Male	Female	Total	% of Total Male	% of Total Female
First	233	66	299	77.9	22.1
Second	162	94	256	63.3	36.7
Third	131	134	265	49.4	50.6

Table 1.3

Table 1.4 presents the count of reviewers by institution country across the First to Third Cycles, both inclusively and for each cycle individually. The total number of reviewers recruited has remained relatively stable, ranging from approximately 250 to 290 in each cycle.

First-Third Cycle				Individual Cycle Only		
Institution Country	Male	Female	Total	First	Second	Third
Ireland	343	204	547	215	165	167
United Kingdom	139	71	210	68	67	75
France	5	1	6	3	1	2
Spain	-	1	1	1	-	-
United States	9	4	13	4	9	-
Germany	2	1	3	1	2	-
Canada	6	-	6	2	1	3
Belgium	3	2	5	1	1	3
Australia	1	-	1	1	-	-
Sweden	2	2	4	1	2	1
Czech Republic	1	-	1	1	-	-
Finland	2	-	2	1	1	-
Italy	1	-	1	-	1	-
Kosovo	2	-	2	-	2	-
Austria	1	1	2	-	1	1
Portugal	-	1	1	-	1	-
Denmark	2	1	3	-	-	3
Slovenia	-	1	1	-	-	1
Switzerland	2	1	3	-	-	3
New Zealand	-	1	1	-	-	1
Norway	2	-	2	-	-	2
The Netherlands	3	2	5	-	2	3
Total	526	294	820	299	256	265
% of total	64.1	35.9				

Table 1.4

Feedback, Monitoring and Review

Ongoing monitoring of the Quality Review process is ensured through a structured debrief following each review, aimed at assessing and improving operational effectiveness. Feedback is systematically gathered via debrief meetings and questionnaires completed by Heads of Schools and Peer Reviewers. Additionally voluntary feedback is often sent to the QEU from both Heads and panel members. The following messages are some examples of the feedback received by the QEU following periodic Quality Reviews:

“‘It’s been a constructive, uplifting, and rewarding process. Thank you” I can’t tell you how relieved I am and how happy I am with the outcome... thank you. I realise that the work you did, resulted in a better review. I am very grateful.”

Head of School

“My colleagues and I are unanimous that our recent quality review was conducted with skill, rigour, courtesy and due consideration for the reality of academic life under Covid-19. We are grateful to ...you and your staff for supporting and driving the process.”

Head of School

“I would have to rate it as one of the best run quality reviews that I've had the pleasure to take part in. We were very fortunate with the other members of the panel and the chair was really excellent. ... You have a great team...”

External Peer Review Panel member

“...thank you ... for your help and support in organising the Quality Review logistics and documentation ... It made it very easy for us as reviewers to participate. Thanks also to ‘the Review Coordinator’ in particular for your insightful scribing and support of the Review Team!”

Internal Peer Review Panel member

“Thank you all very much for the opportunity, I really enjoyed it & thank you for your patience with me!”

Student Peer Review Panel member

“I am forever grateful for your listening ear and the generosity of spirit you showed me, and I hope the next school you are working with truly appreciates what you bring with you.”

Staff member from unit under review

“Thank you for your leadership and the choice of excellent reviewers... You continue to bring pride on this institution in your work and I thank you for that.”

UCC Senior Officer

Section 2 National Institutional Quality Review (CINNTE)

UCC underwent its Institutional Review as required by the policy for [Cyclical Review of Degree Awarding Bodies](#) in 2023. Following the site visit in March 2023, the draft Institutional Review Report was provided to UCC in June 2023 for factual accuracy check. UCC provided an Institutional Response to accompany the draft Review Report in August 2023. The final Review Report was subsequently published by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) in November 2023.

The expert panel recognised 39 areas of excellence and offered some insightful recommendations. UCC was commended for its ambitious Strategic Plan, commitment to sustainability, student supports, and community engagement. The report reflected UCC's dedication to high-quality education, research, services and deep commitment to student partnership and engagement.

