



# UCC

University College Cork, Ireland  
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

## Fheabhsú Cáilíochta Quality Enhancement



### QUALITY REVIEW

### PEER REVIEW PANEL REPORT

### SCHOOL OF NURSING AND MIDWIFERY

*“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.”*

(UCC Quality Enhancement Committee Remit)

**February 2024**

## Contents

Context.....	3
Methodology and Site Visit .....	3
Panel Members.....	4
Objectives of Quality Review .....	5
Commendations and Recommendations.....	5
Commendations .....	5
Summary Recommendations .....	6
Recommendations.....	7
Short-Term Recommendations .....	7
Medium- to Long-Term Recommendations .....	8
Recommendations – Further Detail .....	9
Overall Analysis of Self-Evaluation Process.....	13
Self-Evaluation Report (SER).....	13
SWOT .....	13
Benchmarking .....	13
Developments since previous Quality Review .....	14
Good Practice Case Study.....	14
Overall appraisal .....	15
Facilities.....	15
Final Comments and Conclusion .....	16
Next Steps .....	16
Appendix A – Panel Profiles.....	18
Appendix B – Timetable.....	21

## Context

The Catherine McAuley School of Nursing and Midwifery in UCC is located in the Brookfield Health Science Complex and is one of six schools situated within the College of Medicine and Health (CMH). Founded in 1994, it has grown to become one of the largest units in the University and a school of national and international reputation. Its programme portfolio has grown significantly from one undergraduate programme offering initially to: five undergraduate (UG) programmes; twenty postgraduate (PG) programmes and a range of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses and two research programmes. All its offerings except two PG programmes are accredited with the National Board of Nursing and Midwifery of Ireland (NMBI). So far, the School has graduated more than 5,500 nurses and midwives and provided postgraduate education and continuing professional development to over 2,500 healthcare professionals. It is the top ranked School in the subject of Nursing in Ireland and first school of Nursing and Midwifery to have been awarded the Athena Swan Bronze Medal in Ireland (2021). The subject of Nursing is currently ranked 33<sup>rd</sup> in the world according to the QS rankings and ranked 51st-75th according to the 2020 Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU).

The staff headcount at the School is 95 (corresponding to 84.61 FTEs), on a range of contracts (permanent and fixed-term). Out of these, 58 are academics, 30 (corresponding to 24.2 FTEs) Professional Services and 6 are Technical Support Staff. The gender mix of full-time and part-time, permanent and fixed-term staff in the School is 85% female and 15% male, with a senior management team that is primarily female (the headcount for male staff across all the staff categories and roles is 14). These statistics are reflective of the gender profile in the nursing and midwifery professions. The current staff profile indicates a considerable increase in the number of senior roles within the Unit since the publication of the last Quality Enhancement Report (2012).

The most recent student figures reported in the School's SER refer to the headcount for the academic year 2022/23 of 1230 - of which 926 are undergraduate, 304 postgraduate, 232 CDP and 38 research students. Among the postgraduate students, PhD/Practitioner Doctorates accounted for 25.5 FTEs, and Research Masters for 4 FTEs.

## Methodology and Site Visit

A model for conducting site visits virtually was developed in 2020 to enable completion of Quality Reviews under the prevailing public health restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This model ensured continuity in the operation and delivery of quality review and enhancement activities. In 2022 the model moved to a hybrid review comprising of a 2 day on-campus site visit and 2 half-day virtual meetings.

This visit took place under the hybrid review process over 2 weeks from the 23 January to the 1 February 2024. During the site visit the Panel met with staff, students, senior officers and relevant stakeholders. During the virtual meetings the Panel met with external stakeholders and focused on writing the Report with a particular emphasis on the commendations and recommendations. The sequencing of meetings was organised to ensure coherence and progression in the conduct of the review. The platform used for the virtual meetings was MS Teams. The timetable for the site visit afforded appropriate time to engage with the broad variety of stakeholders. The timetable is included as Appendix B.

The Panel brought together internal and international peer reviewers (Panel profiles can be found in Appendix A). The internal reviewers provided knowledge of institutional and organisational structures with the external Panel members contributing their peer expertise. The student Panel member brought valuable insights and perspectives on student issues, as well as proactively and effectively contributing to the broader discussions with the various stakeholders. His level of professionalism and competency was publicly commended by the School's staff and broader stakeholder group. At the end of the site visit, the Panel presented its initial findings - both commendations and recommendations - to the staff of the School.

To support the Peer Review Panel and facilitate effective engagement throughout the site visit, additional guidance and support was provided by staff of the Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU) in UCC. This included technical support, as well as briefing and advisory support prior to and throughout the review. Review coordination was provided throughout by a Review Coordinator to facilitate the review process and to support the Peer Review Panel in formulating and agreeing the final Panel Report. The Report was compiled collaboratively, with the contribution of the entire Panel to the production of the final version of the document.

### Panel Members

Refer to Appendix A for detailed Panel profiles.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position/Discipline</b>	<b>Institution</b>
Professor Martin Bradley	Retired Fellow	Queen's Nursing Institute
Professor Helen Cheyne	Professor of Maternal and Infant Health Research	University of Stirling
Ms Nora Geary (Chair)	Corporate Secretary	University College Cork
Mr James Hennessy	School of Chemistry	University College Cork
Professor Mary Malone	Vice Dean (Education); Professor of Nursing	King's College London
Dr Christopher McCusker	Head, School of Applied Psychology	University College Cork

<b>Review Coordinator</b>		
<i>Dr Silvia Brandi</i>	<i>Quality Enhancement Unit</i>	<i>University College Cork</i>
<b>IT and Logistics Coordinator</b>		
<i>Ms Sheila Ronan</i>	<i>Quality Enhancement Unit</i>	<i>University College Cork</i>

## Objectives of Quality Review

The overarching objectives of academic quality review at UCC are to enable Schools, through evidence-based self-evaluation, to:

1. Reflect on and promote the strategic enhancement of their academic activities to ensure an outstanding learning experience for all students (enhancement dimension);
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of their processes for assuring academic standards and provision, in line with the University's academic mission and strategy (assurance dimension).

