



MAYOR SQUARE BUILDING



SPENCER DOCK BUILDING

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FOREWORD



I am delighted to present this Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) on behalf of National College of Ireland. This document has been prepared to demonstrate the investments we have made over the last five years to build a distinctive and sustainable institution for the long-term benefits of our students, staff, stakeholders and the wider community.

This self-evaluation process has provided a valuable opportunity for us to reflect and consult, to analyse data and secure feedback from our students, staff, external partners and employers, enabling our Executive to critically reflect on our impact and achievements. The ISER also provides a robust baseline for our Governing Body and our institution's progress against our 2022-2027 Strategic Plan.

Through our ongoing work with QQI, and a wide range of stakeholders and peers, we maintain confidence in the robustness of our quality, governance and management practices, and the relevance, currency and impact of our programmes, research and support services. This core strength is essential as we continue to scale in the size and complexity of our programmes; our learner population; our academic, government and industry partnerships; and our opportunities to impact on the local, national and international communities.

The overall effectiveness of our approach allows us to make bold and informed long-term decisions, and to change lives through education by creating new opportunities for our students, our stakeholders, our community and for our valued staff.

Taken in conjunction with the Institutional Profile (IP), we are confident that this ISER will provide the External Institutional Quality Review Panel (QQI's "CINNTE" Panel) with the information they need to prepare for their visit to our campus in the heart of Dublin's North-East Inner City. We look forward to that engagement.

Professor Gina Quin
President, National College of Ireland

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

National College of Ireland (NCI) holds a unique position in the Irish Higher Education landscape. An independent and not-for-profit institution since 1951, originally founded by the Jesuit Order, NCI has a long history of commitment to enabling lifelong learning through the provision of flexible and innovative access pathways to Higher Education. Our Mission, “to change lives through education” remains as relevant today, in 2024, as it was when the College was founded.

In its early years, the College focused on human resource management and industrial relations, providing higher education for Ireland’s developing workforce and economy. In 2024, NCI now provides almost 100 programmes on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), in human resources, business, accounting, finance, psychology, computing, data science and artificial intelligence and in education and lifelong learning, particularly for education professionals working in early-years (pre-school) and further education settings. Many of our programmes are also accredited by Professional or Statutory Bodies, in recognition of the quality of the programmes leading to these qualifications.

We consider ourselves to be in the vanguard of tertiary provision, in line with current government priorities for the development of a unified tertiary education system. We ensure learner success is central to our academic and support services, and all our learning, teaching and research activities are underpinned by our active commitments to social justice and sustainability. We are actively developing innovative partnerships with other education providers and engaging pro-actively with employers, community-based organisations and government departments and agencies.

NCI’s academic qualifications are mapped to the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and are awarded by Quality and Qualifications (QQI). With a total of 6,016 registered students in 2022-23, we are one of the largest independent Higher Education Colleges in the Irish sector. We operate on a fully not-for-profit basis, receiving some government funding and free-tuition fees for some students. Since January 2024, this funding has come directly from the Higher Education Authority (HEA).



FROM THERE TO HERE: TRANSFORMATION SINCE THE 2009 EXTERNAL REVIEW

Our self-reflection and self-evaluation journey for the 2024 CINTE review began with an acknowledgement by the Executive Group of the scale of the transformation that has taken place at NCI since the last external institutional quality review in 2009¹.

EXPANSION OF THE NCI STUDENT AND STAFF COMMUNITY

NCI in 2009 was a college of 3,700 students, spread across the Schools of Business (79% of registered learners), Computing (11% of learners), and Community Studies (10% of learners). At that time, more than two-thirds of learners, 70%, were studying on a part-time basis. Supporting these students on their learning journey, we had a staff community of 248 FTE (full-time equivalent staff), of which 126 were teaching staff.

Since then, the College has since almost doubled in size to 6,016 enrolments in 2022/23, now spread across two Schools of Business, Computing, and a Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning (CELL). Our staff numbers have increased by 44% to 357 FTE, of which 190 are teaching staff. Figure 1 below provides a snapshot of the key profile statistics in 2022/23.

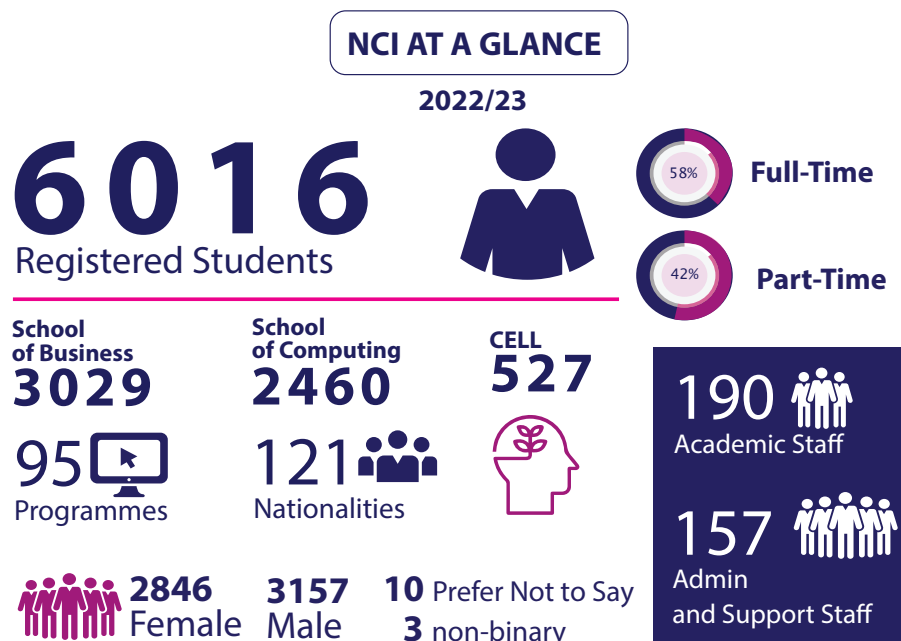


Figure 1: NCI Students and Staff at a glance

¹ The 2009 External Review was carried out under the auspices of the (then) Higher Education Training and Awards Council (HETAC).

In the years since 2009, our student population became more balanced across full-time and part-time study modes, with 58% of 2022-23 learners registered on full-time programmes. Figure 2, below, illustrates the step-change that has taken place.

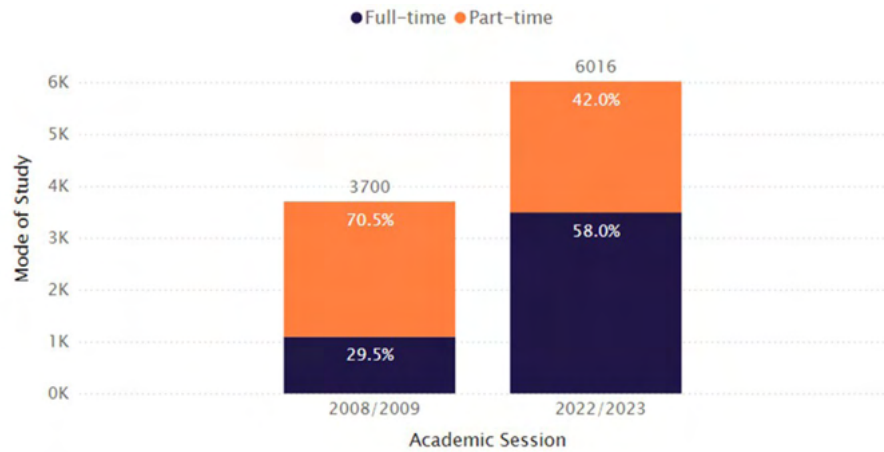


Figure 2: NCI learner numbers and profile by mode of study

In the intervening period, we have also very significantly grown our postgraduate student numbers. In 2009, 70 learners were registered to postgraduate programmes leading to Level 9 awards on the NFQ. Mirroring the trend in the wider Irish HE sector, this had increased by 2022/23 to 42.4% of total student enrolments representing some 2550 students. In addition, NCI offers students the opportunity to achieve Level 10 (doctoral) Research Degrees through collaborative arrangements with Maynooth University.

Figures 3 and 4, below, provide high-level data on our evolving enrolment profile over the past five years since 2018/19.

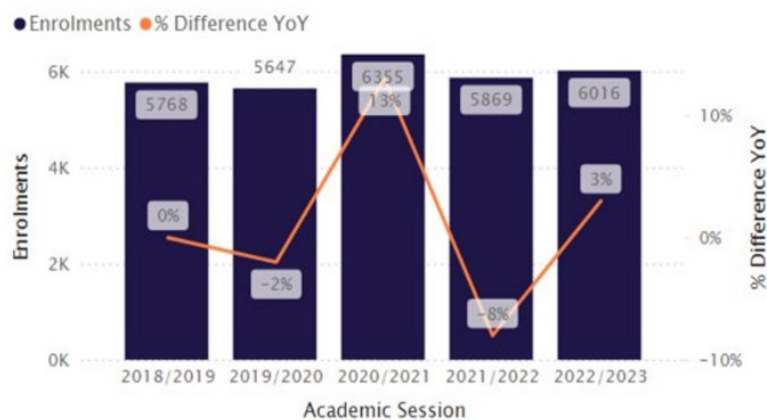


Figure 3: NCI enrolments by academic session, from 2018/19 to 2022/23

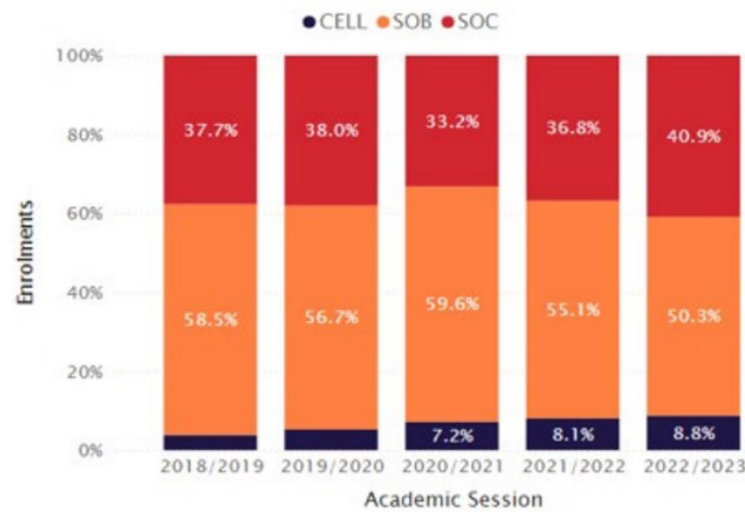


Figure 4: NCI enrolments by academic session and School/CELL

NCI IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

While our learner community is now larger and more diverse than ever, our geographical location in the North-East Inner City (NEIC) of Dublin is a daily symbol of our active and continued commitment to and investment in the local community. The NEIC is a mixed community which includes historic inner-city-working class neighborhoods, that have low levels of third level educational attainment, including small areas very close to NCI where less than 10% of the population has a third level education². The NEIC is also home to many of Ireland's Multinational Companies, concentrated in the International Financial Services Centre and Dublin's Silicon Docks, and newer residential developments often occupied by well-educated professionals. In terms of our distinct impact on the NEIC community, 46% of students admitted to our programmes through the Central Application Office (CAO) process are currently from secondary schools based on the northside of Dublin which are categorised as DEIS Schools (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), receiving additional government funding to address issues arising from socio-economic disadvantage.

Our central presence in this vibrant community forms a key part of our institutional DNA; informs our core values and continues to inspire us to expand opportunities for individuals to achieve academic excellence that is grounded in social justice and sustainability and lifelong career opportunity. The hugely important work of our [Early Learning Initiative](#) (ELI) is a central plank of NCI's access mission, through a world-leading, community-focussed early-years education and outreach programme and a growing Restorative Justice programme in the North-East Inner City of Dublin. We include a Case study (Appendix A7) on the current Restorative Justice programme.

OPENING THE DOOR BETWEEN CORPORATES AND COMMUNITY – RESTORATIVE CONVERSATIONS WITH ARTHUR COX

Appendix A7 – p 127

GROWTH OF NCI RESEARCH

It is clear just how much NCI's learner numbers, and profile have grown and evolved since the last external institutional review in 2009. These major changes in the profile of the NCI learner community are reflected in a widening and deepening of subject strengths within Business, Computing and Education which is also evidenced through the growth in volume and peer-reviewed excellence of our academic research output.

We are proud of the recently launched [NCI Research Strategy](#) for the 2023-2027 period. Over the last five years, NCI has participated in international research projects worth €64m of which NCI received €5.9m, across Business, Computing, Education and ELI. Two Cloud Competency Centre projects, DIGITAL4Business and DIGITAL4Security, accounting for €40m and €2.5m of funding respectively and are funded by the European Commission's HADEA³ programme. A total of 62 research applications (2018-2024) have been processed through the NCI Research Ethics Committee.

² This statistic is taken from Pobal HP Deprivation Indices. Small area 268109001 (Sheriff Street area) <https://data.pobal.ie/portal/apps/experiencebuilder/experience/?id=4c84af35e84b434b842c59a03aca0b82>

³ Accessible at [European Health and Digital Executive Agency - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

Further information is provided in our Institutional Profile document and under Objective 1K of this report.

EVOLUTION OF GOVERNANCE AND QUALITY ASSURANCE INFRASTRUCTURE

Since the 2009 Review, and particularly since our Re-engagement Review with QQI in 2018, our governance and management and QA infrastructure has significantly evolved to provide the necessary quality oversight and decision-making processes for our expanded learning, teaching, research and engagement activities. We provide more information and evaluation of our current structures and processes under Objective 1A and 1B of this report.

Recommendations implemented on foot of the 2009 Review included, among others, the role of Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research (hereafter referred to as the Vice-President), and the creation of the Academic Operations Committee, to support the practical, operations-based services planning and resourcing requirements of the Executive Group, liaising with Academic Council as required.

In relation to Quality Assurance policies and procedures, following the approval of our full suite of QA Policies and Procedures through QQI Re-engagement in 2019 (the current QAES system, 2019, as amended), several of our Academic Governance committee terms of reference and memberships were refreshed in 2020 and we now operate a maturing QA and Quality enhancement system which seeks to support the schools, service units and the College more widely to monitor, evaluate and enhance the quality of their programmes and support services, meeting the standards set by our Awarding Body, QQI and a wide range of professional and statutory bodies.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2027: DISTINCTIVE AMBITION AND ACCESS

Building on our foundation and heritage as an independent college that excels in access to academic excellence, and our impressive growth in recent years, our current [Strategic Plan 2022-2027](#) envisions our future position in 2027 as:

We are an independent HEA designated institution with relevant funding, awarding NCI qualifications, a collaborative thought leader in higher education and access.

We began the process of consultation and development of our new Strategic Plan in 2021. We wanted a plan that would seek to build on our many strengths and recognise our achievements, but also challenge us to raise our ambitions for the 2022 – 2027 period. One of the first tasks during the process was to assess NCI's long-standing mission to change lives through education. We asked ourselves, and others, did this mission still hold in the third decade of the 21st century? The conclusion to our deliberative process with staff, students and external stakeholders (public and private) and the Governing Body was that it did; in fact, we believe that our mission has become more, not less relevant over time.

Ireland's adults are currently among the most well-educated globally - recent analysis shows that over half of Irish adults hold a third level qualification⁴. However, we also know that stark inequalities persist, with a markedly higher proportion of students in the third-level sector continuing to come from wealthier (income) families. At NCI, our social justice values mean that we remain committed to providing tertiary level opportunities for all learners and focussed on providing pathways for those not traditionally primed to

⁴ See: [Irish population educated to record level with half having 3rd-level qualification, census finds – The Irish Times](#); OCED [Education at a Glance, 2023: Education GPS - Ireland - Overview of the education system \(EAG 2023\) \(oecd.org\)](#)

progress to third level education. We therefore provide support to five distinct cohorts of learners: (i) first generation CAO students; (ii) mature 'second-chance' students; (iii) young socio-economically challenged families served by NCI's Early learning Initiative (ELI); (iv) lifelong-learners and those seeking to upskill; and (v) international students. NCI's Governing Body had an active part to play in the design, as well as the approval, of the 2022-2027 Strategic Plan and continues to guide the College through oversight of the Executive's Strategic Implementation Plan. Further details on the self-assessment, development and monitoring processes are provided within Objective 1A.

INSTITUTIONAL POSITIONING

Under Strategic Plan Priority 6: Positioning, we confirm our institutional intention as:

Priority: We will build on our foundation of distinctive education provision in our chosen fields and will become increasingly recognised as a valued, distinctive provider.

Outcome: A recognised regionally focused, nationally impactful and sustainable higher education institute, committed to access and innovation, in function of successful and employable graduates and flexible lifelong learning.

We believe that we have already advanced our sectoral position, in line with our strategic objectives in this priority area, however we urgently require additional and sustained government investment, as well as a change in status, to maintain and enhance quality for our students and further enhance our social and economic contribution to the local and national community and beyond, as outlined below.

DESIGNATION AS AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Our stated ambition is to attain the status of Designated Institution of Higher Education, a process which is set out in relevant legislation (sections 54 – 55 of the Higher Education Authority Act, 2022). The regulations and pathway for NCI towards attainment of this status are unclear at present. As a first step, NCI became a HEA-funded institution in January 2024 (previously our public funding had been provided directly from the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)). We are hopefully of achieving HEA-designated status and a commensurate increase in our level of funding, in line with that enjoyed by HEA-designated HEIs.

NCI already has significant involvement with the HEA (and DFHERIS) through a range of initiatives and programmes to support students and their education and training needs, including the skills-oriented [Springboard](#) and [Apprenticeship](#) initiatives, the SUSI grant scheme, the [Higher Education Access Route](#) (HEAR) and [Disability Access Route to Education](#) (DARE) admission schemes for economically disadvantaged students [Student Assistance Fund](#) and the [Fund for Students with Disabilities](#) (which is not currently available to private HEIs)

NCI is a founding member of the [Dublin Regional Skills Forum](#), set up by DFHERIS and with other members from across the public Higher Education sector; we are also the proud holder of an [Athena Swan](#) Bronze Award holder, which is also funded and co-ordinated in Ireland by the HEA.

This level of engagement demonstrates how NCI seeks to ensure that its students, and staff, have equality of access to the services and supports that are available to peers in other publicly-funded HEIs.

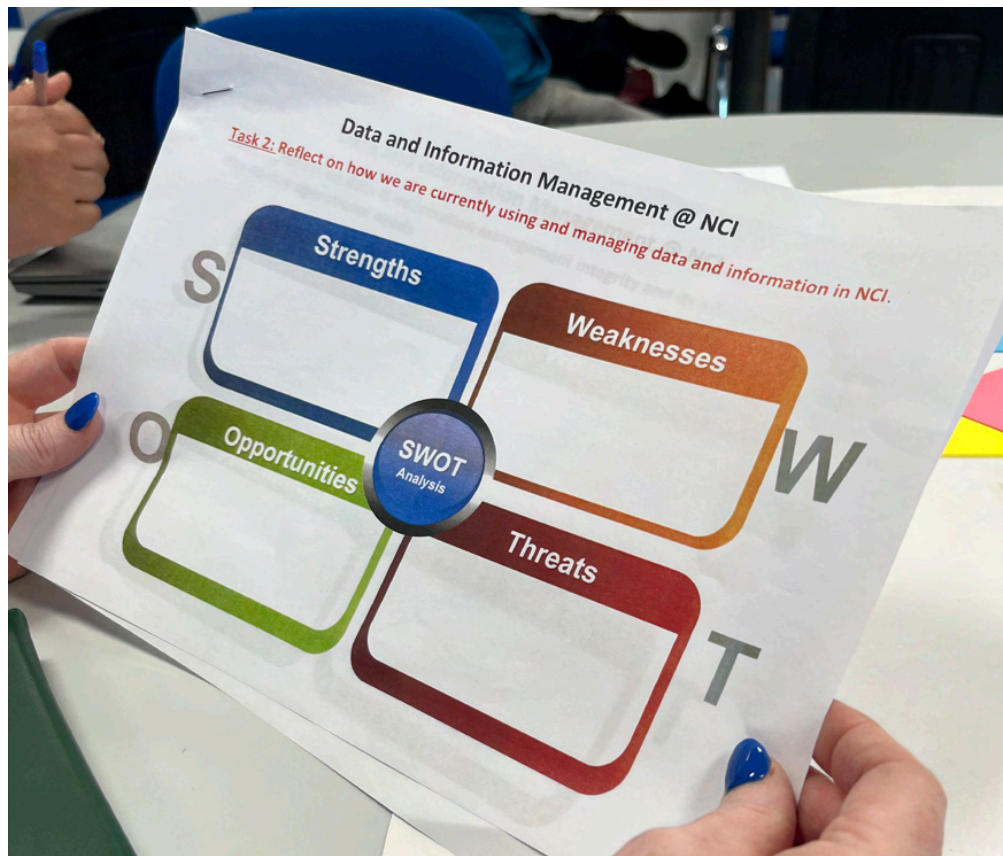
FUNDING

At present, NCI receives limited core grant funding from government and we receive “free fees” for undergraduate students on a range of our programmes, subject to a cap that is set by DFHERIS. Securing HEA-designated Institution status would arguably lead to an increase in exchequer funding for NCI programmes and students and for NCI research activity, as well as access to competitive HEA-funding schemes available for developmental, collaborative, sector-wide initiatives in areas such as the enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment, the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL); Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, among others. At present, we have little or no access to the initiative-specific funds in these domains which are available to HEA-funded universities and colleges.

DELEGATED AUTHORITY

For several years, we have been on a path towards Delegated Authority from QQI, to award our own qualifications. This process began with the successful completion of the 2018/19 QQI Re-engagement process, and the subsequent devolution of responsibilities (DR) to NCI; further details are provided under Objective 1E. While the criteria, procedures and regulations for Delegated Authority for NCI and other relevant QQI-provider colleges have not yet been published, we know that a successful CINNTE Review process is a critical step towards meeting these criteria.

We are confident that this self-evaluation report, and the CINNTE process, will demonstrate how we are ready to embrace the opportunity, and the challenge, that Delegated Authority will bring. Our track record of successful programme expansion, including innovative, collaborative national and international programmes under QQI’s validation policies and criteria, shows the maturity of our due diligence and internal governance and management processes. We know that this maturity is essential to underpin the academic awarding autonomy of Delegated Authority.



2022 – 2027 STRATEGIC PLAN SUCCESS MEASURES






	Distinctive Provider We are recognised as a distinctive provider in higher education, providing access and broadening participation through innovative teaching, student supports, diverse delivery modes and a focus on lifelong learning, with clear community and enterprise engagement.
	Employer-Focused We have strong relationships with employers who provide input to programme design, accreditation, placements, graduate employment and research partnerships.
	Community-Engaged We are recognised as a model of community engagement, and a national leader in early education interventions for both early learning and student access.
	NCI Students We have 8,500 students (full-time and part-time) who are proud to be distinctive NCI graduates.
	NCI Staff Our staff are supported and motivated to excel in their role as educators and professionals, aligned to NCI's mission and strategy and our position in the HE landscape and wider community.
	Space We meet best practice in contemporary learning environments and have appropriate space for students, community and activities in our city-centre campus.
	Learner Experience We provide academic excellence and enterprise experience through innovative teaching, learning, assessments and research from full-time and industry expert academics.
	Positioning We are an independent, HEA-designated institution with relevant funding, awarding NCI qualifications; a collaborative thought leader in higher education and access.
	Sustainability NCI and NCI students demonstrate commitment to furthering the UN Sustainable Development Goals across all activities.

Figure 5: 2022 – 2027 Strategic Plan Success Measures

CINNTE REVIEW PROCESS METHODOLOGY

The diagram below summarises the self-evaluation, management and approval structures followed over the last 24 months, leading to the creation of the Institutional Profile (IP) and this Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER).

Reporting Structure September 2022- December 2024

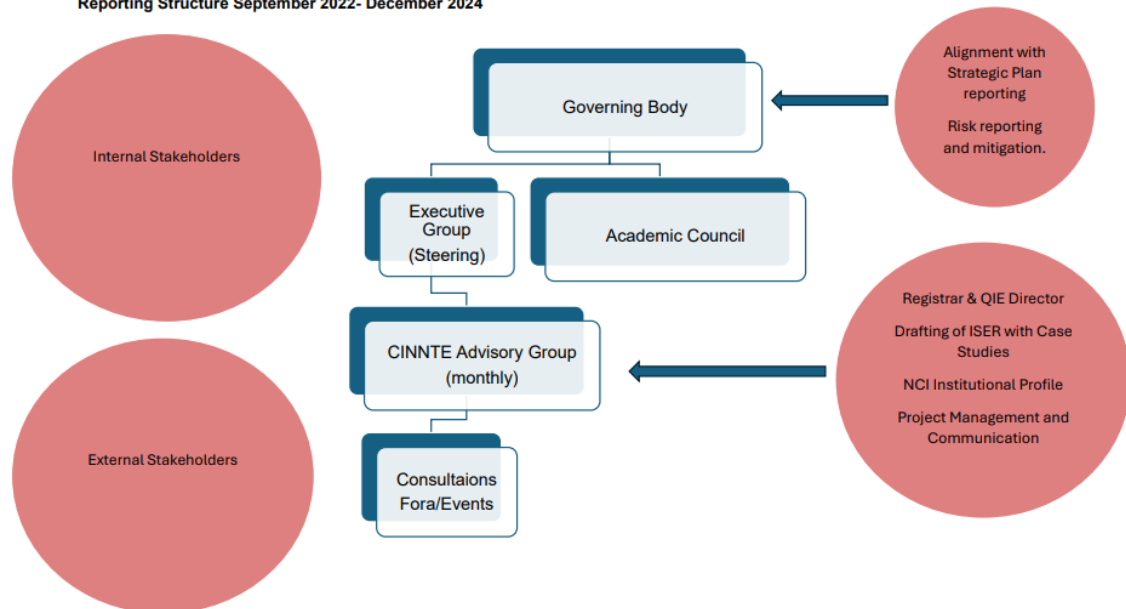


Figure 6: Reporting structure September 2022- December 2024

CONSULTATION PROCESS FOR CINNTE REVIEW

Our CINNTE consultation process began with an initial acknowledgement by the Executive Group of the College's transformation since the last external review in 2009. The EG then conducted a workshop in Summer 2022, identifying a range of themes to be triangulated with key stakeholders internally and externally throughout 2022/23 and 2023/24. A CINNTE Advisory Group was subsequently established to oversee preparations and enhance consultations. The Terms of Reference for this Group are provided in Appendix B.

In November 2023, agreement was reached with QQI on the timeline for the review of NCI. This focused the work of the CINNTE Advisory Group into a 12-month project timeline. This group then began to meet more regularly to provide guidance and support for the Registrar as Advisory Group Chair, and the QIE Director, as CINNTE Project Director. The Advisory Group has met frequently throughout 2023/24.

Membership includes representatives from several areas of the College, both academic and support. The NCISU President is also a member of the Advisory Group.

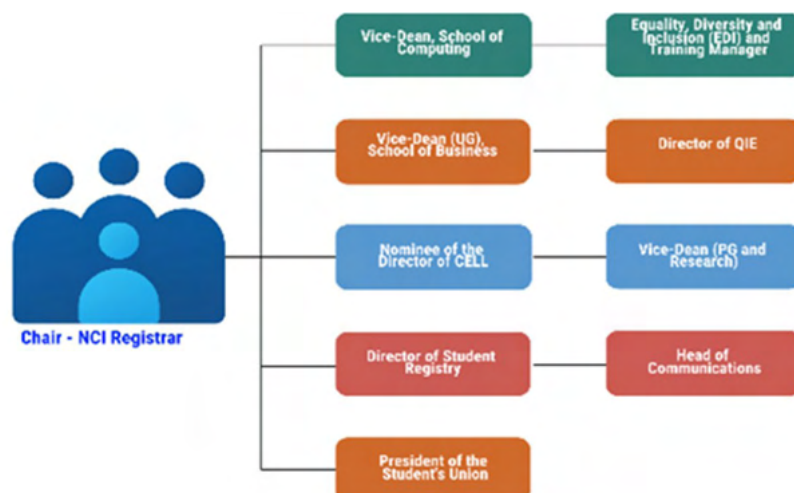


Figure 7: CINNTE Advisory Group Members

In March 2024, QIE launched an internal CINNTE SharePoint site as our core consultative portal. This provided an online, easily accessible information and consultation space for staff, which proved essential for good communication and staff engagement throughout the self-evaluation process. All survey results and findings from consultation activities were shared via the site.

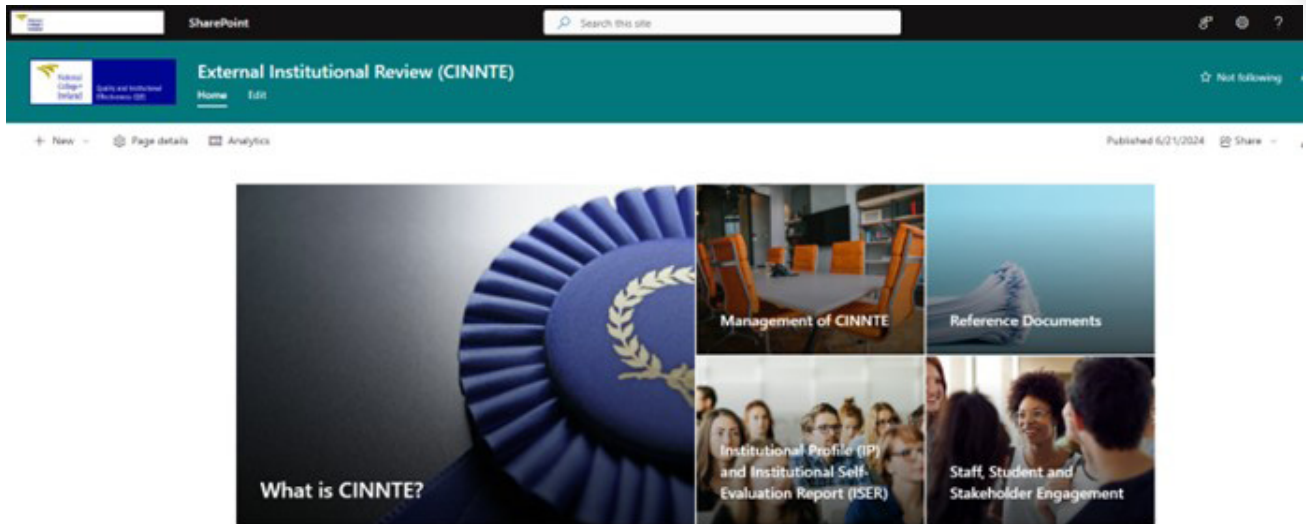


Figure 8: CINNTE All Staff SharePoint

Regular reports on progress throughout the self-evaluation process were also provided to the Executive Group, Academic Council and Governing Body. Formal updates were provided in presentations to staff townhall meetings, biannually, by the Director of QIE. Additionally, the President and the QIE Director issued emails to update staff on progress throughout 2023/24 and provided links to any published materials on the CINNTE all-staff SharePoint site.