Following the publication of the Institutional Review Report, UCC developed an [Action Plan](#) to indicate how the recommendations within the Review Report would be addressed. It is noteworthy that the close alignment between the University's Self-Assessment for CINNTE and its Strategic Plan (2023-28) consultation will enable the management of the post-CINNTE actions to continue in alignment through the University Leadership Strategy implementation process.

Section 3 Student Feedback Ecosystem Project

Pilot Survey Background and Rationale

As already indicated in last year's Annual Report, the UCC-wide Student Feedback Ecosystem Project (SFEP) was co-designed and led by the Quality Enhancement Unit and CIRTl in 2021-23. This initiative was developed as a response to the need for a systematic and consistent university-wide process for gathering student feedback, following the suspension of the SysEval survey in 2016.

The UCC-wide Student Feedback Ecosystem Project (SFEP) was rolled out in 2022-3 by the Quality Enhancement Unit, with the support of a cross-functional team, having been awarded SATLE funding by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. It culminated in the development of a new integrated student module surveying tool – combining consistency of core questions with module-specific inputs. Such 'Proof of Concept' student feedback survey was piloted in late 2022 by virtue of an IT integration of Canvas and Qualtrics. A comprehensive account of the project background and rationale is included in the QEC Annual Report to the Governing Authority 2022/23 (Section 3, pp.3-4).

Post-Pilot Survey Follow-up

Following the pilot survey phase, an independent user-focused evaluation was carried out in Spring-Summer 2023. The evaluation put forward a recommended approach for a future roll-out of a module-level student feedback survey, using Canvas to deploy the survey to enrolled students and leveraging the potential of Qualtrics as appropriate. The overall objective is to re-establish a University-wide module level survey which provides feedback on the student learning experience to inform colleagues delivering modules and aggregated synoptic data that can inform quality processes such as accreditation, periodic programme monitoring and review.

The next stage of this activity is to scale-up the original pilot to a wider sample of modules and students to prototype a steady-state replicable and sustainable university-wide student feedback system taking account of the recommendations of the evaluation. This will be achieved through the establishment of a short-term project sponsored by the Vice-President for Learning & Teaching, that will be coordinated by the Quality Enhancement Unit working in collaboration with the Office of the Deputy President & Registrar, Academic Affairs and Governance, Centre for Digital Education and IT Services.

Section 4 QEU Activities

Good Practice Symposium

The inclusion of Good Practice Case Studies in periodic quality reviews was introduced by the Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU) in 2016. Since then, the QEU has been committed to recognising and sharing good practices as well as publishing the case studies on their website. The inaugural Good Practice Symposium was launched in October 2022 followed by the second event held on 23rd May 2024 in the Dr Dora Allman Room, Hub. The call for entries was extended to all staff and students.

The Good Practice case studies were showcased in the areas of education, training, research and professional support services with each submission aligning with one or more Strategic Goal within UCC's [Strategic Plan 2023-2028 Securing our Future](#). The keynote speech was delivered by Dr Oliver Vettori from WU Vienna University of Economics and Business. Dr Vettori, along with Ms Marie Gould, Quality and Qualifications Ireland, with Professors Maria Cahill and Pádraig Cantillon-Murphy (both QEC members) formed a Selection Committee that adjudicated the winners for 'Best Poster' and 'Best Presentation' on the day. These included:

- Best Poster: *'ASK UCC and Student Central'*, represented by Ciara Murphy, in collaboration with Michelle Higgins, Edward Kidney and Ciara Scanlan.
- Best Presentation: *'Show them what you know:Community Engaged Learning (CEL) working towards a sustainable future'* delivered by Dr. F. Jerry Reen (School of Microbiology), in collaboration with Dr. Niall O'Leary (School of Microbiology), Dr. Ruth Hally (CIRTL), Irene Ní Shúilleabháin (UCC Greenshoots), and India Murphy (Student partner).