Thus, peer review goes beyond quality assurance to also embrace continuous quality enhancement. The Peer Review Panel Report reflects these objectives in the recommendations and commendations outlined to support the School of Nursing and Midwifery. This will enable the School to further refine its priorities and optimise its activities in the pursuit of its ambitious drive for excellence within the international and national arena of higher education and for leadership and innovation in the healthcare sector.

## Commendations and Recommendations

### Commendations

Based on the information obtained from the Self-Evaluation Report and meetings with multiple internal, as well as external stakeholders to the School of Nursing and Midwifery, the Panel commends the School for the following:

1. The great esteem it enjoys within the College, the University and its wider stakeholder group;
2. A clear, accessible and honest Self-Evaluation Report, reflective of an inclusive and participatory approach to the self-evaluation process;
3. Its global engagement across research, teaching and learning, reflected in their QS subject rankings (i.e. 33<sup>rd</sup> for the subject 'Nursing');
4. Its responsiveness to the competing needs and strategic objectives of multiple stakeholders – University and College; Government (Department of Health, Health Service Executive, Higher Education Authority, ...); external professional bodies (NMBI; HIQA, ...); clinical partners (within acute and community and primary settings); students, patients and service users; national and international research funding bodies;
5. Breath of external stakeholder engagement (clinical sites; academic collaborators and mobility exchanges for staff and students, nationally and internationally; external accreditation bodies; private healthcare sector; charities; regional groups and governmental bodies and others) and high degree of stakeholder satisfaction with the engagement, competence, responsiveness, openness and flexibility of School's staff, students and graduates;
6. Strong commitment to EDI, reflected by the School's Athena Swan Bronze Award and a number of School-level initiatives, such as the EDIB Student Forum and an established system of support for international students and evidence of extensive value-driven community engagement and initiatives;
7. The staff at all levels for their commitment and work to ensure students continue to have a positive learning experience despite increasing registration numbers;

8. Staff – collegiality, commitment, work ethic, pastoral care and dynamism;
9. Efforts to develop a research culture and infrastructure within the School, including the provision of a dedicated physical environment for contract researchers;
10. Innovative and student-centred approaches to curriculum development, teaching, learning and assessment (including simulation training, Virtual and Immersive Reality and student podcasting on healthcare matters);
11. Evidence of patient-centric approaches in various aspects of School's initiatives (curriculum input, teaching, research and decision-making);
12. The Clinical Skills and Simulations Resource Centre (CSSRC) and its staff's effectiveness in supporting top-class experiential learning;
13. School's contribution to the wellbeing of the whole University's community through the PAWS project and other initiatives.

### Summary Recommendations

The recommendations made by the Panel were signalled by a combination of elements, including recommendations by the School in the Self-evaluation Report (SER), combined with internal and external stakeholder discussions during the review. Considering this, the Panel, as well as endorsing the key recommendations outlined in the SER, has identified the below key areas for the [School of Nursing and Midwifery](#) to focus on, to further enable the growth and success of the school.

1. Acquisition of additional space and development of an infrastructural plan;
2. Development of a School-specific workload allocation model;
3. Development of a staffing plan following the establishment of a Task and Finish Group;
4. Provision of promotion-focused mentoring opportunities to School's staff;
5. Review of the Executive Committee's appointment criteria and processes;
6. Review of decision-making and communication processes within the School;
7. Enhancement of School's research activities and supports for contract researchers;
8. Re-envisioning of the Student Experience Committee;
9. Comprehensive review of the student learning experience and journey;
10. Prioritising completion of the commenced programme curriculum review and planning.

## Recommendations

### *Short-Term Recommendations*

The Panel considers the following as short-term priority recommendations for the School to act upon over the next 12 months:

**1. The Panel supports the Head of School's efforts to:**

- a. Secure the acquisition of appropriate academic, clinical and social spaces to meet the needs of an increasing student and staff population within the School (SER's R2), in line with the HEA's targets for Nursing and Midwifery Education, with the NMBI's requirements for programme reaccreditation and best healthcare clinical practices;
- b. Develop a long-term Plan for the School in terms of its infrastructure.

1a of this recommendation should be implemented before the commencement of the next academic year to ensure the Unit can accommodate the agreed enrolment quota and provide students with suitable lecturing, learning and social spaces. As for 1b, it should be implemented within one year following receipt of the Panel Report.

**2. The Head of School, in consultation with the School's Executive Committee and the wider staff base, should lead and develop a school-level workload model, tailored to the differential responsibilities of academic and other staff categories.**

**3. The Panel recommends that the Head of School and the School's Executive Committee, in consultation with the College HR Business Manager, develop a staffing plan (inclusive of succession planning) by establishing a bespoke Task and Finish Group to focus on further exploring a range of recruitment and contractual arrangements (e.g. joint appointments, Lecturer Practitioner posts and others, as deemed appropriate) to attract clinicians to join the School's team, taking cognisance of the national work under way.**

**4. The Head of School should work with senior academic colleagues to enable all staff to engage meaningfully with the promotions criteria by expressing their pedagogical practice within promotions application.**

**5. The Panel recommends that the Head of School, in consultation with the broader School base, reviews the School Executive Committee membership to ensure that:**

- a. Its processes of appointment are transparent;
- b. This group is inclusive and representative of the range of staff categories and roles within the Unit.