STAFF SURVEY AND CONSULTATION WORKSHOPS

Throughout March and April 2024, we undertook a series of consultation activities to involve staff directly in our CINNTE self-evaluation process. We launched an all-staff survey on themes relevant to CINNTE, which was followed up with a "CINNTE Consultation Fortnight" in April. 22% of our staff responded to the survey and provided us with a rich dataset of views on wide-ranging themes. To follow up on the themes arising from the staff survey, members of the CINNTE Advisory Group and others chaired eight staff focus groups (see Figure 9). The total number of participants across all focus groups was 259.

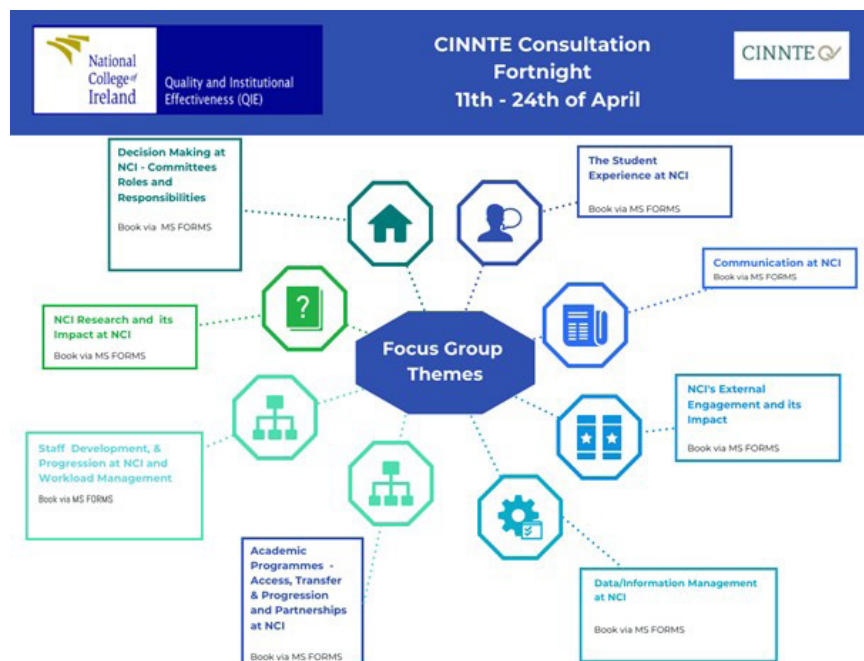


Figure 9: CINNTE Consultation Fortnight

STUDENT CONSULTATION

In addition to our Business-As-Usual student feedback mechanisms, we issued a bespoke survey to our Class Reps, in May 2024. The response rate of 22.5% was reasonable, given the time of year, and we followed up with an in-depth class representative focus group. The Teaching Enhancement Unit and Student's Union also collaborated on an additional survey, issued to students registered on online modules - 26% of whom responded.

BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY CONSULTATION

In May 2024 we issued a survey to external employers who had been a part of programme validation and revalidation panels organised by NCI. A response rate of 43.1% was secured from a range of representatives from businesses aligned with our academic programme areas, and from community and charity sector representatives.

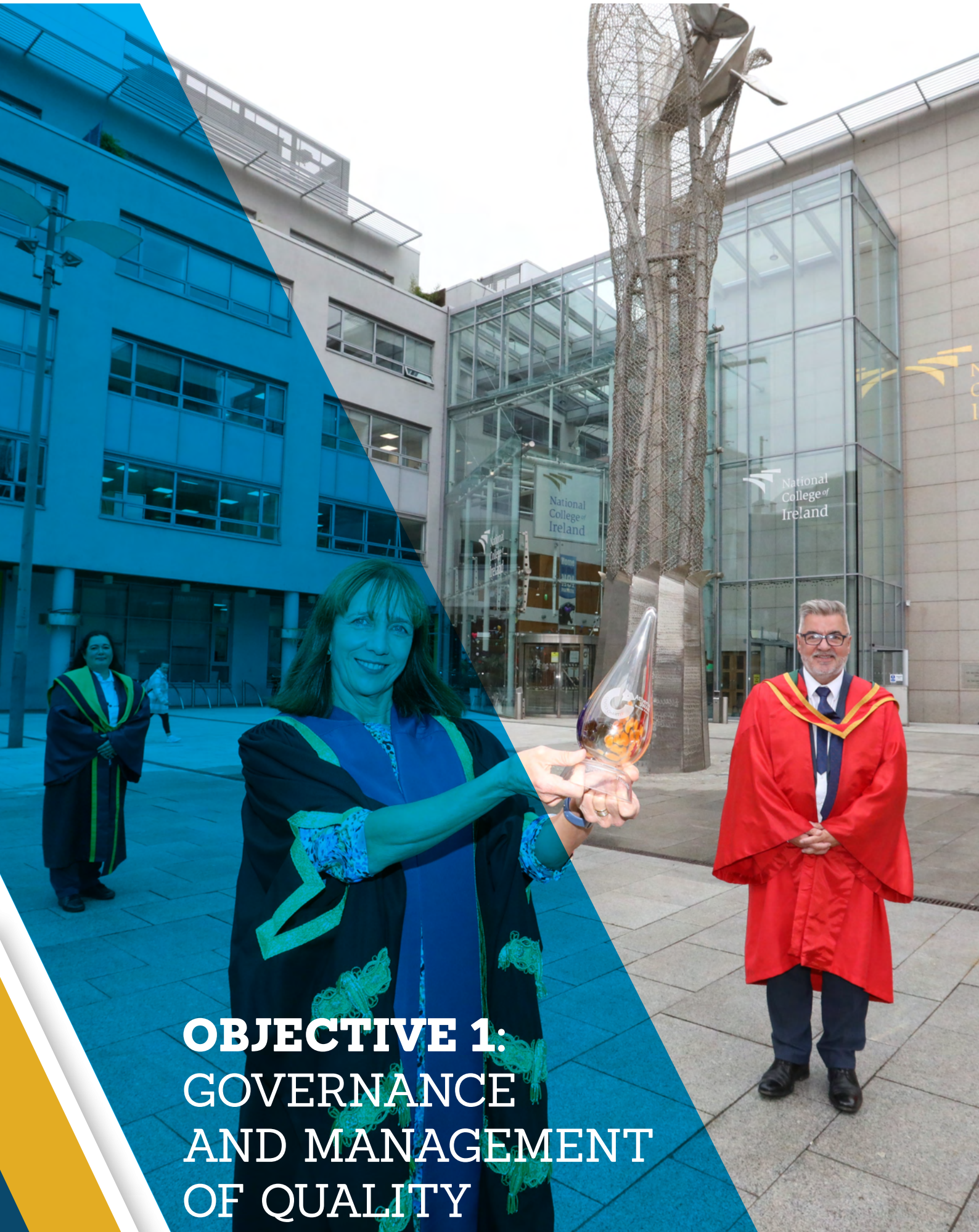
ISER APPROVAL AND PUBLICATION

The outcomes of this intensive consultation process informed the final ISER document, written by the ISER Advisory Group Chair (Registrar) and CINNTE Project Director (QIE Director) between June and August 2024. An extensive range of case studies from across NCI was also collected throughout the consultation process; these were selected to illustrate the many initiatives and developmental activities underway across Schools and professional service areas of the College. These Case Studies are published in Appendix A.

The draft ISER was shared with members of the Executive Group and ISER Advisory Group, prior to the final ISER being approved by the NCI President and submitted to QQI in August 2024. Following submission, the ISER, alongside the IP, will be shared with Governing Body, staff and key stakeholders on the CINNTE SharePoint, as well as externally on the NCI and QQI websites.

It will also be shared with all internal and external stakeholders scheduled to meet with the QQI Panel in the December 2024 Main Panel Visit.





OBJECTIVE 1: GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

OBJECTIVE 1A:

NCI'S MISSION AND STRATEGY



Figure 10: NCI's Mission and Values

NCI is distinctive in the Irish higher education landscape. Guided by our mission, vision and values, NCI has a clear focus and record of delivering access to higher education evidenced through our track record of:

- flexibility in programme delivery modes: part-time; full-time; accelerated degrees; apprenticeships; microcredentials; online and blended.
- agility and innovation in programme development with specific focus on applied learning and learning employability, and closeness to industry.
- our collaborations with further education colleges; secondary schools; Education and Training Boards (ETBs); industry and government departments.
- our unique programme of early education 'from cradle to college' through the [Early Learning Initiative](#) (ELI).
- innovations with the Pathways in Technology ([P-TECH](#)) programme, to tackle educational disadvantage.
- our physical positioning in the heartland of Dublin's North Inner City, an area of extreme economic, social and educational disadvantage which is also home to Ireland's International Financial Services Centre and Silicon Docks multinational companies.
- our maintenance of a research-informed, student-centred approach to learning and teaching that is sustainable, relevant and progressive for students, staff and the wider community.

As outlined in our Introduction, our Mission, to "to change lives through education" remains as relevant today, in 2024, as it was when NCI was established as the Catholic Worker's College in 1951.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2022 – 2027 DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Throughout 2021/22, NCI developed a new institutional Strategic Plan, building on the previous Institutional Strategy (2016-2021) and our Academic Strategy (2019-2024). NCI's mission statement was stress-tested with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders as part of our consultation process.

The consultative process followed is outlined below:

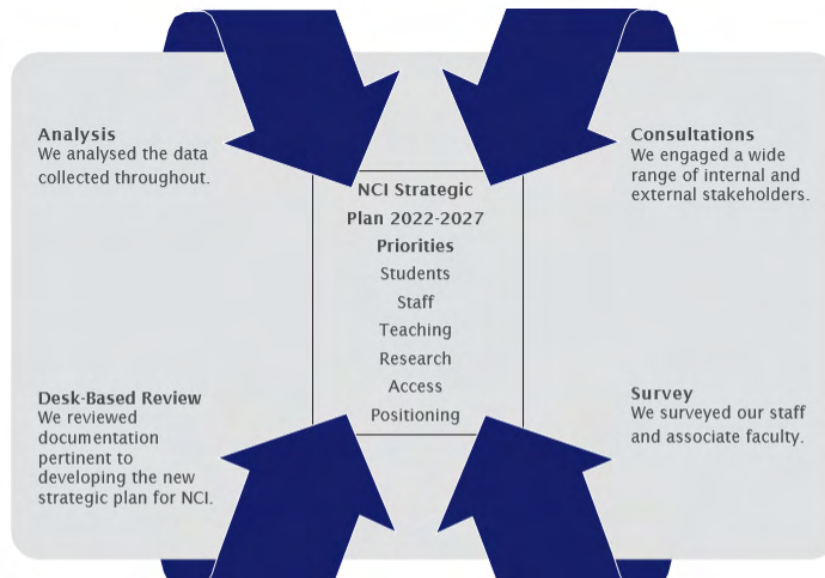


Figure 11: NCI Strategic Plan development process 2022-27

Key stakeholders, internal and external, provided valuable feedback to inform our future strategic direction based on our distinctiveness and achievements of the past, as outlined below:

- Providing access to quality education in our chosen areas is our most distinctive attribute and should remain central to all that we do.
- Our learner body has changed substantially in recent years. We should build on its diversity – ranging from part- to full-time, from domestic to international, from Central Applications Office students to in-work students, to support our distinctive mission.
- Our approach to staffing, ranging from full time and associate faculty from regional employers to community representatives in the ELI, is strongly rooted in the communities we serve. This is a distinctive feature of NCI and should be fostered.
- Our excellence and innovation in design, delivery, supports and assessment of programmes underpins our ability to offer unique access to education. Our approach to teaching and learning (at a pace and in a way that suits the learner) is a distinguishing feature of NCI that we should build upon.
- We should build our research and innovation capacity in a manner that is tightly coupled to our distinctive mission.
- We occupy a distinctive position within the Irish higher education landscape. We should focus on nurturing and developing that distinctive position.

Based on the above, alongside the outcomes of workshops held with the Executive, Academic Council and Governing Body, six strategic priorities emerged for 2022-2027:

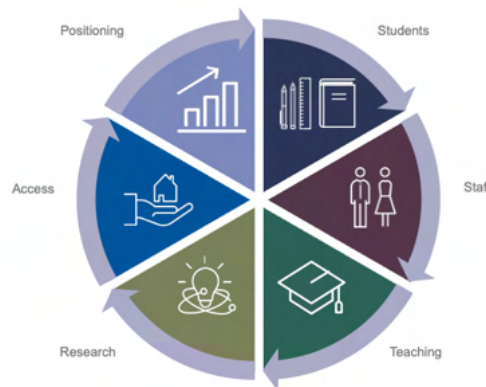


Figure 12: Six Strategic Priorities for 2022-2027

Furthermore, sustainability and alignment with the UN Sustainability Development Goals (UNSDGs) was agreed to be a cross-cutting theme across each of the six priority areas. A Sustainability Steering Group (SSG), chaired by the Vice President, was subsequently established to develop an overarching sustainability strategy, due to be approved in Q4 2024.

The 2022-2027 Strategic Plan was approved by the Governing Body in June 2022 and published thereafter. It was launched at an all-staff meeting led by the President in July 2022 and progress reports are shared with staff biannually.

IMPLEMENTATION: EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNING BODY TRACKING

Embedded within the published Strategic Plan, is a commitment to establish appropriate structures to provide accountability, flexibility and ongoing risk management throughout the strategy lifetime and to oversee its implementation. This commitment was realized through the establishment of an Executive Group Strategic Implementation Plan. This plan includes agreed priorities for Executive Group members to be implemented across each calendar year. Two strategic Implementation Plans have been considered and approved by the Governing Body to date. Progress against Strategic Plan priorities is tracked through MS Planner and monitored at each Executive Group (EG), Senior Management Team (SMT) and Governing Body (GB) meeting. A snapshot of the live plan from July 2024 is presented below. Many of the 'not started' or 'late' actions are aligned to external timelines of work – such as QQI's Trusted Ireland/IEM or Delegated Authority (DA) applications – or linked to the new NCI Sustainability Strategy.

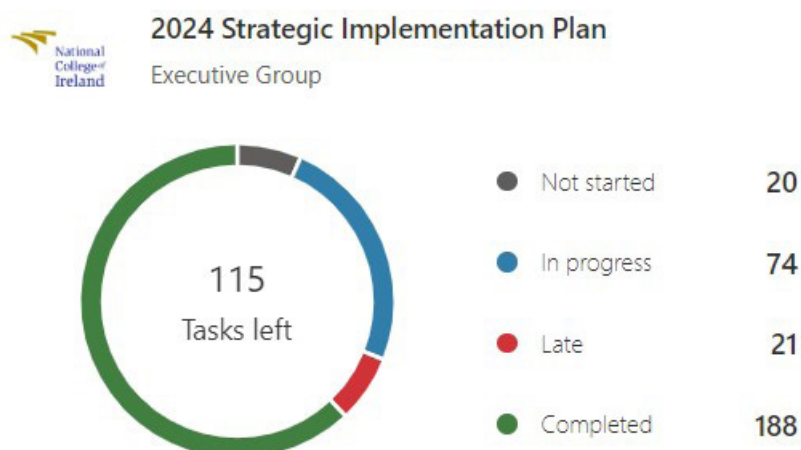


Figure 13: 2024 Strategic Implementation plan, "Snapshot" as at July 2024

An annual review of Strategic Plan achievements is undertaken by Governing Body. This is scheduled to be completed each December, to enable the Executive, IT, staff development and financial planning priorities to be agreed upon as part of the Q1 annual budgeting process.

In December 2023, the Governing Body held its first Strategic Plan Workshop to assess the progress made by the Executive throughout 2023. Of the 173 actions identified for completion in 2023, 82% of actions were completed (142) and 18% (31) remained in progress. Governing Body requested that given the ever-evolving complexities of the external environment, a horizon scanning exercise should be undertaken to inform NCIs continued strategic, financial and operational planning and prioritisation. This work was completed in Q2 2024 and resulted in a report to Governing Body in May 2024. The outcomes were also shared with members of the Executive and Management Groups.

As outlined in the published strategy, a mid-cycle assessment will be completed by Governing Body in 2025 to ensure the strategic priorities are aligned with institutional and stakeholder needs and expectations. The 2024 Horizon Scanning exercise will inform this Governing Body assessment.

NCI/NCISU PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Building on the principles of the National Student Engagement Programme (NsTEP), in June 2022 the College strengthened its commitment to the learner voice and to being learner-centred, through the launch of a new Partnership Agreement with the NCI Students' Union (NCISU). NCI was delighted to be one of the first HEIs in Ireland to publish a formal Partnership Agreement, which demonstrates our commitment to both our learners and our learner leaders.

The Partnership Agreement enables us to:

- Place the needs of our learners at the heart of everything we do.
- Empower and engage learners to inform our decision-making processes.
- Ensure learners can formally and informally express their individual and collective experiences and see a timely and proportionate response.
- Ensure we have transparent and appropriate procedures for dealing with learner complaints and appeals.
- Promote a culture of integrity, equality, diversity, inclusivity, and mutual respect between staff and learners, including within the learner-teacher relationship.

By entering into this Partnership Agreement, the College and NCISU confirmed a shared commitment to work together in deliverance of NCI's Mission. We agreed to focus our combined energies on identifying and responding to the individual, collective and lifelong learning needs of our students. We committed to working together to ensure our learners become independent, work-ready and community-focused lifelong learners by fostering, promoting, and respecting equality, diversity and inclusion and mutual respect across our staff and learners.

In advance of and following the signing of the Partnership Agreement, NCI and NCISU leaders have worked closely together on a range of welfare and academic integrity initiatives, including in areas such as gender identity; consent training; a cross-college process for confidential reporting of bullying and/or harassment; and initiatives around academic integrity. NCI and NCISU also co-designed our refreshed Student Complaints procedures. Case study A1 provides reflections on the Partnership Agreement from the current NCISU President.

**REFLECTION ON NCI-NCISU
PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**

Appendix A1 – p 114

NCISU leaders play a key role in our governance structures, being represented on our Governing Body and Academic Council. The NCISU President as an ex-officio Governing Body member, was also active in the development and approval of our Strategic Plan. Representatives from both Executive Teams meet biannually to review the effectiveness and implementation of our partnership working commitments. The quality of NCISU was recognised nationally at the USI 2024 Student Achievement Awards (SAAI) with NCISU winning the Small Students' Union of the Year award.

EVALUATION

The evidence and processes cited above give us confidence that our institutional mission and strategic priorities are in line with internal and external stakeholder needs. The learner voice and quality of the learner experience remains central to NCIs evolving academic, operational and strategic planning priorities. Our Partnership Agreement with NCISU helps us to ensure that the needs, views and experiences of our students are at the core of our work operationally, academically and strategically. Our mission commitment to change lives through education is referenced by governors, staff and our NCISU partners as a driving force for membership of the NCI community. It is what makes us distinct. It is what makes us proud.

Articulating NCI's distinctiveness in the Irish HE sector was an underpinning principle of the 2022-2027 Strategic Planning process. As a small, not-for-profit institution, committed to accessibility, but also an institution that has substantially grown over the past decade, the Strategic Plan was designed to ensure we maximised the impact of our knowledge, expertise, time and resources. While there is overwhelming high-level support for the priorities, objectives and outcomes identified in the Strategic Plan, the main challenges facing the Executive Group in terms of implementation are:

- Ongoing workload demands and timeline pressures of short-term/business as usual (BAU) activities limits the time available to work on the longer-term strategic goals.
- Insufficient quantifiable KPIs in some areas hinders our ability to track progress towards the achievement of our longer-term strategic goals.
- The need for greater ownership and engagement of staff with the strategic priorities.

The strategic planning process recognises that the Implementation plan needs to be regularly reviewed and adjusted to ensure ongoing relevance and currency. Further work is required to maintain a dynamic, empowering and unifying process that does not compete with the time and resources needed for delivery of core business needs and services to our students. On a practical level, the Executive are also seeking to maximise the benefits of utilising MS Planner as the Strategic Plan tracking and reporting tool.

In addition to the President providing Strategic Plan progress reports at biannual all-staff events, the NCI President's Awards were explicitly redesigned in 2022 to align with and celebrate the outstanding contributions of our staff to the achievement of our institutional mission and Strategic Plan priorities. The awards celebrate Excellence in Teaching; Research, Access and Engagement and Impact, and the annual competitive process has helped to enhance staff connection with our strategic priorities. Feedback from staff and Executive Group members highlights that further work is required to enable staff to see how their work directly contributes to the achievement of our strategic priorities and how strategy impacts positively on the overall NCI experience and mission.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

We believe that the 2022-27 Strategic Plan provides a robust mechanism for us to unify as a community to deliver our Mission, Vision and Values. It has the capacity to enhance our efficiency, effectiveness and impact, while reinforcing evidence of our distinctive place within the tertiary landscape in Ireland. Our approach is to identify priority actions annually and monitor progress regularly at Executive level; coupled with a scheduled mid-cycle review in 2025, we believe this approach ensures that our work and our priorities remain flexible and responsive to evolving stakeholder needs.

We will continue to improve the quality and impact of our Mission and Strategy by:

- Agreeing additional KPIs, with quantifiable metrics where appropriate, for 2025-2027 to enable us to achieve our stated Strategic Plan goals.
- Launching our Sustainability Strategy.
- Providing robust qualitative and quantitative data to inform the Governing Body's mid-cycle review of our Strategic Plan in 2025.
- Documenting and communicating individual, team and institutional level achievements and contributions towards Strategic Plan goals internally and externally.

OBJECTIVE 1B:

STRUCTURES AND TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

GOVERNING BODY

As outlined in NCI's Memorandum and Articles of Association, and Chapter 2 of NCI's Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES), the Governing Body constitutes the Board of Directors at NCI and is responsible for the overall direction of the College and its compliance with company law. The Governing Body approves and monitors the College's strategic direction and policy, its financial planning, and compliance with best practice in all College activities.

It consists of members drawn from the following nominating bodies:

- NCI President (ex officio)
- IBEC - 2 nominees
- ICTU - 2 nominees
- The Jesuit Community - 2 nominees
- The Staff of the College - 2 elected staff members
- The Students Union of the College (NCISU) - 1 elected member (ex officio)
- Independent Directors– up to 5 nominees – including one Senior Independent Director
- The Chairperson - elected by Governing Body members.

The Governing Body may establish committees it deems appropriate for the effective performance of its duties, but always maintains the following committees:

- The Finance, Audit and Organisation Committee
- The Remuneration Committee
- The Nominations Committee
- The Risk Committee

The Governing Body oversees the management of and controls the affairs of the College and all property of the College, and performs the functions conferred on the College by its Memorandum and Articles. The Governing Body meets at least four times per year, retains full and effective control over the College and monitors the Executive management and performance.

The Governing Body is also responsible for:

- Approval of statements from external auditors, annual budgets and Strategic Plans.
- Approval of annual reports and accounts submitted to the Companies Office.
- Board Appointments and removals.
- Approval of terms of reference and appointments to Governing Body Committees.
- Approval of Bank facilities, Mandates and Guarantees.
- Appointment of the President of the College.
- Receipt and approval of quarterly President reports to the Governing Body and Annual Quality Reports from Academic Council.
- Approval of terms of major contracts.
- Significant acquisitions, disposals and retirement of assets of the College.
- Major investments and capital projects, delegated authority levels.
- Treasury policy and risk management policies.
- Review of the system of internal controls.

All members of the Governing Body are supported in their work by the Company Secretary who is responsible for ensuring that procedures are followed, and that applicable rules and regulations are complied with. The Code of Conduct for members of the Governing Body, published within the Governors Guide, includes a Disclosure of Interests and self-evaluation process. The members of the Governing Body review and adopt the annual financial report from the Finance, Audit and Organisation Committee on the effectiveness of the College's internal controls, including financial, operational and compliance controls. They also accept regular reports from the Risk Committee, and formally approve the NCI Risk Register.

All new Governing Body members receive briefings and guidance through the Governors Guide, on the conduct, roles and responsibilities of Governing Body and the NCI governance and management structures from the Company Secretary. They also meet with Senior Management Team members as part of their induction. In line with the Code of Conduct, the Governing Body participates in a self-evaluation process of its effectiveness every two years. The last exercise was completed in February 2022, and the next process has been scheduled to be completed later this year. At the Governing Body meeting in December 2023, several changes to the Governors' Guide were proposed and agreed as an outcome of the 2022 process. While NCI does not currently fall within the remit of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, in March 2024, Governors received a information on its requirements and noted that NCI is already in compliance with many aspects. Governors and the Company Secretary are responsible for ensuring their continued alignment with identified best practice.

RISK MANAGEMENT

As outlined in Chapter 2 of the QAES, oversight of institutional risks rests with the Governing Body and its Risk Sub-Committee. The NCI Risk Register is prepared annually by the Executive and is formally approved by the Risk Committee and Governing Body, with progress monitored and reported at each Governing Body meeting by the Risk Committee Chair. The Finance Sub-Committee provides an additional layer of oversight to financial risks, most recently, the financial risks associated with the purchasing of the second campus building – Spencer Dock - in 2022/23.

Throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic, an additional Academic Risk Register was created and maintained to oversee the quality of our programmes and assessment practices, as well as the fully online learner experience throughout the pandemic. The Academic Risk Register was managed by the Executive and monitored by the Risk Committee and Governing Body.

In 2022, the NCI Risk Register was redesigned to explicitly align institutional risks to the six pillars of the Strategic Plan. Each risk includes or impacts one or more of the following risk areas:

- Strategic
- Reputational
- Operational
- Financial
- Compliance
- Health & Safety (including Child Protection)

In Q2 2024, the Risk Committee and Finance Committee prepared and approved a new Risk Appetite Statement and Risk Appetite Evaluation Map (below), that was subsequently approved by the Governing Body in May 2024 and was incorporated into NCI's Risk Management Policy.

Risk Appetite Evaluation Map					
Risk grade / score:		Low 1-9	Medium 10-19	High 20-29	Critical 30-36
Risk Area	Strategic	Manageable			
	Reputational	Manageable			
	Financial	Manageable			
	Compliance	Manageable			
	Health & Safety				
	Operational	Manageable			

Figure 14: Risk Appetite Evaluation Map

ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The Governing Body is ultimately responsible for the governance and management of quality across the institution. It delegates this responsibility to its own sub-committees, as well as to the Academic Council, Senior Management Team (SMT) and Executive Group (EG), all of which are chaired by the President of the College.

The Terms of Reference and Membership for each of the Governance and Management Committees is provided in the CINNTE Repository. Figure 16 shows the governance and management structure, with academic governance committees in yellow and executive/management committees in blue.

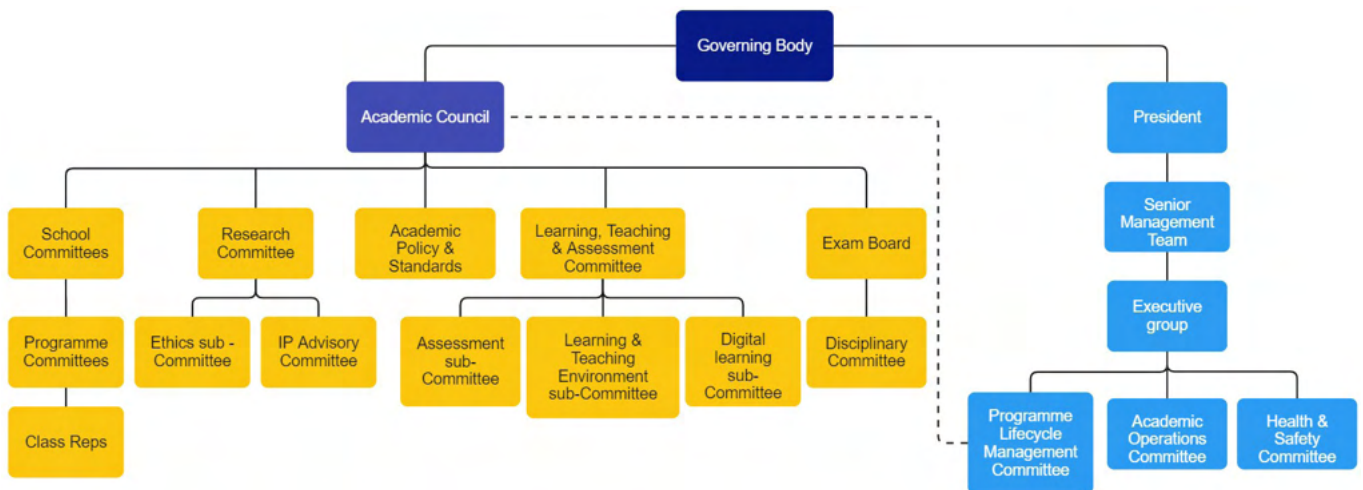


Figure 15: Academic Governance and Management Structure

The marriage of academic governance and executive management is the pivotal relationship that underpins and supports the day-to-day delivery of quality across all of our activities. Where academic governance requires evidence of the quality of our validated programmes and the learner experience; executive management prioritises delivery, strategy, the allocation of resources and the management of risk. The President, supported by the Senior Management Team and Executive Group, ensures that the system of governance and management works efficiently and effectively, safeguarding the interests, needs and experiences of all internal and external stakeholders. Reports on academic governance and management from the President, Vice President, and Registrar are discussed at every Governing Body meeting providing governors with transparency for quality and decision-making across our management and governance structures.

