

Guidelines for the Institutional Review
of Quality Assurance Effectiveness
at Recognised Colleges which
are Linked Providers of NUI



Ollscoil na hÉireann
National University of Ireland



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1. Background and Context

Under its Charter and Statutes (as amended), NUI is empowered to recognise colleges of higher education and award degrees and other qualifications in those colleges, subject to the University being satisfied that the colleges and the courses they provide meet appropriate quality standard.¹ Accordingly, NUI has ongoing responsibilities in relation to quality assurance and enhancement in these Recognised Colleges, in order to ensure comparability between NUI awards made in the Colleges and those made by the NUI's Constituent Universities. This longstanding oversight role in the Recognised Colleges was supplemented by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 ('the 2012 Act'), which defined NUI as a Designated Awarding Body. While an NUI Recognised College may be a Designated Awarding Body in its own right, a Recognised College which does not have this status is defined by the 2012 Act as a Linked Provider of NUI.² The 2012 Act places specific statutory responsibilities on the University in relation to the quality assurance and enhancement policies and procedures of Recognised Colleges which are also Linked Providers.

Effective quality assurance is of the highest significance for the NUI, since it underpins the University's mission of upholding the value and prestige of NUI qualifications at home and abroad.

NUI's overall quality policy is that responsibility for quality lies with Recognised Colleges themselves, guided by NUI as the awarding body and in line with national policy and European best practice guidelines where relevant.³ At the time of granting Recognised College status, NUI Senate approves the internal quality assurance policies and procedures of Colleges which are Linked Providers.⁴ This process is governed by the published NUI *Policy/Procedures for the Approval of Quality Assurance Procedures in the Recognised Colleges* (2017). As detailed in that document, the College must have regard to the 2012 Act, relevant guidelines and policies of the state regulator Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), relevant NUI policies and procedures, and any Memoranda of Agreement between NUI and the College. NUI also encourages Colleges to

1 NUI Statute LXXXVI (Chapter LIX), 'Recognised Colleges'.

2 A Linked Provider is 'a provider that is not a designated awarding body but enters into an arrangement with a designated awarding body under which arrangement the provider provides a programme of education and training that satisfies all or part of the prerequisites for an award of the designated awarding body'.

3 NUI, *Policy/Procedures for the Approval of Quality Assurance Procedures in the Recognised Colleges* (November 2017).

4 In the case of the Institute of Public Administration (IPA), which returned to NUI Recognised College status in 2018, these internal QA policies and procedures were approved on 17 October 2018 by its previous Designated Awarding Body, University College Dublin, and then by NUI Senate on 8 November 2018.

have regard to relevant European standards, primarily the 2015 *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG).

The 2012 Act charges NUI with reviewing the effectiveness of the quality assurance and enhancement policies and procedures of its Linked Providers at least once every seven years following initial approval. However, NUI also has the authority to conduct such reviews more frequently as it thinks appropriate.⁵ NUI is primarily guided in this task by the *Statutory Guidelines for the Review of Linked Providers by the National University of Ireland*, issued by QQI in March 2019. Review of Linked Providers takes the form of an Institutional Quality Assurance Effectiveness Review ('Institutional Review'), which is an internationally recognised and accepted approach within the world of higher education. Institutional Reviews evaluate the effectiveness of institution-wide quality assurance policies and procedures. Since the Institutional Review aims to assess the effectiveness of the Recognised College's established QA systems, it is expected that a College will draw upon the outcomes of ongoing self-monitoring when completing the Review.

In its broader context, the Institutional Review forms the final element in a cycle of QA monitoring by NUI of Recognised Colleges which are Linked Providers. Beginning with the initial approval of the College's QA system by NUI Senate, this cycle then encompasses:

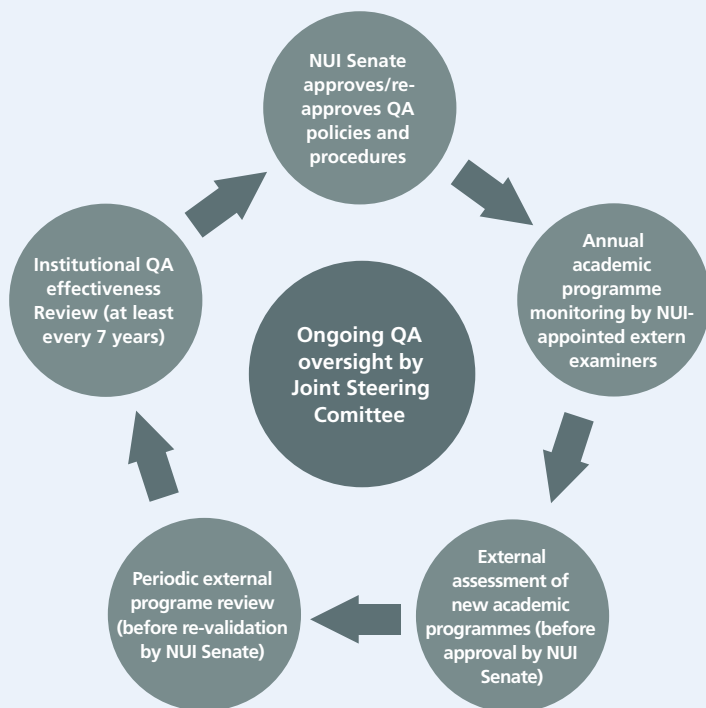
- ▶ Annual academic programme monitoring through NUI-appointed external examiners;
- ▶ Independent external assessment before NUI approval of new academic programmes leading to NUI qualifications;
- ▶ Periodic external review before NUI re-validation and re-accreditation of existing programmes.⁶

These monitoring activities are themselves subject to ongoing QA oversight by joint Steering Committees. Figure 1 depicts this cycle of QA oversight and monitoring by NUI of Recognised Colleges that are Linked Providers. It is expected that such a College will draw upon the outcomes of previous elements in the cycle when completing an Institutional Review.

5 In the case of the IPA, the first such effectiveness review will take place in 2020, two years after initial approval of the QA policies and procedures by NUI Senate.

6 NUI, *Guidelines for the Periodic External Review of Programmes Leading to NUI Degrees and Other Qualifications in Recognised Colleges that are also Linked Providers of NUI* (May 2019).

Figure 1: NUI QA oversight and monitoring cycle in Recognised Colleges that are Linked Providers of NUI



2. Purpose of this Document

These *Guidelines* are intended to provide information for Recognised Colleges which are Linked Providers of NUI in preparation for an Institutional QA Effectiveness Review ('Institutional Review').

These Guidelines have been informed by documents issued by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and by a range of other authoritative resources, some statutory and others voluntary, at institutional, national and European levels. These *Guidelines* draw upon:

- ▶ NUI's existing suite of published QA policies and procedures;
- ▶ Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (as amended);
- ▶ QQI's *Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners* (July 2015);
- ▶ QQI's *Policy for Cyclical Reviews of Higher Education Institutions* (February 2016);
- ▶ QQI's *Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines* (April 2016);
- ▶ QQI's *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for use by all Providers* (April 2016);
- ▶ QQI's *Sector Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Designated Awarding Bodies* (July 2016);
- ▶ QQI's *Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Providers of Research Degree Programmes* (March 2017);
- ▶ QQI's *Cyclical Review Handbook: Universities and other Designated Awarding Bodies* (September 2017);
- ▶ QQI's *Statutory Guidelines for the Review of Linked Providers by the National University of Ireland* (March 2019);
- ▶ QQI's *Framework of Good Practice for Research Degrees* (July 2019)
- ▶ *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) (2015).

3. Scope of Institutional Review

The 2019 QQI *Statutory Guidelines for the Review of Linked Providers by the National University of Ireland* state that reviews of Recognised Colleges which are Linked Providers must be 'comprehensive in scope in relation to awards recognised within the NFQ', the National Framework for Qualifications.

In its reviews of Recognised Colleges which are Linked Providers, NUI is concerned primarily with how the Colleges assure the effectiveness of QA arrangements for educational programmes leading to qualifications placed on the NFQ and made by NUI in its capacity as a Designated Awarding Body, including research degrees.⁷ In this context, the Review will also consider how the research and/or professional practice activities of those delivering educational programmes and the overall research environment of the College contribute to the quality of provision. Reviews will assess both how the College *assures* the quality of its educational provision, and also how this quality is *enhanced* within the College.

