ANNUAL REPORT

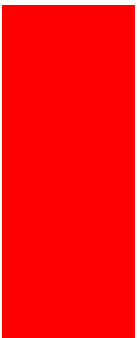## Quality Enhancement Committee

2019/20 and 2020/21

UCC

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

1) Table of Contents

Introduction

This report unusually covers two academic years, as a result of the global pandemic which abruptly and profoundly disrupted the delivery of education, continuity of research and services offered through higher education institutions globally. On 12ᵗʰ March 2020 UCC moved with less than 6 hour's notice to remote delivery of its operations. An immediate period of intensive and rapid re-design ensued to enable the University's delivery of teaching and learning, continuity of research and professional services and critical support functions to be re-configured to a remote and distributed organisational model. Academic and professional colleagues displayed agility, creativity and commitment to ensure continuity of their activities for students, educators, researchers and service users.

Throughout the re-design period, intrinsic and ordinarily tacit assumptions about the quality of teaching, research and services were surfaced as colleagues across the University worked together to make decisions about adaptations, revisions to policies and procedures in response to the challenges presented by Covid-19. Whilst this intense re-design period was under-way, the formal statutory periodic quality review process was re-scheduled from March 12ᵗʰ to early October 2020. This suspension affected units which were due to undergo site visits in March 2020 to June 2020, as well as those scheduled to complete self-evaluations for site visits early in academic year 2020/21.

Remarkably, despite the intense demands of re-design, the quality review cycle resumed in October 2020. Its successful resumption signals clearly the commitment of the University community to high standards of academic and professional practice and the quality enhancement ethos expressed in the University's Strategy 2017-2022. All reviews took account of the Covid-19 impact and were characterised by open and collegial dialogue about these immediate challenges as well as the longer-term disciplinary and organisational enhancement issues for excellence.

The process of periodic quality review at UCC is enhancement-led in its focus and aims through international peer review to contribute to ongoing organisational, academic and professional self-evaluation and development as a hallmark of a vibrant and dynamic university. Particular thanks is due to all UCC colleagues for their engagement in the ongoing University quality processes during this period of unprecedented turbulence. The gracious and generous involvement of all external peer reviewers, student reviewers, internal reviewers and Review Chairs collectively ensured a constructive atmosphere throughout the virtual site visits. Finally, the dedication of the staff of the Quality Enhancement Unit that organise and support the periodic quality review process is acknowledged.

This report of the University Quality Enhancement Committee provides a rich synoptic account of quality enhancement activities over the period 2019/20 and 20/21.

Elizabeth C Noonan, Director of Quality Enhancement

Context

UCC is an autonomous degree-awarding body under the terms of the Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education & Training)(Amendment) Act 2019[1] and is responsible for assuring and enhancing the quality of education, research and allied services offered by the University through its internal quality assurance and enhancement procedures. The Quality Enhancement Unit, working through the Quality Enhancement Committee, is responsible for developing and enabling the University's processes for external peer review of its activities in accordance with prevailing national Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines[2] , published Codes of Practice for quality in higher education and the European Standards Guidelines (2015) . The Universities Act (1997) section 35, sets out the obligations for the establishment of quality procedures and the functions of the Governing Body in respect of the application and outcomes of quality procedures.

This report of the Quality Enhancement Committee serves to:

- Provide assurance to the Governing Body on the effectiveness of the scope and application of the University's quality procedures as required under the relevant Acts
- Ensure relevant outcomes arising from the quality process are identified to inform strategic developments and direction of the institution
- Demonstrate that the quality assurance and enhancement process supports and maintains the University's reputation through dissemination, exchange and adoption of good practice arising from peer review.

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[1] http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2019/act/32/enacted/en/html

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

Executive Summary

This report provides a comprehensive account of internal quality enhancement activities in the University for the period 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Section 1 Themes arising from Quality Reviews 2019/20 and 2020/21

The themes arising from Quality Reviews for the last two academic years - 2019/20 and 2020/21 have been thematically analysed and organised in accordance with the current 5 pillars for UCC 2022. The analysis of recommendations and commendations is presented as wordles of intersecting sets, visually representing important themes that align with the strategic pillars. This analysis underlines the connection between the outcomes of Quality Review and ongoing institutional strategy development and provides a horizontal perspective on review outcomes.

A further analysis, which considers the frequency of recurrence of themes provides a vertical perspective on review outcomes and highlights the top three recurring themes over the period 2019-2021 which relate to: strategy and governance; learning, teaching, assessment and student experience and staff development provision.

Section 2 Thematic Reviews

This section outlines Thematic Reviews conducted in the period of this report on Work Placement and Teaching and Assessing with Technology and identifies the signature findings. Thematic review, although a relatively new approach within internal quality procedures provides considerable scope for interrogating topics of strategic significance . The approach is an enhancement-led evaluation of existing University-wide processes, practices or policies to assess their current stage of effectiveness and identify international good practices that can inform future developments.

Section 3 Reports of Review undertaken 2019/20 and 2020/21

This section outlines the reviews undertaken during this time period and provides a link to each published report of the Peer Review Panel on the University website. This meets the requirements of current QQI Core Statutory Guidelines.

Section 4

The impact of Covid 19 both delayed the planned schedule of Quality Reviews and also required the re-design of review site visits to comply with prevailing public health requirements. The section outlines the changes made, including the use of a Covid19 addendum to document and evaluate Schools' experience from a quality perspective. Analysis of the Covid Addenda confirms the exceptional agility of Schools in rapidly responding to and adapting to intensely challenging circumstances whilst maintaining the quality and standards of the student learning experience.

Section 5

This section provides some detail on the gender balance of review panels, as well as their institutional affiliation and benchmarking activities undertaken for self-evaluation. As part of ongoing monitoring of internal and external stakeholders' experience of quality review a summary analysis of recent surveys is provided. Overall the feedback confirms the effective management, operation and support of quality review methodology.

Section 6 International Projects

The Quality Enhancement Unit is involved in a number of international projects and the work undertaken as part of these projects is outlined.

Section 7 QQI Matters

This section details the purpose of the Annual Institutional Report which is a statutory submission to QQI and a link to the published report is provided. UCC will undergo Institutional Review CINNTE by QQI in March 2023, detail of the objectives and timing of the CINNTE review is provided.

Section 8 Looking Ahead to 2020/21

This provides a short summary of the areas of activity for the coming academic session, foremost amongst these is commencement of the self-evaluation process for Institutional Review.
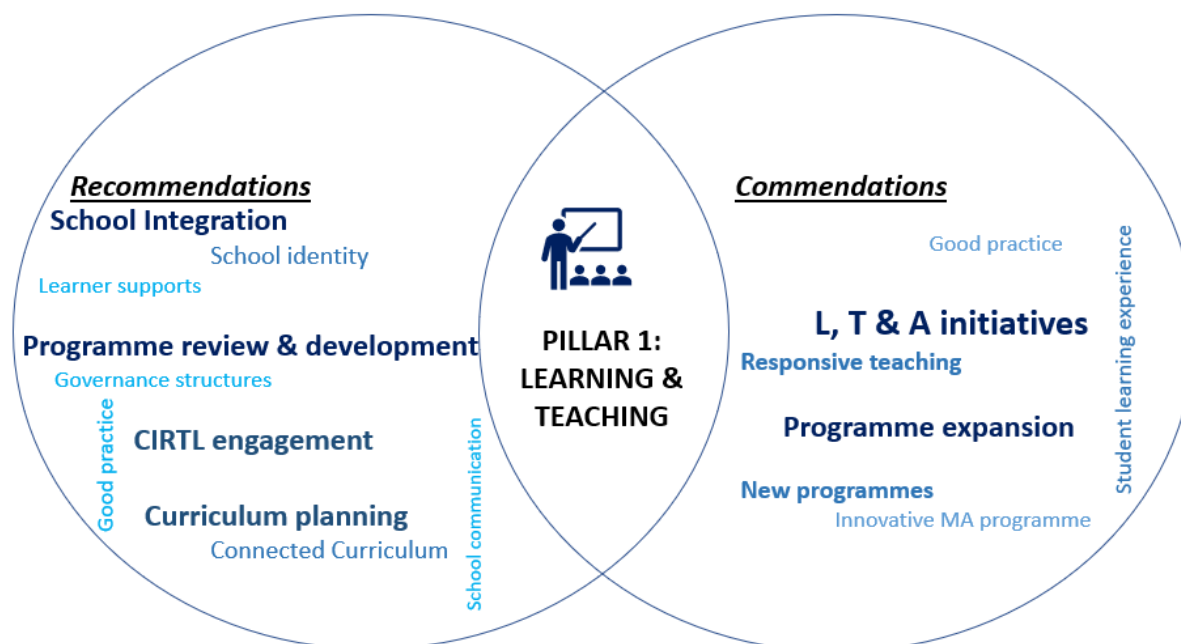
Section 1 Themes Arising from Quality Reviews

The themes arising from Quality Reviews for the last two academic years - 2019/20 and 2020/21 have been thematically analysed and organised in accordance with the current 5 pillars for UCC 2022. The following section provides the word clouds generated from the recommendations and commendations across the Pillars accompanied by a short explanatory text. The wordles of two intersecting sets visually represent the outcome of an analysis of the recommendations and commendations contained in the Quality Enhancement Reports.

Commendations and recommendations were carefully considered in terms of both overall meaning and key expressions and coded accordingly. Clusters of themes were further categorised and subsumed under a few broader encompassing themes. This analysis underlines the connection between the outcomes of Quality Review and ongoing institutional strategy development and provides a horizontal perspective on review outcomes.

A further analysis, which considers the frequency of recurrence of themes provides a vertical perspective on review outcomes and highlights the top three recurring themes.