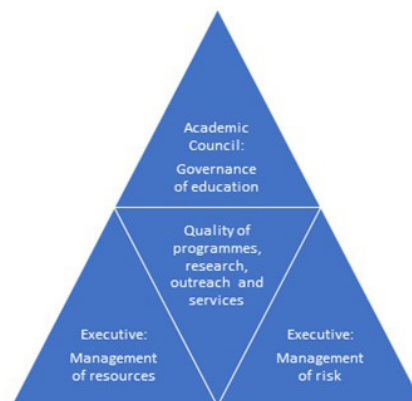


Figure 16: How governance and management structures enable Quality across NCI activities

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

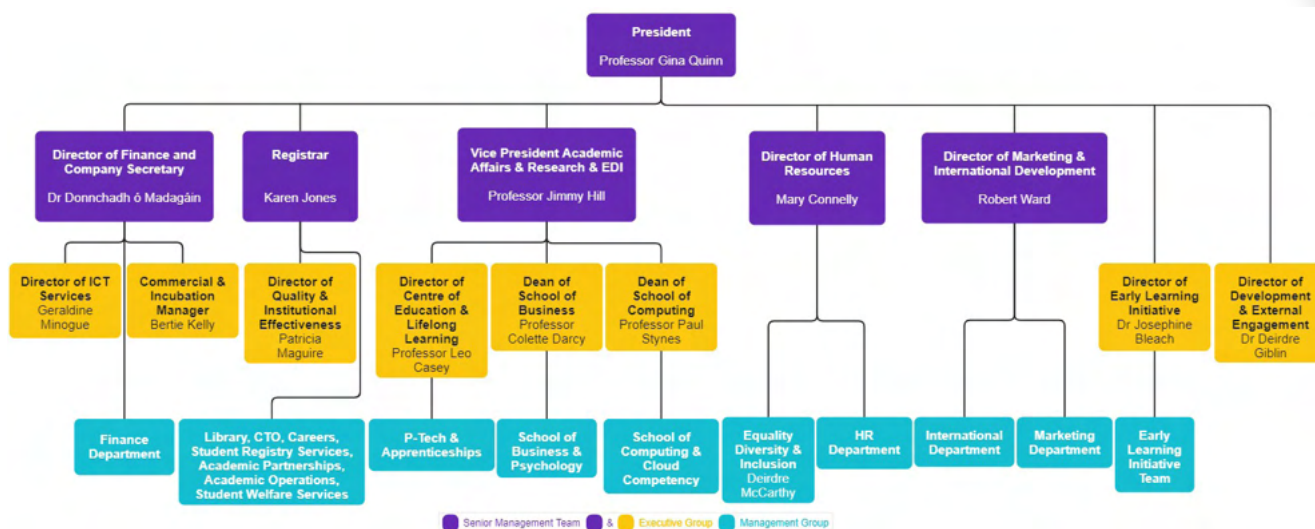


Figure 17: NCI Organisational Management structure

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)

As the most senior executive committee of the College, the Senior Management Team (SMT) is responsible for supporting the President in the exercise of their responsibilities as outlined in the NCI Memorandum and Articles of Association. Although each member of the SMT has an overall defined area of responsibility, the SMT assumes a shared responsibility for all areas of College business and assists the President in reporting to the Governing Body.

The SMT meets monthly, and is chaired by the President (or person delegated by the President if required) and is responsible for:

- The development, implementation and impact of NCI's Strategic Plans and policies.
- The effective management of the College's financial, physical, and human resources.
- Initiating actions to safeguard the reputation and distinctiveness of the College.
- Committing the College to major initiatives where these fit with College strategy.
- Reviewing business critical and high-level risk and initiating actions to mitigate all risks highlighted in the NCI Risk Register.
- Corporate governance and ensuring NCI's compliance with regulatory, statutory, and legal requirements.
- Managing and monitoring the financial allocation model and budgetary rules of the College.
- Capital projects decision-making (construction, acquisition, refurbishment, and leasing of properties) in line with policies on capital approval levels.
- Ensure College programmes and activities reflect environmental and sustainable objectives aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- Approving Academic Partnerships; Memorandums of Understanding and Memorandums of Agreement between NCI and partner institutions at national, European, or international level.
- Ensure that the College's policies, procedures, and activities reflect those of an equal, diverse, and inclusive organisation.
- Coordinating the College response to emergencies and crises to ensure business continuity.

- Agreeing the College's approach and safeguards to secure and manage data.
- Representation of the College in external activities.
- Reporting to Governing Body as required.

EXECUTIVE GROUP (EG)

The Executive Group (EG) comprises of Executive Directors, and Senior Management Team (SMT) members, that collectively hold responsibility for developing and implementing the vision and strategy of the College. The EG meets monthly. It is accountable to the President for the management and leadership of the College academically, operationally, and strategically.

The EG is chaired by the President (or person delegated by the President if required) and is responsible for:

- Collectively managing and delivering the overall strategic direction of the College, taking account of the resources required and availability of same
- Understanding the academic environment and the broader College environment, and implications for programme delivery and learner success.
- Providing a critical link between Academic Council and the work of the Executive Group.
- The management and allocation of resources across all College activities and programmes.
- Providing oversight of Teams across the College and reporting back to Teams on relevant matters relating to College operations and business.
- Providing guidance and leadership on learner-facing initiatives, referring matters to the National College of Ireland Students Union (NCISU) as appropriate.
- The effective risk management of the College within each area of responsibility and maintenance of an accurate Risk Register for Risk Committee of Governing Body.
- Approving institution-wide policies to comply with College, and external statutory or regulatory requirements, with recommendations to Academic Council and Governing Body.
- Implementing actions to drive equality, diversity, and inclusion initiatives.
- Considering and approving recommendations from the Programme Lifecycle Management Executive Sub-Group on College programme portfolio
- Ensuring operational supports for learner success, teaching and research excellence are optimally configured and resourced.
- Ensuring sustainability is represented in all aspects of College business and across our portfolio of programmes
- Protecting the reputation of the College
- Representing the College in external activities.

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

In December 2019, Academic Council approved a refresh of the NCI academic governance structure as a key action within our QQI Re-engagement Action Plan. A self-assessment review conducted by Academic Council in January 2020 instigated this process, resulting in a refreshed Academic Council Terms of Reference and Membership (approved by Governing Body in May 2020). The refresh provided an opportunity to clarify the role and responsibilities of Academic Council and the connectivity with and expectations of its sub-committees, to increase the impact and effectiveness of evidence-based decision making within NCI. The refresh also enabled us to expand the representation of academic and non-academic staff on Academic Council.

The Terms of Reference and Membership for two Academic Council Sub-Committees – the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee (LTA), and the Research Committee (RC) were also approved in 2020. Both are working efficiently and effectively. The LTA has established three active Sub-Committees who in the past two years have led on a range of important initiatives as well as developments in teaching, learning and assessment redesign required throughout and following the pandemic. The Digital Learning Sub-

Committee led on the development of NCIs guidelines for online and blended delivery in line with QQI guidelines, enabling NCI to participate in the pilot of QQI's fully online delivery in 2023. The Assessment Sub-Committee has played an important role in the refresh of NCIs academic integrity and disciplinary policy and procedures, approved at the June 2024 Academic Council meeting for implementation in the 2024/25. Similarly, the Research Committee led the development of the NCI Research Strategy, approved by the Governing Body in October 2023, and hosts our annual research day.

The Academic Policy and Standards Committee (APSC) and the Academic Operations Committee have not met in the last academic year. The workloads have been undertaken through other existing NCI structures, including through the new Programme Lifecycle Management Executive Sub-Group (PLM ESG), established in 2021 and the new Academic Operations Team, established in 2022. The Academic Operations Committee is scheduled to be redesigned and relaunched by the Vice-President and Registrar in advance of the 2024/25 academic year. The work of the APSC is likely to continue through the PLM ESG to enhance efficiency and minimise duplication across our committee structure.

Consultations with Executive Group members, staff and faculty as part of this Institutional Review have reinforced the need for greater clarity and communications in the work and decisions made across the entire NCI committee structure. This has been agreed by the Senior Management Team and Executive Group, who approved a refresh of their own Terms of Reference in June 2024 to clarify the differences between the two leadership teams. Both refreshed Terms of Reference will be shared with staff and published on the NCI SharePoint and website to enhance transparency, efficiency and effectiveness.

PROGRAMME QUALITY

On a day-to-day basis, the authority of the Academic Council to manage the quality of our academic portfolio, is the responsibility of the Vice President, supported by the Deans of the Schools and the Director of the Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning (CELL). Vice-Deans and Programme Directors, underpin the work of our academic leadership team who exercise this authority and responsibility through school committees, and in turn, programme committees.

The role of the programme committee, and the programme director as the chair, is fundamental to the governance and management of programme and module quality at NCI. The purpose of the programme committee, as presented in Chapter 2 of the NCI QAES, as follows:

- A programme committee is established for each programme offered by NCI, and it is responsible, in conjunction with the relevant Dean of School, for developing and assisting in the operation of the programme.
- The programme committee ensures the quality delivery of the academic programme and that learners are well informed that their progress is being monitored, a reasonable balance of work is offered to the learner, and that assessments are appropriate, consistent and fair. The committee ensures the relevance and quality of the programme by a process of periodic evaluation.

The importance of our academic leadership team, and the school and programme committee infrastructure are documented within our QQI programme review, validation and revalidation processes. The programme director plays a particularly important role in quality assurance and enhancement as NCI's academic programmes, leading to QQI awards on the NFQ, are subject to cyclical in-depth programme-level reviews five years after initial validation or revalidation. This process requires significant leadership from programme directors, guided by the School/CELL academic leadership teams and supported by the Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (QIE) Office.

QUALITY AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS (QIE) AT NCI

The QIE Office coordinates all quality assurance, improvement and monitoring processes within NCI. Our qualifications are validated and awarded by QQI and we align our quality processes with QQI policy and guidelines, which are in turn aligned with the European Standards & Guidelines for Quality in Higher Education. Several of NCI's qualifications are also accredited by Professional and Statutory Bodies active in our subject areas. Further details of which are provided in our Annual Quality Reports and in Objective 1J of this report.

Over the past 5 years, NCI has engaged with the following institutional level processes with QQI to be able to develop and deliver QQI validated programmes:



Figure 18: Programme Quality Assurance

The QIE Office is responsible for promoting continuous quality improvement and effectiveness across NCI at programme, module and institutional levels through policies, procedures, and quality-related processes and innovations. As outlined in our Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES), quality is the responsibility of all staff in NCI. The QIE Team is committed to empowering staff and students to maximise their efficiency and effectiveness at NCI through a culture of continuous quality improvement. Institutional Effectiveness at NCI is a commitment to transparency, consistency and connectivity in decision-making.

EVALUATION

Following the Q1 2024 transfer of our Core Grant and Free Fees from the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) to the Higher Education Authority (HEA), it is anticipated that NCI's governance and reporting structures will need to be reviewed in 2024/25. It remains to be seen what performance audits, reporting requirements or governance changes will be imposed by the HEA, but we remain confident that our knowledge and experience benchmarked against sectoral good practices, will enable us to transition effectively. We will however need to plan financially and operationally for the resource impacts if we are required to increase capacity and capability for data analysis and institutional performance reporting once the quantum of the new requirements is known.

To further enhance the effectiveness of decision making by Governors and Executive leaders, we have already invested in a Management Information System (MIS) Project Team, comprised of experts in three teams across the institution. But this work has been slow due to competing workload pressures alongside the need for these key experts to also support us in other business areas during and following the pandemic. This MIS Project Team will continue to advance its work throughout and beyond 2024/25.

Our Risk Register, Risk Management Policy and Risk Appetite Statement have been recently refreshed and are closely monitored by the Executive Group, our Governing Body and its Risk and Finance Committees. We have experience in adapting our risk management approach in line with internal and external environments, as demonstrated by the creation of an Academic Risk Register throughout the pandemic, and the alignment of the NCI Risk Register to the Strategic Plan in 2022/23. Alignment of the NCI Risk

Register to the annual budgeting process is recognised as important to ensure resources are allocated to achieve short and longer-term institutional level priorities.

Executive members have highlighted a need for greater clarity and consistency on how risks captured and mitigated at a business unit/school level, are escalated or de-escalated from the Institutional Risk Register once the register is formally approved by Governing Body. There is a need for the Risk Register to be more dynamic and responsive to the pressures of the operating environment and evolving internal and external needs. The refreshed Terms of Reference for SMT and EG, approved in June and July 2024 respectively, highlight the roles and responsibilities for risk management between the two leadership groups. Further clarity on how individual risks are managed between operational managers, EG and SMT members would enhance our ability to manage and mitigate risks across the leadership and management portfolio as they impact on institutional priorities, reputation and effectiveness.

The theme of governance and management of quality was to the fore during the self-assessment and SWOT analysis processes conducted by staff and Executive Group members throughout this review process. This is understandable given its centrality to the effectiveness of how we work as an institution, and also how we function as a community of staff and students.

The Executive Group workshopped this theme in Q3 2022, to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to enhance how our governance and management structures work. Emphasis was placed in clarifying the terms of reference, membership as well as communications channels between governance and management forums. Staff were then asked, as part of the CINNTE all-staff survey in March 2024 and focus-groups in April 2024, to rate their levels of familiarity with NCI governance and management committees. The average familiarity scores returned for key committees including the Governing Body, the Academic Council and the Executive Group were at 2.8 out of a (maximum) of 5. This confirmed the views of the Executive Group workshop that there is a need for greater transparency and communication of roles and responsibilities across the management and governance structure.

Taking the outcomes from Executive Group and wider staff consultations together, we have identified three overarching themes:

(i) Improve Transparency

While feedback tells us that the relatively small size of the College staff community lends itself to a high level of awareness and familiarity with decision-making committees, the evidence shows that this does not necessarily equate to a high level of understanding of the functions of our committees and how decisions are made and communicated, among our staff. It has become clear that some decision-making processes are not fully transparent, and that there is some ambiguity about the roles and responsibilities of committees and decision-making groups across NCI. The refresh of the EG and SMT Terms of Reference in 2024 was a positive step in clarifying the distinctions between the two leadership teams, but further work is required to increase awareness. A Leadership Development Project has been initiated to help further strengthen the effectiveness, transparency and impact of decision making by the EG and SMT from 2024/25 onwards.

Staff feedback during our CINNTE review also suggested some simple solutions to information-provision, such as a regularly maintained central and easily accessible database of committee memberships and terms of reference. This would promote greater staff trust, and perhaps also enhance staff confidence and participation in decision-making processes. Work on this project is now underway.

(ii) Clarify Information Flows

Feedback confirmed staff members were unclear of the information flows up and down the management and governance structures. A range of structures currently operate that enable information to flow up from programme and school committees into

Academic Council as well as Governing Body through standing reports from the Deans and Director of CELL. Information also flows down from Governing Body through EG meetings, where Executive members are tasked with communicating information to their teams. In addition, Management Group Meetings and All-Staff meetings and monthly communications from the President are utilised as information sharing mechanism. It would be beneficial if these flows were documented, as well as reviewed to ensure the communications flows up and down in a timelier manner. The Registrar has agreed to document this information flow and make it accessible to staff in advance of the new academic year.

(iii) Simplify the Structure

As an agile institution, that needs to be efficient, effective and responsive in its decision making in line with internal and external evolving stakeholder needs, it is important that decisions across the institution are made in a timely and efficient manner. As part of our CINNTE review process, NCI's Director of Quality and Institutional Effectiveness is currently updating Chapter 2 of the QA Handbook with respect to the Terms of Reference and Membership for each of the College Academic Governance and Management Committees. The review process will consider streamlining or simplifying structures where appropriate. This review will conclude in Q2 2025 to enable the refresh to reflect the feedback and outcomes of this CINNTE panel and process.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Overall, we believe our governance and management structures are robust and regularly benchmarked against national best practice, as affirmed in the 2019 QQI Re-engagement process. We recognise as an Executive the importance of increasing transparency to staff alongside the need to ensure qualitative and quantitative data informs effective decision-making across our governance and management structures. These identified areas of improvement will enhance staff engagement and understanding of institutional-level decision-making, and thus enhance our organisational efficiency and effectiveness. We also recognise the need for our institutional and local risk registers to have clear pathways to enhance the escalation and de-escalation of risks in line with evolving needs. This will provide greater visibility to our Governing Body that academic, operational, financial and strategic risks are being managed and assurance that our institutional Strategic Plan priorities can be achieved.

We will continue to improve the quality and impact of our governance and management structure by:

- Securing additional resources to increase our capacity and capability to meet new governance, planning and reporting requirements from the HEA once known.
- Increasing the availability and utilisation of quantitative and qualitative data to inform effective decision-making and reporting internally and externally.
- Updating our Risk Management Policy to ensure operational and institutional level risks are regularly reviewed, escalated and de-escalated as appropriate, based on the effectiveness of mitigations and the evolving internal and external environment by the Executive Group.
- Ensuring that the Committee Terms of Reference, Membership and decisions made across the institution are accessible to staff to enhance engagement, awareness and understanding.

OBJECTIVE 1C:

THE DOCUMENTATION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AND PROCEDURES

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT SYSTEM (QAES)

NCI successfully completed the QQI Re-engagement process in June 2019, wherein our QAES – which acts as NCI's Quality Handbook - was formally approved by a panel of peers as demonstrating alignment with national (QQI) and European standards and guidelines.

Our QAES contains 13 Chapters and is published [online](#), for internal and external stakeholders.

While the QAES was last updated as a holistic exercise in 2018, in advance of the QQI Re-engagement process, individual chapters have undergone a refresh in line with evolving institutional needs, as exemplified below:

- In April 2020 – Academic Council approved a refresh of Chapter 12: Apprenticeship Programmes. This Chapter was rewritten in advance of and following the 2019 QQI validation of the BA (Hons) in Recruitment Practice Apprenticeship Programme. The updated policies and procedures within Chapter 12 were rewritten to aligned with regulatory and quality assurance guidelines and in response to QQI Panel feedback.
- In October 2021, NCI's Academic Council approved a new Appendix to Chapter 3: Programme Development, Validation and Evaluation. This new appendix sets out NCI's Procedures for Devolution of Responsibility for Arrangement of Independent Evaluation Reports (IER). Devolved responsibility was granted to NCI following the successful Re-engagement process. The updated Devolved Responsibility procedures were subject to review and agreed with QQI.
- Most recently, Academic Council in October 2022 approved a refresh of Chapter 13: Procedures for Online and Blended Learning. This Chapter was previously entitled Technology Mediated Learning. This updated chapter underpinned NCI's successful participation in QQI's 2022-23 pilot validation initiative for the validation of online programmes. In June 2023, NCI's Higher Diploma (NFQ Level 8) in Data Analytics was successfully revalidated in a fully online mode, combining synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning pedagogy and assessment methods.

POLICY MANAGEMENT

Chapter 2 of the QAES presents our 'policy on policy management'. It outlines the processes by which College policies are developed, approved and maintained. Through using a consistent policy development process and format we aim to assemble policies that:

- Are appropriately developed and regularly updated.
- Are easy to find, read, communicate and understand.
- Are consistently applied across the College.
- Are compliant with applicable laws.
- Are compliant with applicable policies of regulatory and awarding bodies.
- Reduce risk; and
- Promote best practices across the College community.

Each policy has a Policy Manager and Executive Owner that is responsible for:

- The drafting of new or revised College policies.
- Ensuring policies are up to date.
- Consulting with interested parties, including learners.
- Steering the policy through the levels of College management and/or governance structures for formal approval prior to implementation.
- Monitoring publication, training and implementation.

All policies are approved by one of the following four bodies: Executive Group; Senior Management Team; Academic Council; or Governing Body.

ACADEMIC POLICIES

All academic policies are approved by Academic Council in advance of implementation. Staff and faculty are provided with opportunities to contribute directly through consultations, or through the committee structure. This can include presentations by policy owners to programme and school committees within the development phase. This helps us ensure our academic policies reflect the experiences of our faculty, staff and students. The NCI Students' Union (NCISU) are also consulted, where appropriate. In 2024, this was most recently undertaken with the review of the NCI Academic Integrity Policy approved by Academic Council in June 2024 following an extensive period of consultation.

Throughout 2024/25 a rolling schedule of reviews of all our institutional policies will be initiated, alongside support from Registry to policy owners to migrate to new templates. A policy refresh priority for 2024/25 has been identified in the theme of Assessment. This will include a refresh of Chapter 4- Assessment within our QAES. Much work has already begun, by our Head of Assessment and Examinations, the LTA and its sub-committees. Significant input has already been secured that will inform this policy refresh from academic leaders, faculty and administrative staff. This work will continue throughout 2024/25. NCISU will also be consulted in this process which aims to clarify academic and administrative roles and responsibilities, as well as to release pressure points within the existing assessment and examination structure.

While all College policies and procedures are subject to regular review by QQI – through re/engagement, institutional review, programme validation and revalidation panels - they are also subject to review and evaluation by a range of external professional and regulatory bodies that accredit or recognise NCI programmes. These include the CIPD; the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI); the Qualifications Advisory Board (QAB) within the Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare division of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY); the Teaching Council; Chartered Accountants Ireland; ACCA and the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants. Most recently, NCI successfully completed PSI re-accreditation in Q1 2024. A review by the QAB as part of its new institutional assessment methodology, is anticipated to be undertaken in 2025.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND EFFECTIVENESS PLAN (QIEP)

Following completion of the QQI Re-engagement process, a Quality Improvement and Effectiveness Plan (QIEP) was launched. This was a response to the NCI Academic Strategy (2019-2024) and included our QQI Re-engagement Action Plan. The QIEP outlined how NCI's new Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (QIE) Team (repositioned from the former Quality Assurance and Statistical Services Team (QASS)) and our refreshed QAES would impact on the achievement of Academic Strategy goals and to the overall quality and effectiveness of NCI's academic achievements and impact.

The activities proposed in the QIEP were monitored quarterly by Academic Council, however progress was slower than anticipated while QIE and the institution responded to the evolving priorities of the pandemic. The QIEP was utilised to advance NCI's approach to institutional effectiveness and a culture of quality by increasing transparency, consistency and evidence-based decision-making making in the following five areas:



Figure 19: Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES)

Rather than continuing to maintain the QIEP as a distinct document, the actions of the QIEP were incorporated into the priorities of the QIE Director following the launch of the Executive Strategic Implementation Plan in 2022/23.

ANNUAL QUALITY REPORTS (AQR)

NCI was required to submit its first Annual Quality Report (AQR) to QQI in February 2021. The AQR spanned activities completed within the Sept 2019 – August 2020 reporting period. The AQR provides documentary evidence of the development and evolution of NCI's internal quality system. It provides QQI with assurance that our internal QA procedures have been established and are being implemented consistent with regulatory requirements. Four AQRs have been produced to date by the QIE Director, approved by the Academic Council, and submitted to our Governing Body as the Annual Quality Report from Academic Council. They are also published on the NCI and QQI websites providing transparency on our QA infrastructure to internal and external stakeholders.

Our AQRs confirm alignment and compliance with all relevant national legislation and QQI Statutory QA Guidelines and Sector-specific guidelines for Independent /Private Providers. We are also regularly reviewing QQI policy statements and guidelines, which are particularly important during the extensive programme review and programme planning processes.

EVALUATION

We are confident, following completion of numerous QQI and professional body reviews, that our QAES and our institutional policies and procedures are compliant with a wide range of national, European, international and statutory benchmarks and requirements. Several of the case studies contained within our AQRs have been highlighted as examples of good practice by QQI in their annual synthesis of AQRs. The outcomes of two AQR case studies were also highlighted with poster presentations at QQI's 10th anniversary celebration in October 2022. The AQRs are valued internally and provide a robust account of quality assurance and enhancement activities and events across the College. They also provided an excellent baseline for this self-assessment process.

Feedback from Executive Group members and staff over the last few years has highlighted the need to review and reinforce our structures around policy development, management and communication flows. This is particularly important as the institution continues to scale, to enable us to sustain consistency in practices by new and existing staff. It is evident from feedback that our policies and procedures need to be more

accessible. To this end, in 2023/24, our Registry and IT Teams worked to develop a singular repository of policies and procedures to enhance accessibility, knowledge, consistency and transparency. Within the repository, each policy has a named manager – usually the manager responsible for policy implementation, and a named Executive Director, responsible for the overall impact and currency of the policy.

We also continue to use quality processes to review the efficiency and effectiveness of our administrative structures, policies and procedures. Since 2021, we have operated a 'Temperature Check' admin review process to enable our administrative teams to review and reflect on their policies and procedures. In 2021, this methodology was successfully utilised by the International Team, to assess their policies and procedures against the QQI Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Students. This process has equipped NCI well for the self-evaluation process required for the forthcoming TrustED Ireland/International Education Mark, due to be launched by QQI in Q3 2024.

In 2023, the Central Timetabling Office (CTO) utilised the same self-assessment and peer review approach to review its effectiveness in advance of contemplating significant changes to the NCI timetabling system. This review process resulted in Executive Group agreement for a holistic refresh of timetabling, which was completed as a major IT and change management project throughout 2023 and 2024. Learner and staff feedback secured in May 2024 identified overall support for the changes undertaken which are anticipated to improve organisational efficiency as well as boost opportunities for learner engagement and attendance. Further details on our non-academic self-assessment process is provided within Objective 3.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Throughout 2024/25 a rolling policy refresh process will be initiated, overseen by Registry and QIE. This process will include the development of a new policy templates, as well as enforce a plain English approach and the development of process flow-charts to ensure all policies and procedures are clearly visible, accessible and understood. This approach will enhance consistency in implementation as well as raise awareness of policies and procedures by all internal stakeholders. We will ensure all policy managers consult NCISU to ensure student facing policies and procedures are accessible and understandable to our diverse learner body, online and on campus.

We will continue to improve the quality and impact of our policies and procedures by:

- Publishing all College policies and procedures in an accessible repository for staff alongside a schedule of policy reviews to enhance opportunities for staff consultation.
- Publishing all learner facing policies and procedures in an accessible and understandable manner for ease of use by students, co-designed with NCISU.
- Rolling out a refresh of the QAES and all academic policies utilising a new template format for enhanced transparency and consistency.
- Ensure guidance on how and where to locate policies and procedures is embedded into formal orientation and training sessions for staff and students.



OBJECTIVE 1D:

STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Chapter 8 of the QAES outlines NCI's commitments and policies for staff recruitment, management and development. All HR policies are formally approved by the Senior Management Team or Executive Group prior to publication.

NCI's strategic commitment to the development and well-being of our staff community is the second of our six strategic priorities in the [2022-2027 Strategic Plan](#). We know that the performance and wellbeing of all our staff is critical to our success in achieving all the other priorities within our Strategic Plan. The CINNTE review process has helped to further clarify where additional effort will be needed at institutional level as we move into the 2025 – 2027 Strategic Plan period.

The Strategic Plan priority for NCI staff, alongside the outcome by 2027 is as follows:

Priority: We will support and train all our staff to be agile and responsive in meeting the needs of students, employers and other key education partners.

Outcome: A skilled and motivated staff that are supported to have a clear understanding of mission and strategy and the needs of stakeholders, sustainability and the environment.

To sustain quality across our expanding learner numbers and portfolio of programmes, as well as to create more academic, research, community-action research and build more external partnerships, NCI is committed to ensuring that its staff are competent, empowered and motivated in their roles. This holds true for our part-time Associate Faculty (AF) as for our permanent faculty (F) and our professional support service staff. The CINNTE review process has helped to further clarify where additional effort will be needed at institutional level as we continue within the current Strategic Planning period.

STAFF PROFILE

As outlined in our Institutional Profile Document our approach to staffing, ranging from associate faculty from relevant employers to community representatives in ELI, is strongly rooted in the communities we serve. This is a distinctive feature of NCI and adds value to us as a community of staff within NCI. As of April 2024, the College had a total headcount of 431 staff, as follows:

Category ● Non-Academic ● Associate Faculty ● ELI ● Permanent Academic Faculty

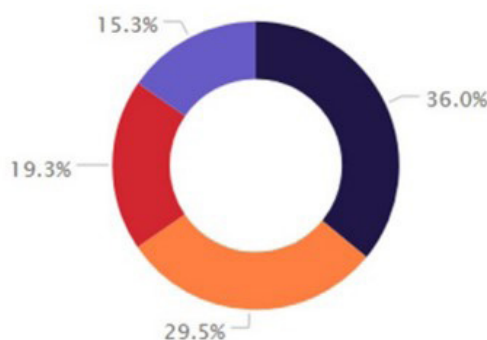


Figure 20: Overall Staff by Category as of 02/04/2024

In terms of teaching staff (headcount), 34% of faculty have permanent positions while 66% are Associate faculty (part-time roles). NCI and its students benefit from the diverse & real-world experience and expertise that our Associate Faculty bring to the learning experience.

Faculty Distribution ● Associate Faculty ● Permanent Academic Faculty



Figure 21: Faculty Distribution as of 02/04/2024

Women are the predominant gender type in NCI's workforce (62.7%). This can be partly explained by the dominance of female employees in the Early Learning Initiative (who account for 19.3% of total NCI staff). Building upon tried and tested models of early years' education intervention, ELI staff work with communities in areas of greatest need, to provide world-class parent and child learning support programmes. This is a strongly gendered area as 90.4% of ELI staff are women, many of whom work less than full time hours.

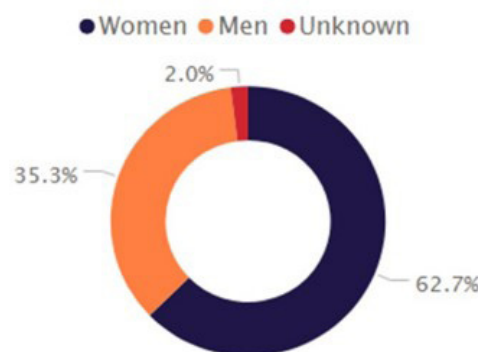


Figure 22: Overall Staff by Gender

The fields captured in NCI's CoreHR system for Nationality and Ethnic Group are currently optional and not mandatory at NCI. However, NCI is committed to enhancing the collection of staff demographic data in the future. During the most recent data gathering exercise in April 2023, 76.7% of staff provided their Nationality, while 53.5% indicated their Ethnic Group. Among staff who filled in the Nationality field, 78.2% are of Irish nationality, 8.5% are of Indian nationality, and the remaining 13.3% represent various other nationalities, as outlined below:

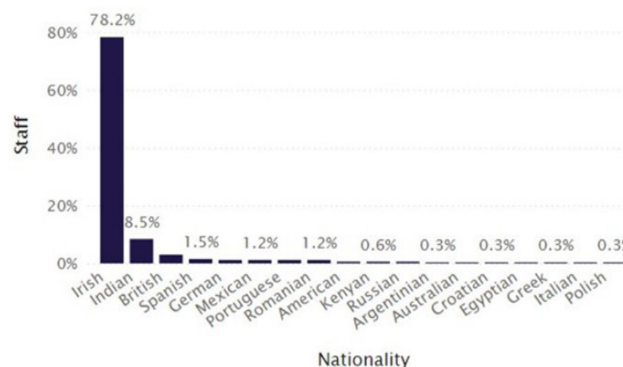


Figure 23: Overall Staff by Nationality

STAFF RECRUITMENT AND COMPETENCE

The competence of our staff is assured through a robust and transparent recruitment and selection process based on agreed job descriptions and competency-based interviews. Approvals for all vacancies to proceed to recruitment is granted by either the Senior Management Team (SMT) or Executive Group (EG) based on completion of an Employment Authorisation Form (EAF). This is a requirement for all academic and non-academic posts. In 2024, NCI enhanced the efficiency and effectiveness of our recruitment process with the launch of an e-recruitment software package, integrated into the CoreHR system and the College website. We are currently operating a Hybrid Working Policy, which was developed following a cross-college evaluation of our COVID-19 remote working experiences. Case study A4 provides more information on the Hybrid Working policy development and review process.

**HYBRID WORKING
POLICY POST-COVID-19
RESTRICTIONS**

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Our recruitment and selection policy is reviewed regularly, particularly to take account of NCI's commitments to greater Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and our Athena Swan Charter. Interview and selection training for managers and Executive Directors is mandatory and under the current strategy it is repeated every two years to keep our management updated on all aspects of EDI and equity of process when recruiting new staff.

Once recruited, NCI's HR department places a strong emphasis on staff induction and onboarding, providing a 6-week an induction programme at the start of every academic year for all staff and faculty that have started in NCI in the preceding months. This provides orientation to introduce the new hires to College policies, culture, and team members. The central programme is supplemented by onboarding at local School/Unit level including for new faculty/AF organised by the Academic Operations Team supporting academic leaders.