**6. The Panel recommends that the Head of School, in consultation with the Executive Committee, reviews the communications and decision-making processes within the School and establishes initiatives to enhance their effectiveness, in order to:**

- a. Ensure all members of the team are fully appraised on strategic and operational developments and direction;
- b. Ensure that structures and processes are in place to enable two-way communication processes within the School for staff and students;

- c. Consider organising initiatives within the School that promote collaborative decision-making and inclusion opportunities (e.g. School Away Days for staff).

**8. The Panel supports the School SER's recommendation (R10) to re-envision its Student Experience Committee, to foster increased engagement with the student body at a strategic and decision-making level.**

### *Medium- to Long-Term Recommendations*

The Panel considers the following as areas of recommendation where the School's activities could be further enhanced incrementally over the medium-term (within two years of receipt of the Panel's Report).

**7. The Head of School, with the support of the School's Executive Committee, should pursue the SER's recommendations to enhance the School's research activities by:**

- a. Developing a dedicated research support structure for contract research staff (R12), which may include measures such as the establishment of a redeployment register and the introduction of annual performance/ professional development reviews;
- b. Considering the establishment of a Research Support Officer post within the School.

**9. While acknowledging that the School has limited control over the clinical placement site arrangements, the Panel recommends the Head of School, with the support of the reinstated Student Experience Committee and the Allocations Team, to engage in a comprehensive review of the student learning experience and journey to address the current placement capacity challenges.**

- a. This should be done in consultation with both clinical placement partners and students to find creative and innovative solutions in the context of an emerging change in healthcare delivery and its implications for Nursing and Midwifery education at a local and national level.
- b. This should address issues such as the governance of placement and School's responses to students' concerns during placement, among others.

**10. The Panel recommends the Head of School, in conjunction with the School's Executive Committee, continues to be responsive to the emerging healthcare needs by:**

- a. Prioritising the completion of the ongoing review of UG and PG curricula
- b. Reviewing and discussing with relevant stakeholders the PG programme portfolio;
- c. Continuing the expansion of interdisciplinary and interprofessional learning and training.

Further explanation and additional information on the above priority, medium- and long-term recommendations are provided in the *Recommendations – Further Detail* section of this report.



## Recommendations – Further Detail

This section of the report provides additional information for the recommendations made for the [School of Nursing and Midwifery](#). The Panel considered seven *priority recommendations* for the School to act upon within the next 12 months, as well as three medium- to long-term recommendations to implement within two years from the publication of this Report.

### Physical Infrastructures

*Recommendation 1:* The Panel acknowledges the critical space shortage faced by the School in light of the steadily increasing student numbers (> 25% over the last three years). The Panel deems it as a critical priority for the School to secure new academic teaching, learning and social spaces for students and staff before the commencement of the next academic year. This was already identified as a key recommendation in the School's own Self-Evaluation Report and also ascertained by the Panel itself during its site visit to UCC, inclusive of a tour of facilities. The building of a two-floor extension to the current premises in Brookfield should be inserted within a comprehensive plan drawn on the basis of a thorough consideration of future developments in nursing and midwifery education within a new integrated healthcare system.

### Staff

*Recommendation 2:* The Panel supports the SER's prioritisation of the development and adoption of a clear and transparent workload allocation model, aligned with both institutional promotion criteria and parallel workload model developments at both, University and College-level. However, it believes that the School does not have to wait for this to happen at college level and exclusively for academic staff members. The Panel is of the view that the School of Nursing and Midwifery needs to tailor this framework to its specific circumstances as a large and busy clinically-focused unit, addressing the multifaceted nature of academic responsibilities, while being cognisant of the administrative burden connected with steadily growing student numbers and the frequent turnover of professional services staff within the Unit. The Panel believes that this exercise will provide opportunities for a clearer and more transparent distribution of tasks, as well as a reduction in duplication of work and will benefit the overall wellbeing and professional development opportunities of staff.

*Recommendation 3:* The Panel is aware that the School has chronically suffered from staff shortages, especially at senior level, as already ascertained by the previous Peer Review Panel in its Report (2012). While some recent recruitment successes and promotions have partly addressed this challenge at least for the Nursing component of the Unit, this is still a critical issue for Midwifery, as well as for the School as a whole, especially in consideration of the staff's average age profile within the Unit, together with the difficulties in securing clinical and joint appointments.

In light of this, the Panel believes that the development of a staffing plan (inclusive of succession planning) should be preceded by the establishment of a Task and Finish Group, whose remit will be to find creative and innovative solutions to current challenges experienced by the School in the recruitment, retention and promotion of staff with clinical currency. It is critical that this staffing plan, particularly in respect of new appointments, be drawn up with reference to the overarching School Plan and in alignment with the College and University's strategic priorities for the School, taking account of long-term developmental needs to ensure balance across the various areas of practice represented within the School.

*Recommendation 4:* the Panel found that a considerable proportion of staff has performed leadership roles and has held senior responsibilities for a significant number of years, which is not reflected in their seniority level. In particular, the Panel acknowledges the low morale generated by the poor outcomes for the School's staff at the recently concluded University's promotion process, conducted according to the new academic and administrative promotion schemes. To overcome this issue, the Panel recommends the School to liaise with the relevant senior colleagues (e.g. Office of the Vice-President and Registrar; Office of the Vice-president for Learning and Teaching; Office for the Vice-President for Research and Innovation) to set up mentoring programmes that support the School's staff in effectively engaging with the existing promotion criteria, setting out coherent career pathways and identifying research and publication opportunities (e.g. concerned with clinical practice and pedagogy especially in the case of staff with clinical training and teaching-heavy roles).

#### Management and decision-making

*Recommendation 5:* It became apparent to the Panel during the Site visit that the School's Executive Committee was recently downsized and restructured in its functioning modalities with the loss of representativeness from some staff categories. However, it did not appear clear what appointment criteria and procedures do currently apply and the effectiveness of this forum in its new configuration. The Panel recommends that this should be redressed through a collective review of the Executive Committee's membership and appointment criteria and operational procedures, to be conducted in consultation with the broader School base.