Pillar 1: Teaching & Learning

Recommendations
School Integration
School identity
Learner supports
Programme review & development
Governance structures
Good practice
CIRTL engagement
Curriculum planning
Connected Curriculum
School communication

PILLAR 1: LEARNING & TEACHING

Commendations
Good practice
L, T & A initiatives
Responsive teaching
Programme expansion
New programmes
Innovative MA programme
Student learning experience

Commendations

The primary theme of Learning & Teaching initiatives highlighted the vibrancy of practices in operation across the University, as evidenced through: Case Studies of Good Practices; evidence of cross-School engagement in the development of new approaches; responsive teaching approaches which take account of students' learning needs and the adaptations made in response to the impact of the pandemic. Programme development and expansion was highlighted and several instances of agile and relevant programme development were highlighted as well as the thoughtful enhancement of existing programmes, such as the 'programme health-check initiative' adopted by Society, Politics & Ethics.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the enhancement of Learning and Teaching drew attention to the importance of integrated structures for Schools. Completing schoolification was seen as important to provide the necessary governance, leadership and academic infrastructure to enable development, consolidation and effective delivery of Schools' programme and module portfolios as well as targeted development of programmes with high potential. Commentaries on programme review & development, and curriculum development noted the importance of developing and embedding graduate attribute skills and making visible alignment with the University's Connected Curriculum approach. The opportunities for collegial sharing of sharing experiences, resources and approaches in teaching modules within disciplinary areas, as well as the importance of accessing the support and expertise of the Centre for Integration, Research, Teaching and Learning were also emphasised. Particular teaching and learning practices such as the use of Panopto, assessment practices and the embedding of research skills were also identified.
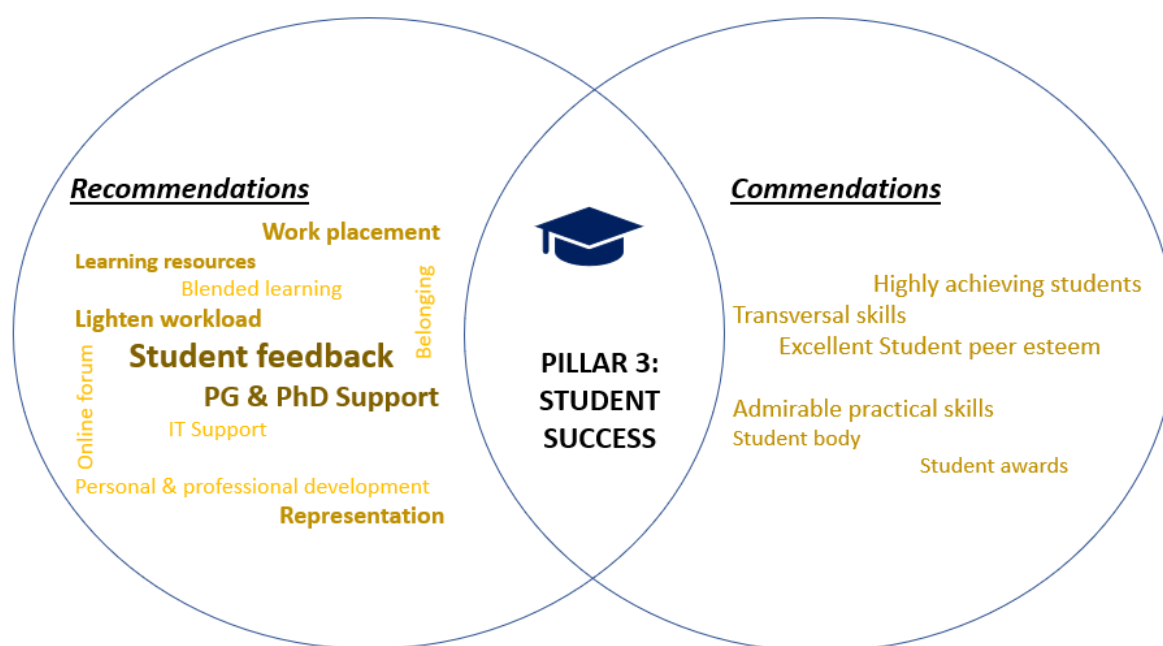
Pillar 2: Research and Innovation
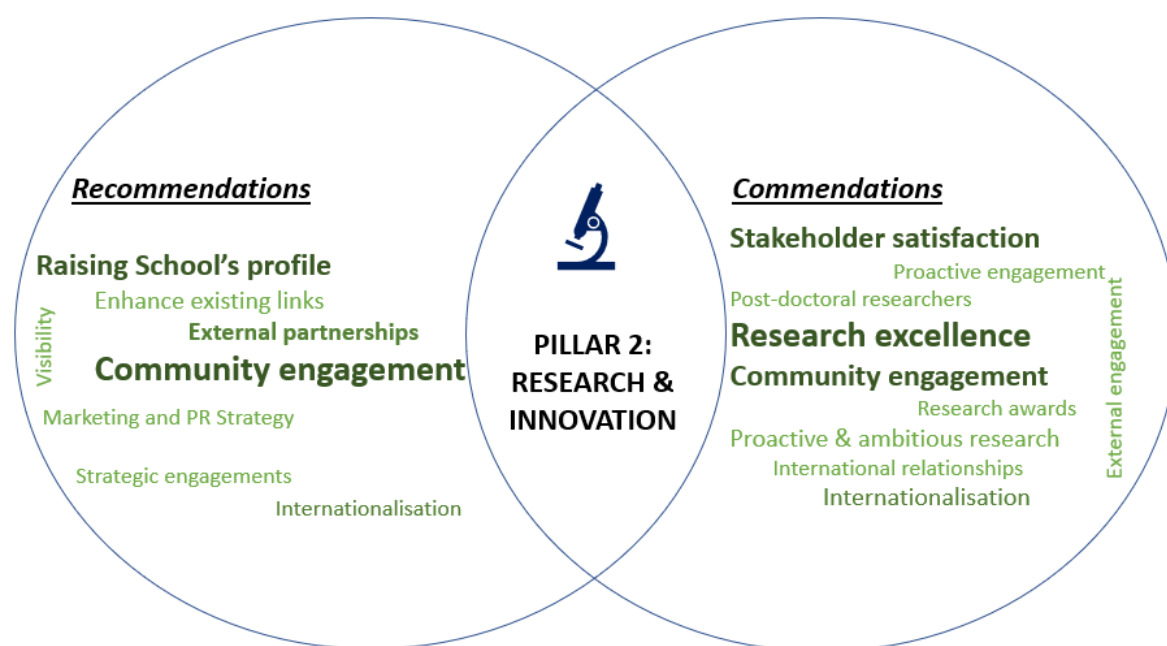
Commendations

Research excellence and community engagement were central themes in Panels' commendations. Excellence in discrete and specialist research areas was identified and acknowledged in spite of high workloads. The range, ambition and relevance of research was also commended along with output levels, such as in Physics: 'the research output is good for the size of the Department;'. Community engagement was also evidenced in the connection between Schools and their external stakeholders including industry, such as in the School of Biological, Earth & Environmental Science: 'School appears to be very responsive to the needs of external stakeholders and industry requirements'. Research excellence and community engagement were also seen as convergent, in the School of Law where research excellence and output was central to broader societal engagement: 'Evidence of extensive external engagement at local, national and international level with significant contributions to policy and society'.

Recommendations

Although community engagement emerged in the commendations, Panels also noted the importance of this continued endeavour to continue building the profile and reputation of Schools with their wider stakeholder groups, both locally national and internationally. The importance of taking a strategic focus to deepen external engagement was emphasised. There was strong encouragement for Schools to use existing mechanisms such as Advisory Boards, international PhD recruitment, and also to intensify participation in existing international networks at European level.

Recommendations
Work placement
Learning resources
Blended learning
Lighten workload
Online forum
Student feedback
Belonging
PG & PhD Support
IT Support
Personal & professional development
Representation

PILLAR 3: STUDENT SUCCESS

Commendations
Highly achieving students
Transversal skills
Excellent Student peer esteem
Admirable practical skills
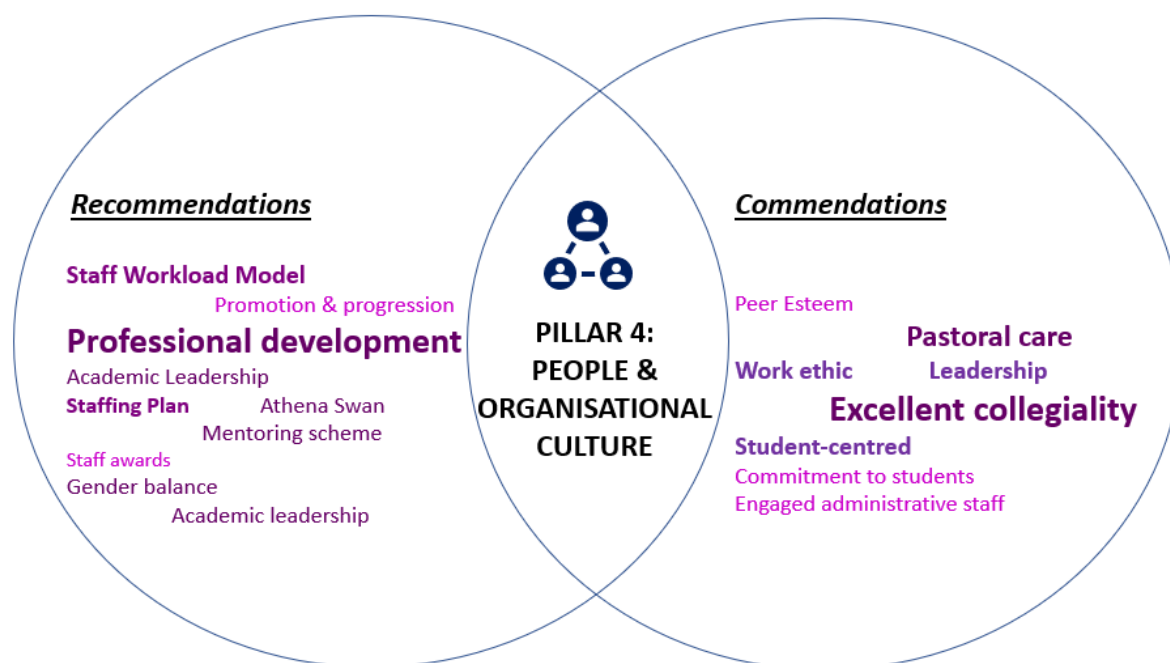Student body
Student awards

Commendations

Commendations on student success reflected the intrinsic motivation of students in terms of high performance at the point of enrolment, along with their commitment to furthering a positive student experience within their School. Evidence of the development of important transversal skills as well as appropriate disciplinary skills and student's own awareness of the importance of both categories was highlighted. For example, in Society, Politics and Ethics: 'Apparent good student awareness of developing transversal skills indicates good level of academic support.'

Recommendations

The effectiveness of student feedback mechanisms was particularly prominent across all academic units in terms of systematic approaches and evidence of feedback loops demonstrating that student feedback had been taken into account. For example, in Education: 'School Executive Management Team should ensure that there is a standardised best practice approach to obtaining, and responding to, student feedback and communicating this to students.' Broadly, student feedback was framed as an important communication channel, a source of information on teaching and learning effectiveness and consistency of the student learning experience. The particular requirements for supporting postgraduate and PhD students was also prominent in terms of provision for induction and advice on training and development opportunities, and establishment of relevant fora to support academic and social development and networking.

Pillar 4: People & Organisational Culture

Recommendations

Staff Workload Model
Promotion & progression
Professional development
Academic Leadership
Staffing Plan Athena Swan
Mentoring scheme
Staff awards
Gender balance
Academic leadership

PILLAR 4: PEOPLE & ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Commendations

Peer Esteem
Pastoral care
Work ethic Leadership
Excellent collegiality
Student-centred
Commitment to students
Engaged administrative staff

Commendations

The excellent collegial ethos emerges as a strong commendation across all reports. Expressions of collegiality included the positive esteem and mutual respect of staff across all occupational categories: academic; professional and support staff as well as external stakeholders' esteem of UCC staff. Instances of collegiality in action were reflected in highly affirmative student support and pastoral care, the strong work ethic and commitment of staff to the goals of Schools, influential leadership practices and staff commitment to the work of the University within the wider community, e.g. School of Maths 'Excellent peer esteem of School staff and students by colleagues and professionals'. Terms such as flexibility, engagement, dedication were used frequently to convey the qualities of collegial behaviours and actions.