As the College continues to grow and become more complex in the range and depth of our learning, teaching and research activities, our learner body diversity, and our interactions with external business, community and government partners, so the requirement to assure the competence of our staff increases and becomes more challenging. Within this context, we know that we must provide progression opportunities for all categories of staff. Importantly, we must strive to make informed decisions around the optimum balance between Full Time Faculty and AF. A workload management and full economic costings modelling of our programmes has been initiated and is currently being stress-tested to inform future decision making in this area. Awareness of the programmes with high dependency on AF allows us to target administrative supports accordingly to help reinforce quality across the teaching, learning and assessment experience. It also allows us to target learner supports, including academic integrity supports, to learners that might have more limited access to their AF.

NCI encourages its staff to undertake further education that is relevant to their role or contributes to the strategic, operational or academic needs of the College. Once they have met eligibility requirements set out in the Educational Assistance Policy, all staff, faculty and associate faculty can access freely any NCI programme of study. For academic staff, including Associate Faculty, the NCI Teaching Enhancement Unit provides a wide range of education and training in teaching and assessment practices and is at the forefront of best practice in key areas such as Technology-Enhanced Learning and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Based within the Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning (CELL), the Teaching Enhancement Unit draws from the research-informed, innovative programme provision of the Centre, of which Technology-Enhanced Learning has long been a specialism. In recent years, the Teaching Enhancement Unit has been strengthened by the addition of a dedicated Digital Learning Design Unit which specialises in staff training for blended and fully online programme and module design, pedagogy and assessment.

In terms of their highest academic or professional qualification(s), 70% of academic faculty hold a PhD, while 22% possess a Master's Degree as their highest qualification. 2% declared that they hold an MSc but are in the process of pursuing a PhD; another 2% possess qualifications not listed as options in the survey. The remaining 2% are qualified through the Professional Chartered Accountancy Examinations. 2022 data on the highest academic/professional qualifications of NCI Staff is outlined below:

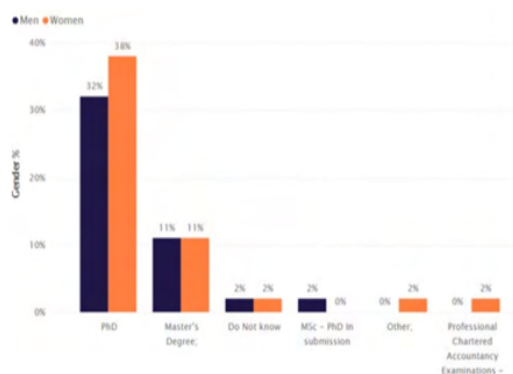


Figure 24: Highest academic/professional qualifications of NCI Staff, April 2022

RETAINING AND PROGRESSING OUR STAFF

As a relatively small college in a competitive and diverse Higher Education sector in Ireland, we know the importance of retaining good staff and encouraging their progression to more senior roles within the College. This applies equally to our academic and non-academic staff categories.

The College has for many years generously supported academic staff to attain PhD qualifications. In 2024, NCI supported 6 members of staff/faculty to undertake PhD level study, with 3 completing their PhDs within 2024. Furthermore, two Executive Group members also completed Doctoral programmes in this review period supported by NCI. We have taken significant strides recently towards academic staff retention and career advancement by reintroducing a competitive academic promotions process. Two main promotion routes, both of equal importance, emphasise competence and achievement in: (i) Teaching, Research and Impact and (ii) Learning and Teaching.

Within the most recent round of Academic Promotions in 2023, 11 staff were promoted to the status of Professor or Associate Professor, from a pool of 25 applicants, with a gender break down of 36.4% male and 63.6% female. We have reviewed and are now building on the 2023 process by launching the 2024 academic promotions round over the 2024 summer period.

In recent years following the end of Covid-19 government restrictions, we, alongside other HEIs, experienced a rise in staff turnover, notably among non-academic staff. This is showing signs of abating as we close out the 2023-24 academic year, particularly given our published position on hybrid working arrangements which is generous within the sector. While our staff training programme is extensive, the College recognises and acknowledges the importance of progression opportunities for non-academic, professional support staff whose contribution enables the delivery of teaching, research and the wider NCI experience.

We currently operate a Promotions process for non-academic staff with the most recent round completed in Q1 2024. This provides an opportunity for non-academic staff to have their roles regraded and resized, as well as request allowances for additional responsibilities. In 2022/23 several key administrative management posts were resized though this process as part of the Streamlining Student Success Initiative. This approach created several manager and professional manager roles across Registry and Academic Operations Team with a view to recognising, retaining and rewarding the skills and experience of our excellent and committed administrative managers and Directors.

The HR Department is currently planning a programme for the academic year 2024/25, to review how the institution recognises and rewards non-academic staff performance with a view to rolling out a new Performance Management Framework for non-academic staff in 2025. We know that this is needed and will support individuals to flourish, but it is also an essential tool in our institutional succession planning, to identify potential leaders at management and director levels, and prepare them for these roles. This work is identified as a priority within the Strategic Implementation Plan.

STAFF WELL-BEING

Like other organisations in the tertiary education sector and further afield, staff well-being has particularly come to the fore in the post-Covid restrictions era. NCI has developed and implemented a Hybrid Working Policy, which in June 2024 was complimented by our Flexible and Remote Working Policy. Flexible and Hybrid working is both beneficial to NCI and its staff. We expect to see evidence of its positive impact in terms of staff recruitment, retention, well-being, as well as productivity, as the model becomes more deeply embedded in our working culture. Strategically, NCI is increasing its institution-wide emphasis on staff wellbeing, with a plethora of on-campus and online events and training activities in areas such as Mental Health; Healthy Eating and Menopause information sessions.

We were gratified to be recently recognised by the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) as among the top 100 Companies in Ireland for Wellbeing. In the coming year 2024/25, we will embrace the Higher Education Authority (HEA) Healthy Campus Framework, which will provide for cross-college collaboration with students and staff alike and has received full backing of the NCI Students Union.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (EDI)

NCI's Equality and Culture survey, in 2023, was an important milestone in our developing culture of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion across all our educational, staff development and our community outreach activities. With a response rate of 39% of staff, we learned much about the profile of our staff community itself as well as their needs – and views – on how the College should better support a culture of EDI at all levels. A significant majority of respondents, at 78%, agreed that NCI's leadership was committed to EDI. Our commitment to EDI is championed by the position of Vice President and a dedicated EDI and Training Manager.

We are committed to providing regular training for all staff in EDI topics and issues, and an expanded Action Plan is now set out in our application for renewal of the Athena Swan Bronze award, submitted in Spring 2024 following Governing Body and Executive approval. Case study A3 provides more information on the review process that underpinned our recent application. The HR Director provides regular reports to the Governing Body, Senior Management Team, and Executive Group on EDI achievements as well as HR recruitment, retention and absence trends. Within 2024, The HR Director reports included:

- January 2024 - SMT considered a HR analysis of key data across the 2023 calendar year.
- March 2024 – EG and GB considered and approved the NCI Athena Swan Bronze Award Renewal Application
- May 2024 - GB considered the Gender Pay Gap Report

ATHENA SWAN RENEWAL

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EVALUATION

The 2022-27 Strategic Plan recognises the importance of the staff community, their skills, motivation, agility and responsiveness to the internal and the external environment. The CINNTE review process completed with Executive Group and staff reflected many of the findings of the NCI 2023 Equality and Culture survey and CINNTE areas for enhancement have emerged that similarly resonate with action areas in our Athena Swan application. Both review activities affirmed a high-degree of positivity among NCI's workforce and that staff continue to value engagement with mission-aligned activities, driven by NCI's core mission, vision and values.

During the 2022 Executive Group self-assessment process, we asked ourselves the question "Can you build your career at NCI, as an academic or a professional administrator?" The EG noted that it was becoming increasingly challenging to retain ambitious staff and that we should examine and enhance our employer brand. For academic staff who are research-active, or seeking to engage in academic research, there was an acknowledgement of the imperative for a new institutional Research Strategy,

as well as promotional opportunities for such academic staff. Both areas have been addressed in 2023/24. In relation to non-academic staff, the Executive recognised the need for a formal performance management framework to support the development of further competencies and help to retain and ideally, progress such staff within the College. As outlined above, this is a Strategic Plan priority for the HR Director in 2025.

NCI Associate Faculty's positive, industry-focussed contribution to the learning experience was a notable thread emerging across the CINNTE review, however both the Executive Group and the staff focus groups in Spring 2024 identified the risks and benefits of dependence on part-time teaching staff. The current mix of permanent and associate faculty, as evidenced in the Institutional Profile, sits at 34% permanent to 66% associate faculty (albeit these are employed on part-time basis therefore headcount does not equate to FTE). It became clear during discussions that inherent challenges exist both to recruit and retain associate faculty, particularly in areas like Computing where the national employment market is buoyant. Linked to this, we identified that it is essential to ensure adequate time is available to train and familiarise new associate faculty with the systems and processes that underpin the teaching process within the College. The Quality Assurance procedures of the College apply to all teaching, learning and assessment processes and we identified the need to increase both supports and training, and feedback opportunities, for Associate Faculty. The proposed policy refresh process will enhance the accessibility and transparency of NCI policies to AF staff to we raise awareness and to ensure we are equipping our valued AF with the skills and supports to succeed in their roles.

Furthermore, a Strategic Plan priority for the Vice President and Director of Finance throughout 2023 and 2024 has been to produce a workload management model to enhance the effectiveness of our utilisation of full time and associate faculty. This process has been completed across the first two years of the Strategic Plan and scheduled to be completed before the end of 2024. The model will improve our financial planning alongside resource management structures. It will also assist the targeting of support and guidance to the recruitment, training and ongoing supports to associate faculty while they work with us in NCI.

On the non-academic front, following the completion of the Administrative Services Review in 2019, a working group was established under the leadership of the Vice President, to identify and implement sustainable solutions to enhance professional administration staff retention, increase opportunities for career progression and improve consistency and effectiveness of administrative services for staff and students. While several structures were debated throughout the reporting period, the Executive approved the Streamlining Student Success Structures in 2021/22. This initiative involved the creation of several career progression opportunities and approved the creation of an Academic Operations Management Team in 2022/23. The new Academic Operations Team underwent a second review in 2023 to assess its progress to date and how best to maximise its impact in the future. In April 2024, the President and Vice President agreed to transfer the Academic Operations Team to the Office of the Registrar to strengthen collaborative working with wider Registry Services and to enable us to clarify administrative roles and responsibilities across the learner and programme lifecycles.

This project will be regularly reviewed by the Executive and should result in:

- The delivery of a more consistent and transparent learner experience regardless of registration status, mode of delivery or learner location.
- An improvement in how faculty experience administration and support services and an increase in the effectiveness of these services (including minimising unnecessary administrative burdens) to meet the needs of faculty.
- Improved retention of faculty and professional staff and stronger evidence of career progression and satisfaction.
- An enhanced ability to make informed, student-centred decisions at institutional, school and programme level.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The College is continuing to put in place a range of measures to support our faculty and staff to excel in their roles, to look after their health and their well-being, and to recognise their efforts and improve promotion and progression opportunities. This is a strategic commitment and builds on the recognised excellence and impact of our award-winning HR Team. We continue to value diversity across our staff and continue to embrace the missions and values that are central to our staff and stakeholders.

We will continue to improve the quality and impact of our staff by:

- Securing equitable HEA funding to allow us to maintain a strategic focus on and investments in our academic and non-academic recruitment and promotions processes.
- Introducing a Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) for non-academic staff as part of a refreshed career progression policy, that also explicitly highlights individual staff contributions to Strategic Plan priorities.
- Utilising our workload management and programme costings model to enhance transparency in academic budgeting and planning activities.
- Maintaining the focus of the HR department on staff well-being to enhance retention, and on training and awareness-raising in EDI and related domains.



OBJECTIVE 1E:

PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT, APPROVAL, AND SUBMISSION FOR VALIDATION

Chapter 3 of the QAES outlines NCI's commitments, policies and procedures for programme development, validation and evaluation. In 2021, this Chapter was updated to include a new appendix which clarified NCI's procedures for devolved responsibility, granted following the successful QQI Re-engagement process. The updated Devolved Responsibility (DR) Procedures were subject to review and agreed with QQI prior to approval by Academic Council.

Our Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027 lists Teaching as one of our six priority areas. The Strategic Plan priority for NCI teaching, alongside the outcome by 2027 is as follows:

Priority: We will develop and maintain successful programmes, distinctive in our design, delivery and assessment and aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Outcome: Successful, innovative, sustainable programmes aligned to our unique position in the higher education landscape.

Programme governance and management structures, including the responsibilities for programme quality outlined in our Memorandum and Articles of Association, are presented in Objective 1B. Overseen by our QIE Team, our faculty engage in a wide range of QA mechanisms with QQI staff and panels through programme quality and validation processes, which provides us and our stakeholders with continued reassurance of our programme quality and compliance with national QQI policy and guidelines, and also our compliance with the European Standards & Guidelines for Quality in Higher Education. Additionally, several of NCI's qualifications are also accredited by Professional and Statutory bodies active in our subject areas as outlined in Objective 1C and Objective 1J.

In practice, having DR means that we are responsible for arranging the Independent Evaluation Panels (often referred to as QQI Panels) of academic subject matter experts, industry specialists and (external) learner representatives that will meet with NCI staff, students, alumni and others to assess our applications to revalidate existing programmes, or to validate new programmes leading to a new QQI award. As well as managing the Panel process, we have DR to ensure that the Independent Panel produces its Independent Evaluation Report (IER) in line with QQI's requirements. These reports are then submitted to QQI for consideration and approval at the QQI Programme and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) which issues QQI Certificates of Validation outlining the details of the programme validation period, content and assessment structures.

PROGRAMME LIFECYCLE MANAGEMENT (PLM)

The establishment in 2021 of the Programme Lifecycle Management Executive Sub-Group (PLM ESG) provided an effective mechanism for the Academic Council and the Executive Group to ensure that the College portfolio of programmes remains current and relevant to societal/Industry and learner needs and that the portfolio is scalable and sustainable to deliver. The PLM ESG monitors the performance of existing programmes and NCI collaborative partnerships across four stages in the programme lifecycle as shown below:



Figure 25: Programme Lifecycle

PLM STAGE 1: PROGRAMME DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

In line with NCI's Strategic Plan objective to grow our learner body to 8,500 by 2027, NCI's two Schools (Business and Computing) and our Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning (CELL) have been actively developing new programmes. In the past five years, NCI has successfully validated 38 new programmes, for delivery across a variety of locations, lengths and levels.

Once a programme concept, strategic alignment and business case has been endorsed the by Dean/Director of CELL, a Programme Opportunity Proposal (POP) form is prepared and presented by the faculty and academic lead at a PLM ESG meeting. A rigorous debate ensues while members stress-test the proposition. Evidence of demand and sectoral need, as well as market gaps and saturation are discussed. The views from the industry/ employer networks maintained at a programme and school level, are also presented at this stage to reinforce the case for development based on industry needs. Alignment with strategic positioning, complementarity with the NCI portfolio of programmes, and our areas of distinctiveness and expertise are also considered. At this stage, a POP can be approved, rejected or additional information requested before a formal decision is made. The outcomes of PLM ESG deliberations are submitted to the EG/SMT and Academic Council by the QIE Director and the Programme Lifecycle Manager who support the PLM ESG.

Once approval to proceed has been granted, programme teams with guidance from their academic leaders, develop programme specifications in line with QQI validation policy and criteria, and a wide range of QQI guidelines in topic-specific areas such as Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP) and Blended and Online Learning programme design and delivery. Programme teams carry-out in-depth research on comparable programmes nationally and internationally, and further in-depth consultation with business/industry/ relevant external stakeholders to benchmark and develop the module (MIMLOS) and programme (MIPLOS) learning outcomes, academic structure, resource commitments and curriculum for the proposed new programme. A range of institutional supports from the Teaching Enhancement Unit; Finance; IT; the Library; Careers; QIE and academic peers are made available to assist programme teams prepare for QQI validation.

PLM STAGE 2: PROGRAMME VALIDATION AND REVALIDATION

The table below provides summary data of the 97 NCI programmes that successfully completed QQI validation or revalidation in the past 5 years, through intensive work with 43 different QQI panels.

	2019/20		2020/21*		2021/22		2022/23		2023/24**		Total	
	Programmes	Panels	Programmes	Panels	Programmes	Panels	Programmes	Panels	Programmes	Panels	Programmes	Panels
Validation	2	2	11*	7*	10	4	8	3	7	3	38	19
Revalidation	10	6	2	1	19	6	15	6	11	4	57	23
Differential Validation (Major changes)					2	1					2	1

*including 10 micro-credentials completed by 4 QQI Panels via desk-top review)

** only the reports finalised from 2023/24 panels were included in this analysis. Four validations are still in progress and are not included above.

Figure 26: Programme Validation and Revalidation Process

As outlined above, the 2019/20 – 2023/24 period has been incredibly labour intensive for the entire NCI team, but particularly our faculty/academic leaders and QIE. As a testament to the skills, knowledge and experience of our academic leaders, faculty and staff, we have throughout this demanding timeline enjoyed a 100% success rate. Each review panel and their outcomes are considered a cross-college event, drawing in support and engagement from our support staff, students, employers and alumni in addition to the core faculty, academic leaders and QIE. Our employer network is also

active in meeting QQI panels to demonstrate the value, relevance and currency of our programmes submitted for validation and revalidation.

Within this timeline, our staff, faculty, and academic leaders have reviewed, reflected upon and designed/redesigned a large number of programmes, including almost the entire portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in the School of Business, and the postgraduate portfolio in the School of Computing. Both Schools have also proactively launched microcredentials, enhancing NCI's ability to respond in a timely manner to emerging government and stakeholder needs, particularly in the post-Covid restrictions environment. Over a dozen microcredentials were developed and validated by QQI within the last three years with NCI being one of the first providers to secure QQI validation for a 10 credit microcredential in December 2020 – Certificate in Software Development Fundamentals.

In line with our Strategic Plan commitments to embed sustainability into our programmes, the two Schools have been proactive in developing and validating modules and programmes where UNSDGs are embedded throughout the curriculum and/or learning outcomes. This timeline also saw the revalidation of our distinctive Accelerated Degrees within the School of Business. These demanding but also successful degrees, offering a degree in two years, are unique in QQI's portfolio of programmes and also within Ireland. Our School of Computing has also led the way with MSc innovations in the fields of AI for Computing and AI for Business.

Several new programmes have also been designed and validated by CELL and ELI Director that respond to UNSDG 4 - Quality Education: Widening Access - Promoting Lifelong Learning-Distance Learning-Student Learning Supports. These programmes demonstrate NCI's commitment to lifelong learning and to changing lives through education for our learners as well as their families and their wider communities.

Two new microcredentials were specifically designed to underpin the success and impact of our innovative Early Learning Initiative (ELI) Home Visitors programme. Working in partnership with Government and local communities, NCI's ELI team has developed a range of innovative programmes to improve the educational aspirations and outcomes of children and young people. It has grown from 400 participants (children, parents, and professionals) to 14,000+ a year and moved beyond its initial Dublin Docklands catchment area to supporting other communities across the entire country. These programmes are unique in Ireland and indeed globally.

The CELL Director and the CELL Team also designed and secured validation for two new NFQ Level 9 microcredentials for secondary school teachers to teach on our innovative Pathways in Technology (P-TECH) Level 6 HE Certificate programme within three Dublin North-East Inner City (NEIC) partner schools. The aim of P-TECH (a concept originated in the USA) is to provide post-primary students in the NEIC area with an innovative and highly relevant education programme that enables them to earn third-level/ QQI credits while in school. The first cohort of the Level 6 Certificate in P-TECH programme students graduated in April 2024. This was a true celebration for us, our partners and our learners. This Level 6 Certificate in P-TECH was also the first QQI HE Award to be delivered within a school environment.

In 2023/24 we partnered with the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb) to develop and design a progression pathway spanning FE and HE for our P-TECH Graduates. The new four-year BA Honours programme in Digital and Business Skills (DABS), with embedded Certificate and Diploma exit awards, is NCI's first programme developed and delivered in partnership with an ETB. It is our first tertiary degree to be delivered through a FE and HE Partnership. This programme will have its first enrolments in September 2024 following PAEC approval anticipated in Summer 2024. This programme is also another first for QQI as our awarding body, validating a programme that is delivered in partnership by an ETB and a HEI.

PLM STAGE 3: PROGRAMME DELIVERY

Following validation and revalidation, our programme teams are supported throughout the delivery cycle by the respective academic and School/CELL leaders as well as a wide range of support services across the College, including dedicated programme co-ordinators within our Academic Operations Team. Supports are provided to faculty and students across each stage in the learner journey. We ensure all new and existing Faculty and Associate Faculty receive briefings and guidance (as outlined in Objective 1D above) to equip them for success in the role. Additionally, targeted training sessions, such as those delivered by the Examination Team on Exam Regulations, are also provided to faculty and external examiners.

External examiner reports are vital measures for the continuous improvement of programme quality at NCI. Upon receipt, the reports are discussed at programme team meetings, and specific issues are communicated directly to relevant team members. This ensures that feedback is promptly addressed and integrated into the programme. An analysis of 5-yearly programme review reports completed by QIE over the period from April 2021 to April 2024 identified some specific points of feedback and the actions taken by the programme teams. This is included as Appendix B4.

In addition to the information arising from external examiner reports, throughout the delivery of the programme, QIE provide programme teams with a range of qualitative and quantitative data arising from student surveys. NCI has also worked to ensure programme specific results from the national student survey – studentsurvey.ie – are accessible directly by programme teams. This information is considered in programme committees and informs ongoing discussions and formal annual programme monitoring. The most recent studentsurvey.ie rating of overall satisfaction, completed in 2022/23 indicated NCI students were satisfied overall with their experience at NCI.



Figure 27: National Student Survey Results 2022/2023

PLM STAGE 4: PROGRAMME MONITORING AND REVIEW

Each Programme Committee and Programme Director plays a critical role in programme monitoring and reviews, supported by the QIE function. This important final stage in our PLM process involves programme teams reviewing programme performance annually and at the end of the five-year validation period. We discuss the programme monitoring and review process in much greater detail within Objective 3: Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review.

EVALUATION

The introduction of the PLM structure in NCI has largely worked well. It has helped us to be more strategic in the management of our portfolio of programmes, and more data-led when making Executive decisions around of programme viability and quality across our portfolio of programmes. Experience over the past three years has helped us to refine the documentation requested by the PLM ESG of programme teams, to enhance effective decision making on new and existing programmes.

We recognise the importance of utilising robust, accurate and complete data at each stage of the PLM. We have established a team of experts – our MIS Project Team - to develop dashboards for utilisation by programme teams, academic leaders and the Executive when making decisions about our portfolio of programmes. Case study A10 provides more information on this important project. In March 2023 and March 2024, we analysed our portfolio and our entry points against competitors across the marketplace, to help us reinforce our distinctiveness in terms of accessibility, branding and portfolio planning. We have recognised the need to continue to strengthen our capacity and capability to gather and use qualitative and quantitative data at each of the stages in the PLM as a mechanism for data-informed decision making. This will enhance our efficiency and effectiveness at each stage of the PLM process.

**MANAGEMENT
INFORMATION SYSTEMS
(REPORTING) PROJECT**

Appendix A10 – p 134

Our experiences across Stages 1 and 2 of the PLM have demonstrated the importance of the involvement of specialist support teams (such as IT, the Library, Admissions, Academic Operations, the Digital Learning Design team and Careers and Employability Service) as part of discussions with academic colleagues at the proposal and approval stage of new programmes. We will implement this approach more consistently from 2024/25 onwards. This will enable us to ensure that specialist resources or delivery modes – such as online delivery and assessment, work placements or collaborative delivery with a partner institution – are built into the development phase from the outset. Our continued innovation and expansions with partners nationally, such as with P-TECH and government departments such as the Department for Social Protection, and internationally in China and through Erasmus+, highlight the need to be mindful of additional contractual requirements that need to be supported for diverse programme delivery.

Furthermore, it is essential that all human resources, including faculty, lab assistants, work placement co-ordinators and research supervisors, are also explicitly factored into and agreed at Stages 1 and 2 of the PLM to enable us to secure the commitments within the annual financial planning process – with provisional budgets approved subject to QQI validation and aligned against minimum approved learner numbers. This approach will help us better understand and prepare for the needs of the delivery team and learners post validation, as well as help us financially and operationally plan to scale programme delivery to the agreed maximum outlined within the five-year programme validation period.

Stages 2 and 4 of the current process are also very onerous on faculty. The templates provided by QQI for validation and revalidation continue to be refined by QQI to minimise duplication and burden, but the administrative workload remains extremely heavy. A stated intent of NCI in its Strategic Plan is that by 2027 we would hope to have secured Delegated Authority from QQI, once the DA application process is launched. This would enable us to retain the rigour and steps in our existing QQI approved processes, given the need to align with QQI and ESG requirements, however, we would hope to make the process less administratively burdensome, particularly the 5-yearly review process.

Our experience of delivering the PLM approach has also highlighted the need for us to agree and fund a Programme concept phase - a “Stage 0” of the PLM cycle. This would enable us to further explore our Teaching commitments as outlined in the Strategic Plan, for identifying more systemic opportunities to embed UNSDGs/sustainability and/

or EDI commitments across our existing and any proposed new programmes. This stage would enable faculty to have some time and resources to review MIPLOs, MIMLOs and assessment strategies to identify opportunities for our students to gain the education and skills they will need to face the national and global challenges of sustainability, and equality, diversity and inclusion in society after graduation. This would enhance our ability to deliver on our Strategic Plan commitment to have distinctive graduates in the workplace and, our commitments for EDI skills to be embedded across the curriculum made within our recent Athena Swan Bronze Award renewal application.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Our extensive engagement in QQI validation and revalidation processes not only provides us with confidence that our policies and processes of programme review and revalidation meet national and European standards, but also the confidence that we have the competence to self-manage this work once Delegated Authority (DA) is secured. We anticipate the achievement of DA would require a proportionate increase in resources to enhance our capacity, but our competence is well documented. As our portfolio of programmes continued to evolve, spanning innovations in delivery modes, levels, lengths and locations, we will continue to benchmark our practices against national and international experts and practices. We will continue to utilise qualitative and quantitative data to make informed decisions and to assure ourselves and our stakeholders that NCI's portfolio of programmes remains relevant, current and of the highest quality.

We will continue to improve the quality and impact of our programme lifecycle management (PLM) infrastructure by:

- Securing Delegated Authority from QQI once the application process is launched.
- Ensuring resource commitments identified within programme validations are reflected in our annual budgeting process and throughout the programme validation lifecycle.
- Ensuring administrative and specialist support staff join programme development teams to ensure specialist programme requirements are planned in advance of delivery.
- Strengthening our capabilities to make evidence-based decisions across the PLM process, utilising consistent, accurate and complete qualitative and quantitative data sets.

OBJECTIVE 1F:

ACCESS, TRANSFER, PROGRESSION

Chapter 6 of our QAES sets out the admissions policies, procedures and regulations to manage access pathways into our programmes. The Chapter also highlights: (i) our procedures for the Recognition of Prior and Experiential Learning (RPEL), (ii) arrangements for students from other higher education providers to transfer into an NCI programme, and (iii) progression pathways for students within NCI and elsewhere.

Access to high-quality education is our most distinctive feature and is central to NCI's Mission and Values. We place great importance on pathways and the underpinning policies, procedures and processes that provide the enabling infrastructure that allows access to happen. NCI actively leads national and international developments in the broad area of Access to Higher Education and we noted with interest the QQI (2023) Insights Publication on Access, Transfer and Progression in the Irish FET and HET sectors entitled "From Counting to Cultivating Successful Participation: a Review of the Landscape of Practice Supporting Access, Transfer and Progression in Irish Education and Training".

Our Strategic Plan priority for access, alongside the outcome by 2027 is as follows:

Priority: Guided by our mission, vision and values, NCI will continue and develop its focus on delivering accessible higher education.

Outcome: NCI is a distinctive and leading higher education institution in the HE landscape delivering diverse access to higher education through programme agility and innovation, flexibility in delivery modes, collaboration across the HE landscape, mission-centric research activity and 'cradle to college' programmes, from our North Inner City Campus.

At NCI, we view access to tertiary education as a 'cradle to college' commitment, since our world-leading Early Learning Initiative (ELI) provides targeted interventions to pre-school children in the local North-East Inner City of Dublin (NEIC) and nationally in areas of social and economic disadvantage. Regarded as 'our college' by the local community, NCI is an iconic symbol, providing a visible tangible reminder to the local community that third level education is not only a right but within reach.

THE EARLY LEARNING INITIATIVE (ELI)

Established 15 years ago, ELI is an innovative access programme and provides a comprehensive community initiative addressing the educational divide in Dublin's Inner City and across Ireland. ELI is now a recognised world-leading early-years education intervention initiative; with an ever-expanding research profile nationally and internationally. It has grown substantially and is actively influencing government policy in the pre-school/early-years area, working daily with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, DCEDIY), the Health Services Executive (HSE), TUSLA (the Child and Family Agency).

Through ELI, we are delivering an integrated programme of educational support from antenatal/birth up to third level. ELI's multi-level interventions with various stakeholders are designed around four themes: Home Visiting and Parent Support; Literacies; Educational Guidance; and Capacity Building. ELI's strong integration with the communities around NCI ensures that their work continues to support at-risk children and young people, helping them achieve their full potential, however ELI and our success has been such that plans have been expanded by creating an ELI National Centre in Parent Child Home Visiting and Family Engagement, providing advisory support and guidance at centres around the country that wish to develop Home Visiting and Home-based Learning Support Services. Case study A6 provides more information on the ELI ParentChild+ programme and its benefits.

**EARLY LEARNING INITIATIVE:
PARENTCHILD+ BUILDING
CAPACITY NATIONWIDE**

Appendix A6 – p 125

ELI's 2020-25 Strategic Objectives are:

- A national leader and centre of expertise in accessibility, widening participation and educational pathways with a particular focus on early childhood and family learning.
- National centre for developing sustainable models of Home Visiting across Ireland and innovative emerging future-orientated family home-based learning.
- Innovation centre for adapting and transforming our existing activities, pedagogies, and processes to remain responsive to ever-changing needs and policy contexts.
- Pioneering research to capture new knowledge and practices and disseminate them locally, nationally, and internationally.
- Develop our expertise in capacity-building for long-term sustainability planning, particularly in relation to programmes and services for children and young people in statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

It is important to highlight that ELI is wholly integrated into the governance structure of NCI and ELI's strategic development is central to the College's access and community engagement, with full support from the Governing Body. The Director of ELI is a member of the NCI Executive Group and NCI's President is a member of the ELI Advisory Committee, together with two other members of Governing Body. The governance structure of ELI is provided in Repository. This level of integration and alignment is essential for good governance, but also to provide ELI with the necessary NCI executive management support to progress its activities. ELI's QQI validated programmes are delivered from within the CELL Portfolio. This complements the work of CELL in Early Childhood Education and Care. In Q3 2024 a permanent PlayLab will be shared between ELI and CELL on the Mayor Square campus.