*Recommendation 6:* It seemed apparent to the Panel during the site visit that decision-making processes and lines of communication may not always follow a two-way flow. This may be exacerbated by the fast pace of working in a very large and busy academic unit with a clinical mandate. Some staff members appeared to be unaware of recent strategic and operational developments and direction taken at management level. Communication discrepancies appeared evident also from the feedback of staff and students. There appeared to be subcultures within the School and some belonging issues among specific staff sub-groups. The Panel believes that these various issues need to be speedily addressed through a comprehensive review of all the decision-making and communication processes within the Unit and that the School would benefit from initiatives promoting collaborative decision-making and inclusion opportunities.

#### Research

*Recommendation 7:* Although the Panel acknowledges that the School's research activities and publications outputs lie outside the scope of the internal periodic quality review processes of academic units at UCC, research still features not only as one of the expanding key activities at the School of Nursing and Midwifery but also as one of the strategic priorities of the University, as explicitly outlined in the UCC's Strategic Plan 2023-2028, in the Academic Strategy's focus on the 'connected curriculum' (and its emphasis on the interdependence of teaching and research) and also sanctioned by the new academic promotion scheme of the University.

In light of this, the Panel recommends the School to promptly implement its own SER recommendations to enhance its research activities (involving both staff and students) and set up a

research support structure within the School, including forms of support for the increasing number of contract researchers who contribute to the School's research endeavours. Specifically, it recommends to proceed with the integration of the University's Research Administration Project into the School's framework for PG research students, as stated in the SER (R7); continue to develop relationships with other Nursing and Midwifery research units, nationally and internationally; develop and implement a strategy for more joint working/research initiatives; offer secondment opportunities both to other units and to UCC; consider a search for an innovative research consultant to further develop the School's research programme.

### *Student Experience*

*Recommendation 8:* The Panel acknowledges and supports the School's efforts to increase student engagement, feedback and partnership at a more strategic level, which inform the SER's recommendation to re-envision the Student Experience Committee. More specifically, it recommends considering what structures need to be put in place to ensure the re-envisioned Student Experience Committee's effectiveness. This may include the appointment of a member of the Executive Committee as the Student Experience Committee's Chair, to establish a direct link between students and School's leadership structures.

Overall, the Panel commends the School's responsiveness to student feedback and needs, which clearly emerged from the SER and during the site visit to UCC. This is also exemplified by the School's ongoing review of the UG and PG curriculum, which was also instigated by students' expressed concerns around programme structures and module assessment workloads, as well as calls for innovative and flexible learning and teachings approaches, including an increased and more frequent use, from earlier years, of simulation and experiential teaching and learning approaches.

*Recommendation 9:* A recurrent topic of student and other stakeholders' concerns during the Panel's site visit to UCC centred around current challenges experienced by students in connection with various aspects of the clinical placement component of their programmes. In light of this, the Panel, while acknowledging that many of these challenges are contextual and structural and, as such, beyond the direct control of the School of Nursing and Midwifery, it is also of the view that carrying out a comprehensive review of the student learning journey, involving the participation of all key stakeholders, may help identify creative and innovative solutions to these challenges or, at least, open up negotiations with the governmental counterparts to deal with the existing issues connected with newly introduced clinical placement options within the integrated primary and community healthcare settings. Indeed, many of the challenges are rooted in changing healthcare staff and student demographics, the scarce placement capacity within Irish clinical settings, as well as the ongoing radical transformation of Irish healthcare system away from acute hospitals and towards community and primary healthcare settings.

In light of this, the Panel recommends the School to carry out a review of the whole student experience, focusing on the clinical placement component in its various stages – organisationally, in terms of the logistics of student pathways; and clinically, during placements, in terms of student supervision and logistics (e.g. domains, skills, competencies, progress notes as a key tool of continuity and consistency in charting and assessing student progress and skill/competency development). This should be done by gathering feedback from both clinical placement partners (in the various stakeholder roles - organisational and on the ground) and students (including from the re-envisioned

Student Experience Committee), involving them in a co-design approach to identify together desirable and feasible changes to current placement practices. While doing so, the School needs to take into account the increasing dependency on simulation training, as a complement to clinical placement hours to meet the training needs of a steadily growing nurse and midwife student population, and on the growing need for interdisciplinary and interprofessional learning approaches. Finally, it would also be important for the School to open up negotiations with the government and Department of Health on supports to be made available for students in placement within the primary and community healthcare settings.

### *Curriculum review and planning*

*Recommendation 10:* The Panel regards the completion of the already commenced undergraduate and postgraduate portfolio review as essential, in light of the healthcare shift from prevalingly acute settings to an integrated primary and community system and in the face of actual and projected student numbers increases, as part of the governmental response to critical shortages of nurses and midwives in Ireland. This review should ensure more rationalised and efficient offerings to stabilise and limit the workload weight on already overstretched staff members, while maintaining the School's responsiveness to the needs of multiple stakeholders and the challenges posed by the current reconfiguration of the healthcare system in Ireland. The latter requires higher education institutions to engage in a significant expansion of interdisciplinary and interprofessional learning and training opportunities for nurses, midwives and the other healthcare students and professionals, among other transition measures.

## Overall Analysis of Self-Evaluation Process

### **Self-Evaluation Report (SER)**

The Peer Review Panel perceived the Self-Evaluation Report as a clear, accessible, well-structured thorough document, which provided enough detail and demonstrated the collegial, participatory and inclusive approach to self-evaluation adopted by the School.