Recommendations

Professional development emerges as a strong recommendation across all reports. Under this theme the importance of supporting the development of staff through appropriate, training, mentoring and other development opportunities was emphasised. In the context of academic staff creating an appropriate focus for professional development in balancing individuals' multiple responsibilities for teaching, research and administration was seen to be important and particularly so in relation to opportunities for career advancement. For example, the School of Languages Literatures and Culture: 'The School should prioritise professional and career development of its staff and, in this context, the Head of School should make sure that the School Mentoring scheme and periodic Staff Performance Management and Development review are utilized effectively'. A notable sub-theme is that of academic workload which has relevance for professional development as well as supporting continued collegiality. A number of reports stressed the need for explicit and transparent workload models.

Pillar 5: Infrastructure & Resources
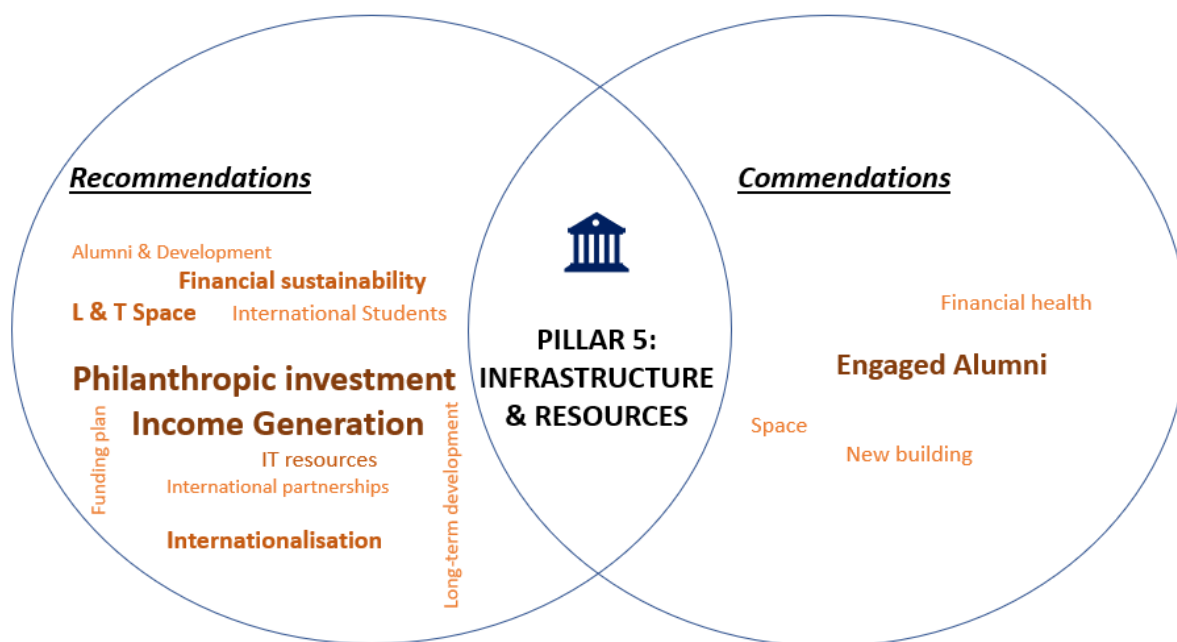
Commendations

Commendations on infrastructure and resources encompassed Schools' effective outward social networks and specific physical infrastructure. The effective social networks particularly emphasised acknowledgement of positive and vibrant alumni engagement, along with community engagement and the positive profile of one School's provision reflected in the high quality of students enrolled. Particular attention was drawn to the quality of the physical infrastructure of the ASSERT Centre; a "State-of-the-art, high-tech healthcare simulation facility" and the Cork Centre for Architectural Education for the 'Design and use of the new building'.
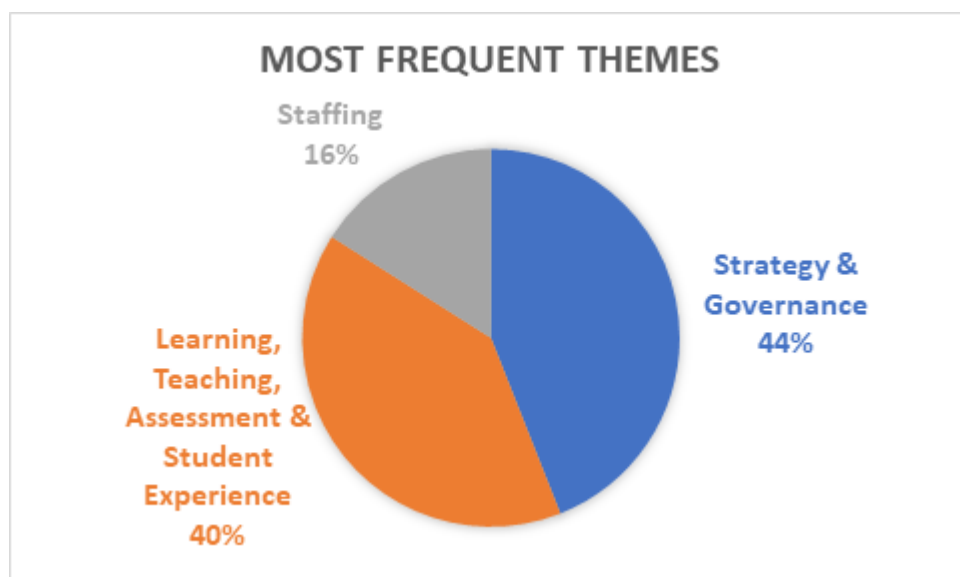
Recommendations

Recommendations clustered around income generation and philanthropy. The necessity of continued proactivity and responsiveness to avenues for income generation was identified across all the reports. Income generation was framed in terms of preserving and further developing existing income streams, including national funding opportunities, preservation of international income, and revenue potential of buildings. Reports also noted the necessity of funding availability to support other infrastructure dimensions including student resources, IT provision, Library provision and conference attendance. The need for philanthropic development was identified across all academic unit reports as necessary to support strategic development of educational offerings, and resources for the future as well as supplementing current income streams. In a number of reports, Panels recommended that managers should actively liaise with appointed fund-raisers at College level to advance strategic philanthropy.

Recurring themes from 2019 to 2021

The previous section presented an analysis of Panels' outcomes against the five pillars of *UCC 2022,* illustrating the convergence between units' quality enhancement needs and the University's strategic targets actions. To complement that horizontal view, this section provides a vertical view of the themes by outlining some of the most frequent quality enhancement issues identified by Panels within the periodic quality review framework.

The single most recurring thematic area identified by Panels for quality enhancement is broadly 'strategy and governance', and this is consistent across all units: academic (8), professional services (1) or research centre (1), which all have at least two substantial recommendations with a 'Strategy and Governance' focus. This is consistent with all current reviews within the third review cycle 2016 – 2024 to date, and a longitudinal analysis of recommendations across quality review cycles is likely to produce results that are consistent with this finding.

Unit	Type	# Strategy & Governance Recommendations	# Learning, Teaching, Assessment & Student Experience Recommendations	# Staffing Recommendations
Alumni & Development	Professional Services	2	N/A	2
ASSERT Centre	Research Centre (M&H)	5	N/A	1
School of BEES	Academic (SEFS)	3	4	1

CCAE	Academic (SEFS)	6	4	1
School of Education	Academic (CACSSS)	2	4	2
School of Law	Academic (B&L)	9	7	1
School of LLC	Academic (CACSSS)	2	9	3
School of Mathematical Sciences	Academic (SEFS)	13	8	5
Dept. Physics	Academic (SEFS)	11	7	2
School of Society, Politics and Ethics	Academic (CACSSS)	2	7	2
Total #	10	55	50	20

Prevalence of 'Strategy and Governance' recommendations

The number of 'strategy and governance' recommendations presents a certain variation from one unit to the other, from the lowest having two to the highest having more than ten recommendations in this area. However, this unevenness can be attributed to a degree of individuality in the context of each review and different Panel compositions which in turn finds expression in the style and detail of the Peer Review Panel Report. The context of a review is influenced strongly by the development trajectory of a unit, for example some units experienced specific mergers or organisational change, or others were at a particular stage of planning and/or strategy prioritisation. The signature style of Panels is also important, for example, some Panel recommendations are articulated in one or two long comprehensive recommendation statements with several subheadings, whereas others opted for a detailed and explicit listing of all the aspects, which need to be addressed under the 'strategy and governance' heading, in the form of separate recommendation items. Moreover, many of the recommendations ascribed to other themes (e.g. Learning, Teaching and Assessment, Staffing and Resources) also have a strong strategic component, for example strategic approaches to curricular development or pedagogic approaches which are unit-wide.

Number of recommendations for 'Strategy & Governance'

In light of this, the total number of strategy and governance recommendations is influenced by the number of individual subpoints within a very long recommendation as well as strategic recommendations identified in other themes. Notwithstanding, it appears that at least 55 recommendations across ten reviewed units over the last two academic years relate to substantial strategy and governance issues.

When the recommendations with a strategy and governance focus are considered in their own merit, the word 'plan' itself occurs 62 times. Among these, 21 occurrences are preceded by the adjective 'strategic'. The latter sometimes pertains to the unit's local strategy (16), whereas in other occurrences it refers more broadly to the University's strategic plan (7) and very often to them both. It is important to note in the context of strategy and governance, that Peer Review Panels continually emphasise and pay attention to ways in which units' strategy / planning activities align with UCC's institutional strategies, as well as wider disciplinary matters informed by international good practice and developments. Thus, the two references to local and University strategy are mutually reinforcing throughout the body of reports rather than reciprocally exclusive, even when this is not explicitly spelled out in recommendation statements.

Some further details of the strategy and governance theme include:

- external engagement of units with 8 occurrences of the need for (re)constituting an 'advisory board' to the unit, either 'external' or 'strategic', in order to ensure ongoing external expert support and liaison with industry/professions/ community and other relevant stakeholders regarding emerging trends and needs in the relevant fields
- suggestions for clearer articulation of vision, mission and values. In some instances, explicit connections are made between a unit's vision (9), mission (4) and values (4) and the articulation of an integrated coherent 'School identity' (4 occurrences). In other cases, the link is with the units' 'aims and objectives' (2).
- strengthening formal planning activities, with 11 occurrences of 'business plan', 4 of 'action plan' and, finally, 3 of 'staffing plan'.

The issues of strategy and governance illustrates Panels' strong encouragement to connect units' vision, mission and values with the wider University strategy, socio-economic and political context and through SMART plans to enable effective implementation pathways (9 occurrences).

Points of reflection on strategy and governance theme

The strategy and governance recommendations arising from periodic quality reviews present a strong signpost towards issues that are or could be further addressed in the next institutional strategic planning cycle. Two issues appear to be relevant:

- Schoolification process
- Head of School role

Schoolification

As acknowledged in the section above structural changes and the organisational maturity of academic units, provided a significant backdrop to their review contexts. Schoolification despite having begun a few decades ago, has progressed over the years at different speeds and encountered varying degrees of acceptance and difficulties from one unit to the next. This has relevance in terms of the recommendations for their further activities to realise an optimal configuration for organisational and operational integration. Schoolification was particularly relevant in the case of three of the units reviewed. The outcomes of work underway through UCC 2022 (Pillar 1, action 1.2.1) is addressing the conclusion of Schoolification.