Additionally teaching and research collaborations have deepened between ELI and the two schools within the College. Our ELI researchers present at each of our Annual Research Days alongside our faculty across our Schools and CELL. Our Discover University initiative, for example, is a partnership between ELI and NCI's academic Schools and CELL, and focusses on providing opportunities for young people aged 14-17 to spend one week in NCI over the summer, to experience a taste of life at NCI and encourage them to see college as part of their future. Recent government funding has also enabled ELI and the School of Computing to provide STEM Play and Learn and (Computer) Coding Clubs for young people. This is how we prioritise access at NCI, by continuously innovating to bring third-level education into the sights of children and young people in local communities and beyond. Beyond this, ELI's reputation and standing among the families in the North-East Inner-City community is now such that in the wake of social unrest and a serious public order incident in the city centre in November 2023, ELI was among the first local groups to call for a community-based Restorative Practice initiative to address the serious impact of the unrest on local families and communities. Case study A7 provides more information on the ELI Restorative Practice initiative.

**OPENING THE DOOR BETWEEN
CORPORATES AND COMMUNITY
— RESTORATIVE
CONVERSATIONS
WITH ARTHUR COX**

Appendix A7 – p 127

P-TECH: BRINGING HIGHER EDUCATION INTO LOCAL SECONDARY-SCHOOLS

NCI works closely with second-level schools in the local area to promote college-level education as an achievable target – in fact a real prospect- for students who may be the first in their family to complete and attain second-level Leaving Certificate/equivalent qualifications. In recent years, our Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning (CELL) has developed and implemented a ground-breaking collaborative partnership with local secondary schools, offering an adapted version of the Pathways to Technology (P-TECH) programme, which provides a Higher Education award (NFQ Level 6 Certificate) for secondary students, beginning in transition year which normally takes place prior to the commencement of their Senior Cycle at school. The CELL P-TECH team is currently engaged in a ground-breaking tertiary degree-partnership development with the City of Dublin ETB, to provide a degree-level progression pathway for these Leaving Certificate students.

ADVANCED ENTRY FROM FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES

We are proud of the advanced standing arrangements that we have in place with a range of Further Education Colleges, whereby students can gain advanced entry to several of our undergraduate major degree awards in the School of Business and the School of Computing. These relationships are long-standing and work well; with students every year gaining advanced entry to stage 2 (year 2) of our BA (Hons) Business degree, our BSc (Hons) Computing Science degree. Currently, programme teams in both Business and Computing are discussing ways to further strengthen these tertiary relationships with our FE partners, seeking to move away from a system of one-to-one Agreements with individual FE Colleges, towards a widened scope whereby students from any FE College within the Education and Training Board (ETB) network, who meet the programme entry requirements, gain advanced entry to our undergraduate degrees. In this way, NCI is pro-actively addressing the Government's political and economic and social prioritisation of increased tertiary education opportunities for learners, leaving behind the traditional binary divide between the Further and Higher Education sectors. We update our list of advanced entry agreements annually, within the Annual Quality Report (AQR) to QQI.

APPRENTICESHIPS

In addition to providing pathways from further to higher education, we are also to the fore in the provision of access pathways to HE for industry professionals, through our Apprenticeship programmes. NCI was the first Higher Education provider in the Irish sector to secure QQI validation for a HET Apprenticeship programme, the Higher Certificate in International Financial Services (NFQ Level 6), which provides access to a Higher Education qualification for entry level employees within the nearby (but also nationwide) Irish financial services sector. The Higher Certificate, and the Higher Diploma in Financial Services Analytics (NFQ Level 8: a conversion programme for those wishing to focus on the analytics area and gain a level 8 qualification) are both Consortium-led Apprenticeship programmes with Financial Services Ireland. NCI has further developed a unique BA (Hons) degree apprenticeship programme in the field of Recruitment Practice, the only one of its kind globally. This highly successful Consortium-led apprenticeship has enthusiastic leadership and support from the Employment and Recruitment Federation.

By cultivating business, industry and government relationships, in the context of our Access mission, but also with our Social Justice values in mind, we are constantly anticipating future education and skills needs and acting with agility and innovation to create new and flexible opportunities for willing learners.

ACCESS THROUGH THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

We are also keen to encourage a diverse range of students to access our major undergraduate degree programmes and as such, we operate a well-developed RPEL process whereby those without the formal academic credentials to gain access to our degrees can apply for admission and attest to the relevance of their knowledge, skills and competencies that have been gained outside of formal learning settings. NCI has been at the forefront of access to Higher Education through the Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL). Our well-established procedures and guidance have supported hundreds of students to gain admission to our degree programmes, or exemptions from designated modules within programmes. Case study A5 provides information on how the RPEL process works at NCI.

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) AT NCI

Appendix A5 – p 122

FLEXIBLE DEGREE PROGRAMMES AT UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL

NCI has a proud history and heritage as a provider of part-time Higher Education opportunities for individuals who may have missed out on college in their earlier years, or who are time-poor and unable to commit to full-time study. Unlike the tradition in the public universities in Ireland, we have always enjoyed high numbers of part-time undergraduate degree-level students – across our major qualifications such as the BA (Hons) in Business, or in Marketing or Human Resource Management, and we are one

of only two providers in the country to offer the BA(Hons) Psychology programme on a part-time basis. Those interested in gaining a BA (Hons) in Computing Science can also avail of the part-time option at NCI.

We are committed to those flexible options as they speak directly to our Access mission and we have considerable expertise in these delivery modes. So much so that when feedback from students and employers indicated a need for degree-level provision in Business in a compressed timeframe, we were able to respond by creating the accelerated BA (Hons) in Business, followed by the accelerated BA(Hons) in Human Resource strategy and practice, and the BA (Hons) in Human Resource Management – both structured as three-stage Honour's degree programmes but delivered over two full calendar years. Case study A2 provides more information on the development process and impact of the BA (Hons) in Business Management.

**PROGRAMME INNOVATION
THROUGH ACCELERATED
UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES:
THE BA (HONS) IN BUSINESS
MANAGEMENT**

Appendix A2 – p 116

PROGRESSION TO LEVEL 10

As outlined in further detail elsewhere in this report, we offer the ability for NCI students to progress to Level 10 awards through our collaborative partnership with Maynooth University. This model enables NCI students to enrol on a joint NCI/Maynooth University programme, with faculty allocated by both institutions to jointly supervise doctoral candidates. This builds on our previous Level 10 awarding arrangements with QQI, which resulted in the graduation of our last enrolled NCI/QQI Doctoral Candidate in April 2024. The Level 10 arrangements with Maynooth University are currently undergoing a review to increase the visibility and awareness of this progression pathway to faculty and students from 2025 onwards.

MONITORING ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION THROUGH OUR PROGRAMMES

NCI's Academic Council and Governing Body regularly receive and discuss admissions reports which highlight year on year trends at institutional, school and programme-levels. Given our commitments to access our validated programmes, the data we collect is invaluable to us for assessing and demonstrating the demand and impact of our various pathways.

In Q1 2024, the HEA published data on learner progression trends as part of a national conference, which highlighted:

- Non-progression rates are highest amongst disadvantaged students, at 23%, and lowest amongst affluent students (12%).
- By NFQ Level, Level 7 entrants had the highest non-progression rate, at 31%, followed by Level 6 entrants at 25%, and Level 8 entrants at 14%.

This benchmarking data is particularly valuable given our access brief and our domestic learner profile. The HEA Conference which launched this dataset also highlighted examples of initiatives across the sector used to track and retain students that are disengaging or are at risk of non-progression. Many of these initiatives were developed through the Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund (SATLE) which is a €6.4m funding allocation administered by the National Forum in partnership with the Higher Education Authority to drive teaching and learning innovation and enhancement across the higher education sector. NCI does not currently have access to this funding stream, but it is hoped this could be rectified as part of our new funding arrangement with the HEA. Our Strategy for Student Success 2023/24 – 2025/26 identified the structures within NCI that we utilise to identify those at risk of disengaging for us to proactively target supports to those most likely to benefit from them.

Our Student Information System (Quercus+) provides us with the mechanism to track learner non-completion data. This data is analysed institutionally and by programme teams in the context of annual and cyclical programme reviews. The ability to analyse learner progression data on a year-to-basis is included as a business requirement in the MIS Project. As NCI is now a HEA-funded institution and likely to be subject to increased reporting requirements in this context, we recognise the need to be able to deliver this data as part of the MIS-reporting project.

EVALUATION

The CNTE review process has provided us with a valuable opportunity to discuss strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in relation to ATP internally. Staff feedback felt that NCI is punching above its weight in the level of innovation and commitment to growing access routes to HE; but acknowledged that we are battling for equity in government resources to enable us to fully support the needs of our distinct domestic learner population who are at risk of non-progression based on national datasets. Despite these challenges, staff agreed that we have many existing strengths – as befits a college with access as a central plank of its mission and strategy. The availability of articulation agreements, exit awards from our degrees, the large offering of part-time programmes, and our unique accelerated undergraduate degrees were cited as evidence of the proven strengths and flexible structures across NCI that facilitate learner access.

Building on the strength of our long-term partnerships and articulation agreements with further education colleges, our staff and Executive Group members recognised there is significant potential for growth with our existing FE partners as well as with the Education and Training Board sector. NCI has always worked to anticipate and respond to government's education and skills priorities, and we are strongly supportive of government's emphasis on reducing the binary divide between Further and Higher Education. This support is being put into action through our current work with the City of Dublin ETB and the National Tertiary Office (NTO) to launch our new tertiary BA (Hons) Digital and Business Skills degree, which will not be dependent on the CAO points system as the primary admissions route. Strategically, the Governing Body and the Executive are supportive of an expansion of this collaborative tertiary degree model and we demonstrate our capacity to deliver as a HE partner for the National Tertiary Office.

The College has also made progress in terms of identifying and supporting students most at risk of not-progressing. Our Strategy for Supporting Student Success was developed to help us streamline and target support services to learners identified by data as likely to benefit most from interventions. Planned increases in qualitative data, including progression data, will help ensure we target supports at those most likely to withdraw from their studies. Furthermore, in July 2024, the Senior Management Team agreed to support advancements in our IT infrastructure in 2024/25 to reinforce our existing structures for tracking students at risk of disengaging from their learning experience in NCI linked to attendance and engagement data. We will continue to monitor the impact of this approach.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Access to Higher Education has and will continue to be the flagship feature of NCI's strategy and positioning in the Irish sector. No other HEI in the sector benefits from the history and capacity that we built over time, providing multiple access routes and flexible learning opportunities for diverse learners. We will continue to build on our strengths academically and through the Early Learning Initiative and strategically widening our access, transfer and progression pathways as a tertiary partner of choice for other FE and HE and industry/government partners. We will work to ensure our underpinning College procedures and systems can accommodate this expansion to ensure we provide robust data that informs decisions made by our academic leaders and the Executive around the evolving availability of access, transfer and progression routes.

We will continue to improve the quality and impact of our access, transfer and progression pathways by:

- Securing equitable funding from the HEA to support the increased reporting and support needs of our learners to enhance progression and completion rates.
- Strengthening existing articulation agreements with FE partners and exploring new access routes for learners through the continued expansion of FE Partnerships, P-TECH and Apprenticeships.
- Expanding our opportunities for Level 10 progression routes through our partnership with Maynooth University.
- Exploring the evolving opportunities for the academic and strategic expansion of our ELI across our schools and within our portfolio of programmes, including our early-childhood education provision in CELL.

OBJECTIVE 1G:

INTEGRITY AND APPROVAL OF LEARNER RESULTS, INCLUDING THE OPERATION AND OUTCOME OF INTERNAL VERIFICATION AND EXTERNAL AUTHENTICATION PROCESSES

Chapter 4 of the QAES: Assessment, sets out our assessment principles and practices, alongside our measures for assuring quality through internal verification and external authentication.

Within our Teaching Strategic Plan 2022 -2027 commitments we identified the need:

Objective 3.4: To develop the processes and data sets that drive the relevance and effectiveness of NCI's programme design, assessments and graduate outcomes

For all modules that contribute to programmes leading to QQI-awards, each Module Descriptor required for QQI validation, includes: (i) an assessment strategy that details the assessment type (formative/summative); (ii) the assessment instruments that will be deployed, such as an exam project or case study, and (iii) the percentage weighting of each assessment within the overall grade. Once a programme is validated by QQI and a Certificate of Validation issued, assessment information is provided to the Admissions Team and the Exams Office to create the curriculum and assessment infrastructure within the Student Information System – Quercus+.

To ensure robustness and integrity across our assessment and examination structures we operate a 'two lines of defence' model, utilising internal moderation and external examiners to ensure academic standards are benchmarked against internal and external best practice. This approach provides a high level of assurance to the Academic Council, Governing Body and QQI, as our awarding body, that learner assessments across NCI are fair and equitable.

VERIFICATION AND MODERATION PROCESSES

INTERNAL MODERATION

In NCI, faculty follow a robust grading process at module level and all assessments that contribute towards the final grade (summative assessments) are subject to our policy of internal moderation, which involves 'Blind Double Marking' by a second internal examiner or 'Seen Double-Marking' through retrospective sampling of scripts already marked. We operate several models of internal moderation which are deployed depending on the credit-volume (ECTS) of the modules concerned and their weighting percentage within the module. This is a key step in our internal results verification process, prior to release of sample scripts and assessments to the appointed External Examiner.

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

NCI's External Examiner Policy is also contained within QAES Chapter 4: Assessment. The External Examiner process provides an extremely important layer of quality assurance for the entire assessment and grading process. NCI's External Examiners are formally appointed by the Registrar, and a register of all external examiners, including their terms of appointment, is maintained by the Assessment and Examinations Team. The Team also provides detailed training, handbooks and guidance to proposed and existing External Examiners on the expectations we have of them in the role, as well as the range of supports available on our assessment and examinations rules and processes [see Repository for the full policy].

External Examiners are asked:

- To review the appropriateness of the MIPLOs and other learning-related objectives of the programme.
- To investigate the actual attainment of learners using information agreed and supplied by the College.
- To compare the MIPLOs and Learners' actual attainment with the relevant awards standards outlined in the National Framework of Qualifications and with corresponding data from other programmes in the same discipline in other higher education institutions, both nationally and internationally.
- To determine whether the applied procedures for assessment are valid, reliable, fair and consistent.
- To review the appropriateness of the programme assessment strategy, assessment procedures and, developing from this, all subsidiary module assessment strategies.
- To review key assessment tasks prior to their assignment whilst taking account of prior learnings; and
- To report all findings to the College and make evidence-based recommendations if necessary.

As identified in Objective 1E and Objective 3 of this ISER, External Examiner reports are received, considered and responded to by programme teams as part of annual and 5-yearly programme reviews. An overarching analysis of recurrent themes arising from External Examiner Reports is also completed by QIE.

Briefing sessions are held biannually by the Assessment and Examinations Team to ensure faculty/ AF and external examiners are aware of their roles and responsibilities within our assessment and examination procedures. These sessions are recorded and copies of the presentation, alongside any updated templates and guidelines, are shared. During workshops held in the 2023/24 academic year, valuable suggestions were put forward and subsequently implemented leading to the following changes that have further increased integrity and transparency across our processes:

- All samples of learner assessments are now required to be provided in PDF format.
- The sample must be the Turnitin version uploaded by the student.
- Turnitin version will also include any comments or feedback from the lecturer grading.
- Sample should be saved and labelled with Student ID_ Grade. This is for the benefit of the External Examiner to ensure consistency in the way in which samples are labelled.

EXAM BOARDS

Provisional grades are received and reviewed at biannual Internal Exam Boards for organised by the Assessment and Examinations Office each of the two Schools and CELL. These are chaired by the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research. Final verified grades are presented and ratified at the QQI Exam Boards (from which grades are submitted to QQI for all award stage students). The formal QQI Exam Board is also chaired by the Vice President. This two-step process ensures the integrity of grades, since any issues reported or identified during the internal exam board can be addressed in good time before the final QQI Board, at which the relevant External examiners are present and asked to provide comments once the final grades have been presented. Attendees at the internal and QQI exam boards are advised to attend dedicated briefing sessions led by the Assessment and Exam Team on the rules and timescales to be applied throughout the verification of results process.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND THE AUTHENTICITY OF RESULTS

NCI has been actively engaged throughout the last five years with a range of national and international networks to assure the authenticity of our learner results and academic integrity. Most notably, we have aligned with and contributed to the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN), AdvanceHE and the International Centre for Academic Integrity (ICAI).

Our Learning Teaching and Assessment Committee, and its three sub-committees have been working extensively to produce guiding principles, policies and procedures for students and staff, particularly in relation to the use of AI in assessment. These documents include the NCI Academic Integrity Policy on Assessments and use of AI Generated Material such as ChatGPT, approved by Academic Council in October 2023 and most recently, the June Academic Council approved a new Academic Integrity Policy to be applied across 2024/25. Our policies and procedures for academic integrity are supplemented by a range of videos as well as plain English answers to FAQs from faculty and students, prepared by our Library, Teaching Enhancement Unit and the NCI Students Union (NCISU). Case study A8 provides more information on this important policy and staff and student supports.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
POLICY AND GUIDELINES**

Appendix A8 – p 130

In short, the stance of the College is that AI tools can be positive and powerful supports for learners and staff when used in ethical and acceptable ways. We require students to self-declare and provide evidence of any AI usage in line with approved guidelines, so that staff can make informed decisions around academic integrity. In turn staff are supported to be clear as to what constitutes appropriate AI use in their assignment descriptors in line with institutional and national guidelines.

Our Teaching Enhancement Unit and our Library Academic Support Centre have created an extensive range of support materials for our Faculty. With the rise of AI tools like ChatGPT, Grammarly and GitHub Copilot, students now have resources that can significantly aid in their learning and creation of their academic work. While these tools can be beneficial for idea generation, editing, and self-study, they also present new challenges in maintaining academic integrity. NCI acknowledges that the use of AI is quickly becoming a part of everyday society and should be embraced. As such, the College publishes explicit guidelines on the use of AI in assignments, and what might be permitted by faculty within assessment design. Lecturers with questions around academic integrity are encouraged to contact the Library, the Teaching Enhancement Unit and the Assessment and Examinations Team. Throughout 2023/24 the Teaching Enhancement Unit also led a series of Assessment Redesign workshop to directly support faculty navigate the challenges of this topic particularly in relation to AI.

Similarly, an extensive range of materials are published for our students on how to utilise AI and avoid academic misconduct. The Library Academic Support Centre takes on the primary responsibility here and we provide more information on their services in supports for students is provided in Objective 2B: Learner Supports.

DETECTING THE USE OF AI AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES

Since 2022/23, all students' assignments are required to be submitted via Turnitin. This generates an AI score which is visible to faculty and staff. We are clear in our guidelines to faculty that Turnitin similarity and AI scores alone cannot be used as a reason to bring a student through to disciplinary process and should always be used as indicators of possible impropriety.

Academic dishonesty cases considered by the College Disciplinary Committee, chaired by the Registrar include:

- Collusion including speaking to another student during an examination
- Exam cheating
- Plagiarism
- Misrepresentation
- Bribery
- Falsification of results
- Possession of copies of examination question or examination paper, in advance of the examination being held
- Untrue claims to have carried out experiments / research

Data on disciplinary cases is captured and reported at internal and QQI Exam Board by the Registrar. An analysis – per calendar year - of disciplinary cases (as shown below), is completed annually within Registry. The data informs, particularly trends around programmes, triggers a range of targeted supports and measures, in conjunction with academic leaders including programme directors and Deans/Vice-Deans. As outlined below, approximately 1% of our total enrolled students per annum have come through

the Disciplinary Process over this review period.

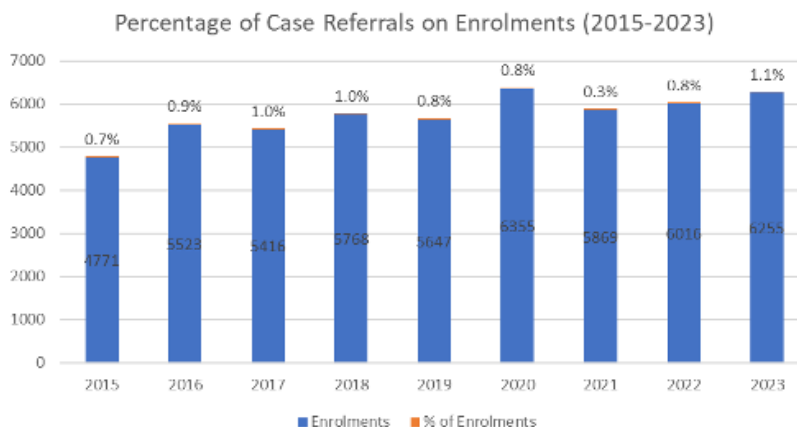


Figure 28: Data on total disciplinary cases referred

EVALUATION

NCI works hard to ensure our assessment and examinations policies and procedures are consistently applied and aligned with national and international best practice. We are attuned to the impact of AI on academic integrity as well as the challenges and pressures experienced by students that are undertaking in-person on-campus examinations in-person for the first time (post-Covid restrictions). We continue to utilise our internal experts to ensure we support faculty, internal moderators, external examiners and our students to maintain academic integrity standards and that we guide students that avail of Generative AI and Large Language Modelling tools do so in a responsible way. Despite the inherent challenges in this area, we remain vigilant and adaptive to ensure we provide confidence in the robustness of our internal grading and verification procedures of learner results, as well as in the effectiveness of our External Examiner system.

We do recognise, through this CINTE evaluation process, that the grading and results verification process is placing a significant workload burden on many faculty, and administrative support staff across our Assessment and Examinations and Academic Operations Teams. This is particularly the case for those faculty with teaching responsibilities across multiple, large modules such as those in the School of Computing at postgraduate level. The work to be undertaken across 2024/25 to review and refresh our assessment and examination guidelines will include a review of timelines and workload requirements in advance of learner results being presented at internal and QQI Exam Boards. We will explore options to stagger deadlines where possible, prioritising the QQI Exam Board verification processes. We currently are constrained by the dates of QQI Exam Boards and the deadlines for submitting verified results to QQI. When we secure Delegated Authority from QQI, we would aim to review these timelines to minimise the workload pressures experienced presently by our academic and administrative teams. These pressures have been more acute in recent years as the institution has scaled in size and complexity. We will continue to identify and explore efficiencies, such as the use of online rather than in-person exam boards, to alleviate burdens and enhance our effectiveness wherever possible.

Figure 30: Data on total disciplinary cases referred

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

We remain committed to ensuring academic integrity across our learner results. We will continue to utilise our experienced team of internal and external experts who continue to assure us of the integrity of our assessment and examination processes despite the fast-paced challenges in this field. We are committed to proactively engaging with national and international networks to ensure we benchmark our policies, procedures and guidelines against identified best practice, and we continue to explore investments in AI detection tools to enhance fairness, equity and academic standards.

We will continue to improve the quality and impact of our academic integrity processes by:

- Providing training, guidance and supports from orientation onwards to students, faculty and external examiners on our mechanisms for protecting academic integrity.
- Refreshing our assessment and examination policies and procedures in 2024/25.
- Reviewing timelines across the marking, verification and exam board structure to minimise pressures on faculty and administrative staff.
- Collecting and analysing data on disciplinary cases to target academic and learner supports.

OBJECTIVE 1H:

INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

Chapter 9 of the QAES outlines NCI's commitments and policies for information governance and management. It confirms the importance within NCI of having information systems that support teaching and learning, the implementation of quality assurance policies and procedures, and effective and efficient decision making.

Within the Teaching pillar of our Strategic Plan, we confirm a commitment to:

Objective 3.4 - Develop the processes and data sets that drive the relevance and effectiveness of NCI's programme design, assessments and graduate outcomes

INFORMATION AND DATA SECURITY

Information systems are selected and implemented in consultation with the wider user community using the NCI management approach and are required to adhere to the principles of privacy by default and accessibility by design. Enterprise systems are procured on the basis that they are supported by a reputable vendor with sufficient supports available to NCI. Where systems are cloud based, data must be held in line with approved policies.

Institutionally, we remain acutely aware of our obligations in relation to information and data security. Under the leadership of our Director of IT, significant progress has been made over recent years to ensure that these obligations are met across the entire organisation. In 2021, NCI's information security measures were tested having been subjected to a cyberattack. Consequently, a comprehensive review of the College information security structure was undertaken with support from external experts, who helped us recover and identify any future vulnerabilities. External experts helped us establish a continuous improvement plan to ensure we can meet the challenges of the ever-changing security landscape based on identified best practice. The findings and recommendations of this information security report were received and implemented by the Executive, and closely monitored by the Governing Body and its Risk Committee.

NCI subsequently introduced an Information Security Management System (ISMS), updated our information security and data protection policies. As outlined in our Executive Strategic Implementation Plan, our IT Department are also working towards alignment to the ISO27001 framework. A Change Management Policy for all information assets and supporting systems was also introduced alongside an IT risk management policy and IT risk register. In addition, a third-party system is used to backup NCI's Microsoft 365 tenancy. NCI has leveraged the Multifactor Authentication (MFA) capabilities of the Microsoft 365 platform to add a layer of security to our Business Systems that hold data. The College has an SLA in place with a third party to provide VMaaS, SIEM, Incident Response and EDR services. IT Security Awareness training is delivered to staff throughout the year to test the systems in place and staff reactions. Throughout 2023/2024 the College has also made available to staff national cybersecurity training delivered by HEANet. Participation has been strong in these training events, including from Executive Group members.

The primary system for storing learner data is the Student Information System (SIS) – Quercus+. Once a learner is registered, their academic journey is managed in SIS. The College has built an integration platform wherein learner data flows to all required systems including: Moodle – our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE); Technology One, our Timetabling system; and the Library Management System. The SIS infrastructure components are hosted in NCI's Microsoft Azure tenancy and therefore benefit from the built in resilience and security of this platform. Currently there is no data uploaded into Quercus+ from any of the other third-party systems.

In advance of the Pandemic, NCI adopted a "Cloud First" strategy for delivery of all IT services to support programme delivery and management practices. Working with the College's Data Protection Officer (DPO) all business-critical systems had Business Impact

Assessments (BIA) and Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) completed on all systems that collect, store or process personal identifiable information. This approach enabled us to transition smoothly into the online delivery model required for all College academic and business activities throughout the pandemic.

DATA PROTECTION COMPLIANCE

NCI is committed to ensuring all personal data is processed in line with the data protection principles and good practices. In line with the requirements of the GDPR and Data Protection Acts, NCI appointed a Data Protection Officer. Our DPO is suitably trained, independent, and of sufficient seniority to perform the tasks required. Our DPO Reports to both the Director of Finance/Company Secretary and to the President. Our DPO designs, delivers and monitors a range of data protection policies and procedures in alignment with legislative requirements. These are presented above in Objective 1C and outlined below.

NCI fulfils its data protection obligations through several means, including:

- Deployment of Data Protection by Design and by Default within our Project Management Lifecycle for all new systems/changes to processing.
- Regular risk assessments/testing to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of technical and organisational measures on existing processing.
- Formalised Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) where processing “is likely to result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of natural persons” and/or “processing on a large scale of special categories of data”.

Records of all the above activities are retained for audit purposes by the DPO.

We also clarify to staff and contractors their responsibilities and obligations for ensuring compliance with data protection requirements and provide relevant training and guidance. Data protection training is mandatory for all NCI employees. Annually, all NCI staff will have to complete this training and a record is maintained for audit purposes. Queries in relation to personal data are promptly and courteously dealt with. When an employee receives an enquiry about the handling of personal data, they must know what to do, and/or where to refer it.

Our SMT and Governing Body are responsible for approving and reviewing our DPO policies, and for mandating the allocation of appropriate resources to ensure their successful implementation.

DATA QUALITY AND UTILISATION

In 2022, the College established a small ‘Management Information Services’ (MIS) Team with a view to data cleaning and creating a range of self-access dashboards to inform data-driven decision making at a programme, school and institutional level. Significant progress has been made over the past two years particularly in relation to data for annual programme monitoring and 5-yearly programme reviews. Data from the MIS Project Team, alongside data from our Examinations Team, has been vital to enhance oversight of programme quality. Case study A10 provides more information on the aims of the MIS project and progress to date. An example of MIS data utilisation is outlined below.

**MANAGEMENT INFORMATION
SYSTEMS (REPORTING)
PROJECT**

Appendix A10 – p 134

Analysis of the Impact of Covid Alternative Arrangements on Learner Retention, Progression and Achievement

In Q1 2023, MIS data was utilised to analyse and assess the impact of QQI’s Covid Alternative Arrangements on learner retention, progression and achievement rates. Between 2019/2020 – 2022/23, QQI permitted all HEIs to apply flexibility in teaching, learning and assessment principles and practices to ensure that students were not negatively impacted by the pandemic. This flexibility remains in place until June 2025.

The flexibility included changes to assessment rules and regulations, which included the removal of academic and financial penalties for students needing to defer or repeat a

module or programme. Additionally, throughout this timeline, most modules reduced the number of assessments to two, lightening the assessment load on students and faculty. The use of online assessment tools, such as Terminal Assignment-based Assessment (TABAs) appeared to have impacted positively on School of Computing pass rates. This period also saw significant teaching enhancements applied across the faculty through networking and the sharing of effective practices across Faculty.

While there were increases in pass rates noted throughout 2019/20 and 2020/21, when the assessment mitigation measures were applied, there did not appear to be any areas of concern around academic integrity, rather the Covid mitigations applied had proven beneficial to our learners. Pass rates appeared to be largely returning to the pre-Covid levels by 2023 and remained in line with sectoral norms. An updated analysis in Q4 2023, shared with Academic Council and Governing Body, showed improvements in pass rates in 2022/2023 from the previous academic year such as:

- Full-time learner pass rates increased by 6%, rising from 79% in 2021/2022 to 85%.
- Part-time learner pass rates exhibited a 3% increase, ascending from 84% to 87%.
- The overall 1st year pass rate demonstrated an increase from 77% in 2021/2022 to 83%.

Academic leaders that had an increase or decrease from the 2021/22 baseline, were asked to consider the factors that may have impacted on the change. The refreshed Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) Process was to be used to provide a comprehensive and systematic tool for monitoring data trends and triggers for change throughout the five-year programme lifecycle. Positive and negative impacts on learner achievement identified through this process were considered at a School/CELL and Institutional level to inform continuous quality improvement.