Despite this, the Panel is of the view that some sections of the main SER document did not fully reflect the extent of success and positive engagement by the School. For instance, the concise section on the External Stakeholder Feedback did not include any details of the breadth and depth of external engagement by the School as a Unit, by presenting only the summary feedback of an unqualified indistinct homogeneous group. However, the meeting with the School's external stakeholders helped rectify this misleading impression derived from the initial reading of the SER. Similarly, the section on benchmarking may have benefited from the inclusion of a synoptic table clearly demonstrating the interconnection between this exercise and some of the priority recommendations elaborated by the SER.

Overall, the SER's reflective and honest approach led to the identification of a range of key recommendations that are endorsed by the Panel in this Quality Enhancement Report.

### **SWOT**

The SWOT session and analysis was conducted by a facilitator within UCC, external to the [School of Nursing and Midwifery](#), as appropriate, and all permanent staff in the School were invited to attend the workshop held for half a day in April 2023 under the leadership of the then newly appointed Head of School. The session had a high attendance rate (roughly three quarters of the invited staff). This was further enhanced with systematic data collection from internal and external stakeholder groups, including students and occasional hourly staff and contract researchers.

The Panel considered that the SWOT exercise provided a foundational point to identify some of the existing critical issues for the School such as its increasing student numbers, staffing and workload issues for staff of all categories and grades, as well as infrastructural challenges.

### **Benchmarking**

The School of Nursing and Midwifery engaged in aspirational benchmarking with the Karolinska Institute in Sweden and the School of Health in Social Science Nursing Studies in the University of Edinburgh - two comparable European units similar in size (staff and student numbers), with a similar range of undergraduate and postgraduate education offerings and situated among the top 30 ranked schools in the world.

The benchmarking areas were chosen on the basis of the findings from the School's SWOT exercise and centred around teaching and learning, workload models in use, global performance measures and clinical academic partnerships.

While the Panel acknowledged the high degree of engagement with benchmarking and the great amount of work that was went into it, demonstrated by the inclusion of two detailed reports within the SER's appendices, it noted that the overall implications from this comparative exercise were not explicitly drawn out in a visually simple and summative way within the main body of the Self-Evaluation Report. For instance, the inclusion of a synoptic table showing the connections between the completed benchmarking exercise and the School's own recommendations would have provided the Panel with a clearer understanding of the key learnings for the School and their use for its quality enhancement efforts in the selected areas. Despite this, it is clear that some of the key SER's recommendations - e.g. the development and adoption of a new workload allocation model; the curricular mapping of assessment workload and adoption of contemporary teaching and learning approaches - were also influenced by, and greatly benefited from, the conducted benchmarking. It seems also that the School is intentioned to utilise the benchmarking findings for the implementation of future quality enhancement initiatives beyond their inclusion as recommendations in the SER.

### **Developments since previous Quality Review**

The previous internal periodic quality review of the School of Nursing and Midwifery was held during the academic year 2012/13. At that time the Unit received a total of 28 recommendations from the Peer Review Panel – 7 relating to governance; 11 to Teaching and Learning, 2 to the student experience and 8 to research. The great majority were addressed by the School and contributed to an increase in the staff's seniority levels (although not to the full extent of the recommendation) and academic development and to its current growth as a globally recognised provider of nursing and midwifery education, training and research. Only two recommendations pertinent to research were not actioned: the establishment of an International Scientific Advisory Board and of a Visiting Professor Programme, to expand its international collaboration network. Despite this, over the last ten years, the School has considerably raised its global engagement in research, academic exchanges for staff and students as well as the attraction of large numbers of international students. For instance, its staff joined a range of international nursing and midwifery networks, fora, action groups, with some being awarded Fullbright scholarships, while increasing numbers of staff and students engaged in Erasmus + mobility exchanges. However, the Panel noted that the current international engagement initiatives of the School appear to be linked to staff members' efforts and interests rather than systematic and strategic planning by the School's leadership. In light of this, the Panel is of the view that the staff would benefit from the establishment of a Research Support Officer post to strategically enhance and support the research efforts and applications within the School.

### **Good Practice Case Study**

After a long process of staff consultation and debate, the School chose two initiatives as case study of good practice among its many innovative instances. The first project, entitled the 'INSPIRE' (**I**nteraction **S**kills for **N**ursing **P**ractice through **I**nnovation, **R**esearch and **E**ducation) exemplifies the use of immersive simulation as an innovative tool to teaching Intellectual Disability Nursing Education and with an impact on the degree of empathy demonstrated by students involved in the initiative.

The second project, entitled 'Supporting and Enhancing the Educational Experience of International Students at the School of Nursing and Midwifery' outlines the range of services and supports that the

School put in place in order to ensure that international students are helped settle in Cork, resolve any potentially arising issues and thrive at UCC.

The Panel was impressed with the selected case studies, as well as the five projects exposed during the 'Enhancing the student learning experience' session. It commended the amount of time, energy, academic and administrative resources inputted towards the successful development of these initiatives, demonstrated their great sense of empathy, care, consideration and dedication for all students, their integration, success and wellbeing. Finally, individual Panel members expressed a desire to find out more about some of the presented initiatives with a view of duplicating them within their own units.

## Overall appraisal

Overall, The Peer Review Panel for the quality review of the [School of Nursing and Midwifery](#) found the review process to be thorough, insightful and grounded on an honest self-reflection and meaningful engagement with quality enhancement principles and processes. Indeed, the Panel acknowledged most of the Self-Evaluation Report's findings and endorsed most recommendations identified by the School in its Self-Evaluation Report.

The Peer Review Panel was pleased to discover, during the sessions with internal and external stakeholders, that the School is held in great esteem within the University and among the greater stakeholder groups, in contrast with the recurrently expressed perception, held by many staff members, of not being adequately valued by the Institution. The Panel concluded that the staff across all categories are the biggest asset of this Unit and acknowledged the professional commitment, contribution and high standards upheld by staff including the strong commitment to significant EDI-informed initiatives, their deep sense of social justice and dedication to the health and wellbeing of students, the University community and wider society.