Head of School Role

The significance of the Head of School role may merit some further attention in relation to a number of aspects: appointment duration and any enabling structures required to support postholders in fulfilling the responsibilities of a Head of School.   In most of the cases (5 units), contracts for heads of unit have a three-year duration (academic units) or slightly longer (4 years) with the possibility for renewal for a specified period. This timeframe corresponds to less than half of a quality review cycle, thus the frequency of leadership change may have impact on the continuity and coherence of units' planning and implementation through quality review cycles. In other cases (2), there has not been change in leadership for a very long time. Some appropriate formal mechanisms to provide continuity and handover between Heads may be advisable, this would be particularly relevant in relation to the peer review outcomes which extend beyond three years.   Maintaining network opportunities such as a Heads Forum, providing further development opportunities on topic specific HE developments as well as leadership support and learning opportunities might be considered.

Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Student Experience

The second top thematic area, which emerged frequently in the internal quality review process over the last two academic years, is 'Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Student Experience'. These two areas, although belonging to two different pillars in UCC 2022 (respectively 1 and 3), are often linked in together in Panel Reports, since the former plays an important part in the overall quality of the student experience. Aspects of this theme included recommendations about the approaches to student feedback (9 instances) and student feedback loop (3 occurrences). The development of students' transversal skills and opportunities illustrates alignment with the Academic Strategy and appears in relation to opportunities for the provision of professional/work placement modules to students, liaison

with career services, engagement with graduate attributes programme, library workshops, University's student support services. The need for 'consistency' of the student experience (2 occurrences) and, more specifically, 'work'/ 'professional' 'placement' ('module/s') opportunities for all students emerge as key aspects, with 18 occurrences throughout the 'Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Student Experience' area across eight of the ten reports (two reviewed units did not have enrolled students). Excessive 'workload' also emerges an important aspect for enhancement, concerning both staff and students alike, through re-evaluation and rationalisation of modules, their credit-weighting and other aspects of Learning, Teaching and Assessment.
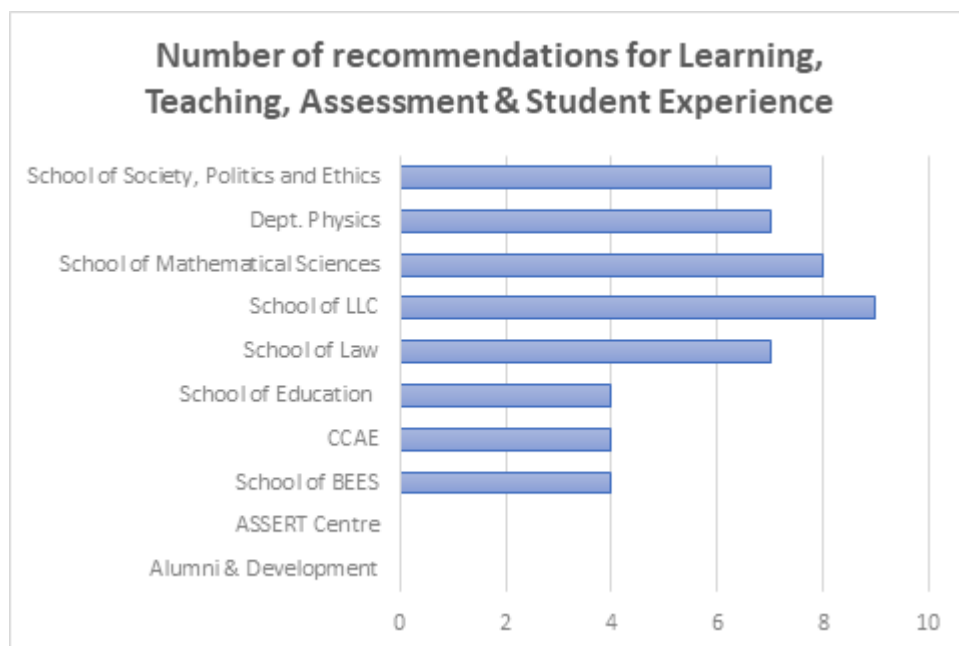
Staffing developmental priorities

Finally, the third top thematic area across the ten quality reviews is related to staffing issues, with a total of twenty recommendations. Some staffing issues are evident in the recommendations of other thematic areas such as 'strategy and governance', 'resources and sustainability' and 'finances and philanthropy',such as references to 'staffing plans' within the strategic context.

The facilitation of staff professional development (6 occurrences), careers (8 occurrences) and leadership (4 occurrences) emerges as a strong recommendation across all reports. The importance of supporting their professional growth through appropriate training (1 occurrence), mentoring (2 occurrences) and other opportunities is reiterated. In particular, academic staff professional and career development is tied in with a more balanced workload (6 occurrences) / model (4) allowing for an appropriate focus also on research, in addition to teaching and administrative duties. Issues of gender balance (1 occurrence) and the Athena Swan process (2 occurrences) are also touched upon.

Section 2 Thematic Reviews

Thematic Reviews are under-taken periodically to address issues of strategic importance. The approach is an enhancement-led evaluation of existing University-wide processes, practices or policies to assess their current stage of effectiveness and identify international good practices that can inform future developments. Specific features of Thematic Review include:

- Applying an institutional lens, holistic approach: policy to practice
- Scope is horizontal: multiple stakeholders in an activity
- Wholly external expert panel
- Strategically aligned and sponsored

During 2019/20 & 2020/21 two important Thematic Reviews were undertaken on the topics of: *Work Placement* and *Teaching & Assessing with Technology*. Both topics were apposite in light of the challenges presented by Covid and offered a strategic opportunity for the University to engage in peer review and the identification of good practice already in place in UCC as well as the opportunity to draw on internationally accepted good practice.

Thematic Review of Work Placement

The Review of Work Placement recommended a strategic shift to the internationally recognised approach of Work Integrated Learning (WIL), which leverages multiple opportunities and instances for students to engage in workplace learning and the development of transversal skills across a variety of contexts:

"*WIL is an umbrella term describing student learning involving an external partner (e.g., an employer, a community) where the tasks involve the practice of work that is meaningful, authentic, and an intentional component of the curriculum. WIL includes (and often is dominated by) work placements, however, WIL also includes campus-based student consultancy projects, commissioned works, competitions (where student groups compete to find a solution to a workplace problem), community projects, entrepreneurship, start-ups and enterprise, service learning*" (Thematic Review of Work Placement,2020, p.6) [3]

The recommendations of this report have important resource and organisational change implications which are currently being evaluated and prioritised. A Quality Enhancement Plan is in development and will be presented to the Quality Enhancement Committee in December 2021.

Thematic Review of Teaching and Assessing with Technology

The Thematic Review of Teaching and Assessing with Technology provided an opportunity to take stock of the lessons learned as well as strategic configuration, organisation and governance for the future of digital education. The review affirmed the success of operations to date and the collegial working relationships which have underpinned very successful support for the delivery of digital education.

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[3] Thematic Review of Work Placement available at:
https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/support/qualityenhancementunit/reports/thematicreports/ThematicReviewofWorkPlacmentsinUCC.pdf

Overall the Panel's recommendations were directed towards, building and formalising existing arrangements through: clarifying strategic leadership role of VP for L & T; strengthening the academic governance and decision-making structures; improving organisational structures including one point of reference for support; and approaches to building, developing and sharing digital expertise more widely within University community. As detailed in the report, the Panel suggested that:

"Good foundations exist but it is apparent that with clearer leadership, better governance, improved organisation and a focus on building expertise across all areas, the University will be able to ensure its plans for digital education are robust, sustainable and build on the positive engagement over the last two years."(Thematic Review Report 2021, p 16) [4]

A Quality Enhancement Plan is in development and will be presented to the Quality Enhancement Committee in December 2021.

Future of Thematic Reviews

Thematic Reviews are at an early stage of development and application at UCC, however early outcomes indicate some positive attributes, which include: a customised focus to review activity; opportunity for strategic alignment between review function and wider organisational priorities and goals; strong developmental focus and opportunity to engage leading international experts.

Although the sample of Thematic Reviews is small, 3 to date, it would appear to date that strategic sponsorship of these reviews will continue to be significant to their success given the University-wide scope and topic specific focus. It is also important to note that their institutional scope from policy to practice, is highly compatible with both the ongoing implementation of the Connected Curriculum (Academic Strategy) and the wider Connected University initiative, UCC 2022. Further development of the Thematic Review methodology could include international benchmarking as part of the profile and institutional self-evaluation and data provided to underpin Thematic Reviews.

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[4] Report under consideration for publication by QEC at meeting of 8th July 2021.

Section 3 Reports of Reviews Undertaken 2019/20 & 2020/21

Period and Thematic Reviews 2019/20

Review of:	Dates:	Link to Peer Review Reports:
Alumni & Development	8-10 Oct 2019	https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/support/qualityenhancementunit/reports/admin/PanelReport-AlumniandDevelopment.pdf
School of Society, Politics and Ethics	22-24 Oct 2019	https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/support/qualityenhancementunit/reports/cacsss/FinalPanelReport-SchoolofSociety,PoliticsandEthics.pdf
School of BEES	3-5 Dec 2019	https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/support/qualityenhancementunit/reports/sefs/FINALSchoolofBEES_PanelReport-APPROVEDfollowingQEC.pdf
School of Education	11-13 Feb 2020	https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/support/qualityenhancementunit/reports/cacsss/FinalSchoolofEducationPanelReportQECApproved.pdf
School of Law	25-27 Feb 2020	https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/support/qualityenhancementunit/reports/buslaw/FinalSchoolofLawPanelReportQECApproved.pdf

Periodic and Thematic Reviews 2020/21

Rescheduled to from 2019/20 to 2020/21 due to Covid-19

Review of:	Dates:	Link to Peer Review Reports:
Thematic Review of Placements*	Week of 5 & 12 Oct 2020	https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/support/qualityenhancementunit/reports/thematicreports/ThematicReviewofWorkPlacmentsinUCC.pdf
School of Mathematical Sciences*	4-5 & 10-12 Nov 2020	https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/support/qualityenhancementunit/reports/sefs/SchoolofMathematicalSciences-PeerReviewGroupReport2020-21.pdf
Department of Physics*	18-19 & 24-26 Nov 2020	https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/support/qualityenhancementunit/reports/sefs/DepartmentofPhysics-PeerReviewGroupReport2020-21.pdf
School of Languages, Literatures & Cultures*	2-3 & 8-10 Dec 2020	https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/support/qualityenhancementunit/reports/cacsss/SchoolofLanguages,LiteraturesCultures%C3%82%C2%A0-PeerReviewGroupReport2020-21.pdf
ASSERT Centre	19-21 Jan 2021	https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/support/qualityenhancementunit/reports/comh/ASSERTCentre-PeerReviewGroupReport2020-21.pdf
Cork Centre for Architectural Education*	3-5 & 9-11 March 2021	Report approved for publication by UCC Quality Enhancement Committee 8th July, 2021. To be approved by MTU Academic Council on 17th September 2021
Thematic Review of Teaching & Assessing with Technology	19-22 & 27-28 April 2021	https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/support/qualityenhancementunit/reports/thematicreports/TeachingandAsessingwithTechnology-ThematicReview2020-2021.pdf

Section 4 Covid-19 and Quality Review

Adaptations to Review

A number of Quality Reviews were rescheduled from 2019/20 to 2020/21 due to Covid-19 (detailed in the tables above). To enable completion of Quality Reviews under the prevailing public health restrictions, a model for conducting site visits virtually was developed. This model ensured continuity in the operation and delivery of quality review and enhancement activities. Development of the revised model was informed by emerging practices for quality review nationally and internationally under Covid-19 arrangements. Core principles which guided the redesign were the need to:

- Achieve completion of the review process whilst recognising the significant impact of Covid-19 adaptations for teaching, learning and assessment for academic units.
- Uphold the overall integrity of the review process and maintain comparability by ensuring that the objectives for review could be achieved under adapted circumstances.
- Coordinate the sequence of the site visit to ensure coherence and retain all the relevant meetings with staff, students and stakeholders.
- Manage the process of Review Team establishment and working ethos.