Where a Recognised College offers programmes which are not placed on the NFQ and which do not lead to NUI awards, such teaching activities are outside the scope of the Institutional Review. Comprehensive review of the effectiveness of QA relating to NUI-accredited programmes will necessarily involve considering aspects of the Recognised College outside of those programmes, such as governance structures, academic and administrative support services offered to students, and library facilities. The extent to which such aspects are included in the scope of a given Institutional Review will be set out in the agreed Terms of Reference.

⁷ In relation to research degrees, see QQI's guidance documents: *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Providers of Research Degree Programmes* (March 2017) and *Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degrees* (July 2019).

4. Outline of the Institutional Review Process

In line with the 2019 *QQI Statutory Guidelines for the Review of Linked Providers by the National University of Ireland*, NUI has adapted the model for Institutional reviews set out by QQI for their cyclical review of Designated Awarding Bodies.⁸ Based on the internationally accepted procedure for an Institutional Review, this is a flexible model with a general structure, allowing for differentiation between institutions. There are five key elements:

1. The agreement and publication of specific Terms of Reference;
2. A Self-Assessment Report (SAR) from the Recognised College;
3. An external assessment by a panel of external reviewers, including a site visit;
4. The publication of a report including findings and recommendations;
5. A follow-up procedure to review actions taken.

An indicative timetable of the overall process is attached as Appendix 1. However, the timeframe for each element will depend upon the scale and structure of the particular College under review.

⁸ See: QQI, *Policy for Cyclical Review of Higher Education Institutions* (February 2016); QQI, *Cyclical Review Handbook: Universities and other Designated Awarding Bodies* (September 2017).

5. Terms of Reference

Every Institutional Review of a Recognised College which is a Linked Provider of NUI will involve the creation of Terms of Reference at the outset of the process. The Terms of Reference reflect the scope of the Review and act as a guide for the College undergoing review and for the External Review Panel.

NUI will set the Terms of Reference for each Review in consultation with the relevant Recognised College. The Terms of Reference will be formally approved by NUI Senate before the beginning of the Review. They will be specific to the circumstances of a particular College and will reflect the precise nature of its relationship with NUI, its stated mission and strategic plan, and its approach to quality assurance.

NUI will seek to ensure that the Terms of Reference reflect, *inter alia*, NUI's QA and other academic policies and guidelines, the four key objectives for institutional QA review set out in the 2017 QQI *Cyclical Review Handbook* (see below), and any specific areas of interest or concern that have arisen during NUI's monitoring and oversight processes with the Recognised College, based on its approved QA policies and procedures.

NUI will take care to ensure that the Terms of Reference take into account the four key objectives set out in the 2017 QQI *Cyclical Review Handbook* in a way that is appropriate to the particular mission and circumstances of the relevant College. These four objectives are:

1. To review the implementation of the College's NUI-approved QA policies and procedures, including consideration of:
 - ▶ The management of academic standards;
 - ▶ The enrichment of the learner experience;
 - ▶ The ways in which QA outcomes are used in decision making;
 - ▶ The use of evidence-based approaches for QA management, including quantitative analysis;
 - ▶ The QA aspects of any collaborations, partnerships and overseas provision.

2. To review how the College enhances quality through governance, policies, and procedures, with regard to its stated mission and quality targets.
3. To review the effectiveness and implementation of the College's procedures for student access, transfer, and progression.
4. To review the College's compliance with QQI's 2015 Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners.⁹

⁹ The *Code of Practice* defines an 'international learner' as 'a person who is not an Irish citizen but is lawfully in the State primarily to receive education and training'. The document acknowledges that 'not all requirements of the Code will apply to all providers, depending on their circumstances and services offered'.

6. The Self-Assessment Report (SAR)

The Self-Assessment Report (SAR) is a key element in an Institutional Review, and will help to inform the external assessors appointed for the following stage of the Review. Self-evaluation is a self-reflective and critical evaluation completed by an institution. Through self-assessment, an educational institution outlines how it effectively assures and enhances the quality of its activities and this normally includes input from teaching staff, administrators, and students. The distinction between ongoing self-monitoring and formal self-evaluation is typically in frequency and scale; self-evaluation takes a broad view of the entire institution and is usually carried out at specified intervals. Self-evaluation should also be taken as an opportunity to engage in dialogue with relevant stakeholders beyond the institution, including graduates, employers, collaborative partners, and external experts.