The Symposium aimed to highlight and share the remarkable work being done by the UCC community as examples of Good Practice from which others can learn. The event provided a unique opportunity for professional networking, the exchange of ideas and practices, and the potential for future collaborations. It also allowed the QEU to open a dialogue on the evolving definition of good practices at UCC. Following the symposium, the posters were transformed into digital artefacts and displayed on the QEU [webpage](#), making them available to the wider university community. The QEU plans to host the Symposium on a biennial basis.

Photos from the Good Practice Symposium, May 2024



Case Study of Good Practice

Sustainability of the Case Study of Good Practice Symposium



Case Study Synopsis

This case study reflects on the commitment of the Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU) to align to both sustainability and the University's current financial goals. The Good Practice Case Study was introduced as a new initiative by the Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU) in 2017 as an integral part of the self-evaluation process for quality reviews in UCC. The first Case Study of Good Practice Symposium was held in 2022 with 34 case studies being submitted and following the success of this event, it was decided to host this biennially.

The overall aim of the symposium is to highlight the great work that is carried out by the UCC community that are considered instances of Good Practice from which others can learn from.

The poster boards were sustainably sourced and are reusable as well as recyclable. The case studies will be available on the QEU webpage in the form of a digital artifact.

Prizes were kindly donated by an external source.

Key Words: *Case Study of Good Practice Symposium, Sustainability*



Area/s of Alignment

- ☒ Research & Innovation
- ☒ Student Success
- ☒ Global Engagement
- ☒ Our Staff, Our Culture
- ☒ Our Place, Our Footprint



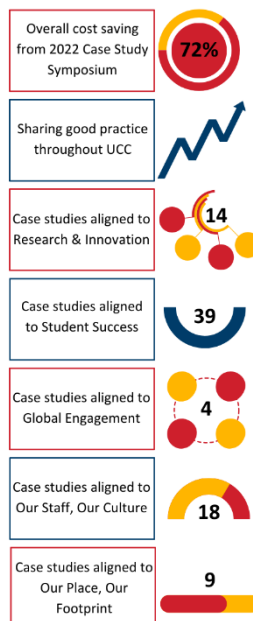
Video Links | Graphics



[QEU Website](#)



Key Impacts



Intended Enhancements

- Continuing to support greater awareness around good practice in UCC, improving quality and increasing effectiveness within the University.
- Highlighting and celebrating the great work being done within the UCC community considered as good practice.
- Poster boards will be reused and made available for use by staff / students for future events.



Additional Information

The Case Study of Good Practice Symposium started in 2022, as an initiative in preparation for the Institutional Review. Posters from the event can be found on the QEU website.

Event Collaborators: *Dr Stephen Hammel, Seugnet Kritzinger, Marie O'Regan*

Poster Presenter: *Dr Silvia Brandi*

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL); Strategic Quality Enhancement Project

Launch of work-integrated learning.

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is the internationally recognised term that was introduced to UCC following the [thematic review](#) of placement by the QEU in 2020. WIL is the umbrella term that describes student learning involving an external partner where tasks involve the practice of work that is meaningful, authentic, and an intentional component of the curriculum.



The official launch of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) took place on Thursday 18th January 2024 in the Dr Dora Allman Room, Hub. Staff from across the university attended to learn more about work-integrated learning, celebrate existing work in this field and understand where we can develop and expand work-integrated learning within the curriculum.

From left: Professor Nuala Finnegan (Dean of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies), Ms Elizabeth Noonan, Ms Clodagh Kerr (WIL Project Manager) and Ms Alison O' Mahony

Professor Nuala Finnegan, Dean of Undergraduate and Postgraduate studies opened the launch on behalf of Professor Stephen Byrne, Deputy President, and Registrar. Staff heard from Elizabeth Noonan, Director of the Quality Enhancement Unit, and their role in the thematic review of Placement in 2020 and the origins of this project. We heard also from expert in the field Dr Karsten Zegwaard, Associate Professor and Director of the Work Integrated Learning Unit in Waikato University New Zealand. Dr Zegwaard is also the Editor-in-chief for the International [Journal of Work-Integrated Learning](#). Alison O' Mahony, Deputy President of the student's union spoke about her participation in the work-integrated learning Working Group and her own WIL personal experience.