In place of the usual physical site visit at the University over a 2.5-day period, the virtual visit was configured to take place over a 5-day period spread over two weeks. Microsoft Teams was used as the virtual platform for all meetings. The longer timeframe of the site visit provided for increased flexibility, whilst retaining all the relevant meetings with staff, students and stakeholders and so ensuring that the objectives of quality review would be fulfilled.

The Panels brought together national and international peer reviewers. Internal reviewers provided knowledge of institutional and organisational structures with the external Panel members contributing their peer expertise. The student Panel members brought valuable insights and perspectives on student issues.

To support the Peer Review Panel and facilitate effective engagement throughout the site visits, additional guidance and support was provided by staff of the Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU). This included technical support, as well as briefing and advisory support prior to and throughout the site visits. Review coordination was provided throughout by a Review Co-ordinator from QEU to facilitate the review process and to support the Peer Review Panels in formulating and agreeing the final Panel Reports.

The objectives of quality review were maintained throughout the Covid-19 period. 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 CCAE in further refining its priorities and optimising its activities in the pursuit of its ambitious drive for excellence within the international and national arena of higher education.

Rationale for Covid-19 Addenda in Quality Review

Due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, academic units in UCC were required to transition their Teaching, Learning and Assessment activities online within a very short timeframe. Simultaneously, five units had their site visit postponed from Semester 2 of the academic year 2019/20 (Semester 2) to the following academic year.

> School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures
> Department of Physics
> School of Mathematical Sciences
> ASSERT Centre
> Cork Centre for Architectural Education (CCAE)

At that time, all units apart from CCAE had submitted their Self-Evaluation Report to QEU either in late 2019 or in early 2020. The elapsed time between SER submission and virtual site visit as well as the significant adaptations required to academic delivery was captured through a short Covid 19 Addendum. The emphasis of this exercise was to consider what worked well and what was learned as part of the response to Covid-19, including positive experiences and learnings as well as longer-term developments or adaptations that might be needed. The template provided by QEU for the Addendum contained the following guiding questions:

- What challenges did you face in adapting your teaching, learning and assessment to deal with Covid-19 over the past few months? Were there particular challenges specific to your discipline?
- What have you learnt?
- Have any unforeseen opportunities arisen?
- Are there any successes that you would like to highlight?
- Do you have any other reflections on the impact of Covid-19 which are noteworthy for the School, its staff and students?

Findings from the comparative analysis of Addenda

The submitted Covid-19 addenda, as well as the sections of the CCAE's SER dealing with the impact of Covid-19 on the Centre's Learning, Teaching and Assessment practices, show significant similarities, despite the different nature of the reviewed units.

Challenges

Digital skillset and resources' shortages

UCC being a campus-based university, all units concurred in highlighting the incredible challenge that the abrupt move to remote learning, teaching and assessment initially posed to their continuation of routine academic operations since March 2020. Specifically, all units identified digital skillset and resources' shortages among staff and students as particularly overwhelming, in the first instance. This represented a steep learning curve for most units. There was a race against time to conclude Semester 2's teaching and readapt final examinations to an online format, while upholding the integrity of the examination processes at a very short notice. Issues included the lack of digital skills, lack of access to specialist

software and hardware, lack of familiarity with online-specific L, T and A pedagogies and delivering methods.

Uncoordinated staff-students communication and L, T & A approaches within units

All units recognised the impact on students' engagement, learning and wellbeing of the sudden transition to virtual learning and teaching spaces. This represented a great challenge, also due to uncoordinated staff-students communication and disparity of adopted platforms, tools and lecturing approaches for online delivery. Furthermore, there was a high degree of apprehension among students regarding having the camera on during online lectures. Hence, student participation in the virtual environment presented some difficulty with decreased student engagement and active contribution to the lectures.

Unit-specific challenges

Teaching, learning and assessment challenges were also unit specific. For instance, Mathematical Sciences and Physics heavily relied on traditional board-based computational teaching and, thus, struggled to source web cameras for the remote delivery of lessons. Web cameras were unavailable on the market due to their sharp rise in demand. Similarly, the adaptation of written examinations for accredited programmes revealed to be an energy- and time-consuming task as the adoption of alternative approaches had to be agreed upon with accreditation bodies. Finally, the initial loss of access to the IT lab was a major issue for progressing student research, particularly at PG level.

The School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures was faced with supporting students abroad to return to Ireland, as well as repatriating international students. The School had to resort to alternative curricular options in UCC for third year students in the Year Abroad programme (academic year 2020/21). Furthermore, the temporary loss of access to library resources for staff and students at first represented a significant drawback, with the library being regarded as the School's learning, teaching and research labs.

CCAE and the ASSERT Centre (and, to a lesser extent, the Department of Physics), given the experiential, hands-on, studio/lab-based nature of their Learning, Teaching and Assessment practices, experienced very specific challenges. While ASSERT had to cancel all its trainings/courses/workshops from March 2020 to the end of that academic year, CCAE resorted to the temporary provision of powerful virtual machines to students, although this could be financially sustained only in the short-term.

Learnings, opportunities and successes

All the addenda point to the incredible efforts made by most units since March 2020 in order to effectively adapt their Learning, Teaching and Assessment to the unprecedented and unexpectedly prolonged remote arrangements of their academic practices and, thus, guarantee quality learning experiences for their students. These documents provide evidence of a range of learnings, opportunities and successes on behalf of the units, which were achieved in a relatively short period of time. Often the accounts under these three categories overlap and reoccur, since opportunities swiftly turn into successes and sources of reflective learning and long-lasting adoption of creative novel L, T and A practices. Therefore, they are discussed together in this report.

Staff and student digitalisation and adoption of new pedagogical methodologies and tools

Within a relatively short time span, units recorded an unprecedented digitalisation of both staff and student cohorts, with adoption of a range of online platforms and tools for their learning, teaching and assessment practices. Lecturers soon found new ways of reaching out to students and ensuring they could support their learning. For instance, online surveys were introduced to gauge students' difficulties and address them during the lectures (Department of Physics); the chat function was discovered as an effective source of communication for more reserved students. Examples of successful alternative solutions include: considerable investment in e-books and close cooperation with library management, purchase of a complete suite of mathematical software and storage for all students; development of ad hoc student feedback surveys to support successful learning; outdoor research projects, buildings surveys and tutorials for CCAE students.

Assessment represents an area that witnessed major transformation with a move away from traditional formal examination modes and towards Continuous Assessment practices, including, for instance, collaborative trans- and inter-disciplinary project-execution-based assessment for CCAE students, as well as submission of digital portfolios.

Increased School-level coordination of and dialogue on L, T and A

A very positive outcome of the sudden adaptation to the pandemic appears to be the establishment of increased school-level coordination, cooperation and dialogue on Learning, Teaching and Assessment, complemented by a parallel strengthening of such efforts at University level. This has resulted in an unprecedented proliferation of pedagogical engagement, research and dialogue within units and across the University, with participation in seminar series, establishment of ad hoc committees and consideration of the mainstreaming of successful novel blended and online L, T and A methodologies going forward.

Familiarisation with novel forms of student learning support and increased pastoral care provision

In the face of the unprecedented challenges, UCC staff, after an initial disorientation, report responding with creativity, adaptability and problem-solving skills, identifying alternative methodologies and methods to support students. Particular attention appears to have been paid to issues of student wellbeing, anxiety and depression. The recognition of the importance of increased pastoral care for students emerges as a constant across the addenda, as both a dimension of lectures and ad hoc remote sessions.

Practical sessions and tutorials secured for scientific and practice-based units

All units with strong experiential, practice-based dimensions, report their success in establishing protocols and procedures for a safe return to the teaching and learning space for Semester 1 of the current academic year (and the final part of semester 2), with a specific attention for the needs of first year students (e.g. provision of intense digital training in preparation for further Covid-19 related restrictions). In this way, the Department of Physics, the CCAE and the ASSERT Centre managed to guarantee the provision of great part of the necessary in person learning and teaching opportunities – lab and design studio/outdoor tutorials and classes.

Unprecedented uptake of trainings, conference and workshops opportunities

The move to the virtual landscape for higher education institutions locally, nationally and internationally, opened up several opportunities for both staff and students to participate in greater range of events than ever before. Indeed, units listed, as both, successes and opportunities, their uptick in participation to specialist inter/national conferences, trainings, workshops, as well as hosting online specialist conferences and AGMs and other events and seminar series.

Innovation, research and community engagement success

Units also indicated positive research developments concerning their staff and, to some extent students, since the outset of the pandemic. These include: successful research funding applications and research collaborations (both Covid-19-related and unrelated); article publications (e.g. School of Mathematical Sciences; ASSERT Centre); online Summer research projects for students (Department of Physics). Interestingly, CCAE engaged in inter- and transdisciplinary real practice collaboration, with local authorities and private architectural and engineering firms involving its students and staff in executing all the phases of work realisation. Other units gained confidence in delivering some new programmes fully online (e.g. School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures).
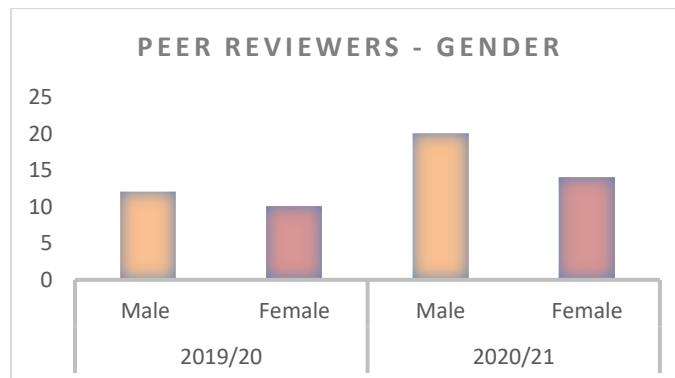
Additional reflections and insights