Guidance from QQI stresses that the SAR should focus particularly on the quality of the learner's experience, achievements, and contributions, and on findings from a variety of stakeholders.¹⁰ The emphasis of the SAR should therefore be on presenting evidence of the impact on learners and stakeholders, rather than on more compliance-focused evidence of implementation of QA policies and procedures.

As the type of Recognised College and the scope of its educational provision may vary, NUI will take a flexible approach to the structure of the SAR. The self-assessment process should not normally involve the production of significant amounts of new written material; existing evidence gathered through current QA monitoring processes should be used wherever possible. The SAR must meet the needs of its primary audience: NUI and the appointed panel of independent external assessors. The SAR should be evaluative and reflective in nature, and should refer to other sources for information where necessary. A well written SAR will be user-friendly, avoiding technical jargon, and will strike a balance between explanation and self-evaluation.

10 QQI, *Statutory Guidelines for the Review of Linked Providers by the National University of Ireland* (March 2019).

6.1 SAR Outcomes

There are a number of high-level, overarching outcomes for the SAR. Firstly, the self-evaluation process will provide the Recognised College with an opportunity to demonstrate how it evaluates the effectiveness of its QA activities. Secondly, the process will evaluate whether the Recognised College's tools – its approved QA policies and procedures – are effective at assuring and enhancing quality. The SAR normally has a third outcome: a plan for how and when the College will address any recommendations made in the report.

6.2 Co-ordination of the SAR

At the outset of the process, the Recognised College should appoint a Co-ordinating Group responsible for drafting the SAR. While including sufficiently senior staff, the Group should be broadly representative of those involved in the management of quality assurance and enhancement in the Recognised College. The Group may include:

- ▶ At least one senior member of staff, who should chair the Group and act as the liaison with the NUI Manager of Academic Affairs;
- ▶ A student of the Recognised College, preferably at postgraduate level, or a recent graduate;
- ▶ A representative group of staff who manage quality and enhancement across teaching provision and related support services.

The Chair of the Co-ordinating Group and the NUI Manager of Academic Affairs should agree a SAR submission date, approximately 12 weeks in advance of the subsequent Site Visit by the External Review Panel (see Section 7). This date will inform the scheduling of meetings of the Co-ordinating Group. Where a potential conflict of interest arises, this should be referred initially to the NUI Manager of Academic Affairs. As appropriate, the issue may be further referred to the NUI Head of Academic Affairs and Registry and/or the NUI Registrar and NUI Senate.

While the self-evaluation process should be as inclusive and participative as possible, the SAR should be written by a small group or possibly designated to one author, to ensure that a single voice comes through the document. If possible and where appropriate, near-final drafts of the SAR should be shared with stakeholder groups, such as alumni and professional bodies, for comment and/or information.

6.3 Indicative SAR Structure

As the type of Recognised College and scope of educational provision may vary, NUI will take a flexible approach to the structure of the SAR. However, the structure of the SAR must be agreed with NUI prior to the work beginning. An indicative SAR structure is outlined below, but this should not be regarded as prescriptive:

- ▶ Introduction and context;
- ▶ Analysis and evaluation of how QA effectiveness is assured;
- ▶ Summary of findings (including a SWOT analysis or similar tool);
- ▶ Referenced list of the evidence used (documents/case studies etc);
- ▶ A checklist of responsibilities (referencing the Memorandum of Agreement with NUI).

Alternatively, the SAR may be modelled on, for example, the structure set out in the 2017 QQI Cyclical Review Handbook.

The analysis and evaluation of the Recognised College's QA effectiveness should be supported by appropriate evidence, which it may be appropriate to append to the SAR in full or in part. The length of the SAR will depend on the scope of the College's particular agreements with NUI, the size of the institution, the range of programmes offered, and the extent, quality, and availability of existing documentation. It is envisaged that reports should typically not exceed 30 pages in length, excluding appendices or supporting documents. Since the SAR will inform the external panel at the next stage of the review process, it is important that all supporting documentation is either appended to the report or else clearly referenced and available to the appointed review panel.