Visit to UCC by Dr Karsten Zegwaard



Dr Karsten Zegwaard

In June 2024 the WIL project gained further momentum when the QUE supported a visit by Dr Karsten Zegwaard to UCC to share his expertise as a thought leader in the field of work-integrated learning. As an Executive Board member of the World Association of Co-operative Education, Dr Zegwaard was in Europe to present at the 5th International Research Symposium in Sweden. During his time in UCC Dr Zegwaard met with Professor John O' Halloran, President, Professor Stephen Byrne, Deputy President and Registrar and Professor Paul Mc Sweeney, Vice President of Teaching & Learning. Dr Zegwaard delivered an extensive masterclass and series of open

clinics on developing work-integrated learning in higher education. Feedback from staff was that this session was both informative and engaging with a generosity of knowledge sharing. Feedback included: "I found the masterclass really beneficial and inspiring", "this masterclass was really interesting, practical and worth hearing".

Future plans.

The Higher Education landscape has changed significantly over the past twenty years in relation to placement and experiential learning now known as work-integrated learning (WIL). Growth has been influenced by Global, European and Irish government Policy such as the European Higher Education Area's strategic framework "to facilitate employability" and Ireland's "National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030" (HEA, 2017). A medium-term goal of the strategy is that all "undergraduate students should be encouraged to spend some time in a work or service situation, and formally acknowledge such work through accreditation." The United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Future of Education directly impacts our role in careers as we assist with the "school-to-work transition" and ensure "students are exposed to the world of work in a range of occupations" and "integrate opportunities for work-based learning." The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) policy document "Progressing a Unified Tertiary System for Learning, Skills and Knowledge" means that we will need a **diverse range of WIL activities** to support the different needs of learners.

In progressing the WIL project further, it will be important to develop innovative practices of work-integrated learning within the curriculum to support UCC's strategic ambition, address the government's agenda on developing employability and for our external stakeholders and society in general. WIL is more than employability, it develops students' confidence and transversal skills that goes beyond the world of

work. To increase industry engagement, there is a need to identify emerging WIL models that enable flexibility while optimizing outcomes for stakeholders.

During a recent UCC survey in relation to the implementation of work-integrated learning to the university staff cited that work-integrated learning bridges the gap between theory and practice and students gain authentic real-world experiences, where they develop confidence and professional workplace skills as key benefits to growth in demand for WIL. Resourcing and administration, provision of quality experiences and ability to oversee health and safety of students in participating in work-based learning activities as key challenges along with the lack of recognition and progression for academic staff time in preparing students for the world beyond university.

- The breadth of WIL activities in UCC is currently underestimated and not captured to provide the government with valuable information for our HEA Performance Agreement. By consolidating this information, UCC could show the valuable **contribution WIL is making to society and future economy**. Complete an in-depth mapping exercise on each programme in the university to give greater clarity and oversight of current WIL practices.
- The volatile and uncertain world we live in means we need to have oversight of all WIL activities across the university to avoid risk due to negligence. Centralising core WIL activities through a well-developed **community of practice**, working together on key external stakeholder engagement, health & safety and due diligence of students participating in WIL activities.
- **Collaborate with other HEI's** to develop best practice documentation around health & safety of students participating in WIL.
- Continue to share and learn from international best practice and **experts in WACE and ASET** by showcasing UCC's expertise in the field of WIL.
- Include **students as partners** in the development and progression of quality WIL. Collaborate on research initiatives to learn more about the student experience of WIL.
- Work with HR in relation to **staff recognition** for their contribution to WIL?

Create a culture to support the development of WIL in the curriculum for all staff. Providing quality WIL takes time and energy and this should be recognised.