### Facilities

During its first day of physical site visit to UCC, the Panel visited the School's facilities located within the Brookfield Health Science Complex, a modern purpose-built health science education facility opened in 2004, which accommodates also other schools within the College of Medicine and Health. The complex is equipped with shared lecture theatres, classrooms and tutorial rooms, as well as a 69-seater IT laboratory, a specialised library, a restaurant, toilets and other common spaces for students and staff.

The Panel gained first-hand awareness that teaching, social, lab and office spaces available to the School can no longer meet the needs of a steadily increasing student and staff population, as was also pointed out by respondents to the stakeholder feedback surveys and addressed by a priority SER recommendation. Even the two largest lecture rooms on the ground floor were found to be insufficient to meet the projected student numbers for the next academic year. This led to the Panel's recommendation on infrastructural needs.

On the other hand, the Panel was extremely impressed with the School's Clinical Skills and Simulation Resource Centre located on the second floor and its staff's level of expertise in simulation skills and training provision. However, it is also concerned that even this state-of-the art facility will require further expansion to accommodate increasing learner numbers and in light of the projected more

frequent utilisation of simulation as an essential approach to clinical education and training for undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The Panel also acknowledged the importance of the newly purposed dedicated space for research staff and students, which was also visited during the tour of facilities.

## Final Comments and Conclusion

The enthusiastic and collaborative engagement of staff with the self-evaluation process and at the site visit was greatly appreciated by the Panel. It is evident from both written documentation and site visit that the self-evaluation process was conducted in an inclusive and participatory manner, with a Self-Evaluation Committee composed of staff of all categories and grades, as well as three students - an undergraduate, a postgraduate and a PhD. In the face of this, the Panel was surprised to discover that its Self-Evaluation Report was not disseminated to the whole staff body within the Unit, omission which was explained on the basis of a misunderstanding on the confidentiality scope of the SER's circulation.

The Panel considered this quality review as an excellent learning experience and an opportunity for reflection, as well as engagement with Nursing and Midwifery colleagues and gaining a greater understanding of the invaluable contributions being made and current challenges being faced by the School in the national context of a healthcare sector in transition, impacted by significant shifts in healthcare professionals and students' demographics, profile changes and with increasing needs for interdisciplinary and interprofessional education and clinical training, as well as the intensification of pedagogical approaches based on simulation and experiential learning.

The School offers an extensive range of taught undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (mostly accredited by the NMBI), as well as postgraduate research options. This portfolio, although currently undergoing a review and rationalisation process, meets the needs and requirements of multiple stakeholders and has a significant output in terms of education, training and ongoing continuing professional development offerings to nurses, midwives and other healthcare professionals based in Ireland and abroad, producing graduates ready to hit the ground running in diverse healthcare settings. Its engagement in inter/national collaboration and research has also picked up in recent years, as demonstrated by a range of academic and practice collaborations and exchanges worldwide and the large amount of international students being enrolled with the School. All of this has contributed to the current School's exceptional QS global rankings. The Panel's recommendations are meant to endorse and support the School in its continuing efforts for excellence and leadership in Nursing and Midwifery education, training, research and professional practice going into the future.

### **Next Steps**

The Panel Report will next be presented by the Panel Chair to the Quality Enhancement Committee (QEC), chaired by the President, and subject to QEC approval, will be subsequently published on the Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU) website.



The School of Nursing and Midwifery will implement the recommendations within the timeframes outlined and provide a detailed report on their progress via a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The QEP will be considered and approved by the QEC and published on the QEU website.

## Appendix A – Panel Profiles

Name	
<b>Professor Martin Bradley</b>	<p>Professor Bradley has over forty years’ experience within education, health, social care and professional regulation. He has held positions as a Director of Nurse Education, Chief Nursing Officer and Director of Health Care, Director of the Royal College of Nursing (NI) and Chief Nursing Officer in the Department of Health 2005 - 2011. He has also held appointments to the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the Pharmaceutical Council (NI) and Chair of the NI Association for Mental Health 2011 – 2014. He also led on the accreditation of the UK Board of Health Care Chaplaincy with the UK Health and Care Professions Council - 2017.</p> <p>Professor Bradley has chaired major reviews for the Department of Health &amp; Children, Dublin, on Undergraduate Nursing and Midwifery Education and a Review of Non-Medical Prescribing. He is a Fellow of the Royal College of Nursing, a Fellow of the Queens Nursing Institute (UK) and a Senior Associate of the Royal Society of Medicine. In 2013 he was awarded the OBE for services to nursing in the UK and in 2022 the CBE for services to Defence Medicine. He is HM. Deputy Lieutenant for the County Borough of Belfast.</p> <p>In 2015 he was appointed Vice Chair of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, a position from which he recently retired.</p>
<b>Professor Helen Cheyne</b>	<p>Helen Cheyne is Professor of Maternal and Infant Health Research and Deputy Director of the Scottish Government Chief Scientist Office-funded Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Professions Research Unit (NMAHP RU) at University of Stirling. She trained as a nurse and then a midwife in Glasgow in 1980 and worked as a midwife for around twenty years during which time she first became involved in research. She joined the NMAHP Research Unit at the University of Stirling in 2000 and has gone on to develop and lead a successful programme of research in maternal and child health and wellbeing including trials and large-scale research projects. She led the national survey of women’s experience of maternity care in Scotland in 2013 and 2015. More recently she has developed a programme of research in perinatal mental health including working with colleagues in SE Asia on Maternal Mental Health. She currently co-ordinates the UK Professors in Midwifery and Maternal and Infant Health network. She is a member of the Scottish Perinatal Mental Health Programme Board and chair of the evaluation sub-group. She is an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Midwives.</p>
<b>Ms Nora Geary (Chair)</b>	<p>Nora Geary is the Corporate Secretary of University College Cork (UCC), Head of The Office of Corporate and Legal Affairs (OCLA) and Secretary to UCC’s Governing Authority since 2017. She was appointed Deputy Corporate Secretary in 2011. Ms Geary currently leads the Governance, Legal, Compliance and Risk functions at UCC,</p>