Factors identified as contributing to decreases in pass rates included the escalation of in-person examinations throughout the 2022/23 academic year, particularly affecting cohorts with exemption modules, which may have presented a significant challenge for first-year students. This challenge might have stemmed from their limited experience with traditional exam formats throughout CovidCOVID, potentially impacting their study management and exam skills. Several external examiners confirmed this trend was evident across the sector, with decreases in learner engagement also particularly evident across first year cohorts nationally and internationally. As a result of this analysis, in 2023/24 learner and academic integrity support services were targeted to specific programmes and cohorts of students where we believed they would have the maximum impact. This work is encapsulated in the Strategy for Learner Success highlighted in Objective 2.

EVALUATION

The foresight, skills, robustness and resilience of our IT Team has been tested and proven over this five-year period, which not only enabled us to transition smoothly to our digital campus in March 2020, but also the ability for our core academic and business practices to continue after the 2021 cyberattack. This exceptional work was formally recognised in the 2021 President's Awards.

We have built upon the robustness of our IT infrastructure over the past two years by utilising an IT prioritisation planning approach alongside our annual budgeting process. This has helped us to make informed planning decisions around institutional-level IT priorities and triggers Executive discussions around the impact work on the IT prioritisation list if new projects/systems are proposed. Where we have an agreed IT Priority – such as the 2023/24 transition of the Technology One timetabling platform from on-premises to the cloud – we seek to maximise operational and organisational efficiencies such as increased reporting functionality which will inform space utilisation, workload management and attendance/engagement monitoring practices and decision-making. Where a new system is proposed, such as changes to the CRM used by our

Careers Team in 2023 or our attendance monitoring system in 2024, Executive approval is required to agree the inclusion of the new system and a re-organisation of the IT prioritisation list.

We recognise the need to increase our capacity and capability to gather and analyse internal and external data to inform effective decision making. This includes the need for ongoing data cleanliness, data integrity and to maximise the work completed by our MIS Project Team. Our change in 2024 to being a HEA funded institution provides the opportunity for us to increase our integration with HEA data exchanges and reporting processes. This gives us the advantage of having access to data currently only made available to HEA funded institutions. It also allows us to increase the visibility of NCIs impact and distinctiveness in the sector through our inclusion in more HEA publications. However, it will inevitably increase our data reporting requirements. As a mitigation, our consultation with staff highlighted areas where smoother integration between some of our core student-data related systems would enhance operational efficiency and minimise duplications and inherent risks around manual data processing. We will continue to review and implement integration efficiencies as we progress through the lifespan of this Strategic Plan.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

We recognise the ongoing investment needs and challenges experienced to secure our information and data management structures. We are confident through the proven expertise of our IT Team, our MIS Team, and our DPO, that we can continue to manage and monitor our ongoing compliance obligations, as well as anticipate and mitigate risks. We have the structures in place to provide ongoing reassurance to our internal and external stakeholders of our continued compliance and alignment with national and international standards and best practice guidelines for data protection and information management and security.

We will continue to improve the quality and impact of our information and data management structures by:

- Reviewing our capacity and capability to meet new HEA data returns and reporting requirements once known, following our transition to being a HEA funded institution.
- Continuing to invest time and resources to complete the MIS Project to enhance effective data utilization in decision-making and reporting.
- Reviewing business systems to ensure they support business processes as we continue to scale in size and complexity to enhance operational efficiencies and effectiveness.
- Ensuring opportunities for further systems investment and integration are identified and approved by the Executive within annual IT prioritisation and financial planning processes.



OBJECTIVE 1I:

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Chapter 10 of our QAES outlines our policies and procedures for the quality and consistency of information published about our validated programmes.

INSTITUTIONAL-LEVEL QUALITY INFORMATION

Our quality assurance policies, procedures and activities are published on our QIE website located on our homepage. This is designed to be a key access point for internal and external stakeholders. Its content is managed and updated by the QIE Team, under the guidance of the Marketing Department to ensure alignment with College branding and social media policies. The website content is updated as necessary but reviewed annually alongside the upload of our Annual Quality Reports. The current QIE homepage is shown below:

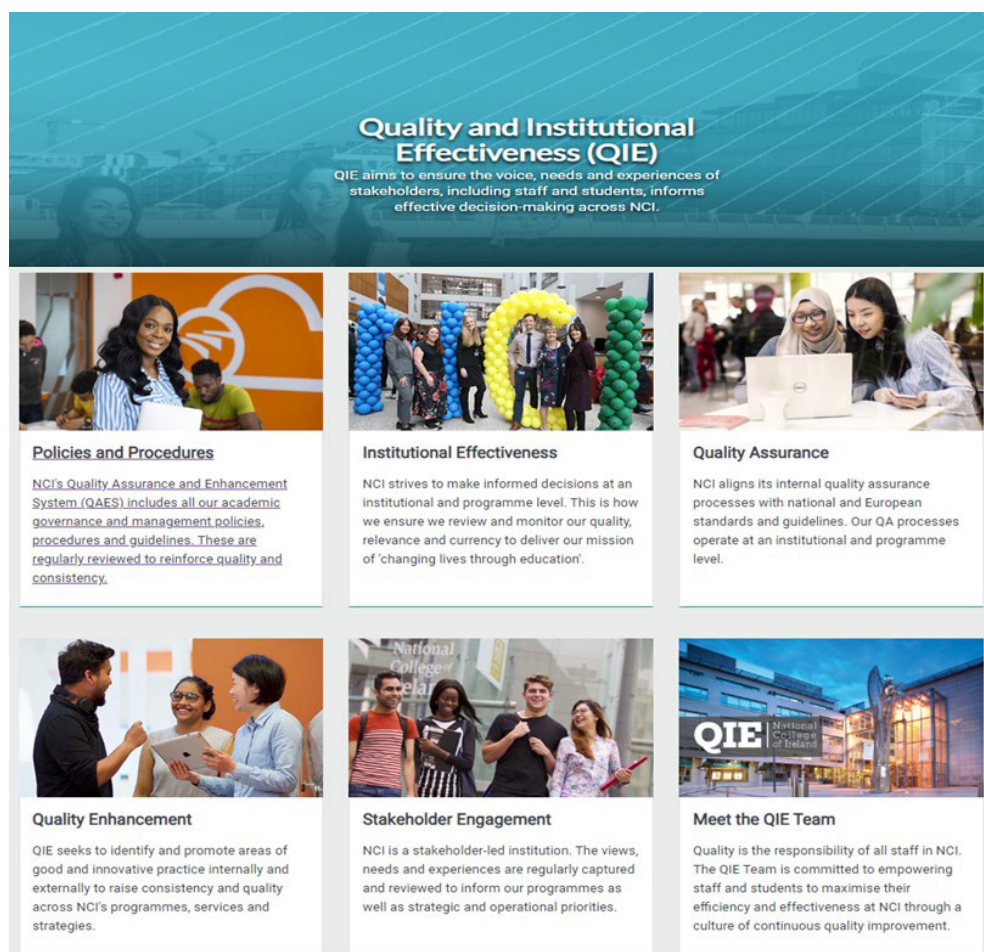


Figure 29: QIE homepage

As highlighted in Section 1C, our primary source of information about our quality assurance and enhancement system, our policies and quality activities are the Annual Quality Reports to QQI. These reports, approved by Academic Council prior to submission each February to Governing Body and QQI, are published on the NCI website (under the Quality Assurance section of our QIE webpage) in addition to being published on the QQI website.

Each AQR provides a comprehensive account of our quality policies and procedures, as well as the reviews and quality assurance and improvement activities undertaken within a 12-month period. In alignment with QQI and European Standards and Guidelines, the AQRs include links to the panel reports arising from peer reviews completed of our academic programmes and our non-academic policies and teams. The AQRs also include data on the diversity of our peer review panels and provide case studies of enhancement activities. Examples of which are published in Appendix A to this report.

Annual Quality Report to QQI



Following successful re-engagement (2018/2019), NCI submitted its first Annual Quality Report to QQI in February 2021 spanning activities completed within the Sept 2019 – August 2020 reporting period.

[AQR 2021 NCI Submission](#)

NCI submitted its second Annual Quality Report to QQI in February 2022 spanning activities completed within the Sept 2020 – August 2021 reporting period.

[AQR 2022 NCI Submission](#)

NCI submitted its third Annual Quality Report to QQI in February 2023 spanning activities completed within the Sept 2021 – August 2022 reporting period.

[AQR 2023 NCI Submission](#)

NCI submitted its fourth Annual Quality Report to QQI in February 2024 spanning activities completed within the Sept 2022 – August 2023 reporting period.

[AQR 2024 NCI Submission](#)

Figure 30: Annual Quality Reports to QQI

PROGRAMME-LEVEL QUALITY INFORMATION

The Director of Marketing and International Development is responsible for the accuracy and completeness of information utilised in marketing and social media activities and on the NCI website about our validated programmes.

The QIE Director informs the Marketing Team and indeed the entire Executive Group, of the outcomes of each QQI panel event following the final close-out session led by the respective panel chair. This provides NCI with confirmation of the Panel's intention to make a recommendation to the QQI PAEC to validate/revalidate a programme following the satisfactory completion by NCI of any panel conditions or recommendations. At this stage in the programme lifecycle, the Marketing Team will add the programme to the NCI website as well as other marketing materials and prospectuses, stating it is advertised 'subject to QQI validation'. Once a programme has been successfully validated by the QQI PAEC, which is often 3 – 6 months after the panel event, and the Certificate of Validation issued by QQI, the disclaimer is removed.

The QQI Certificate of Validation is the core source of truth utilised internally to confirm the validation criteria and conditions alongside the approved curriculum, modes, levels, lengths and locations of delivery. QIE maintain a SharePoint repository of all Certificates of Validation alongside programme validation documents. The content of the Certificates of Validation, alongside module information extracted from the final post-panel validation document, are uploaded into our Curriculum Management system - Coursebuilder - powered by AKARI. This generates the information on the programme and module presented in the course-finder section of our website as well as providing the content for our Programme Brochures as shown below:

Find a Course

Filters Clear all

Search <input type="text"/>	Course types <input type="text"/>	Subjects <input type="text"/>
Awards <input type="text"/>	Levels <input type="text"/>	Start dates <input type="text"/>

BA (Honours) in Accounting and Finance	
Description:	BA (Honours) in Accounting and Finance
Duration:	3 years
NFQ Level:	Level 8
Brochure:	Download BA (Honours) in Accounting and Finance brochure

Figure 31: NCI's online search facility for Programmes

EVALUATION

Much of the self-assessment work completed over the past two years has identified the challenges faced across the institution as we continue to scale. Working Groups established within the Streamlining Student Success initiative, highlighted that greater clarity was needed around roles and responsibilities across a range of steps in the learner lifecycle – from applications to alumni. This in turn has led to the work proposed within the Strategy for Supporting Student Success alongside the launch of our digital and physical support hubs.

Furthermore, there is increasing recognition of the need to clarify roles and responsibilities for exchanging information about validated programmes at each stage in the Programme Lifecycle Management (PLM). This work has been initiated and will continue throughout the 2024/25 academic year. This model is designed to provide an additional layer of transparency and quality control around our validated programmes, which is particularly important for new staff and faculty joining NCI. This will be helpful for ensuring we communicate internally and externally any major or minor modifications made following annual monitoring processes or any validation conditions from QQI.

The single source of truth model led by QIE of QQI validated programmes is an excellent and trusted reference point, regularly updated and maintained by QIE. However, we recognise the benefits from this repository being publicised more regularly to new and existing staff and faculty. The proposed enhanced role for the QIE Director in the orientation and induction processes of new staff and Faculty, as outlined in Objective 1C will be a positive step in this approach.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

We have policies and procedures in place for the publication of programme information following validation and revalidation. We will review our communications, roles and responsibilities to ensure all internal and external stakeholders are assured of the robustness of our controls and structures for programme information published on our website, our prospectuses and social media channels.

We will continue to improve the quality of the information published about our programmes by:

- Publishing clear guidelines on the key roles, responsibilities and information flows across our internal teams following the publication of QQI Certificates of Validation.
- Documenting process flows for any alternations, minor or major amendments approved by NCI or QQI to validated programmes during the delivery phase (Stage 3) of the PLM.
- Providing briefings and communications to staff and faculty to ensure they are aware of the resources on our validated portfolio of programmes, held by QIE.
- Conducting 'spot checks' on published materials to provide a proportionate additional level of quality control around the programme accuracy and completeness.



OBJECTIVE 1J:

OTHER PARTIES INVOLVED IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The policies and procedures for collaborative provision are contained in QAES Chapter 3, which are aligned with QQI's Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes, and Joint Awards (2012) and benchmarked against IHEQN Guidelines for the Approval, Monitoring and Review of Collaborative and Transnational Provision. Chapter 3 also includes procedures for Due Diligence/Risk Analysis and Partner Profiling when new partnerships are being considered by the College. Arrangement for the delivery of Apprenticeship programmes are provided in QAES Chapter 12.

Under Pillar 6: Positioning, our Strategic Plan 2022-2027 outlines a commitment to:

Objective 6.2: Continue to develop partnerships with employers, community, students and the further education sector, in programme design, pathways, work placements and learner employability

PARTNERSHIP GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

Our structures for the management and governance of arrangements with third parties across our education and training activities are captured and monitored in our Annual Quality Report (AQR) to QQI each February and considered by our Programme Lifecycle Management Executive Sub-Group (PLM ESG), Academic Council and Governing Body. Governance oversight of our delivery partnerships and collaborations is included in the Terms of reference of the PLM ESG. This ensures any contractual requirements and delivery complications arising from new or existing agreements to develop and/or deliver a programme with a national, European or international partner, are considered across the entire programme lifecycle by the Executive.

In 2023 we appointed an Academic Partnerships Manager to provide oversight of our arrangements with any third parties nationally, at a European or International Level. The Academic Partnerships Manager provides key administrative support to academic leaders, the Executive, our partners and our students (as appropriate) to ensure the quality of all new and existing partnerships. As an additional quality control, the QIE Programme Lifecycle Manager maintains a Partnership Register for the College and works together with the Academic Programme Manager to review and report on the status of our partnerships supporting academic leaders, and escalate any emerging risks.

In 2023/24 our QIE Team established an online repository of all Partnership Agreements and Articulation Agreements and PRSB accreditations, within the QIE SharePoint system. It is searchable resource accessible to all staff. The Academic Partnership Manager will be able to use this repository as a 'single source of truth' when working with Schools and CELL. This repository is accessible alongside the programme validation repository (searchable by School/CELL and Validation expiry date).

Each of our third-party partnership arrangements for programme delivery are captured in Memorandums of Agreement (MoAs), Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) and/or Service Level Agreements (SLA). These are updated formally as part of programme validation and revalidation activities and submitted to QQI as part of programme documentation. Our Agreements are always signed by an Authorised Officer of the College, usually the President, Director of Finance and Company Secretary or the College Registrar. Importantly, whether an MoU, MoA or SLA these formally approved arrangements always provide clarity on roles and responsibilities to assure the quality of the learner experience; management and governance structures; disputes and appeals structures; and Data Protection provisions when learner or other data is being shared across partners.

ARRANGEMENTS WITH PROFESSIONAL, REGULATORY AND STATUTORY BODIES (PRSBs), AWARDING BODIES AND QUALITY BODIES

As reported in our most recent AQR, NCI currently has in place arrangements with 7 PSRBs, 1 Awarding Body and 1 Quality Body – QQI. Our The quality of our ongoing relationship with QQI is essential for the achievement of our mission, alongside our ability to maintain our distinctiveness, role and reputation in the sector. Our numerous interactions with QQI staff, regulations, policies and procedures, as well as the support and confidence of QQI in NCI's maturity and capabilities are documented throughout this ISER. The importance of this key stakeholder relationship is also monitored within our institutional Risk Register.

In 2021, NCI formally signed up to operating against the QQI Principles for Professional Engagement with Education Providers, including programme validation, professional accreditation and approval. This aids our ability to ensure that professional accreditation, approval processes and all programme validation and related review processes undertaken by NCI with PRSB partners operate with integrity in a transparent, accountable, efficient, effective, and fair way.

In 2023, the Registrar completed for SMT and Governing Body, a risk assessment of our oversight and communications arrangements for programmes for which professional, statutory and regulatory recognition is required. The risk assessment confirmed that the existing mitigations in place or proposed in the Executive Strategic Implementation Plan for 2024 were appropriate and an overall 'low risk rating' was assigned. Mitigations including oversight by the Academic Partnerships Manager, QIE Team and PLM ESG are further outlined below.

Within 2022/23, the School of Business secured QQI Validation for some of NCI's most popular and previously CIPD-awarded Diplomas and Certificates in the professional HR and Learning and Development fields. This strategic move will serve to further strengthen the reputation of these programmes in the Irish (and wider EU) HR domain and make it easier for graduates of the programmes to progress further in the Irish HE sector, since their qualifications will henceforth be recognised as fully aligned with the NFQ as well as fully aligned with CIPD's professional standards.

As outlined previously, our most recent and highly successful engagement with a review by a PRSB was with the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) in Spring 2024.

ARTICULATION AGREEMENTS

We align to the IHEQN definition that an articulation agreement is a process whereby all students who satisfy academic criteria on one programme are automatically entitled (on academic grounds) to be admitted with advance standing to a subsequent stage of a programme of a degree awarding body. These arrangements are subject to a formal agreement between the parties.

As outlined in our AQR, NCI hold 14 articulation agreements with partners in China and Ireland.

Most recently, a new articulation agreement was approved by Academic Council in June 2024. This establishes an agreement between NCI and UniHaven concerning the entry of students from the UniHaven Level 5 Specific Purpose Certificate in International Foundation Studies programme into Stage 1 of NCI's Level 8 programmes. This agreement aims to provide a clear and structured pathway for students, ensuring they can seamlessly transition into higher education programmes in line with QQI policies and standards. QQI was notified of this articulation agreement in July 2024 outlining the relevant NCI programmes that may avail of this arrangement.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

QQI's Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes, and Joint Awards, 2012 defines collaborative provision as a process that occurs where two or more providers are involved by formal agreement in the provision of a programme of higher education and training.

As reported in our most recent AQR, NCI has six collaborative partners. We are proud of our innovations in these partnerships and the strength of our relationships with our collaborative partners. Many examples of these collaborations are highlighted throughout this document, including within the case studies presented in our Appendix A. Most recently our work with the P-TECH partners, including our new collaborative partnership with the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb), illustrates our ambition – and capacity- for greater tertiary collaborations. Successful programme revalidations within 2023/24 have included collaborations with The Wheel and Quality Matters - our collaborative partners for the Certificate in Non-Profit Leadership and Management, the National Recruitment Federation, which leads the Industry Consortium for the unique BA (Hons) Recruitment Practice Apprenticeship and Financial Services Ireland, the Industry Consortium-lead for our Financial Services Apprenticeship programmes.

In July 2024, QQI confirmed the revalidation of our seven existing Special Purpose Award programmes within our suite of programmes developed and delivered for the (government) Department of Social Protection (DSP). In addition, the new 10 credit NFQ Level 8 Certificate in Operations Management was added to the existing suite. The Independent Evaluation Panel were highly complementary of the programmes, as well as the staff and students. The uniqueness, importance and value placed on the programmes by DSP and NCI was commended, as was the strength of the partnership approach. In March 2023, the DSP "suite" of programmes was nominated for and won a Civil Service Engagement and Innovation Award in the category of 'Workforce for the Future.' This important partnership was further externally recognised in the 2024 Education Awards, which shortlisted our partnership with the Department of Social Protection in the category of [Best Community Academic Collaboration](#).

NEW AND EVOLVING PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

ERASMUS+

NCI was granted the ERASMUS + Charter in 2021. Following the appointment of the NCI Academic Partnerships Manager, good progress has been made between NCI and the QQI Awards Directorate regarding options for the quality assurance of ERASMUS + learner mobility exchanges as components of new programmes going forward and/or existing validated programmes. Draft procedural documentation was discussed and has been developed, with input from academic leaders, QQI and Academic Council throughout 2023/24. We are seeking to formally approve an ERASMUS + Quality Framework at the October 2024 Academic Council meeting, as an addendum to QAES Chapter 3. We are currently working with the Dean of the School of Computing to embed an Erasmus partnership into the BA Hons Computing programme, undergoing revalidation in 2024/25. Further opportunities for incoming and outgoing Erasmus+ exchanges for faculty, staff and students will be explored throughout 2024/25 and beyond. We see this as an important area for growth.

KIRCHER NETWORK PARTNERSHIPS

Building upon our membership of the Kircher Network of Jesuit Higher Education Institutions, the International Association of Jesuit Business Schools (IAJBS) and the International Association of Jesuit Engineering Schools (IAJES) in 2024/25 we anticipate further enhancing our opportunities for collaborations at a European and International level through these key Jesuit Networks. We will consider partnership opportunities, such as the Inter-Institutional Online Course Project, which is open to all Kircher universities and centres, allowing institutions to offer online courses. If NCI agreed to pursue this, it would enable our students to take online courses at other institutions within the

Network. Our Academic Partnerships Manager will undertake a desk-based assessment of the Memorandum of Agreement and the academic and operational requirements outlined to inform consideration by Academic Leaders and the PLM ESG in 2024/25.

RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

As outlined in Objective 1F, NCI entered a non-exclusive partnership for the delivery of Level 10 programmes with Maynooth University in October 2019, with the objective of enhancing the research capabilities of both institutions in subject disciplines through the co-delivery and joint supervision of PhD candidates. The Memorandum of Agreement for this partnership, which enables students to enrol on Level 10 Doctoral programmes, jointly supervised by NCI and Maynooth faculty, is in the process of being updated. A refreshed MoA is anticipated to be signed before the end of 2024 following a meeting between institutional representatives in Q2 2024.

Speaking directly to NCI's Strategic Plan ambitions for teaching and research, the 2022/23 academic year saw the development and successful QQI validation of a ground-breaking new suite of postgraduate programmes in the emerging field of Open Data Practice. In partnership with research intensive partners in universities in Rome, Vienna and Bucharest, the Cloud Computing team in the School of Computing worked with industry to develop exciting new Master's, PG Diploma and Certificate programmes in Open Data Practice. These are, we believe, the first fully accredited postgraduate education and training offerings in Open Data in the Irish HE sector and among the first across the EHEA. The College will target recruitment of post-doctoral researchers and individuals working to realise Open Data objectives across public sector and industry settings, both nationally and internationally.

EVALUATION

NCI has invested a significant amount of time, effort and resources to build robust relationships and collaborations with high quality academic, government and business partners nationally, at a European level and Internationally – particularly in China. Many of these relationships are longstanding and are the product of strong relationship building particularly by our Vice President and Academic Leaders. Our distinctiveness in the sector and our mission, vision and goals attracts long-lasting partnerships both individually and organisationally. The quality of our programmes, faculty and students is demonstrated by the length of these partnerships and the willingness for partners, such as the DSP and P-TECH to build a suite of programmes with us.

As the institution has scaled and our portfolio of programmes and partnerships has expanded, we recognised the need for more administrative oversight, to not only protect partnership quality, by ensuring all parties meet contractual obligations, but also to ensure that our arrangements remain fit for purpose, relevant and current for the needs of our learners and partners. The establishment of the Academic Partnerships Manager post, alongside the increased oversight provided by QIE and the PLM ESG gives us confidence that we have the capacity and capability to institutionally support our expanding partnership portfolio and our faculty and academic leaders as they expand their reach and provision nationally and at a European and International level.

This area is identified as an area of growth for NCI as we continue to scale, thus sustaining quality, and monitoring risks is a key commitment for us.

In addition to the extensive range of activities undertaken in this area in 2023/24, we have now committed, with QQI, to complete the necessary steps in 2024 and 2025 to extend our QA scope of provision to include fully online national and transnationally delivered programmes. Having already participated in two pilot revalidations of existing programmes, in fully online mode, in the last two years, we are confident of achieving this extension of scope in 2025, enabling us to continue to work with new institutions and organisations internationally through a range of delivery modes and locations.

In deliverance of our Research Strategy and Strategic Plan commitments for Level 10 programmes, we have recognised that signing the existing MoA with Maynooth University just before the Covid Pandemic, had a negative impact on our ability to establish the necessary infrastructure and marketing materials to maximise the potential opportunities that this arrangement brings to our faculty and students. This was acknowledged in meetings this year with Maynooth University, and we will build upon this opportunity with an updated agreement and formalised administrative and marketing structures before the end of 2024.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

While arrangements with external bodies are inherently complicated, sensitive and labour intensive, the longstanding collaborations, articulation agreements and relationships NCI has developed with QQI, PRSBs, FE partners and other partners nationally and internationally has been vital our continued success, growth and distinctiveness in the sector, particularly around accessibility. Our strength in investing in these partnerships will continue to underpin how we remain distinctive as we scale and sustain quality and accessibility throughout this Strategic Planning period and beyond.

We will continue to improve the quality and impact of our relationships with other parties by:

- Annually reviewing our Repository of third-party agreements, to maintain a single source of truth.
- Undertaking an annual risk assessment exercise of our PRSB and partnership arrangements to provide assurances to our SMT and the Governing Body.
- Approving our Erasmus+ Quality Framework to enable us to scale and sustain quality opportunities for our staff, faculty and students through Erasmus collaborations.
- Exploring short and long term growth opportunities with our existing and new collaborative partners, most notably through expansions with FE partners, Apprenticeships, the Department of Social Protection, the P-TECH initiative, and the Kircher Network, with a view to contributing to our Strategic Plan KPI of growth by an additional 2,000 students by 2027.

OBJECTIVE 1K:

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Chapter 11 of our QAES presents our policies and procedures for research governance and management.

Our Strategic Plan 2022-27 has Research as one of its six strategic priorities, setting out the following as our overarching research priority and intended outcome by 2027:

Priority: We will invest in a step-change in research and innovation capability, in a manner that is closely connected to our distinctive offering

Outcome: A research environment that supports our distinctive provider status, attracts and retains good staff, and enables productive employer relationships.

Our commitments to research excellence and increasing our research capacity, capability and impacts are firmly grounded in our distinctiveness as a Higher Education Institution and our values-driven culture of Access, Social Justice and Sustainability. We have a strong profile of community action research particularly through ELI. As part of our Strategic Plan, NCI will continue to engage employers, external partners and community in research and innovation partnerships.

Our Institutional Research Strategy, launched following Governing Body approval, sets out five major goals for research at NCI until 2027:

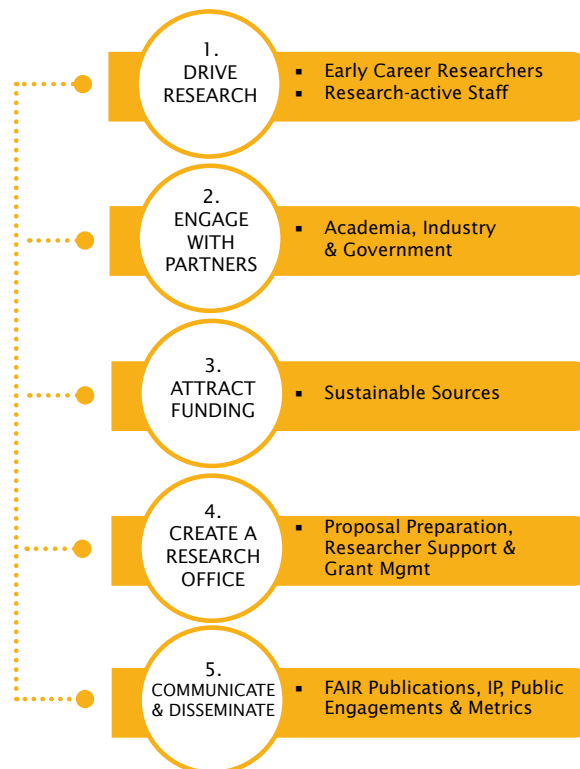


Figure 32: Research Strategy Goals

Led by the Vice President, The Research Strategy (2023-2027) and its five goals and attendant actions were presented at all-staff meetings and discussed in Academic Council and Governing Body prior to their launch. There was much enthusiasm among academic faculty for a strategic framework for research in the medium-term. Since the publication of the Research Strategy, the 2024 academic promotions round included a promotions pathway to Assistant Professor and to Professor grades through the category of Teaching, Research and Impact. This is a major step forwards towards institutional recognition of academic faculty research activity, output and impact and will encourage new faculty to pursue research as a valued activity within the College.

The following research clusters have been identified in NCI's Research Strategy. These clusters will bring together experts from various disciplines to collaborate on research projects that align with our institutional research and sustainability goals and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.



Figure 33: NCI's Research Strategy Clusters (2023-2027)

While our Research Strategy aims to increase the number of Early Career Researchers and research-active staff, NCI does not currently have QA Scope of Provision from QQI to offer research degrees at Master's (NFQ Level 9) or doctoral level (NFQ Level 10). As referenced elsewhere, we are currently working alongside leaders Maynooth University to strengthen our agreement for the delivery of joint doctoral opportunities, whereby NCI students wishing to pursue doctoral study in one of our subject areas can avail of a co-supervisory arrangement and attain the award of PhD from Maynooth University.

The step-change envisaged in the 2022-27 Strategic Plan to enhance our research impact is already underway, evidenced by the impressive level of academic and community-action research across our Schools, CELL and ELI. Case study A12 provides an example of just one of our current mission-aligned research projects, this one addressing issues of Mental Health in Ireland, led by the NCI Psychology team. It is noteworthy that our faculty are attracting international attention through their research, which is being published in the highest-ranking Journals – including Nature.

**STIGMA AND MENTAL
HEALTH IRELAND**

Appendix A12 – p 138

As shown in our Institutional Profile, across the 2018-2022 period, NCI recorded:

- 292 publications, from 160 Authors
- 1.71 Field-Weighted Citation Impact
- 4,820 citations
- an average of 16.6 Citations per Publication and 24 H-Index.

In addition to these research outputs, the Early Learning Initiative (ELI) had 143 publications on NCI's Internal eResearch system of Staff and Learner research outputs (NORMA).

Our research publication outputs, and citations impact are increasingly matched by the volume of research grant funding that we are attracting, with almost €6m recorded as direct funding to NCI since 2018. The Cloud Competency Centre (CCC), within the School of Computing, is leading the way here with several well-funded research and training grants from various European Commission funding streams. Case study A12 provides more information on the CCC's current and planned research activities. ELI is also securing significant competitive funding to support its growing Community Action research agenda. In February 2024, the STEM Family Learning in the Community project, facilitated by ELI in partnership with NCI's School of Computing, was selected as one of the projects to receive funding as part of an Irish government-funded initiative.

**CCC COLLABORATIVE
RESEARCH AND TRAINING**

Appendix A11 – p 138

In 2023/24 we employed a dedicated resource within the Finance team to support faculty and academic leaders gain access to and report on research grants. Additionally, the Academic Partnerships Manager has been providing an additional layer of guidance on European research grant opportunities.

RESEARCH COMMERCIALISATION/ TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

The NCI Technology Transfer Office was set up to assist staff and students in commercialising research, which Enterprise Ireland, and Knowledge Transfer Ireland support under the Technology Transfer Strengthening Initiative. We are part of a technology transfer consortium, the Dublin Regional Innovation Consortium (DRIC), headed up by TU Dublin, IADT, and DIAS. NCI has a team of academic champions who work with students and staff to develop invention disclosures and advise on the next steps before arranging a meeting with the DRIC licensing Executive.