Overall, the units' reflections concur in affirming their willingness to building upon the lessons learnt from the Covid-19 pandemic. There is an evident commitment to maintaining some of the novel approaches, tools and resources that were initially utilised in order to cope with extra-ordinary circumstances. This points towards an increase in blended L, T and A delivery, a sharp rethinking of assessment through the privileging of Continuous Assessment over end-of-semester formal examinations, in line with its understanding 'as a form of learning in itself' and 'for learning' (rather than 'of learning'). The possibility of online programme and module offerings is also considered as a parallel avenue to the in-campus experience, going forward.
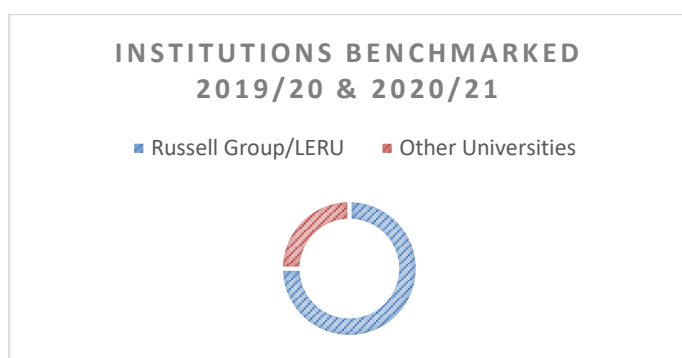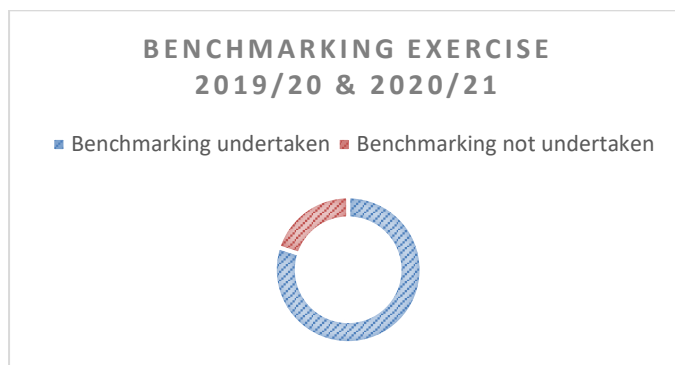
Section 5 Review Operations and Monitoring

This section provides a summary of some features of Quality Review over the reporting period, including the gender balance of reviewers, institution type[5], benchmarking activities and benchmarking reference points.

Snapshot of Review Data

PEER REVIEWERS - GENDER

	Male	Female	Male	Female
	12	10	20	14
	2019/20		2020/21	

INTERNATIONAL ACADEMICS - INSTITUTIONS

	Russell Group/LERU	Other Universities	Russell Group/LERU	Other Universities
	5	4	8	6
	2019/20		2020/21	

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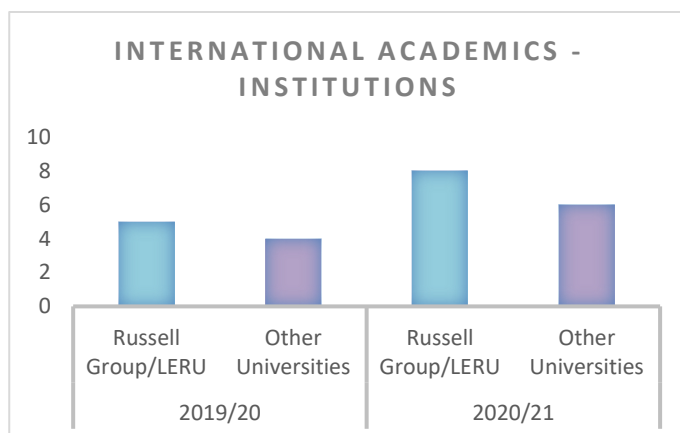
[5] Russell Group is an organisation of UK leading research-intensive universities, the group name derives from the location of the Vice-Chancellors' meetings at Russell Square in London (https://russellgroup.ac.uk/).
LERU is the League of European Research Universities a network of research-intensive universities, membership of the group is by invitation (https://www.leru.org/)

BENCHMARKING EXERCISE 2019/20 & 2020/21

■ Benchmarking undertaken ■ Benchmarking not undertaken

INSTITUTIONS BENCHMARKED 2019/20 & 2020/21

■ Russell Group/LERU ■ Other Universities

Analysis of Stakeholder Feedback

Peer Reviewer and Head of Unit Questionnaires

The Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU) is committed to periodically monitoring and reviewing its management and implementation of internal quality review processes, to ensure continuing operational success, and as necessary, operational refinement. In completing this process of reflective review, the QEU is informed by prevailing national and international good practices, expectations of national statutory and regulatory agencies and feedback from key stakeholders, such as Peer Reviewers and Heads of units.

Stakeholder feedback has now become even more compelling, due to the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 resulting in the adoption of an online remote mode for Peer Review Panel site visits.

QEU developed a range of anonymous surveying tools, which included a Peer Review Panel Member questionnaire (2020/21) and a survey for Head of units undergoing the quality review cycle - 2019/20 and 2020/21 (both administered via Microsoft Forms). The latter survey will be subsequently complemented by a more in-depth investigation and feedback collection stage by means of targeted focus groups. The questions range from the Multiple-Choice Option (MCO) type to the open-answer format, to allow for both comparability of feedback analysis and personalised input re expert suggestions/recommendations regarding the internal quality review process at UCC.

Peer Reviewer Questionnaire – Key Findings

The *Peer Reviewer Questionnaire* is divided into four sections, and seeks feedback on the effectiveness of QEU's management, organisation, implementation and overall support to the Panel during the three key phases of their service – respectively, pre-site visit, site visit and post-site visit.

The response rate to the Peer Reviewer Questionnaire has been 68%, with a total of 19 respondents out of 28 Peer Review Panel members. Since this surveying tool is still active, the findings presented in this report are preliminary and broad. An in-depth analysis of all responses will be carried out as soon as the survey is closed.

The responses concur in revealing an overwhelming and consistent positive feedback for the QEU team, in relation to the comprehensiveness of QEU's support to peer review panels throughout their involvement in the internal quality review process.

QEU's success in the management of virtual site visits and overall quality review process

At a broader level, when the top two positive ratings are combined together ('Excellent' with 'Above Average' and 'Strongly Agree' with 'Agree'), their average response score is above 95% across the three MCQ sections of the questionnaire (pre-site visit, site visit and post-site visit phases). Specifically, the overall Peer Reviewer's combined top two response percentages are: 94% for the pre-site visit stage; 92 % for the site visit stage; 100% for the post-site visit stage.

This clearly points to the effectiveness of the QEU's support to Peer Review Panels at all stages regarding review/IT & logistics coordination. For some questions the top two positive values amount for all the responses. See, for example, feedback to Question 6 below.

6. To what extent was the support provided by the QEU to the Panel during the virtual site visit effective with reference to the following:
   More Details

   ■ Minimal ■ Below Average ■ Average ■ Above Average ■ Excellent
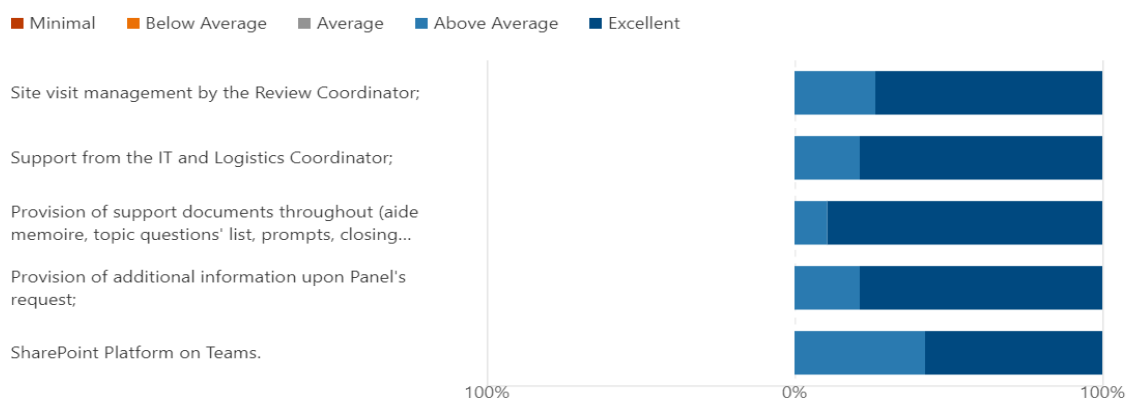
This point is also reaffirmed by the open-format responses in Section 4. For instance, 15 responses to Question 9 'What worked well' concur in identifying the QEU team's support and coordination at every level as a key factor for the success of the remote quality review process. Feedback to Question 11, inviting suggestions/recommendations/further comments for improving the quality review process at UCC instead includes 7 additional complimentary remarks for the QEU team, complemented by ten responses indicating that they have no recommendations for improvement.

Peer Reviewers appear to be quite pleased with the QEU appointment of Panel Chairs. 6 open responses to Question 9 -What worked well?' - stress as positive factors the seniority and broad oversight of Panel Chairs, followed by 5 commendations of the overall composition and competence of Peer Review Panels.

Virtual format perceived as an interim pandemic-driven arrangement

Throughout the virtual quality review process, most Peer Reviewers openly expressed their disappointment at the missed opportunity to conduct a physical site visit of the unit, although they acknowledged the extraordinary contingencies that forced UCC's QEU to temporarily engage in a remote endeavour.

This presupposition offers the context for Peer Reviewers responses to the Peer Reviewer Questionnaire, which is effectively captured by the expression 'under the circumstances', used in some of the open responses to the survey. However, no question asked whether reviewers preferred the physical or virtual format, going forward.

On their own initiative, two respondents explicitly stated their preference for a return to the physical site visit, whenever possible, in response to Questions 10 - 'What could be improved?'. A reviewer defined the potential continuation of the virtual mode as 'detrimental', whereas another regretted the inability 'to meet with the rest of the Panel in person or visit the School'.

Timing issues within the remote site visit's timetable

Overall, most of the suggestions for improvement can be clustered around the issue of timing in relation to various aspects of the site visit's timetable (5 responses), as well as observations on the time and commitment demands from Peer Reviewers (2 responses). This is also confirmed by feedback to Question 4 on the effectiveness of various aspects of the site visit. Although the combined rating of 'average' and 'below average' is still low, it stands out as one of very few modest scores across the whole survey.

Respondents' suggestions range from spreading meetings within each day, having a smaller number of meetings per day, increasing the duration of meetings, spreading the site visit across more days. Finally, two respondents referred to finding better arrangements for the meeting with students to increase the opportunity and time for informal dialogue - e.g. use of breakout rooms or longer duration.

4. To what extent was the organisation of the virtual site visit by the QEU effective with reference to the following:
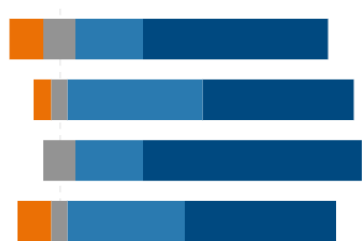
More Details

Legend: ■ Minimal ■ Below Average ■ Average ■ Above average ■ Excellent

Five-day duration (averagely from 10.00 to 15.30) distributed over two weeks;

Amount of meetings per Day (averagely 3);

Duration of meetings;

Spacing of meetings and breaks for each day;

Self-Evaluation Reports' Format

Scope for improvement is also identified in relation to the SER's format particularly the need to provide concise reports based on evidence and data-informed self-evaluation. This is also consistent with the Panel's discussions during virtual site visits and in the final reports.