7. External Review Panel

The SAR is followed by the external portion of the Institutional Review, for which NUI will appoint a Review Panel. Such panels are composed of peer reviewers, who are primarily senior institutional leaders from comparable third-level academic institutions. Some panel members may be drawn, as relevant, from the leadership of external stakeholders such as professional organisations and public sector bodies.¹¹ If appropriate, a student panel member may be considered, although this should not normally be a current or former student of the Recognised College under review. Panel members will be drawn from outside the NUI federal system, with the exception of one member appointed from an NUI Constituent University in order to represent the interests of NUI as the Awarding Body. The Panel will not include a staff member from the Recognised College under review.

The external reviewers may be recruited from outside Ireland, which would have the advantage of bringing an international perspective to the review process.¹² Such international reviewers should come from countries with comparable higher education systems, and must have a high level of spoken and written English. It is envisaged that suitable candidates could be found in English-speaking countries, such as the UK, the USA, Canada, and Australia, and additionally in states where English is regularly used at a high level for professional purposes, such as the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries.

The independence of the Panel is essential. The Recognised College may suggest external reviewers for NUI to appoint, and will have the opportunity to comment on the proposed Panel to ensure there are no potential conflicts of interest. However, the Recognised College should have no contact with any member of the Review Panel before or following the site visit, until the Panel Report has been finalised.

11 In the case of the IPA, a senior official from the Irish Civil Service or Public Service would be a relevant stakeholder to act as an external reviewer.

12 In the case of the IPA, an international Panel member could be recruited from the senior levels of the Civil Service or Public Service in a country with similarly structured governmental and public bodies, most obviously but not limited to the UK.

7.1 Panel Selection

The size of the Review Panel will vary depending on the scale and complexity of the task, but the Panel will have at least four members. In most circumstances, it is envisaged that the panel will have no more than five members. The Recognised College will submit a shortlist of proposed external reviewers to NUI, but the final appointment of the Panel will be at the absolute discretion of NUI. If the Recognised College does not provide a shortlist or review potential conflicts of interest by agreed deadlines, the NUI Registrar will establish the Panel without reference to the College. The final selection of the Review Panel will be reported to the Recognised College and to NUI Senate. Every effort will be made to achieve appropriate gender representation on the Panel.

The Review Panel must include:

- ▶ A Chairperson whose role is to act as leader of the Panel. This is an international reviewer who is a (serving or recently former) senior leader of a comparable third-level institution – usually a head or deputy head of an institution which is of demonstrable relevance in terms of academic discipline(s).
- ▶ A Co-ordinating Reviewer whose role is to act as secretary to the Panel as well as a full Panel member. This is usually a person with expertise in higher education management and prior experience in participating in external QA reviews. As they will be responsible for drafting the report, they will possess excellent writing skills and, in the case of an international reviewer, a very high level of written English.
- ▶ A representative of the National University of Ireland federation, drawn from the senior staff of one of the Constituent Universities and with the agreement of the four Presidents of the Constituent Universities.

In addition to the specific roles above, the full Panel complement will include a range of experts with the following types of knowledge and experience:

- ▶ International QA review experience;
- ▶ European Qualifications Framework and Bologna Process experience;
- ▶ Experience of higher education QA processes;
- ▶ Experience in higher education institutional governance;
- ▶ Experience and proven ability in the enhancement of teaching and learning.

Where panel members are appointed from the senior levels of public sector and professional bodies, the panelists will have knowledge and experience of the education and training needs and processes within such bodies.

7.2 Analysis of the SAR

In preparation for the Review Panel's initial Planning Visit and subsequent Main Visit, each member of the Review Panel will conduct their own desk-based analysis of the SAR and supporting documentation. Reviewers will consider the approach taken by the Recognised College in the self-evaluation process, including:

- ▶ Who wrote the SAR?
- ▶ Who approved the SAR?
- ▶ Who was on the development team?
- ▶ Were a range of staff, students, and stakeholders consulted?
- ▶ How long did it take to develop?
- ▶ How has it been disseminated within the institution?