DRIC: DUBLIN REGIONAL INNOVATION CONSORTIUM

The consortium members run events and training workshops on intellectual property, commercialisation, licences, and invention disclosure competitions while providing advice and support from licensing executives who work on behalf of the member institutes. DRIC assisted in commercialising leading-edge research for Dublin Technological University, IADT, Dias and NCI, winning several high-profile technology transfer licences with companies such as SONY, Microsoft and Bausch & Lomb. Several start-ups were created as a direct result of the assistance from the Consortium and the member institutes.

EVALUATION

Our Research Strategy is fully aligned with NCI's overarching Strategic Plan for the period and this alignment will ensure that effective governance and management oversight and decision-making underpins our ambitious plans for strategic research growth. We know that there is much to strive for when it comes to research impact; not only will academic and community-based research create an enhanced teaching and learning experience for our students; it will also raise NCI's reputation nationally and internationally across our academic subject areas, and – critically – support the recruitment and retention of good academic faculty.

When we asked NCI staff to rate their level of familiarity with NCI's research policy and procedures, as part of the all-staff CINTE survey, 26.1% responded that they were either familiar or very familiar. This relatively low score may not be too surprising, since academic faculty comprised 22.4% of the survey respondents, however it does illustrate nonetheless that there is a job of work to do to raise the profile of research activity more widely across NCI and attract more faculty to engage in research (since only then will they seek out the policies and procedures needed to support their work). We know that the launch of our new Research Strategy will create a strategic impetus in this respect, supported by the inclusion of research in academic promotion criteria and other structural or organisational changes.

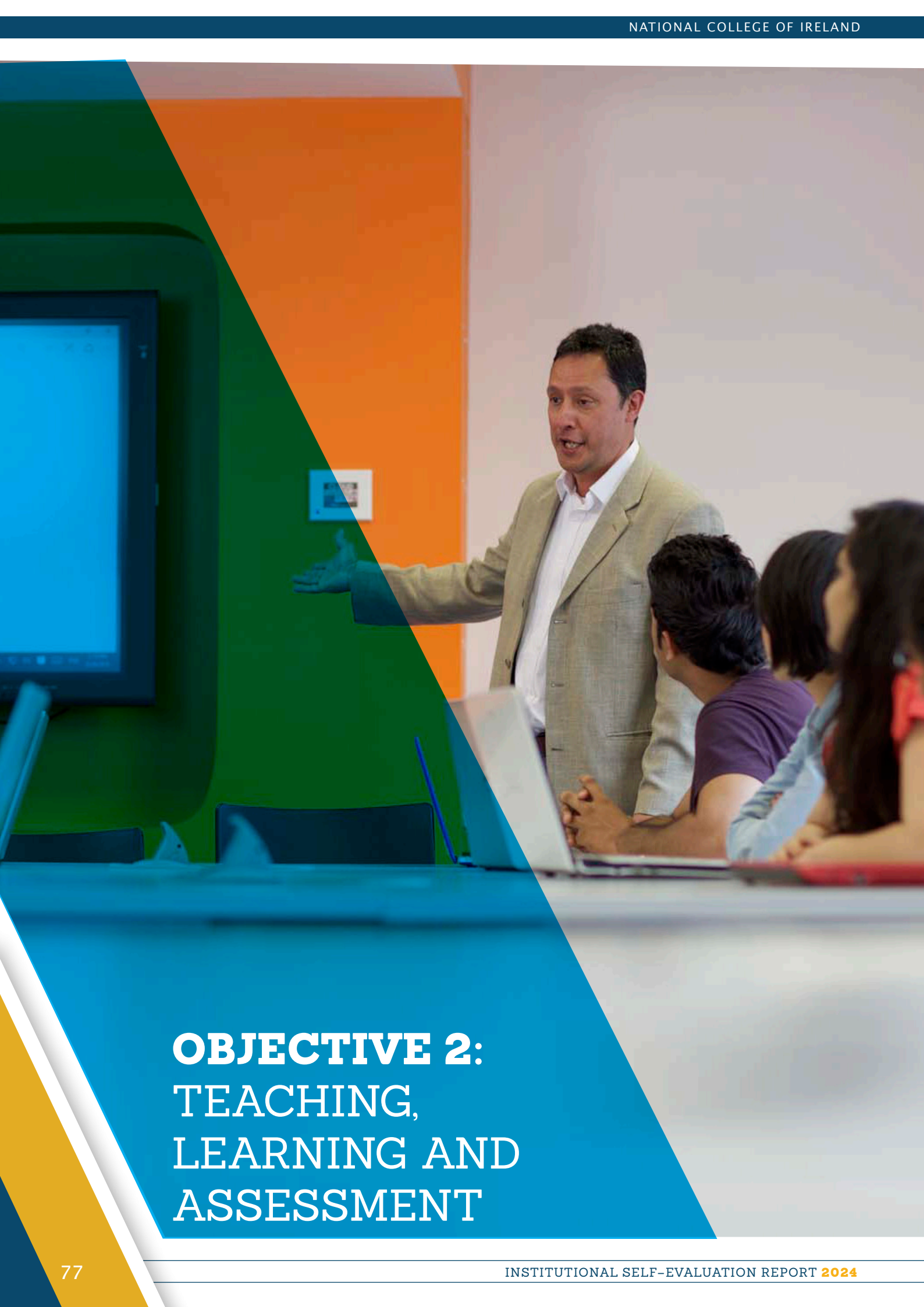
The CINNTE staff consultation process highlighted that while enthusiastic and supportive of the new Research Strategy, further investment was needed as we continue to scale. The SMT is committed to ensuring income generated by research supports the research investment infrastructure.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

From a relatively low base, NCI's research output and impact in academic and community-action research has grown significantly in the recent five-year period. With the launch of our new Research Strategy, aligned to the NCI Strategic Plan Priority on Research (Priority 4), we are clear on the importance of scaling and sustaining the quality, capacity and impact of our research and the infrastructure requirements to achieve this.

We will continue to improve the quality and impact of our research by:

- Delivering upon our Research Strategy commitments.
- Securing external grant funding to support the scaling of our research infrastructure.
- Reinforcing the opportunities for Level 10 research capacity building through our partnership with Maynooth University.
- Documenting and disseminating evidence of our research and innovation impact to internal and external stakeholders.



OBJECTIVE 2: TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

OBJECTIVE 2A:

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Chapter 5 of our QAES outlines our policies and procedures for ensuring quality across our teaching and learning environment.

Strategic Plan Priority 4: Access, states our priority and outcomes for accessibility as follows:

Priority: Guided by our mission, vision and values, NCI will continue and develop its focus on delivering accessible higher education.

Outcome: NCI is a distinctive and leading higher education institution in the HE landscape delivering diverse access to higher education through programme agility and innovation, flexibility in delivery modes, collaboration across the HE landscape, mission-centric research activity and 'cradle to college' programmes, from our North Inner-City Campus.

Objective 5.2: To embed access in our programme design, delivery, assessment and in all student services

PHYSICAL CAMPUS

The ability to scale and sustain quality in teaching, learning and assessment practices across our physical and digital campus environment has been a priority for the Governing Body and our Executive over the past decade. While our investments in our digital campus – through our Cloud-First Strategy - prepared us for success throughout the pandemic, the recent investment in expanding our physical campus - by purchasing our Spencer Dock building in 2022 - equips us for success in the future.

The College has been under significant pressure for space for a considerable number of years and the newly acquired Spencer Dock building, which is just 300 metres from the front door of the existing Mayor Street Campus, adds a valuable resource to NCI's footprint and impact on the communities across the IFSC and the North-East Inner City (NEIC). This additional space allows the College to continue to deliver on its mission, and to provide a better base for our ELI and range of NCI services to the local community. The Spencer Dock building adds 5,600 square metres to NCI's holding in the NEIC and enables us to grow our learner body to our strategic plan target of 8,500, responding to the demands from students and the economy for highly skilled workers.

The Spencer Dock building opened to students at the start of the academic year 2023/24, and includes a significantly expanded Library spanning two floors. This combined space that is now three times larger than previous Mayor Square library. We know through formal and informal feedback from our students and staff feedback, that the new Library facilities and the increases in teaching, study, meeting and social spaces available at Spencer Dock, are very well-received. The Spencer Dock building as well as Mayor Square continues to be available to the community for a range of activities, including our participation in the annual Culture Night event each September.

DIGITAL CAMPUS

In terms of our digital campus, over the past decade we have been at the forefront of digital delivery and digital learning in the Irish sector. Having secured formal QQI approval in 2019 to extend our QA Scope of Provision to include Blended Learning, we have invested in developing our expertise in online pedagogy and assessment since then. Our IT Team established a Cloud First Strategy and instigated a continuous cycle of reviews and upgrades to our Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle) and our MS Teams platform to support online working, teaching, learning and assessments. These pre-Covid investments and our growing experience in blended learning and online delivery and meetings meant that our IT Team and infrastructure were able to scale and pivot services and supports to underpin business continuity in March 2020.

As highlighted elsewhere, our QAES Chapter 13: Technology-Mediated Learning was extensively rewritten in 2022 to reaffirm our policy and practices for Blended Learning delivery. These policy and procedures are currently undergoing further review considering QQI's updated Statutory QA Guidelines for Providers of Blended and fully Online Programmes, published in Autumn 2023. NCI will apply for formal extension of our QA Scope of Provision to offer fully online, transnational programmes, in 2025. This will enable us to continue to build our digital campus in line with strategic, academic and stakeholder needs.

SUPPORTING EXCELLENCE IN DIGITAL AND PHYSICAL DELIVERY

NCI's Teaching Enhancement Unit operates within our Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning (CELL). In 2022, the College took the decision to establish a position of Digital Learning Designer, to lead out on the development of our blended and online provision and this soon grew to form the Digital Learning Design (DLD) Unit, with an additional staff member. The Teaching Enhancement Unit and Digital Learning Design Unit have now come together as one organisational structure to maximise synergies and efficiencies in supporting our faculty.

The Teaching Enhancement Resource Hub for staff is available on the College's Virtual Learning Environment. CELL provides professional development workshops and specialist seminars in each of the areas below, on campus and online, to support growth in the capacity and capabilities of our faculty, and to provide an excellent learning experience informed by the principles of reflective teaching and assessment practice and continuous enhancement. Proficiency in the below competence areas is demonstrated by faculty accessing the online resources and completing the associated activities.

- Teaching Effectiveness
- Reflection on Practice
- Student-Centeredness
- Digital Capacity
- Assessment and Assessment Redesign
- Academic Integrity

Throughout the pandemic this team was vital in providing supports to our faculty new to online teaching, learning and assessment. It also provided a peer-to-peer support network across the College. Currently and in the future, this Team provides an essential support service to our faculty and academic leaders to enhance our continued academic excellence in digital teaching, learning and assessment practices.

CELL also coordinates the induction of new teaching staff through its 'New to Teaching' seminar series, which addresses assessment and feedback, teaching strategies and skills. New teaching staff can also request to meet with a specialist teaching practice mentor to address a particular area of concern. As the NCI Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Practice is delivered through CELL, the Centre has access to a wide range of scholarship on best practices. These are regularly made available to teaching staff as online resources accessible through the Teaching Enhancement Resource Hub and Online Community. Furthermore, its 'Accomplished Teacher' workshop is specifically designed for existing NCI teaching staff and those involved in supporting learning. This professional development opportunity is mapped against the appointment criteria for faculty at different grades.

In recent years, we have been promoting Universal Design for Learning (UDL) across the teaching community, providing staff with access to certified (Digital Badge) training in this fast-growing area, accredited by the HEA funded [National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning](#). To date, 54 staff have completed their training. We are also to the forefront of innovative approaches to the application of UDL strategies in assessment

design; evidenced in our wide-range of Technology-Enhanced Learning programmes in CELL which are most frequently taken by individuals who teach in the Further Education and Training sector in Ireland. [see Repository for the Schedule of Teaching Enhancement Unit CPD activities during the 2023-24 academic year].

THE LEARNER EXPERIENCE

NCI's QAES and our Partnership Agreement with NCISU outlines the range of mechanisms used to gather and respond to the NCI learner voice. On an ongoing basis, we monitor the learner experience by:

- Ensuring that class reps are appointed and trained for each programme and programme instance⁵ and are empowered to represent their peers in discussions with faculty, academic leaders and with NCISU, as appropriate.
- Conducting and analysing results of learner feedback and surveys at a module, programme and institutional level, including feedback from the national student survey – studentsurvey.ie.
- Delivering upon our Partnership Commitments and meeting regularly with NCISU Executive members.

NCI has participated in the national student survey – studentsurvey.ie since its launch in 2019. Responses from 2021-2023 indicate increasing learner satisfaction, overall, with the quality of the experience at NCI. In response to the key non-indicator question about the “Overall educational Experience”, NCI's score shows an increase of 68%-76% over the 5-year period 2017/18 – 2022/23, coming from a lower base than the universities and Institutes of Technology (IoTs).

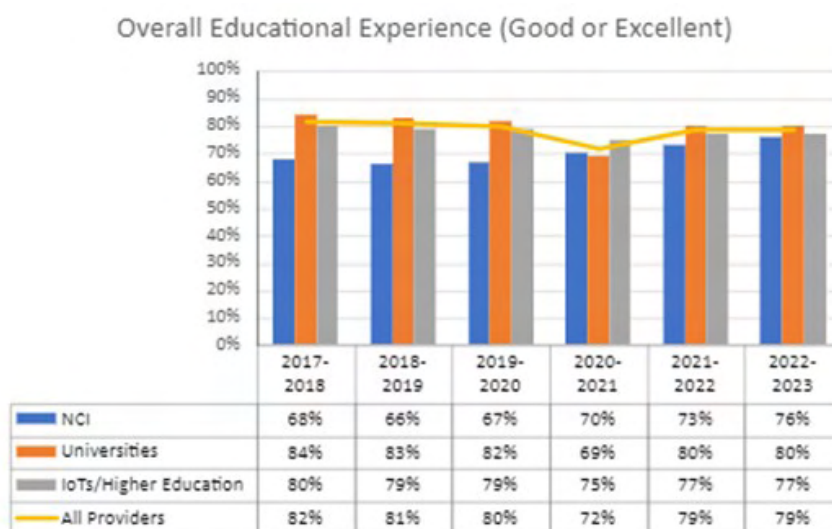


Figure 34: Overall Educational Experience, National Student Survey Results

Similarly, in response to the question “If you had to start your studies all over again, would you choose the same institution?”, we saw an increase from 67 % to 81% of NCI students responding “Probably or Definitely”, over the 2017/18 – 2020/21 period, with a drop off to 77% the following year, during full Covid restrictions and a re-bounce in 2022/23.

⁵ A programme instance is a specific timetabled offering of a programme, normally with a specific mode of delivery on which students are registered, for example, the January 2023-start students on the full-time MSc Data Analytics programme (blended learning) is a Programme Instance of the MSc Data Analytics programme.

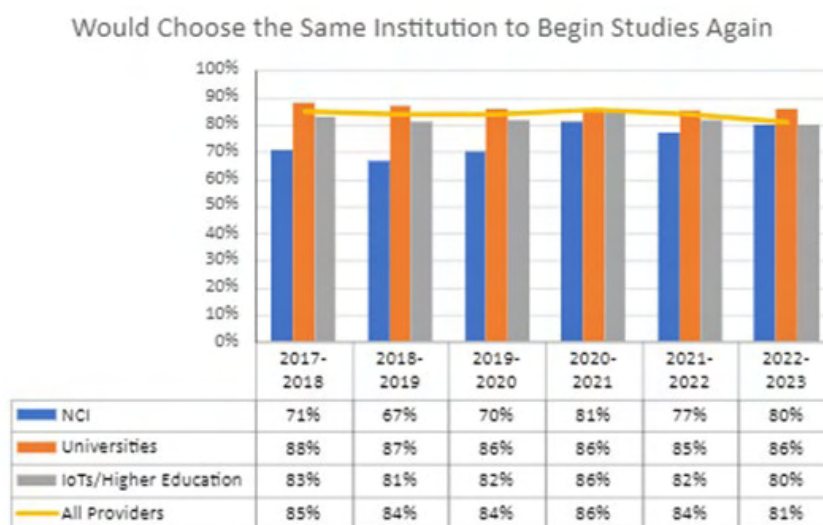


Figure 35: Choosing the Same Institution, National Student Survey Results

NCI's Director of QIE reports on the results from the national student survey annually, to the Academic Council so that high level trends can be identified and monitored. NCI's results during the 2017-18 to 2022/23⁶ period demonstrated an overall improvement in learner satisfaction with their experience at NCI, which is a testament to the investments made in our learner learning experience throughout and beyond the pandemic.

As part of the CINNTE review process, the QIE Office sought feedback from class reps in Q2 2024, on how the role has operated, in their experience. The results of a short survey were encouraging, with 70% of survey respondents saying they felt that NCI had been clear about the expectations of Class Reps and 80% of the Class Reps felt that their inputs and feedback had made an impact on the learner experience. During the focus group, the Class Rep participants commended the leadership of our award winning NCISU Executive Team in focussing attention on the Class Reps' role and reinvigorating the Class Rep Council.

While the feedback from the Class Rep consultation was largely positive, the focus group discussion provided food for thought on some of the challenges inherent in the Class Rep role, such as the difficulties that Reps often encounter when trying to set boundaries with their own classmates in terms of the value of the role, but also its limitations. There was a view that the College needed to optimise scheduling of Class Rep meetings for the Part-time Class Reps who have work/life commitments during the day. This feedback will be addressed by NCISU and our Academic Operations Team in advance of the new academic year.

Later, in May 2024 NCISU worked alongside the Teaching Enhancement and Digital Learning Design Unit to gather up to date views from learners studying on a blended or fully online basis. A bespoke survey was issued in Q2 2024. A preliminary analysis indicated while the overall online experience was reported as positive, enhancements could be made around the quality and consistency of lecturer feedback to online students about their progress through modules. Our Digital Learning Design Sub-Committee will fully analyse the results and identify appropriate actions.

⁶ The national studentsurvey.ie was suspended by decision of the national Steering Group, which sits under the Higher Education Authority, in 2023 therefore no survey fieldwork was undertaken in Spring 2024

EVALUATION

The needs and experiences of students, staff and faculty inform ongoing decision-making by the Executive and Governing Body around the quality and capacity across our digital and physical campus. Decisions and investments made over the last decade, most notably on our Cloud-First Strategy and on the purchase of the Spencer Dock building, were driven by the need to support the growth of our learner body and portfolio of programmes. The Cloud First Strategy led by our Director of IT played a significant role in our business continuity throughout and beyond the pandemic.

The opening of the Spencer Dock building gave our students and staff access to more group study areas as well as social areas, enhancing utilisation of the campus and opportunities to engage in person with faculty and peers. It also expanded the space and services we can provide to the community within the NEIC and IFSC. The space vacated by the Library from the Mayor Square campus is also in the process of being reconfigured as a new physical support hub for students and faculty. The new Support Hub will be opened at the start of the 2024/25 academic year.

Our continued growth in size and complexity in learner numbers and delivery modes and locations over the last five years has created both challenges and opportunities, particularly around space utilisation. We are committed throughout 2024/25 to utilise data from across our structures, including our timetabling system, as well as feedback from our students, faculty and staff, to inform effective decision-making on space utilisation.

We are also aware that the class representative recruitment process, spanning each instance of delivery on each programme, is onerous, and could be improved to better support the value and impact of effective class representation. The challenges and potential solutions have been discussed between the NCISU President, College Registrar and Senior Academic Operations Manager, and a streamlined model, which aims to be more scalable and sustainable, will be pursued, in partnership, throughout 2024/25.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

We have invested heavily in the expansion of our physical and digital campus to meet medium- and long-term growth ambitions and the evolving needs of our students, stakeholders, community, partners and our portfolio of programmes. As outlined in our Strategic Plan commitments, we will continue to maximise our digital and physical campus to reinforce the accessibility of our campus and our programmes to current and future students.

We will continue to improve the quality and impact of our learning environment by:

- Triangulating feedback from our students, faculty and staff on their experiences of the NCI learning environment to inform short, medium and long-term planning by the Executive and Governing Body.
- Working in partnership with NCISU to scale and sustain effectiveness across our class representative structure.
- Utilising data from our systems to maximise effective space utilisation.
- Continuing to support our faculty deliver high quality teaching, learning and assessment practices across our physical and digital campus.

OBJECTIVE 2B:

SUPPORTING OUR STUDENTS

Chapter 7 of our QAES outlines the range of supports in place for NCI students.

Strategic Plan Priority 1: Students, presents our overall commitments to our students as presented below:

Priority: We will foster a distinctive NCI graduate and a well-balanced graduate body that aligns to our mission in terms of distinctive and flexible modes of learning (access) and internationalisation.

Outcome: A balanced student/graduate body that is reflective of our mission (to change lives through education), relevant in a modern, international world and sustainable in the context of global education.

Objective: 1.5: To drive excellence and accessibility in our student supports across our physical and digital campuses.

STREAMLINING STUDENT SUCCESS

NCI prides itself in our shared commitment to being learner centred. Together, we continuously strive to meet our Student Centred Value of placing the learner: 'at the heart of everything we do; our combined energies are focused on their individual and collective, life-long needs'.

In Semester 2 2022, we launched the Streamlining Student Success Initiative, a holistic learner-centred approach to reviewing NCI policies, procedures and practices across the entire learner journey, from applicant to alumni.

A Student Success Steering Committee was established in April 2022 to oversee this initiative. Chaired by the Director of Student Registry, six Task and Finish Groups were created which engaged over 100 members of staff, faculty, students, and learner representatives. The groups spanned the following six key stages of the learner lifecycle.



Figure 36: Streamlining Student Success Key Stages

A series of Student Focus Groups took place online in August 2022. Over 3 days, a range of students and alumni shared feedback on their learner success journey at NCI. Six focus groups were organised (under the six themes above) so that feedback on all elements of the learner success journey could be captured as best as possible. In terms of the learner experience – the students and alumni that participated in the focus groups - classified NCI's learner-centredness as follows:

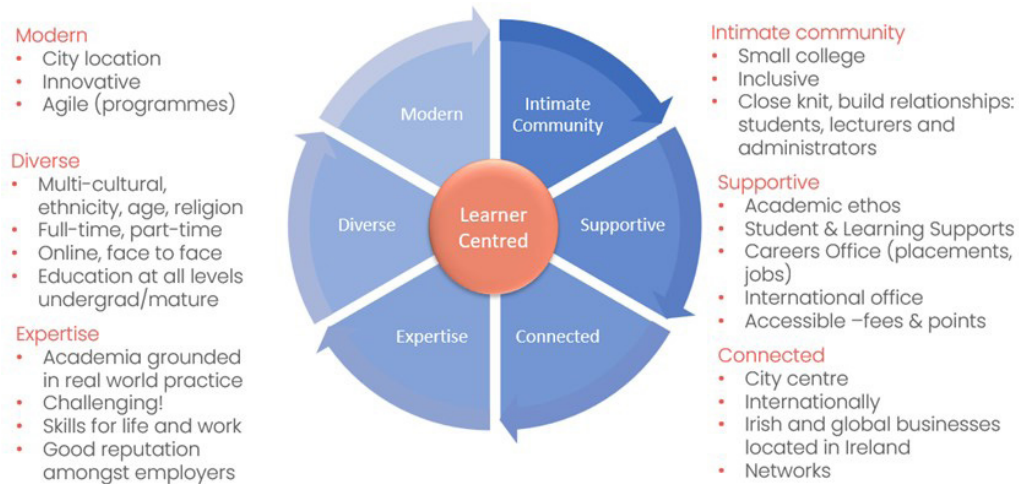


Figure 37: Student Focus Groups Feedback

Outcomes from this research included a key recommendation for each of the task and finish groups, that was also subsequently endorsed by Steering Committee members, that NCI should:

- 1) Adopt a more holistic approach to services across the learner journey.
- 2) Enhance the ability for students to grow skills that will differentiate them in the marketplace.
- 3) Reinforce 'learner voice' mechanisms, particularly between students and faculty.
- 4) Enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of communications through the existing IT infrastructure.
- 5) Undertake further work to refine and communicate assessment and examinations processes.
- 6) Support students to leverage the power of networking as a distinct part of the NCI experience.

We committed to pursuing each of these key recommendations as part of our strategic plan implementation and within the Strategy for Supporting Student Success outlined below. A wide range of actions were also undertaken advancing recommendation 6, building on the existing work of our award-winning Careers Team – further details follow. Networking events have been held throughout 2023/24 including a Networking Masterclass in February 2024, attended by students, staff and Executive Group members.

STRATEGY FOR SUPPORTING LEARNER SUCCESS 2023/34 – 2025/26

Building on the contributions and findings of our Streamlining Student Success Initiative, we set out a new three-year academic year strategy to enhancing learner success, delivered across four key areas:



Figure 38: Supporting Learner Success

Success for this Strategy, was defined as NCI learners:

- Have accessible information on our programmes, our delivery modes and notional timetables at application and enrolment.
- Feel supported throughout their academic, personal and wellbeing journey at NCI and can access timely and accurate support and guidance in person and online.
- Are engaged with the range of learning, welfare, support, careers and social activities available at NCI and feel part of the NCI community.
- Feel heard and that NCI listens and responds to their voice and experiences.
- Achieve their programme learning outcomes and receive their awards.
- Secure graduate jobs and feel their experience equipped them well for entering the workplace.

We agreed to review and refresh our technological solutions throughout the lifespan of the Strategy, in consultation with key stakeholders, to ensure we were able to gather and monitor qualitative and quantitative data to assess its impact. This data-driven approach aims to enhance our ability to support the retention and academic success of our expanding learner population by targeting supports at key times throughout the learner journey, particularly towards individuals and cohorts of students where data suggests they are appearing to disengage or struggle with academic integrity issues.

Through the regular collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, NCI will seek to identify trends and patterns to target interventions, supports, communications and resources. Success measures should be quantifiable in terms of:

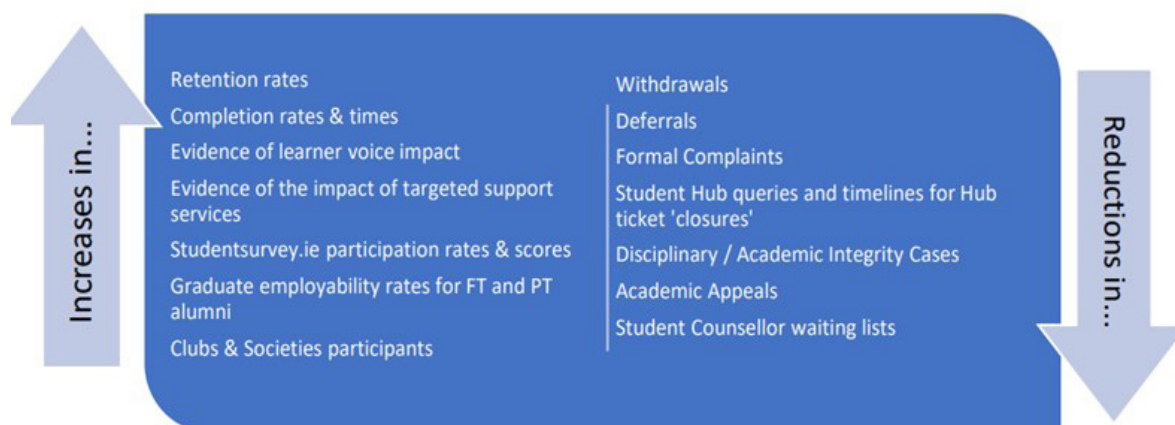


Figure 39: Strategy for Supporting Student Success

An analysis of the first year implementing the strategy was considered by Academic Council in June 2024. The analysis also identified actions to be completed across the 2045/25 academic year, with progress monitored within the Executive Group Strategic Implementation Plan.

ONLINE AND PHYSICAL SUPPORT HUBS

A key part of responding to the Streamlining Student Success outcomes and the streamlining commitments within the Strategy for Supporting Student Success is a commitment to delivering a seamless support service to our students. Throughout the pandemic we utilised a digital support hub mode – through Zendesk. However, we were aware that business and operating rules, as well as service delivery expectations had to be developed to ensure the digital model was sustainable given its use as the core communications tool for our students and staff.

Data on the digital support hub usage is accessible by managers and Executive Group members. In May 2023, the Executive Group noted that between May 2022 and May 2023 over 33,000 tickets had been logged and answered. Agreement was reached that a Service Level Agreement and business owner should be identified, to ensure service

quality and standards were maintained.

Over 107,000 tickets have been received and responded to over the last three years through this system, 36,000 throughout 2023/24 alone. Peak periods for tickets are around assessment and examination timelines.

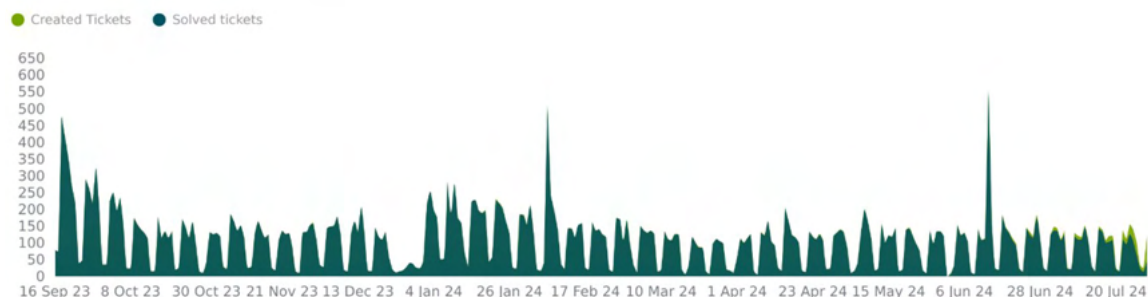


Figure 40: Digital Support Hub Usage

Following consultation on the development of an SLA with key service leaders, Senior Management Team approved an SLA for the Digital Support Hub at its January 2024 meeting for implementation across 2024/25. Data on the number of tickets lodged and timelines for closing tickets are reported to the Registrar quarterly.

In September 2024 a physical student support hub will also be launched, occupying the space vacated by the NCI Library following its move from our Mayor Square to the Spencer Dock building. This space enables us to combine a range of student-facing support services into one physical space. It is hoped that this model will help reach our strategic plan objective of having a consistent high quality support service available on our digital and physical campuses.

LIBRARY ACADEMIC SUPPORT CENTRE

The Centre is the primary service supporting academic integrity, academic writing and referencing skills for our students. The Centre provides support in person and online via learner appointments, a drop-in service, email assistance and delivery of classes across both schools and CELL. Learner demand for the services provided by the Academic Support Centre was at a record high in 2023 as shown below:

- 508 learner appointments - an increase of 32% on 2022
- 283 international learner appointments – 56% of total learner appointments
- 101.5 hours of classes – first time delivering over 100 hours of classes
- 710 assistance emails - a 42% increase on 2022
- 898 assistance documents - a 30% increase on 2022
- 1,303 individual learner interactions overall - a 39% increase compared to 2022.