- Represent UCC on **Advance HE's** first Irish Strategic Advisory Board to develop WIL (note: I am currently applying for this so there is no guarantee I will be accepted on to the board)

External Engagement by Quality Enhancement Unit Staff

QQI AQR Conference

Ms Elizabeth Noonan, Director of Quality Enhancement, Ms Deirdre O'Brien, Senior Quality Enhancement Advisor, and Dr Silvia Brandi, Quality Enhancement Advisor, represented UCC at the QQI Annual Quality Report (AQR) National Conference titled 'Quality in Higher Education: Sectoral Findings and Enhancement Showcase' in October 2023. The conference, organised by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), provided a platform for the dissemination of key findings from the 2022/23 AQR institutional submissions and facilitated the exchange of case studies of good practice among Irish higher education institutions, including universities, technological universities, and private providers.

Ms Noonan participated as an expert panel member, contributing insights on the AQR submission process and offering recommendations for future enhancements to the quality assurance framework. Dr Silvia Brandi also presented the QEU's Student Digital Space initiative as a case study of good practice. The initiative, designed to broaden and deepen digital engagement with the student body, aligned with UCC's strategic objectives on Student Success, emphasising the importance of embedding the student voice in the University's decision-making processes. The QEU presentation highlighted the initiative's alignment with both national and international efforts to enhance student engagement and partnership.

Inno-Methods Conference at the University of Trieste



Ms Elizabeth Noonan, Director of Quality Enhancement, was invited to deliver a keynote at the Inno-Methods 2023 for Quality Curricula conference, held at the University of Trieste, Italy, in September 2023. Organised as part of the European University Alliance initiative, Transform 4 Europe, the conference provided a platform for member institutions to share existing quality enhancement and educational practices, while exploring innovative strategies to enhance curriculum design. The event brought together experts from higher education institutions across Europe, featuring keynote presentations, roundtable discussions, and workshops. Ms Noonan's presentation, titled 'Quality Assurance and Innovative Teaching: Competing or Complementary Activities?', examined the mutually reinforcing relationship between quality assurance and innovative teaching, using three flagship initiatives from the QEU as examples. These included the development of student engagement in quality processes, the recognition of good practice across the institution, and the outcomes of a recent thematic review of Workplace Learning.

From left: Ms Silvia Agostini (University of Trieste), Ms Elizabeth Noonan (UCC) & Giulia Pettenuzzo (University of Trieste)

External appointments and activities

Chair of Validation Panel at National College of Ireland

Ms Elizabeth Noonan was appointed in March 2024 by National College of Ireland to Chair the Validation Panel for a programme suite MSc Business Analytics (multi-mode) with embedded Postgraduate Diploma and micro-credentials.

Appointment to the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland

Ms Elizabeth Noonan was appointed to the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland's (PSI) accreditation panel for a period of 5 years. The PSI is the statutory body responsible for regulating pharmacists in Ireland, in particular overseeing the accreditation of master's in pharmacy degree. The appointment to the panel is for a period of five years.

Appointment as External Chair of Quality Review at Royal College of Surgeons Ireland



Ms Elizabeth Noonan was appointed as External Chair for the Quality Review of the Department of Finance at RCSI, Dublin which took place in September 2024.

From left: Mr Mark Collins (Technical Writer), Ms Karin Lanigan (Head of Member Experience at Chartered Accountants Ireland), Ms Elizabeth Noonan (UCC), Dr Judith Gilroy (Associate Director for Student Academic Affairs), Mr Dhanushi Rodrigo (PhD Student, Atlantic Technological University) and Mr John Hogg (Director of Continuous Improvement, University of Strathclyde).

CINNTE Review of Technological University of the Shannon (TUS)



Ms Elizabeth Noonan served as the Coordinating Reviewer for the CINNTE Review Team at Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), from 15th to 19th April 2024. The approved Review Report is expected to be published following approval by QQI.

From left: Professor Jeremy Bradshaw (Chair, HE consultant), Emeritus Professor Rosalind Pritchard (Ulster University), Ms Elizabeth Noonan (UCC), Dr Inger Seiferheld (University of Edinburgh Business School), Ms Anna Klampfer (Student Representative, Technological University of the Shannon) and Mr Barry O'Sullivan (Chartered Director).