Key questions to be considered by reviewers when analysing the SAR might be:

- ▶ How well have the descriptive and analytical functions been balanced by the Recognised College?
- ▶ Is there evidence of comprehensive self-analysis and self-reflection?
- ▶ Is there evidence of understanding and alignment with NUI, national, and European QA standards and guidelines?
- ▶ Is there evidence of deliberate management of quality assurance and enhancement?
- ▶ Is there evidence of the Recognised College using national and international benchmarks?
- ▶ Is there evidence of the use of data and narrative sources of information?
- ▶ Is there evidence of commitment to a quality culture?
- ▶ Can the reviewers identify issues that the College should explore?

The members of the Review Panel will be asked to provide preliminary comments arising from their initial analysis, including requests for additional information. Panel members will be asked to submit their comments on a template provided by NUI. The comments will be collated by NUI and will provide the foundation for the initial Planning Visit

7.3 Planning Visit and Main Visit

A one-day Planning Visit to the Recognised College will normally be conducted by the Chairperson and the Co-ordinating Reviewer approximately 7 weeks before the Main Visit. A member of NUI staff will also attend to ensure the process is conducted in accordance with published criteria.

The Planning Visit will prepare the ground for the Main Visit. This will include:

- ▶ Ensuring that the SAR and any supporting documentation are well matched to the process of review;
- ▶ Agreeing the schedule of meetings and activities to be conducted throughout the Main Visit (including, where appropriate, visits to multiple campuses);

- ▶ Identifying and agreeing any specific additional qualitative or quantitative documentation that might be required in advance of, or during, the Main Visit;
- ▶ Identifying and agreeing the location for the Main Visit and any facilities and resources that might be required by the Review Panel.

The Main Visit will then allow the Review Panel to seek evidence on the effectiveness of the Recognised College's QA processes, and on how this QA system accords with the College's own mission and strategy, and with national and European requirements. The Main Visit will normally take place over a maximum of two or three consecutive days. The Panel will not observe teaching, but will meet with the College's staff, students, and other stakeholders. During their scheduled meetings and activities, the members of the Panel will receive and consider evidence on how the College has performed in respect of the objectives and criteria set out in the Terms of Reference for the Institutional Review.

The Main Visit will conclude with a short Exit Presentation, made by a member of the Panel (usually the Chair or Co-ordinating Member) to the leadership of the Recognised College. This will briefly summarise the preliminary findings of the Panel. The summary presentation will not be followed by discussion with the College, since the preliminary findings may be modified in light of subsequent reflection and discussion by the Review Panel.

8. The Final Report

The Final Report sets out the findings of the Review Panel. Although the Co-ordinating Member of the Panel will take the lead on drafting the document, the content for the written report will be prepared and agreed by the whole Panel at the end of the review process.

Following the Main Visit, the Chairperson should ensure that the Panel prepares a reasonably advanced first draft of the Final Report as soon as possible. This draft will usually be based upon the preliminary findings set out in the Exit Presentation given at the close of the Main Visit. An agreed timeline for completion and sign-off of the Final Report should then be agreed among the Panel and communicated to NUI. Typically, a Final Report should be made available no later than 8 weeks after the Main Visit. The Report should be sent to the NUI Registrar and accompanied by letter or emails from all Panel members, confirming their agreement with the Report.

It is important that the Review Panel members do not contact the Recognised College directly in relation to the Review. Any request for clarification or further information should be communicated through the NUI Manager of Academic Affairs.

The template for the Final Report will be based on the following format, adapted from the model mandated by QQI for cyclical reviews of Designated Awarding Bodies.¹³

Section 1: Introduction and Context

- ▶ Summary information on the Recognised College's size, mission, strategic aims, and strategic direction;
- ▶ A short statement of contextual factors at the time of the review, including key recent developments within the College as well as summary programme, student, and staff information;
- ▶ A short statement on the College's approach to quality assurance and enhancement.

13 QQI, *Cyclical Review Handbook: Universities and other Designated Awarding Bodies* (September 2017).

Section 2: The Self-Assessment Report (SAR)

- ▶ Key features of the conduct of the SAR process;
- ▶ Information on the membership of the SAR team and the methods employed by the College for securing widespread ownership of the SAR by staff and students;
- ▶ A commentary on the SAR and the way the College has engaged with the institutional review process.