	<p>which ranks in the top three Universities in Ireland. She has implemented vigorous management and structural changes to enhance the overall governance at UCC.</p> <p>Ms Geary is a dynamic and energetic leader. Her style is one of inclusion and focus. She has operated at C Suite level for the past five years. Her problem-solving nature is her trademark and one that allows her to deliver on complex projects. Her values are based on trustworthiness, integrity, honesty, loyalty, hard work, fairness, and generosity, while respecting the contribution of others, enabling her to lead and deliver in a timely and efficient manner.</p> <p>Her previous twenty-eight years were spent in the Health Service, initially in clinical practice and then for ten years in change management and general management roles. Some of her achievements include the commissioning of the Cork University Maternity Hospital and the design of the National Quality and Clinical Care Directorate.</p>
<p><b>Mr James Hennessy</b></p>	<p>Mr James Hennessy is a third-year student in the Schools of Physics and Chemistry, University College Cork, where he is currently studying for a degree in Chemical Physics. Mr Hennessy has also played an active role in student life at UCC and served in various student representation functions. He has served as a class rep for his degree programme, liaising between students, the School of Chemistry, and the School of Physics. In this role, he sits on Staff-Student Committees in both the Schools of Chemistry and Physics. He is currently the Vice-Chair of the Chemical Society at UCC, an organisation dedicated to promoting communication and collaboration between staff and students in the School of Chemistry. He has also served in various mentorship and teaching roles as a Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) mentor for first-year Chemistry students and as a lab demonstrator in the School of Physics. Thanks to these experiences working with the Chemical Society, the School of Physics and the School of Chemistry, Mr Hennessy has gained valuable insight into student needs, expectations and the operations of the University, which will assist him in performing the role of Student Reviewer for the Quality Review of the School of Nursing and Midwifery.</p>
<p><b>Professor Mary Malone</b></p>	<p>Mary Malone is a nurse, a midwife and a health visitor. She is Vice Dean (Education) in the Florence Nightingale Faculty of Nursing, Midwifery and Palliative Care, King's College London in January 2022. Before that, she served as Director of the Oxford School of Nursing and Midwifery at Oxford Brookes University (2018 – 2022). Professor Malone's professional background and early research career was in health visiting and child and family health. Her PhD (2009) was a mixed-method analysis of Internet use by families in three inner London areas. Between 2011 and 2014 she worked as a part-time Research Fellow in the National Nursing Research Unit at King's College London where she contributed to the 'Why Health Visiting' Project (Cowley et al 2012); she has worked with the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health since 2011 to develop educational materials supporting the Healthy Child Programme.</p>

	<p>Professor Malone was a major contributor to the development of the e-Healthy Child Programme, which is a digital learning package for qualified clinicians and students working with children and families. More recently, she was the Principal Investigator for an ESRC-funded study, COV-ed Nurse, investigating the extent to which nurse education prior to and during the pandemic prepared nursing students for their role in COVID. This large-scale investigation of nurse education and its fitness for purpose, from a nursing student perspective, is unique and has shaped her approach to her role which is focused on valuing, respecting and hearing the student voice in education.</p>
<p><b>Dr Christopher McCusker</b></p>	<p>Chris McCusker is Head of the School of Applied Psychology at University College Cork. He is also a practising Clinical Psychologist. He has held academic positions in both the UK and Ireland, as Director of Clinical Psychology training, often in the context of a joint appointment with health services. His research has focused on understanding the determinants of outcomes for children with chronic illness and their families and designing and evaluating psychological interventions, which improve outcomes for children by strengthening the resilience of the family. He has published many papers in this area and is joint author of the seminal book Congenital Heart Disease and Neurodevelopment: Understanding and Improving Outcomes, McCusker and Casey (2016). He is past chair of the Division of Clinical Psychology in Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland British Psychological Society. He has chaired the accreditation committee of the British Psychological Society for Clinical Psychology and led many accreditation panels in the UK and Ireland. He has been the Deputy Specialty Advisor to the Chief Medical Officer in Northern Ireland and led several Department of Health strategy and policy groups.</p>

## Appendix B – Timetable

### In Summary

10/01/2024	Panel briefing from the Director of Quality Enhancement online.
24/01/2024 - Site Visit Day 1:	The Panel meets with the Head of School and School Management Team. This is followed by a meeting with School staff, students and visit to the School's facilities.
25/01/2024 - Site Visit Day 2:	The Panel meets with the Head of College, Senior Management, Programme Directors and key Internal Stakeholders of the School
30/01/2024 - Online Day 3:	The Panel meets with External Stakeholders and prepare their key commendations and recommendations
01/02/2024 - Online Day 4:	The Panel meets with the Head of School. A closing presentation is given by the Panel to all members of the School. Panel members depart.

### **Prior to site visit – online meeting**

<b>Date: Wednesday 10 January 2024</b>	
14.30 – 16.00	Briefing by Director of Quality Enhancement and Review Coordinator Panel discussion – initial thoughts on SER.