Erasmus + Staff Mobility and European Engagement

University of Liège, Erasmus Visit



From left: Ms Dominique Thewissen (University of Liège), Dr Silvia Brandi (UCC) & Ms Catherine Vandeleene (University of Liège)

Dr Silvia Brandi, Quality Enhancement Advisor, participated in the Erasmus+ staff mobility programme at the University of Liège, Belgium in March 2024, where she collaborated with the university's quality enhancement and assurance unit, the 'Service de Management et d'Accompagnement de la Qualité' (SMAQ). The experience offered valuable insights into the policies and practices that sustain a strong quality culture at Liège. By working closely with SMAQ colleagues, Dr Brandi gained a comprehensive understanding of their established programme review processes and observed their transition to a new faculty and institutional-based evaluation model.

Parallels between UCC and Liège were noted, particularly in their size and shared values. Both institutions, as members of the UNIC European University Alliance of Post-Industrial Cities, actively promote sustainability and Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), creating a foundation for potential future collaboration. Dr Brandi's visit not only expanded her professional knowledge but also strengthened international connections, promising to enhance UCC's quality frameworks and institutional partnerships.

EAIR Forum

Ms Elizabeth Noonan served as a Co-Track Chair at the 46th EAIR Forum, hosted by University College Cork from 22nd to 23rd August 2024. The EAIR Forum, organised by the European Higher Education Society, focused on the theme "Sustainability, Resilience, and Wellbeing", bringing together experts from across Europe to explore these critical issues in higher education. The event, held on UCC's campus, fostered discussions and shared insights on fostering sustainable and resilient educational environments.

WU University, Vienna

Dr Stephen Hammel, Quality Enhancement Manager, participated in an Erasmus Visit at the WU (Vienna University of Economics and Business), Vienna. The visit took place from 9th – 13th September 2024 and was focussed on the activities of WU's Evaluation and Quality Enhancement (EQE) team. The EQE team shared insights into their quality processes, with a focus on those which utilise the data programming language R as well as their student feedback (Course Evaluation) process. This aligned well with ongoing projects Dr Hammel has been developing at UCC, particularly the development of key quality indicators which utilise UCC's core data from the Data Hub and transform them into a user-friendly dashboard to further support review panels and units engaging in review. The visit provided an opportunity for Dr Hammel to develop his technical skills and enhance future collaboration opportunities with UCC and WU's quality units.

Facilitating Erasmus + Study Visits

University of Ljubljana

The QEU will host a study visit from the University of Ljubljana the week of 9th December 2024. The visit is part of the University of Ljubljana's follow-up to an international evaluation conducted by the Finnish Quality Agency. As the University of Ljubljana works to further develop and consolidate its quality framework, it has chosen Ireland as the destination for this study visit to gain a deeper understanding of the Irish higher education context. Following their visit to UCC and Munster Technological University (MTU) respectively, the group will transfer to Dublin to attend the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning.

University of Malta

The QEU will participate in an Erasmus+ visit for the University of Malta in collaboration with University College Dublin (UCD). The University of Malta is particularly interested in understanding the QA processes that underpin research programmes, and this engagement aims to facilitate knowledge exchange and enhance their own quality assurance practices. The QEU looks forward to sharing good practices and collaborating with UCD on this visit.

Biruni University

The QEU is currently engaged in discussions to host an Erasmus+ staff mobility visit with Biruni University, Turkey. This collaboration aims to facilitate knowledge exchange and strengthen international ties by sharing good practice in quality enhancement.

Section 5 QQI Matters

Annual Quality Report to QQI 2022/23

UCC's Annual Quality Report (AQR) 2022/23 was approved by QEC on 22nd January 2024 and recommended to the University Leadership Team (ULT) for approval on 7th February 2024, before its submission to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) on 23rd February 2024.

The AQR is the University's formal statement of its institutional level approach and policy for the quality of its education, research, training and related services as defined under the 2012 Quality Assurance & Qualifications Act. The AQRs for all higher education institutions are published by QQI and are used for sectoral analysis and benchmarking, including institutional profiling leading into the Institutional Review. The Annual Quality Report is structured in two main parts: Part A comprises a record of each institution's current QA policies and procedures. Part B covers an extended discussion of the issues arising from quality activities, planned enhancements as well as an evaluation of the impact of previous enhancements. The AQR also includes a Case Study, which is thematically focused.