Head of Unit Questionnaire – Key Findings

The Head of Unit questionnaire consisted of three sections aimed at gathering honest and reflective feedback from heads of units on the following operational aspects: QEU's effectiveness in providing

information, guidance and support to the unit; the unit's own engagement with the quality review process; and a Covid-specific section seeking feedback on the virtual conduct of the site visit.

The response rate has been 50%, with a total of 6 respondents out of 12 co/heads of unit.

Since this surveying tool is still active, the findings presented in this report are preliminary and broad. An in-depth analysis of all responses will be carried out once the survey is closed.

The responses that have been submitted so far are representative of only half of the respondent target group. However, these concur in revealing an overwhelming and consistent positive feedback for the QEU team.

QEU's success in supporting units through the self-evaluation and (remote) site visit stages

Responses overwhelmingly indicate that heads of units felt adequately informed, supported and guided from the initial briefing through the conduct of their self-evaluation process (≈83%), while only one respondent indicated need for greater guidance on the report's structure and contents, as well as on the relevant data to be utilised as evidence base for the unit's self-evaluation. Furthermore, all respondents so far have indicated that the organisation of the site visit timetable was timely and effective from the units' perspective.

As per the Covid-19-specific section, this applies only to units reviewed in the current academic year. Among all respondents, only two belong to this category (i.e. a third of total respondents so far ≈33%). Despite the low degree of representativity of Covid-19-specific feedback, the preliminary finding is still overwhelmingly positive for the QEU: an organised and smooth transition to the online mode of delivery and praise of its support and understanding of the extraordinary pressures affecting units during their quality review this year, as well as of its rigour and professionalism.

3. Did you receive adequate support, guidance and information during the conduct of self-evaluation?
   More Details

   ● YES   5
   ● NO   1

Clear understanding of review process' key goals

Approximately 67% of respondents demonstrated awareness of the review's affirmative and enabling approach and dual focus, geared towards identifying both existing good practices - 'strengths', 'successes', 'progress'- as well as areas for improvement -'moving forward', 'weaknesses', 'failings', 'opportunities for improvement'. An additional response mentioned 'valuable recommendations' that could not be progressed because of delays. Overall, only one respondent provided a fully negative feedback about missed achievement of goals.

A lengthy and delayed process

Half of the responses concur in indicating frustration at the lengthy and delayed quality review process. This is understandable in light of the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020, which forced an initial suspension of the process. The process was subsequently resumed and concluded in the current year. An

additional source of delay was caused by the establishment of a new Quality Enhancement Committee, which deferred the approval of draft reports for a few months. As a result, some heads felt restricted in their ability to act upon Panel recommendations for improvement. However, this reaction can be read as a sign of positive engagement with the process at UCC, eagerness to advance the unit's fulfilment of its potential and progress in its quality enhancement path.

Section 6 International Projects

EQUAM-LA Project

QEU is a partner in the Erasmus+ Project, EQUAM-LA – 'Enhancing Quality Management & Recognition in Latin American universities to underpin the Latin American Higher Education Space'. The general aim of this project is to improve Quality Assurance in Latin America and to promote an understanding of European tools and standards for quality enhancement and recognition in the Latin American higher education system. Fourteen universities from four Latin American countries (Colombia, Argentina, Nicaragua and Panama) are benefiting from this capacity building project.

Activities in the project involve the management of QA procedures and the development of a QA toolkit to facilitate Qualifications Recognition to meet international needs. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all activities, meetings and collaborations on this project to date have taken place virtually.

The Kick-off Meeting in May 2020 comprised representatives from all 14-partner universities in Latin America as well as the seven EU partners, including the ENQA, OBREAL, ANECA, UMU, UCM, UNIROMA and UCC. A Plenary Session, involving all Partners, took place in November. Elizabeth Noonan and Sheila Ronan from QEU represented UCC at both the Kick-off Meeting and the Plenary Session.

Two virtual Study Visits to Madrid and Brussels took place on separate occasions in March 2021. Elizabeth Noonan, Sheila Ronan and Silvia Brandi attended both virtual events. Marita Foster, International Education, presented on behalf of UCC at the Brussels event. Marita's presentation 'Internal Procedure for Recognition of Foreign Qualifications' was delivered to the 14 partner universities from Latin America as well as the participating EU partners.

The EQUAM-LA Project is an important connection to the UCC's strategic alignment to Global and European partner collaboration as well as emphasising the overall goals of capacity building across several national HE systems.

EMINENT Project

The goal of the EMINENT Erasmus+ Project is to support the Haitian Higher Education sector in its efforts to enhance and harmonies Haitian institutions' Quality Assurance systems and processes in response to national and international developments and in line with European Union's Standards in this regard. This programme is led by the University of Alicante, in partnership with two EU institutions namely, University College Cork and the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation, Austria. Five Haitian higher education institutions (UPNIP, UPAG, UPSEJ, UPSAC and ESIH) are the beneficiaries of the EMINENT Project.

Owing to the limitations imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, all activities since March 2020 have taken place virtually. QEU engaged in online training via a series of Masterclasses and tutorial meetings from 13th - 17th July 2020 - these were led by several institutions including the Austrian and Cork partners. UCC delivered a Masterclass focused on self-evaluation, the development of learning outcomes and the application of those outcomes into study programmes. The Masterclass was led by Elizabeth Noonan, joined by Dr Martin Howard, Head of the French Department, Dr Declan Kennedy, Senior Lecturer in Science Education and Dr Silvia Brandi, Quality Enhancement Advisor.

During the training, UCC proposed exercises to the Haitian Universities to implement the concepts on Programme Self-Evaluation and apply their learning outcomes to the study programmes. The Haitian

partners were then offered the opportunity to discuss their advancements with the UCC Panel. Below you will find a link to the EMINENT Project "virtual training" which Dr Martin Howard, Dr Declan Kennedy, Dr Silvia Brandi and Elizabeth Noonan were involved in:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WrhDAH2Tu2w&feature=youtu.be

Since September 2020, QEU has progressed with its delivery of Work Package Five of the EMINENT Project ('Programme Self-Evaluation'). During the last quarter of 2020, QEU supported the Haitian partners in Self-evaluation by delivering three pre-recorded trainings. These trainings were delivered by the following UCC expert advisors: 'Programme Self-Evaluation Report Template with Guidance' (Elizabeth Noonan and Dr Silvia Brandi); 'Conducting SWOT Consultation & Analysis: A Preliminary Step towards Programme Self-Evaluation' (Dr Anne Gannon, HR, UCC); 'Student representation, feedback and engagement in Quality Processes' (Eimear Curtin, Student Union; Dr Catherine O'Mahony, CIRTL; Dr Silvia Brandi, QEU).

Ongoing political and social unrest in Haiti, coupled with Covid-19, has necessitated in a re-evaluation of EMINENT project activities with a view to an extension to the project if required.

ERASMUS Staff Mobility Training

Elizabeth Noonan attended the University of Udine in Italy on an Erasmus Staff Mobility Training visit from 12th - 19th of September 2019. The overall objective of the staff mobility was the: Exchange of Good Quality Practices and Ideas at an International level between Italy and Ireland on Quality Assurance and Enhancement in Higher Education. Elizabeth presented a paper on Quality Enhancement in Irish Higher Education to a meeting of the Quality Presidium (National Network of Rectors, Vice-Rectors & Quality Directors) held at the University of Trieste and she also had the opportunity to engage in a deep practice exchange at Udine University examining the structure and activities of the Office for Quality. Following this exchange two return Erasmus visit requests from Italy to UCC were made and accepted in early 2020 and will be re-scheduled following resumption of international travel and return to campus following Covid-19.

ERASMUS+ Project

A Czech Delegation visited the Quality Enhancement Unit on an Erasmus+ Project in September 2019. The delegation comprised of representatives of various Czech universities from (Prague, Brno, Olomouc, České Budějovice) as well as national representatives from the National Accreditation Bureau for Higher Education. Elizabeth Noonan welcomed the Czech delegates and, following a short tour of the campus, the group met with the UCC President. Relevant stakeholders from schools and units in UCC briefed the group on various aspects within the remit of Quality Enhancement at UCC.

Quality Assurance in Central America

The Director of Quality Enhancement, Elizabeth Noonan, was one of the international quality expert speakers at the virtual forum entitled '*Innovation in Teaching and Learning and its relation to quality assurance in higher education*'. The event was co-organised by CSUCA, OBREAL GLOBAL and *Fundacion* EULAC, as part of the IX Central American Universities Congress. It offered an opportunity for exchanging views on innovation in learning from different perspectives - universities, national systems, quality agencies from Central America and Europe - and explore opportunities for regional and international collaboration in this field.

Section 7 QQI Matters

Annual Quality Report to QQI 2019/20

UCC's Annual Quality Report (AQR) 2019/20 was approved by both QEC and UMT and submitted in March 2021 to QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland). The AQR is in effect the University's formal statement of its institutional level approach and policy for the quality of its education, research, training and related services as defined under the 2012 Quality Assurance & Qualifications Act.

The AQRs for all higher education institutions are published by QQI and are used for sectoral analysis and benchmarking, including institutional profiling leading into the next cycle of Institutional Review (UCC will be reviewed in 2023).   UCC's Annual Quality Report 2019/20 can be found at the following link: https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/UCC%202021%20AQR.pdf

CINNTE: Institutional Review Process

Under the provisions of the Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education & Training) Act 2012, and in alignment with European Standards & Guidelines for Quality (2015) QQI is responsible for enabling external periodic review of the effectiveness of institutions' processes for quality assurance and enhancement.

Under the provisions of the QQA Act, the processes for Institutional Review were updated and the current methodology for Institutional Review of Degree Awarding Bodies has the following objectives:

1. To review the effectiveness and implementation of the QA procedures of the institution through consideration of the procedures set out, primarily, in the AIQR. The scope of this objective also extends to the overarching procedures of the institution for assuring itself of the quality of its research degree programmes and research activities.
2. To review the enhancement of quality by the institution through governance, policy, and procedures. To review the congruence between quality assurance procedures and enhancements and the institution's own mission and goals or targets for quality. To identify innovative and effective practices for quality enhancement.
3. To review the effectiveness and implementation of procedures for access, transfer and progression.
4. Following the introduction of a statutory international education quality assurance scheme, to determine compliance with the Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes to International Learners.

UCC is scheduled to undergo Institutional Review in 2022/23, with a site visit scheduled for week of 6th March 2023. Specific dates for interim stages including development of Institutional Profile; submission of Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (Q3 2022); Review Planning Visit (Q4 2022) and Main Review Site Visit (Q1 2023) will be discussed with QQI at the beginning of academic year 2021/22.