### **Site Visit to UCC – first week**

<b>Date: Tuesday 23 January 2024</b>	
During the day	Panel members arrive in Cork
19.00	Dinner for members of the Panel hosted by the Director of Quality <b>Venue: Hayfield Manor Hotel</b>

<b>Date: Wednesday 24 January 2024</b>	
<b>Venue: Library Seminar Room</b>	
09.00 – 09.30	Private meeting of Panel <i>Panel agree issues to be explored in forthcoming meetings.</i>
09.30 – 10.30	Meeting with Head, School of Nursing & Midwifery (joined by School Manager at 10.10 am) <i>Discussion on the SER and the School's developments to date, its strategic priorities and overview of educational and placement provision.</i>
10.30 – 11.15	Meeting with School's Executive Committee

	<i>Discussion of management, operational priorities and practices</i>
11.15 – 11.45	<i>11.15 -11.25: The Panel will see the PAWS project in action outside the Boole Library – Dr Hartigan will introduce the initiative, followed by coffee break</i>
11.45 – 12.30	Meeting with Undergraduate Students  <i>Discussion of UG student issues, feedback, interaction with the School</i>
12.30 – 13.10	Hybrid meeting with Postgraduate Taught and Research Students <i>Discussion of PG student issues, feedback, interaction with the School</i>
13.10 – 13.45	Lunch 13.45 – School’s Staff member to collect Panel for tour of School’s facilities 13.50 - Taxi to Brookfield Health Services Complex (BHSC)
14.00 – 14.50	Tour of the School’s Facilities - led by Dr Caroline Dalton O Connor, Dr Vera McCarthy, Ms Regina Murphy and Ms Clare Crowley
14.50 – 15.00	Tour Leaders walk Panel to BHSC225 for Meeting with all Staff
15.00 – 16.30	Meeting with Staff of the School <i>What is working well?</i> <i>What could be improved?</i> <i>Any other points to make?</i>  <i>Discuss issues such as communications, staffing, structures and staff development</i> <b>Venue: Brookfield BHSC225 (also BHS231, BHSC264)</b>
16.30 – 17.00	Private meeting of Panel  <b>Venue: Brookfield BHSC225</b>
19.00	Dinner for members of the Panel  <b>Venue: Hayfield Manor Hotel</b>

<b>Date: Thursday 25 January 2024</b>	
<b>Venue: Library Seminar Room</b>	
09.00 – 09.30	Convening of the Panel – preparation for the day ahead
09.30 – 10.15	Meeting with Head, College of Medicine & Health (joined by College Finance Manager at 10.00 am)  <i>Discussion regarding College strategy and priorities. The links between College/ School financial resource allocations process, staffing resources and infrastructure</i>
10.15 – 11.00	Meeting with Deputy President & Registrar

	<i>Discussion of UCC's Strategic Plan and Academic Strategy</i>	
11.00 – 11.30	Private meeting of the Panel (coffee break)	
11.30 – 12.15	Meeting with Senior Officers of the University Vice Head for Research & Innovation, College, Medicine & Health Vice President for Global Engagement Innovation Vice President for Learning & Teaching Innovation <i>Discussion on strategy and priorities</i>	
12.15 – 12.45	Meeting with College HR Business Manager <i>Discussion of College/School Human Resources themes/topics</i>	
12.45 – 13.15	Meeting with Dean of Doctoral Studies and Dean of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies <i>Discussion of the University's ambitions for undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral education, in line with its Strategic Plan 2023-2028</i>	
13.15 – 14.00	Lunch break	
14.00 – 14.45	Case Study of Good Practice Meeting 'Interactive Skills for Nursing Practice through Innovation, Research and Education (INSPIRE)' 'Supporting and Enhancing the Educational Experience of International Students' <i>Opportunity for the School to showcase good practice and enhancements to the student learning experience with a focus on the Case Study of Good Practice</i>	
14.45 – 15.30	Meeting with UG Programme Leaders/Chairs of Boards of Studies  <i>Discussion on programme quality assurance, governance, delivery and assessment</i>	Meeting with PG Programme Leaders/Chairs of Boards of Studies  <i>Discussion on programme quality assurance, governance, delivery and assessment</i>
15:30 – 16:00	Private meeting of the Panel (coffee break)	
16:00 – 16:45	Enhancing the Student Learning Experience 'Teaching Digital Healthcare at UCC' 'Establishing an Equality Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB) Student Forum: Facilitating the Student Voice' 'Enhancing the Experience of Research Students' 'Embedding the Expertise of Service-users in Teaching, Learning and Research' <i>Discussion on programme enhancements to student learning experience including undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students</i>	
16.45 – 17.15	Private meeting of Panel	

	<i>Summative meeting to discuss key emerging themes and topics for report</i>
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### Online Meetings – second week

<b>Date: Tuesday 30 January 2024</b>	
09.30 – 09.45	Convening of the Panel – preparation for the day ahead
09.45 – 10.30	Meeting with External Stakeholders  <i>Discussion of external stakeholders' views and experience of the School</i>
10.30 – 10.45	Private meeting of the Panel
10:45 – 11:30	Clinical Placement Meeting (organisational)  <i>Discussion of relevant clinical placement aspects related to the identification, sourcing, procuring and onboarding of student placements, including areas for further development, innovative approaches and trends</i>
11.30 – 12.00	Break for Panel
12:00 – 12:30	Meeting with Preceptors Nurses & Midwives and Clinical Placement Coordinators  <i>Discussion with nurses and midwives in current practice providing practice teaching and supervision to students for assessment of proficiency in skill levels to qualify as nurses</i>
12.30 – 13.30	Panel meeting to draft the recommendations and commendations

<b>Date: Thursday 1 February 2024</b>	
09.00 – 10.30	Meeting of Panel to finalise recommendations and commendations
10.30 – 11.00	Conclusive meeting with the Head of School and the Head of College  <i>Clarification and discussions of main findings by Panel</i>
11.00 – 11.30	Break for Panel
11.30 – 12.30	Panel to discuss feedback from Head of School; consider closing presentation
12.30 – 13.00	Closing presentation  <i>Closing presentation to all staff, made by the Chair and all the other members of Panel, summarising its principal findings of the Panel</i>
13.00 – 13.30	Panel – wrap up meeting