International Education Mark (IEM)

The International Education Mark (IEM) was established under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education & Training) Act 2012 (amended 2019) as part of QQI's mandate to create a code of practice for international education programmes. The Code of Practice, published in October 2023, focuses on ensuring the quality of services and support for international learners. Compliance with the Code is mandatory for all HEI's enrolling international students in programmes leading to qualifications on the National Framework of Qualifications. The IEM application process requires institutions to assess their compliance with the Code, based on verifiable evidence, and submit a detailed application covering three main areas: the international context, evaluation process, and quality criteria for services provided to international learners.

The IEM application process requires institutions to assess their compliance with 63 criteria, achieving at least 80% compliance to attain the quality mark. This process involves detailed assessments across three main areas: the institution's international context, its evaluation process, and the quality of services and supports for international learners. UCC's application will be led by the Vice-President for Global Engagement and supported by the Director of Quality Enhancement and the Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU). The Director of Quality Enhancement commissioned a report outlining the key aspects and timeline of activities to achieve this quality mark.

Honours Classification Project

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) launched a research project to examine trends in Honours Classification, particularly grade inflation, within the Irish Higher Education sector. The initiative sought to take a 10-year snapshot across a range of undergraduate programmes over the period of analysis, 2011/12 - 2021/22. Each educational institution was asked to put forward several undergraduate programmes for inclusion in the study, with General Nursing being a required submission for all institutions. *UCC put forward the following programmes:*

- *BSc (Hons) Business Information Systems*
- *BSc (Hons) Nutritional Sciences*

- *BCL (Hons) Law*

The QEU coordinated the completion and submission of the case studies for each programme in collaboration with the relevant programme directors and respective Heads of Schools.

QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (Blended, and Fully Online Programmes)

Quality & Qualifications Ireland commissioned the development of Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended and Fully Online Programmes. UCC participated in sectoral consultation for a, contributed to the IUA deliberations on the draft Guidelines, following a process of internal consultation UCC also submitted a response to the draft guidelines. The final version of the guidelines was published in October 2024 and can be found [here](#).

Section 6 Looking forward to 2024/25

Looking ahead to academic year 2024/25, the main priorities for quality work will include:

- Completion of the Third Cycle of Periodic Quality Review, with the following scheduled for review:
 - School of Applied Psychology (Oct 2024)
- Thematic Review: Research Degree Student Experience
- Transnational Education Review: Minzu University of China (collaborative partnership offering a dual degree with the School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences, UCC) and Communication University of China (CUC)
- The development of UCC's CINNTE Action Plan in response to the Institutional Review, which will be included in UCC's Annual Quality Report (AQR) 2022-2023
- Conclusion of the Student Feedback Project
- Engagement with the International Education Mark (IEM) application process

Re-Calibration of Periodic Quality Review

Before commencing the 4th cycle of Periodic Quality Review, the Quality Enhancement Unit plans a re-calibration process to ensure that the methodology for Quality Review is strategically aligned, referenced to current/emergent good practice internationally and nationally and consolidates incremental and current ongoing enhancements to the model. This re-calibration process will take place during 2023/24 and once complete will allow the required period of 12 months preparation for units engaging in review from 2025/26 onwards.

Fourth cycle of periodic Quality Reviews 2025/26 to 2031-32

The fourth cycle schedule for Quality Reviews has been published on our [webpage](#). The review types include Schools, Functional Areas and Specialist quality reviews. Specialist reviews have been developed for distinct units that are not Schools but either offer academic provision or provide significant support to educational activities at UCC. Additionally, there will be Thematic Reviews and Collaborative Reviews of Transnational Education (TNE), with a particular focus on Minzu University of China and Communication University of China.