Section 3: Quality Assurance/Accountability

Section 3 will deal with the objectives of the Review as set out in the Terms of Reference. Each objective will be dealt with separately in a clearly labelled sub-section, and the findings for each objective will be set out in a series of paragraphs. Each paragraph will consist of a statement or series of statements explaining the finding and citing the evidence to support it. Each finding will include the identification of any strengths and areas for improvement. If the Review Panel has identified what it considers to be significant causes of concern in the Recognised College's performance with respect to the relevant criteria, the nature and extent of these concerns will be stated clearly.

Section 4: Conclusions

The key findings and recommendations from Section 3 will be extracted and clearly labelled. Based on the findings, Section 4 will also provide overarching specific qualitative statements regarding each of the Terms of Reference.

The Final Report is an independent document prepared by the Review Panel. However, the Recognised College will be given a formal opportunity to check the factual accuracy of the Report. The College will have the opportunity to address specific issues or recommendations in their formal response to the Report and in the subsequent Quality Improvement Plan. Any minor edits to the Final Report to correct factual errors will be undertaken by the Co-ordinating Member in consultation with the Panel Chair, then sent to the other members of the Panel for sign-off.

Once the Final Report is received by NUI, the Registrar will send a copy to the management and governing body of the Recognised College. The College will be invited to make a short formal response, usually no more than two pages in length, which will become an appendix to the Report. The College should begin drafting this response at the same time as checking the Report for factual inaccuracies. NUI and the Recognised College will publish the Final Report, including the College's response, on their websites. The College will choose whether to publish the SAR on its website. NUI will send a copy of the Final Report to QQI, and it will also be presented to NUI Senate at its next meeting.

9. The Quality Improvement Plan and Progress Review Meeting

Follow-up is an integral part of the institutional review process. The decisions on quality enhancement, which are made in the follow-up to self-assessment and external review, provide a framework within which the Recognised College can work towards developing and fostering a quality culture. Upon receipt of the Final Report, the College will assign responsibility for follow-up to a Quality Improvement Committee or to a relevant existing governance/management committee. This Committee will arrange to have a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) drafted within 12 weeks, addressing the issues identified and recommendations made in the Final Report. Although it may be developed from the College's short response appended to the Final Report, the QIP will be a more detailed document. The QIP sets out how the College will take action on the findings in the Final Report, assigning responsibility for this to specific units and individuals. The QIP is intended to be a benchmark against which the progress of the College may be measured.

Upon receipt of the QIP, NUI will arrange to have it considered by the Chair of the Review Panel and NUI Registrar to determine whether the actions taken or planned are appropriate in order to address the Panel's findings. Other NUI staff may be co-opted as required. As appropriate, NUI may convene a meeting of the joint Steering Committee with the Recognised College to discuss planned actions. The QIP will be published on the NUI website and the Recognised College website, alongside the relevant Review Panel Report.

Approximately 12 months after the QIP has been submitted, the Recognised College will be asked to prepare a Progress Report on the implementation of the QIP actions. The NUI Manager of Academic Affairs will provide guidance on the preparation of the Progress Report, which should be sent to NUI by an agreed deadline.

Upon receipt of the Progress Report, the NUI Registrar will convene a meeting of the joint Steering Committee. The QIP and the Progress Report will form the basis of the discussion at this meeting, which will be Chaired by the NUI Registrar.

The aim of this meeting of the joint Steering Committee is to confirm that all recommendations arising from the institutional review have been or are being dealt with appropriately. The meeting formally brings the review process to a conclusion, although the Recognised College should continue to implement the Quality Improvement Plan. The Progress Report and the conclusions of the joint Steering Committee will form a starting point for institutional review in the next cycle.

As a Designated Awarding Body under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, NUI may issue a Recognised College which is a Linked Provider with post-review directions regarding the effectiveness of the College's QA policies and procedures. Any such directions will be formally issued by NUI Senate at its next meeting, but in the meantime the NUI Registrar may communicate them to the College in writing or at a meeting of the joint Steering Committee. The College has a statutory duty to comply, and must also provide information regarding compliance when requested by NUI.

10. Withdrawal of Linked Provider Status

Under the QQI Act 2012, NUI has a statutory responsibility to withdraw Linked Provider status from a Recognised College where:

- ▶ Post-review “directions” issued to the Linked Provider under the 2012 Act have not been complied with; or
- ▶ There are ‘serious deficiencies’ in the implementation of QA procedures by the Recognised College.