Institutional Review Timeline Overview

Sept 2021 - July 2022	Self-Evaluation
Q3 2022	Submission of the IP & ISER
Q4 2022	Planning Site Visit
Q1 2023	**Site Visit: 6th March 2023** — Main Site Visit
Q2 2023	Report

Looking Ahead to 2021/22

Looking ahead towards quality work in the academic year 2021/22, the following topics will be addressed:

- Preparation for Institutional Review focused on engagement of the University community.
- Enhancement of the Student Feedback Ecosystem (joint QEU/CIRTL project, funded by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning);
- Thematic Reviews on specific enhancement topics, provisionally: Research Degree Student Experience; Quality in Online & Blended Learning;
- Quality Review: Mid-cycle consolidation of outcomes, implementation and enhancement activities for academic and professional units;
- Evaluation of quality review methodology post-Covid in light of national and international developments;
- Pilot process for the cyclical integration of programme management and monitoring with periodic academic quality review;
- Enhancing student engagement in quality activities;
- Aligning periodic quality review processes with professional accreditation: the application of the QQI principles for accreditation (2020);
- Periodic review cycle as scheduled, including advisory support for units undergoing review in 2022 and 2023 https://www.ucc.ie/en/qeu/schedule/;

This list is may be adapted to include any further relevant developments arising from national policy changes affecting higher education quality arrangements or strategic institutional priorities.

Appendix 1: Quality Enhancement Committee

Section 8

Section 9 QEC Membership

QEC Membership: Sept 2016 – Sept 2020

Ex Officio:

- Professor Patrick O'Shea (Chair)
- Professor John O'Halloran, Deputy President & Registrar
- Mr Diarmuid Collins, Bursar
- Ms Niamh Connolly, Director, Projects, President's Office
- Ms Catherine Dawson, Education Officer, Students' Union (2019/20)
- Mr Ben Dunlea, President, Students' Union (2019/20)
- Ms Elizabeth Noonan, Director of Quality Enhancement (Secretary)

Nominated Members:

4 academic staff members – 1 representative from each College

- Dr Helena Buffery, College of Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences
- Dr Patrick Harrison, College of Medicine & Health
- Professor Alan Kelly, College of Science, Engineering & Food Science
- Professor Thia Hennessy, Dean of Cork University Business School

3 staff members – representatives of administrative and support services

- Dr Ger Culley, Director, Information Technology Services
- Ms Kate O'Brien, Manager, College of SEFS (Maternity Leave)
- Ms Kathryn Neville, Manager, College of Medicine & Health
- Ms Michele Power, Quercus Talented Student Programme

QEC Membership: April 2021 – Sept 2025

Ex Officio:

- Professor John O'Halloran, Interim President (Chair)
- Professor Stephen Byrne, Interim Registrar
- Mr Diarmuid Collins, Bursar
- Dr Niamh Connolly, Director of Projects (President's Office)
- Ms Elizabeth Noonan, Director of Quality Enhancement (Secretary)
- Ms Asha Woodhouse, President, Students' Union (2021/22)
- Ms Sinead Roche, Education Officer, Students' Union (2021/22)

Nominated Members:

4 academic staff members – 1 representative from each College

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

3 staff members – representatives of administrative and support services

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

2 members of Academic Council

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

1 Doctoral Student representative

- Ms Niamh O' Mahoney, PhD Researcher, College of Science, Engineering & Food Science

Section 10 QEC Terms of Reference

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

 The Terms of Reference of the Committee are to:

- foster a quality culture throughout the University, that is supportive of innovation, the sharing of good practice and development of excellence in teaching, learning, research and related services;

- oversee the development of University quality assurance and enhancement policies and procedures, informed by national and international policy developments, that support strategic goals for excellence and the identification of good practice;

- facilitate student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement activities;

- ensure that University quality review policies and procedures have regard to prevailing national and European requirements: the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012, published national quality assurance guidelines and European Standards and Guidelines (ESG);

- recommend policy and procedures for ensuring the integrity of various forms of academic association with external organisations including collaborative provision and linked providers;

- review and analyse systematically the outcomes of quality processes and relevant quality indicators to confirm the on-going maintenance of quality and identify any required strategic enhancement activities;

- ensure the methodologies for expert peer review are evaluated as required in order to maintain a focus on both fitness for purpose and fitness of purpose;

- review and propose revision to the terms of reference, where appropriate and necessary.

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

Constitution

Ex Officio Members

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

Nominated Members

- 4 academic staff with experience of participation in quality review and/or knowledge of quality systems – one from each College, nominated by the President.

- 3 administrative & support services staff with experience of participation in quality review and/or knowledge of quality systems from administration and services, nominated by the President.

- 2 members of Academic Council

- 1 Doctoral Student representative

Quorum

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

Sub-Committees

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

Term of Office

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

Casual Vacancies

The Committee has the authority to fill any casual vacancies that arise during the lifetime of the Committee.

Appendix 2: Stakeholder Surveys

![UCC University College Cork, Ireland — Fheabhsú Cáilíochta Quality Enhancement]

Head of Unit Survey on the Internal Quality Review Process

The Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU) is committed to the ongoing enhancement of the University's quality processes. The feedback from this questionnaire will be used to inform the ongoing management and operational development of internal Quality Review processes. We would appreciate if you could tell us about your recent experience as a Head, whose academic or professional services unit underwent the quality review process at UCC.
All responses are anonymous and data will be processed in accordance with the University's GDPR policies.

Thank you,

The UCC Quality Enhancement Team

* Required

QEU's information, guidance and support services to the unit

1. Did you feel adequately informed on the internal quality review process by the QEU's initial briefing session? *

   ◯ YES

   ◯ NO

2. If you answered 'NO' to the previous question, please, tick any of the entries below, which corresponds to an area where you did not feel adequately informed:

☐ Irish quality policy framework and statutory requirements

☐ University's internal quality review cycle, stages and timeframes

☐ Unit's responsibilities and tasks in conducting the self-evaluation process

☐ SWOT consultation with staff

☐ Benchmarking

☐ Student Feedback collection and analysis

☐ Stakeholder feedback collection and analysis

☐ Self-evaluation Report's structure and contents

☐ Relevant qualitative/quantitative data for self-evaluation (student/staff/programmes/services, etc.)

☐ [   ]

Other

3. Did you receive adequate support, guidance and information during the conduct of self-evaluation? *

○ YES

○ NO

4. If you answered 'NO' to the previous question, please, tick any statement below which corresponds to your experience in this regard:

☐ There was no sufficient time for writing the SER

☐ Meetings with the Panel were not organised in a timely and effective manner

☐ The SER template did not give clear instructions on the required approach, contents and structure of the report

☐ Guidance on the required data for self-evaluation was not comprehensive data

☐ [   ]

Other

5. From your experience, was the organisation of the Panel's site visit timetable timely and effective? *

○ YES

○ NO

6. If you answered 'NO' to the previous question, please, tick any statement below which corresponds to your experience in this regard:

○ Communication on the organisation of timetable meetings was not timely and effective

○ The site visit timetable did not include meetings with all the relevant parties

○ [   ]

Other

Unit's Engagement with the Quality Review Process

7. From your perspective, what were your key goals and expectations from periodic quality review at the outset of this cycle? To what extent do you feel they were achieved? *

8. What did your unit learn from the quality review experience up to now? What would you do differently during the next quality review cycle? *

9. What Quality Indicators do you think should be used to assess the quality of the unit's academic standards and student learning experience in the future? *

Covid-19 Specific:

Remote working and conduct of the unit's site visit by the Panel

10. Did the Panel's site visit of your unit occur after March 2020?

○ YES

○ NO

11. If you answered 'YES' to the previous question, can you now comment on how remote working impacted on your experience of the quality review process, including your access to QEU guidance and support throughout? *

12. In light of your experience, what were the positive and/or the negative outcomes of the remote site visit by the Panel? *

13. In light of your overall experience, are there any further comments that you would like to provide the QEU in relation to the future operation of internal periodic quality reviews? *

Quality Peer Reviewer Survey

QEU is committed to the ongoing enhancement of the University's quality processes and the feedback from this questionnaire will be used to inform the ongoing management and operational development of internal Quality Review. We would appreciate if you could tell us about your recent experience as a Peer Reviewer at UCC.
All responses are anonymous and data will be processed in accordance with the University's GDPR policies.

Thank you,

The UCC Quality Enhancement Team

* Required

Pre site visit

1. Please, rate your level of agreement with the following statements: *

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The QEU provided clear details on the Peer Reviewer's role (i.e. responsibilities/tasks, time requirements, remuneration, etc.).	○	○	○	○	○
The Self-Evaluation documents provided an analytical account and context for the Unit's activities.	○	○	○	○	○
The Self-Evaluation documents provided a comprehensive background for the site visit.	○	○	○	○	○

2. If your answer ranges from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Neither Agree or Disagree' in any of the above statements, please indicate what would improve the overall effectiveness in this regard.

3. To what extent did the Panel's Briefing Session succeed in: *

	Minimal	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent
Informing you on the Irish policy framework and University's quality review processes;	○	○	○	○	○
Providing an opportunity for peer dialogue & team-formation;	○	○	○	○	○
Facilitating strategic planning ahead of the site visit.	○	○	○	○	○

Site visit

4. To what extent was the organisation of the virtual site visit by the QEU effective with reference to the following: *

	Minimal	Below Average	Average	Above average	Excellent
Five-day duration (averagely from 10.00 to 15.30) distributed over two weeks;	○	○	○	○	○
Amount of meetings per Day (averagely 3);	○	○	○	○	○
Duration of meetings;	○	○	○	○	○
Spacing of meetings and breaks for each day;	○	○	○	○	○
The Panel met with an appropriate range of attendees.	○	○	○	○	○
Time allocated for the formulation of Panel's recommendations, commendations and observations.	○	○	○	○	○

5. To what extent did the meetings with attendees allow the Panel to gain a deeper understanding of the unit under review in relation to the following aspects: *

	Minimal	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent
Academic standards	○	○	○	○	○
Teaching, Learning and Assessment	○	○	○	○	○
Programme portfolio relevance	○	○	○	○	○
Student experience	○	○	○	○	○
Alignment with inter/national policies	○	○	○	○	○
Good practice	○	○	○	○	○
Staffing	○	○	○	○	○
External engagement	○	○	○	○	○

6. To what extent was the support provided by the QEU to the Panel during the virtual site visit effective with reference to the following: *

	Minimal	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent
Site visit management by the Review Coordinator;	○	○	○	○	○
Support from the IT and Logistics Coordinator;	○	○	○	○	○
Provision of support documents throughout (aide memoire, topic questions' list, prompts, closing presentation's PP slide deck, etc.);	○	○	○	○	○
Provision of additional information upon Panel's request;	○	○	○	○	○
SharePoint Platform on Teams.	○	○	○	○	○

7. If, in questions 3-6, your answer ranges from Minimal to Average, could you, please, indicate in which way the overall organisation of the site visit could be improved? If you have any other relevant comments, please, feel free to include them here.

After site visit

8. To what extent was the support provided by QEU effective in enabling the collective drafting of the Quality Review Report by the Panel with reference to the following: *

	Minimal	Below average	Average	Above Average	Excellent
Support provided by the Review Coordinator	○	○	○	○	○
Timeline for report-preparation	○	○	○	○	○

Overall Open Feedback

9. From your perspective, what worked particularly well in the quality review process at UCC? *

10. From your perspective, what aspects of the quality review process at UCC could be enhanced for the future? *

11. Are there any other comments or good practices that you would recommend for consideration at UCC, based on your knowledge of peer review at your own institution and/or at other HEIs? *

Microsoft Forms