Appendix 1: Quality Enhancement Committee

Section 7 QEC Membership

QEC Membership: April 2021 – Sept 2025

Ex Officio:

- Professor John O'Halloran, Interim President (Chair)
- Professor Stephen Byrne, Interim Registrar
- Mr Rory Condon, Chief Financial and Operating Officer
- Dr Niamh Connolly, Director of Projects (President's Office)
- Ms Elizabeth Noonan, Director of Quality Enhancement (Secretary)
- Mr Colm Foley, President, Students' Union (2023/24)
- Ms Ali O'Mahony, Education Officer, Students' Union (2023/24)

Nominated Members:

4 academic staff members – 1 representative from each College

- Professor Maggie O'Neill, College of Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences
- Professor Chris Lynch, College of Medicine & Health
- Professor Pádraig Cantillon-Murphy, College of Science, Engineering & Food Science
- Professor Maria Cahill, College of Business and Law

3 staff members – representatives of administrative and support services

- Ms Kathryn Neville, College of Medicine and Health
- Mr David Hogan, Institutional Research Officer, Office of the Vice President for External Relations
- Ms Helen O'Donoghue, HR Business Manager, College of Science, Engineering & Food Science

2 members of Academic Council

- Dr Rachel MagShamráin - Head, Department of German
- Dr Mohamad Saab – School of Nursing and Midwifery

1 Doctoral Student representative

- TBC

Section 8 QEC Terms of Reference

Aim: To support the University's mission and strategy for excellence in learning, research and related services through developing and embedding a culture of quality enhancement based on the outcomes of robust expert peer review and informed by ongoing analysis of key quality indicators.

The Terms of Reference of the Committee are to:

- foster a quality culture throughout the University, that is supportive of innovation, the sharing of good practice and development of excellence in teaching, learning, research and related services;
- oversee the development of University quality assurance and enhancement policies and procedures, informed by national and international policy developments, that support strategic goals for excellence and the identification of good practice;
- facilitate student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement activities;
- ensure that University quality review policies and procedures have regard to prevailing national and European requirements: the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012, published national quality assurance guidelines and European Standards and Guidelines (ESG);
- recommend policy and procedures for ensuring the integrity of various forms of academic association with external organisations including collaborative provision and linked providers;
- review and analyse systematically the outcomes of quality processes and relevant quality indicators to confirm the on-going maintenance of quality and identify any required strategic enhancement activities;
- ensure the methodologies for expert peer review are evaluated as required in order to maintain a focus on both fitness for purpose and fitness of purpose;
- review and propose revision to the terms of reference, where appropriate and necessary.

In fulfilling its remit, the Quality Enhancement Committee will advise the University Management team and Academic Council on key quality issues arising with implications for strategy or policy development. It will also provide an Annual Report to Governing Authority to meet the requirements of the Universities Act 1997 and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012 (amended 2019).

Constitution

Ex Officio Members

- President (Chair)
- Senior Vice-President Academic & Registrar
- Chief Financial and Operating Officer
- Director of Quality Enhancement (Secretary)
- Director of Projects (President's Office)
- President, Students Union
- Education Officer, Students Union

Nominated Members

- 4 academic staff with experience of participation in quality review and/or knowledge of quality systems – one from each College, nominated by the President.
- 3 administrative & support services staff with experience of participation in quality review and/or knowledge of quality systems from administration and services, nominated by the President.
- 2 members of Academic Council
- 1 Doctoral Student representative

Quorum

The quorum necessary for the transaction of business shall be 6 at least one of whom shall be the President or the Senior Vice-President Academic. A duly convened meeting of the Committee at which a quorum is present shall be competent to exercise all or any of the authorities, powers and discretions vested in or exercisable by the Committee.

Sub-Committees

The Committee shall establish such sub-committees and working groups, with specific briefs, as are deemed necessary for the efficient operation of the Committee.

Term of Office

The term of office for the Committee is four years, with the current Committee's period of office ending June 2025.

Casual Vacancies and Co-opted Members

The Committee has the authority to fill any casual vacancies that arise during the lifetime of the Committee. The Committee may as required co-opt members with specialist expertise to ensure that its work is appropriately informed.