Reasons for the proposed withdrawal of Linked Provider status must be communicated to the Recognised College, which will have one month in which to respond. After considering the College’s response, NUI may proceed to formal withdrawal of status, with appropriate reasons given. The College has a statutory right of appeal against withdrawal of Linked Provider status, which shall be made to an independent appeals person appointed by NUI for that purpose.

As a consequence of withdrawal of Linked Provider Status, NUI Senate may also review Recognised College status, in accordance with procedures set out in the Memorandum of Agreement between NUI and the Recognised College.¹⁴ This process may take place in parallel to the withdrawal of Linked Provider status set out in the 2012 Act or shortly thereafter.

¹⁴ In the case of the IPA, this process is governed by Section 4.1.6 of the 2018 Memorandum of Agreement between NUI and the IPA.

11. Relevant Legislation, Regulations, and Guidelines

NUI Statute LXXXVI (Chapter LIX), 'Recognised Colleges'

NUI, *Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement* (November 2017)

NUI, *Policy/Procedures for the Approval of Quality Assurance Procedures in the Recognised Colleges* (November 2017)

Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (as amended)

QQI, *Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners* (July 2015)

QQI, *Policy for Cyclical Reviews of Higher Education Institutions* (February 2016)

QQI, *Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines* (April 2016)

QQI, *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for use by all Providers* (April 2016)

QQI, *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Designated Awarding Bodies* (July 2016)

QQI, *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Providers of Research Degree Programmes* (March 2017)

QQI, *Cyclical Review Handbook: Universities and other Designated Awarding Bodies* (September 2017)

QQI, *Statutory Guidelines for the Review of Linked Providers by the National University of Ireland* (March 2019)

QQI, *Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degrees* (July 2019)

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (2015)

Appendix 1: Indicative Timeline

Step	Action	Timeframe	Outcomes
Terms of Reference (ToR)	Drafting of ToR by NUI, in consultation with Recognised College	9 Months before Main Visit	ToR confirmed by NUI Senate
Self-Evaluation	Submission to NUI of Self-Assessment Report (SAR)	3-6 months before the Main Visit	SAR published by College (optional)
Planning Visit	A visit to the College by the Review Panel Chair and Co-ordinating Reviewer to receive information about SAR process, discuss the schedule for the Main Visit, and discuss additional documentation requests	At least 1 month after receipt of SAR, 1-3 months before Main Visit	Schedule agreed for Main Visit
Main Review Visit	Review Panel receive and consider evidence on how the College has performed in respect of the objectives and criteria set out in the ToR	3-6 months after receipt of SAR	Short preliminary report made to the College at the end of the Main Visit

Step	Action	Timeframe	Outcomes
Final Report	Preparation of draft report by Review Panel	6 weeks after Main Visit	Final Report for NUI to review
	Draft report sent to the College for check of factual accuracy	3 Months after Main Visit	
	College responds with any factual accuracy corrections	2 weeks after receipt of draft report	
	Submission of Final Report by Panel	3-6 months after Main Visit	
College Response	Preparation of short formal response from College	2 weeks after Final report	College Response added as appendix to Final Report
Report Outcomes	Consideration by NUI of Final Report, together with College Response Presentation of Final Report to NUI Senate	Next meeting of NUI Senate	Formal decision made about effectiveness of College's QA procedures In some cases, statutory Directions made to College Final Report, including College Response, published on NUI and College websites

The form of follow-up will be determined by whether statutory 'Directions' are issued to the College. In general, where Directions are issued the follow-up will be initiated sooner and more specific actions may be required.

Step	Action	Timeframe	Outcomes
Follow-up Processes	Submission of a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) to NUI by the Recognised College	3 months after publication of Final Report	Publication of QIP by the College
	Submission to NUI of 12-month Progress Report by College, meeting of joint Steering Committee to confirm progress	1 year after Main Visit	Publication of Progress Report by NUI and the College
	Continuous reporting and dialogue on follow-up through the joint Steering Committee and annual institutional reports	Continuous	Annual Institutional Quality Report Steering Committee minutes





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