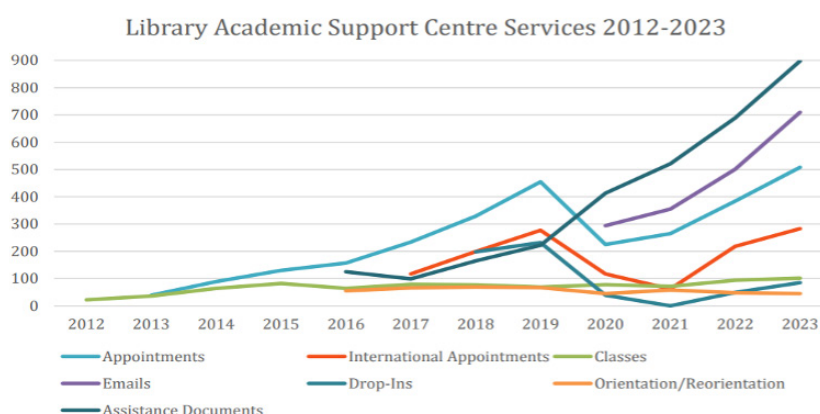


Figure 41: Library Academic Support Centre

This extensive workload and the impact of the Centre on academic integrity was formally recognised with the Academic Support Centre Team winning the 2023 NCI President's Awards for Excellence in Education. The Centre continuously reinforces NCIs expectations and academic integrity values as outlined below.

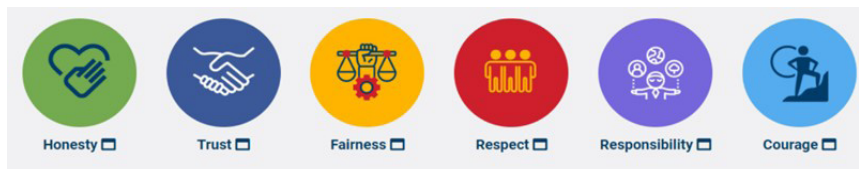


Figure 42: NCIs expectations and academic integrity values

The Library Academic Support Centre is also embedded in our teaching, learning and assessment structures. Within the School of Business, classes are delivered in all modules around the date of first assignments in Semester 1. Bespoke classes are also delivered upon request. These services are utilised similarly in the School of Computing and CELL. Additionally, for the School of Computing, the Centre provides all new postgraduate students with a bootcamp session at the beginning of the first semester. Specialist classes are also delivered for all Research in Computing modules across our Level 9 programmes. All undergraduates conducting their 4th Year Projects also receive a session with the Academic Support Centre. In 2023, the Library Academic Support Centre delivered 101.5 hours of classes which is the highest total to date, reflecting the further integration of its services across the College. These classes were delivered across 39 programmes as well as a designated Academic Integrity session for new international students and two sessions for our widening access Discover University students.

LEARNING AND DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICE

Across our physical and digital campuses, the Learning and Disability Support Service aims to ensure all our students have a positive experience throughout their academic journey in NCI. A range of bookable and drop-in services are available to students through our dedicated support team. We have experienced an increase in the number of students registering with the Learning and Disability Support Service in recent years; 182 students registered in the 2023-24 year, an increase of 40 students (28%) on the previous 2022/23 year. Within this cohort, the number of students with high support requirements is also increasing. Students who register with the Learning and Disability Support Service are provided with the most appropriate supports based on their individual needs, including, but not limited to learning support, occupational therapy, assistive technology, access to educational support workers, Irish Sign Language Interpreters, exam supports, and transport solutions for students with difficulty accessing or navigating public or private transport independently.

Of note also is the increase in the number of Neurodivergent students joining NCI over the last number of years, including those with diagnosed attention deficit disorder (more than doubled from 20 in the 2021/22 year to 41 in 2023/24) and with those with Autism (risen from 15 in 2020/21 to 24 in 23/24). In 2021, NCI became only the second HEI in Ireland to receive AslAm designation as an Autism Friendly HEI. In March 2023, an overview of NCI's Autism Friendly Initiative was provided to AslAm and we continue to work on the implementation of the Autism Action Plan. NCI developed a dedicated sensory room (opened in July 2021), which provides a safe and quiet space for autistic students and staff to self-regulate and de-stress when feeling overwhelmed. We know that the learning environment, study processes and social aspects of college life can present many challenges for neurodivergent students.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYABILITY SERVICE

NCI's Career Development & Employability Service team won the AHECS Excellence in Employability award in 2020, 2018, 2016, 2014 and 2013 and the Education Awards "Career Impact Strategy Award" in 2019, along with rankings for 'Best for Jobs' in the annual Sunday Times Good University Guide 2015.

This proactive service for all students, offers a particularly strong focus on full-time students who do not already have experience in the workplace and require structured supports. These includes bookable one-to-one support sessions with a Careers Advisor in the traditional sense, and a wide range of organised networking events with invited employer representatives. Case study A9 provides more information on the Careers Networking Programme for students. The Careers Service also works with all programme leaders and teams to support students seeking to avail of NCI's growing portfolio of work placement, and internship opportunities embedded across a range of QQI validated degrees.

**CAREERS NETWORKING
FOR LEARNER SUCCESS**

Appendix A9 – p 132

Our Careers Service monitors graduate outcomes, in terms of their first destinations after graduation, on an annual basis and provides reports to academic leaders and to the Academic Council and Governing Body for discussion on annual trends at programme, School and Institutional levels. The First Destinations survey is an annual survey that investigates where NCI full time graduates go after finishing their full-time qualification. The survey is conducted nine months after graduation and gives an invaluable insight into employment opportunities for NCI graduates. 95% of Graduates responded to the most recent First Destination Survey compiled in December 2023 (2022 Graduates).

The Graduate Outcomes figures below shows a positive employment rate across NCI Business graduates:

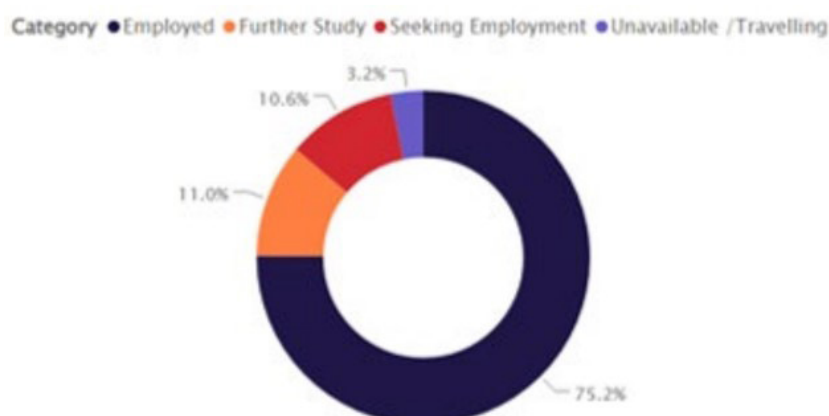


Figure 43: First Destination Survey Results for Business Graduates

And similar positive employment trends across NCI's Computing graduates in 2022:

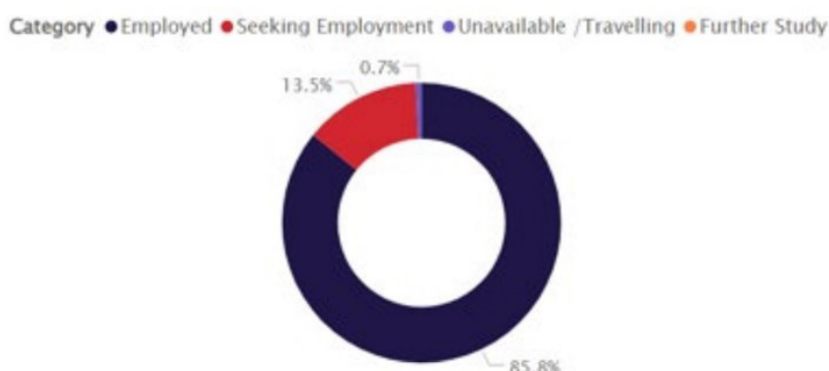


Figure 44: First Destination Survey Results for Computing Graduates

We can see broad alignment with First Destination returns in the HEA sector, where 2022 graduate employment rates by fields of study were 82.1% employment in Information and Communication Technologies & 78.7% employment in Business, administration & law.

Our First Destinations Survey findings confirm the impressive impacts of the employment opportunities made available to our students through internships and work placements

on academic achievements as well as employment success. NCI takes pride in our strong relationships with industry. Accredited work placements are currently offered across seven programmes and are a great way to facilitate collaboration between employers, students and NCI to benefit all involved. Before undertaking a placement, students participate in a variety of career classes and events which include career planning, CV reviews, mock interviews and networking sessions, thus ensuring that they are ready to make the transition to the workplace. While there has been some fluctuation overall, the growth in the number of placements can be seen in a linear trend from 2020/2021-2022/2023. There has been a small decrease in the most recent academic session.

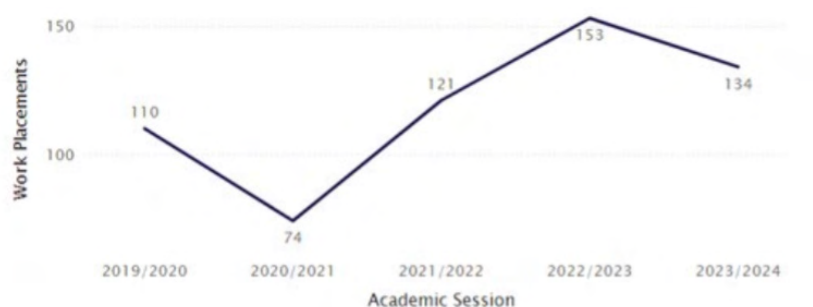


Figure 45: The number of Work Placements taken up by learners on NCI programmes.

Given the demonstrable excellence and impact of our Careers Team on learner academic achievement and graduate employment success, in 2023/24 the Executive approved a business case to upgrade our careers management system. The scope of this project was to implement a system that would support the continued expansion of the work of the NCI Careers Team including:

- The ability to manage all work placement activity (advertising, applications, shortlisting, interviewing, offer, tri party agreement and placement reporting).
- A searchable and integrated jobs board with alumni access and the ability for employers to upload jobs.
- An event management, registration and check in system linked to the learner record system.
- Managing, tracking, and reporting on learner interactions with Careers Service for full & part time students including appointments, event attendance, job applications
- Managing, tracking, and reporting on interactions with employers.
- Targeting communications to specific cohorts of students e.g. non-interacting students.
- Conducting integrated surveys up to and including a survey in line with HEA Graduate Outcome Requirements.
- Facilitating alumni mentoring.
- Facilitating booking and tracking learner appointments.

The Career Development & Employability Service required an integrated system that could effectively manage career events, job postings, appointments, work placements and careers fairs, that can track, measure and report on learner and employer interactions. Business Objectives for the deployment of new system included the ability to continue to provide excellence as the College continues to scale its programmes, students and opportunities for work placements. Benefits also included:

- Supporting delivery of Career Services to NCI students, recent graduates, and employers.
- Driving efficiencies by streamlining processes.
- Facilitating work placement processes.
- Tracking and measuring interactions with students, employers, and alumni.
- Facilitating booking and tracking learner appointments.
- Enhancing job posting and event management capability.
- Conducting a graduate outcomes survey in line with HEA requirements.
- Facilitating alumni mentoring.

This system will be rolled out across 2024/25 and its impact will be evidenced and reported to the Executive, Academic Council and Governing Body annually.

SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

NCI is proud of its international student community, which includes students from 121 nationalities engaged in programmes at post-graduate and undergraduate level across both our Schools.

NCI's overall enrolment profile is predominately from the European region (majority of whom are Irish) with 68.7% in the 2022/2023 academic session; the next largest region for enrolments is South-East Asia with 20%, the remaining 11.3% is Americas, Africa, Western Pacific & Eastern Mediterranean.

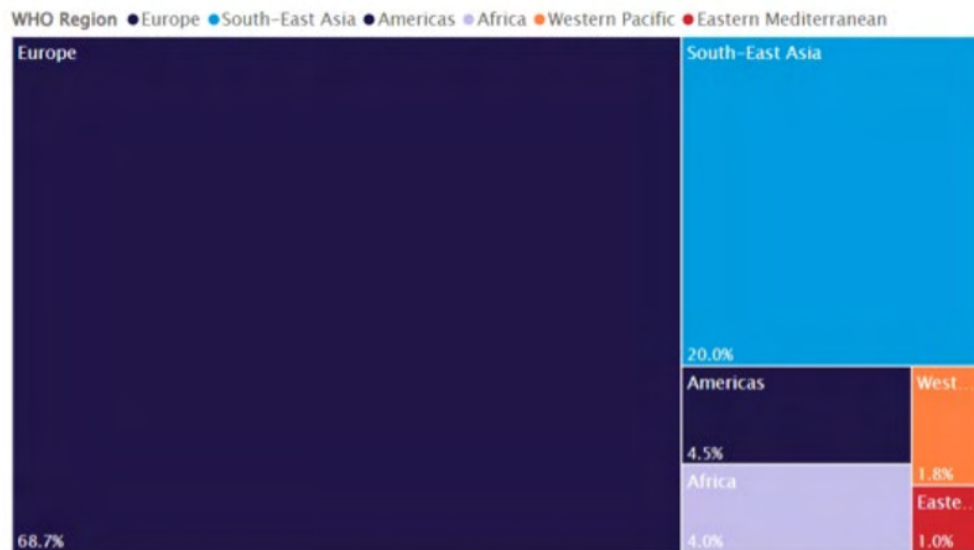


Figure 46: NCI's international student demographic

NCI's level of international enrolment can be linked in the main (although not exclusively) to NCI's large sectoral share of taught postgraduate ICT provision in the sector. NCI's postgraduate Computing programmes continue to attract high levels of interest and enrolment from countries such as India and China and growing markets in South America and Africa.

The NCI International Office is a dedicated service to support the international student experience. Headed by the Director of Marketing and International Development, and the Head of International Recruitment, who oversee a team that spans:

- International student recruitment
- Relationships with overseas partners
- Management of our overseas' offices
- Support services for international students studying with NCI in Ireland

Approximately 85% of new incoming international students travel from their home country to Ireland and about 15% are already living in Ireland, our goal is to ensure that the international students' experience is exciting, inclusive and as successful as possible. We encourage students to join and engage in as many NCI events and NCISU clubs and societies as possible to make friends and to get to know their new home.

The key elements of our International Student Support Services are:

- Pre- Arrival Programme (commences 12-weeks before the start of classes)
- Welcome Programme (3–4-week programme which kick-starts on arrival and focusses on onboarding of students)
- International Student Support: ongoing support with email queries, letter requests and wayfinding around NCI supports and services. To support students the International Support team have a suite of guides and articles to assist students with the most frequently asked questions.

- Peer mentors: NCI students who work part-time casual basis in a paid role. Peer mentors help with a range of activities such as leading campus tours/city tours and activities (ice breakers/ games) in the Welcome Programme and leading social activities with students during the academic year. An important Peer Mentor function is to interact/chat with students on learner life at NCI and their experience living in Ireland using the NCI Unibuddy chat.

Our International Department took home the top prize for best International Engagement at the 2023 Education Awards for the Young Future Leader Project, which gave secondary school students in international markets their first taste of what higher education would be like in NCI, through provision of free, online leadership seminars, delivered in partnership with faculty from across NCI schools.

EVALUATION

NCI is committed to providing a good quality experience to all our students, regardless of the level, length or location of engagement. We pride ourselves in our proven ability to put the diverse needs of our students at the heart of our services, delivered across our expanded digital and physical campus. We are fortunate to have a core group of passionate, creative, experienced and dedicated staff to across the entire programme and learner lifecycle, whose work has been recognised in numerous internal and external award processes. The success and impact of our support service Teams has been reaffirmed in commendations from numerous QQI panels.

We established our Streamlining Learner Success initiative in 2022 in recognition that the institution had already scaled considerably in terms of learner numbers and programmes throughout the past decade. We recognised that we needed to streamline and refine our support services to ensure we could sustain quality in line with our Strategic Plan ambitions. We identified the benefits of streamlining learner services would:

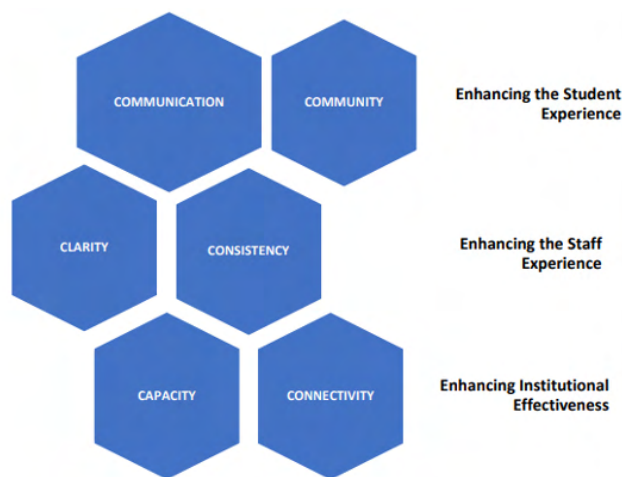


Figure 47: Benefits of Streamlining Learner Services

The anticipated benefits outlined above remain valid, and we are already making good progress working to bring them to full realisation. The outcome of the 2023/24 Academic Operations Team Review and the decision to streamline Academic Operations and Registry Services under the leadership of the Registrar, will enable us to further advance implementation of process refinements and efficiencies throughout 2024/25. Our ability to deliver a more streamlined, efficient and effective learner experience will be enhanced also by the joining of both teams, alongside other learner-facing services, including the International Office, IT Help Desk, CTO and the Learner Fees Office, into the new Physical Support Hub on the ground floor of the Mayor Square Building.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

We are confident that the extensive consultative work undertaken over the past two years with our staff and students has identified a range of tangible benefits for us by streamlining our support services. The establishment of the physical learner support hub – replicating and mirroring the continued success of the ‘one-stop-shop’ model of the digital support hub model – will ensure that we work smarter as an institution as we continue to scale our excellent support services across the digital and physical campus experience.

We will continue to improve the quality and impact of learner support services by:

- Advancing the commitments outlined in the Strategy for Learning Success.
- Monitoring qualitative and quantitative information to assess the learner and staff experiences of the physical and digital Support Hubs throughout 2024/25.
- Utilising annual IT and financial budgeting processes to identify and prioritising opportunities for support service enhancement as they arise.
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities across the Academic Operations and Learner Registry Teams to enhance transparency for students and staff.

OBJECTIVE 2C:

THE ASSESSMENT ENVIRONMENT

Chapter 4 of our QAES confirms our assessment environment. Further details on the range of measures utilised to ensure academic integrity is also provided in Objective 1G of this report.

Priority 5: Access within our Strategic Plan confirms a commitment:

Objective 5.2: To embed access in our programme design, delivery, assessment and in all learner services

At NCI we are committed to ensuring that our assessment strategies and methods provide meaningful opportunities for students to demonstrate their achievement of the validated programme learning outcomes (MIPLOs). As a QQI provider, we ensure that we meet all the requirements for assessment standards specified in QQI's Assessment and Standards (2013, updated in 2022)⁷. These guiding principles include a range of assessment Conventions and Protocols in important areas such as the classification of grades across the varying level of awards of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Assessment and examinations practices across all QQI validated programmes operate in alignment with these principles, conventions and protocols.

OVERSIGHT OF LEARNER ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Our assessment ethos, as outlined in the 2019-2024 Academic Strategy, included a commitment to utilising data on assessment performance as an integral part of our Programme Lifecycle Management (PLM) structure and effective institutional decision-making.

We regularly monitor assessment outcomes at a programme level through annual monitoring and cyclical review. We also consider reports on learner achievements within our institutional-level governance structures. This includes an institutional analysis of pass rates and grade classifications, with comparisons to HEA/National benchmarks considered by both Governing Body and Academic Council. The most recently considered analysis confirmed that our grade classifications between 2018-2023 were aligned with the sectoral averages across awards at all NFQ levels; with the exception that we have awarded less First Class Honours' degrees at Bachelor's (Level 8) and Taught master's (Level 9) level, and less Distinctions at Higher Certificate (Level 6) and Ordinary Bachelor's degree levels (Level 7).

Our Institutional Profile document presents our overall completion rates between 2018-2022, by Mode of Study. In 2022/2023, we saw an 85% completion rate across full time programmes (7% increase in the 5-year period since 2018/2019) and an 87% completion rate across part time programmes (6% increase in the 5-year period since 2018/2019).

NCI Completion Rates by Academic Session

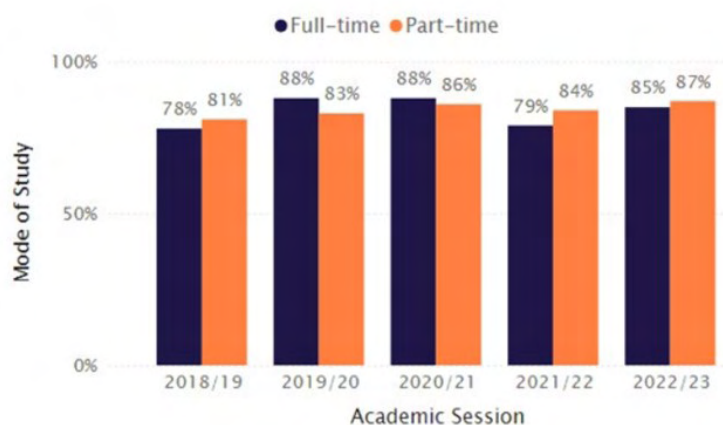


Figure 48: Completion Rates by Mode of Study

⁷ See: [Microsoft Word - Assessment and Standards Revised 2013.doc \(qqi.ie\)](#)

ASSESSMENT DESIGN AND ASSESSMENT STANDARDS

We know that assessment design is inextricably linked to module and programme design, since students can only achieve the stated programme (MIPLO) and module (MIMLO) learning outcomes through the assessments that have been purposefully designed to allow them to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and or competencies inherent in the learning outcomes. Our faculty highlight and explain this relationship to students in-person during the induction sessions at the beginning of their programme of study and as each module gets underway, and this provides the context for students to move forward with their lectures/tutorials and other learning activities in the knowledge and expectation that their learning will be assessed as part of this journey. This also provides the impetus for discussion with students, from the outset, about the importance of academic integrity and introduce the range of supports that NCI provides to students to encourage and guide them to take full ownership of their own learning and consequently, its assessment.

NCI's evolving and progressive Academic Integrity policy and procedures are discussed in detail under Objective 1G.

Pedagogical expertise within NCI is underpinned and enhanced by our Centre for Education of Lifelong Learning. We believe the process of undertaking and completing an assessment is itself a learning process. Because of this, our Teaching Enhancement Unit works with faculty to design assessments of, for and as learning. This is in line with the guidelines from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Whereas assessment of learning emphasises the role of assessment in demonstrating achievement of learning outcomes, we also recognise that assessments in themselves can contribute to learning. This is aptly demonstrated in our approach to teaching enhancement where faculty are encouraged to adopt an integrated approach to learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) strategies.

Two further qualities are worth noting in relation to NCI's approach to assessment. First, we value assessments that are rooted in authentic contexts and reflect the complexity of working life. Well-designed assessments encourage students to appreciate the importance of what they learn and how it is applied in real-world scenarios. Furthermore, our approach to assessment also reflects the reality that students learn in different ways and therefore, where appropriate choice and diversity in terms of mode and medium of assessment are also considered in module design and LTA strategies.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR ASSESSMENT

The provision of Guidance for students on exams and wider assessment rules and regulations is managed by our Examinations and Assessment Team within Registry. This Team led supports and guidance for students and faculty throughout and since the pandemic, most notably, the application of QQI's Alternative Arrangements for Assessment practices, which are scheduled to conclude in June 2025. The alternative arrangements were put in place by QQI to allow institutions to deviate from the validated in-person assessments shifting assessments to the online environment.⁸ The Covid-19 emergency arrangements for alternative assessment deployed within NCI were recorded and monitored as part of our Academic Risk Register which operated between 2020 – 2022. Institutionally throughout this period, our primary concern was to ensure alternative assessments would still enable students to demonstrate achievement of validated module and programme learning outcomes.

Our alternative arrangements for assessment included an accommodation whereby students could repeat an assessment or examination without an academic (capped grade at 40%) or financial penalty (repeat fee). These arrangements have been extended on two occasions. The SMT has agreed that the caps will be reintroduced for those

⁸ These formal QQI alternative arrangements were necessary since academic programmes had not been validated for online delivery and online assessment.

enrolling at the start of the 2024/25 academic year. We anticipate a decrease in deferrals to be a direct consequence of reintroducing this penalty. We will ensure this change is communicated clearly to all returning and new students.

As outlined in several sections of this report, in line with the approaching end of QQI's Covid-19 alternative arrangements for assessment, a review and refresh of our assessment policy and regulations is underway. This work is led by our Head of Assessment and Examinations. A focus on assessment design has already begun, in the context of our institutional approach to Academic Integrity and mitigations against students' improper use of LLMs and Generative AI tools during assessment. Our wider review of assessment policy and regulations will encompass, among other aspects, a review of our internal grading moderation policy; greater standardisation of assignment word-counts and of grading rubrics across our subject areas and a review of our external examiner policy and procedures.

Our assessment adaptations throughout the pandemic showed us that a more flexible approach to the assessment of learning outcomes can pay dividends for students, and for academic staff. This is wholly in line with the principles of Universal Design for Learning – applied to the assessment sphere. Within this period, we introduced a policy of two-assessments per module, to reduce levels of assessment stress and burdens on our students while maintaining the ability to meet module and programme learning outcomes. Discussion with independent academic peers, during QQI revalidation panel discussions in recent years, has also highlighted that sectorally, and in the UK, assessment design for learning, and flexibility in our approaches – encompassing UDL strategies for assessment where possible, while seeking to maintain integrity– will continue to absorb much academic attention in the coming years.

ONLINE PROCTORING OF EXAMINATIONS

NCI provides online proctoring of examinations where needed in line with validated programme requirements through the software provider RPNOW. Our experience over the past three years, pivoting throughout the pandemic, accelerated the development of our expertise in this area. The Exams Team and Digital Learning Design Team have recently finalised an updated policy and set of procedures for the online proctoring system. The updated procedures will be approved by the TLAC and implemented within 2024/25.

PROMOTING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND ADDRESSING MISCONDUCT IN ASSESSMENT

NCI's QAES includes a robust assessment plagiarism policy and procedures, which have widened since approval in 2019, to address academic integrity more broadly. In the last two years, in response to the rise of Large Language Models (LLMs) and Generative Artificial Intelligence tools such as ChatGPT, the TLAC has significantly updated NCI's policy, procedures and guidelines for both students and staff, accompanied by extensive training workshops and informed by national best practice through the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN), of which NCI is a member.

Our institutional policy approach is multifaceted; first and foremost we prioritise awareness-raising, education and guidance for students on the importance of academic integrity in their work, and how, if used correctly and ethically, LLMs and Generative AI tools can support and enhance their learning. We promote the multiple supports available, from lecturers but also from the Library Academic Support centre, on how to conduct academic research for essays and other major non-proctored assignments and to improve skills in academic referencing.

As outlined in section 1 of this report, the Teaching Enhancement and Digital Learning Design Unit has been providing training for academic staff to redesign assessment instruments to mitigate inappropriate students' use of AI. However feedback from staff in the last academic year highlighted the need for an evaluative framework which would

facilitate equitable academic judgements about the severity of academic misconduct within non-proctored assessments. The most recent academic integrity policy update at the Academic Council in June 2024 saw the introduction of a new, structured framework of sanctions for academic misconduct in assessment. The framework includes five levels of sanction, culminating in a Disciplinary hearing at level 5. This new framework will come into effect in 2024/25.

ASSESSMENT INFORMATION PROVIDED TO STUDENTS

All our students receive information on the planned assessment strategy for each module within their Programme. This is published in student handbooks, on Moodle pages as well as on module and programme web pages. Students can also access the validated assessment information for their programmes on our online curriculum repository platform, Cousebuilder. This information-set is maintained by the QIE office, working with programme directors; academic leaders and programme coordinators within the Academic Operations Team. Students can query their assessment schedule with their Programme Coordinators in person or through the digital support hub. Programme Handbooks and Moodle pages also provide a range of information on academic and learning support services including those offered within the Library Academic Support Centre.

An example of an Assessment strategy for a module, as depicted in Coursebuilder, is shown below.

Assessments

Full Time			
Coursework			
Assessment Type:	Formative Assessment	% of total:	Non-Marked
Assessment Date:	n/a	Outcome addressed:	1,2,3,4
Non-Marked:	Yes		
Assessment Description: Presentation – learners are required to present on a topic relating to the material discussed within the module. Feedback will be given to aid them in their submission of their final assignment			
Assessment Type:	Continuous Assessment	% of total:	100
Assessment Date:	n/a	Outcome addressed:	1,2,3,4
Non-Marked:	No		
Assessment Description: Case Study 3000 words – Learners must develop a case study on a topic relating to the subject of the module and its taught content.			
No End of Module Assessment			
No Workplace Assessment			

Figure 49: Assessment Strategy Example from Coursebuilder

STUDENT FEEDBACK ON ASSESSMENT

Students are provided with several channels to provide feedback to module lecturers and to Programme Directors and Coordinators about their assessment experiences. On an ongoing basis, students often discuss upcoming assessments directly with module lecturers and/or Programme Directors, as might be expected during an open and constructive discussion in class time. The Class Representatives are also available to help identify and seek solutions with faculty members to the assessment experiences of our students.

NCI's QAES commits us to providing students with opportunities to provide feedback at a module-level and this includes feedback on the module assessments. Our refreshed module-level student evaluation survey includes a core statement "The way the module was assessed was appropriate and helped to enhance my learning", to which students are invited to indicate to what extent they agree with this statement, on a Likert Scale of 1-5. Students can also then opt to include open-text comments about any aspect of the module, including how it is assessed. Students' views on their experience of assessment across their programme are also captured through the national studentsurvey.ie and where data exists (that is, where students have taken the survey), this is made available to academic Programme Directors.

EVALUATION

As we emerge fully from pandemic restrictions, the College has begun work on a thorough review of the Assessment and Examinations policies and procedures, building upon our experiences over the past five years. To ensure we benchmark against evolving national best practice, we are involved in discussions at sectoral level on the future of assessment in Higher Education as the education and training needs of individuals – and business and society more broadly – change. The impact of Artificial Intelligence tools is undoubtedly accelerating the need for a re-think of assessment methods, not only to maintain academic integrity but also to ensure that assessments are more authentic and can accommodate greater diversity of individuals' learning styles. NCI staff, particularly in CELL and the Teaching Enhancement Unit, are contributing to sectoral discussions through the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and other QQI-led assessment fora. We are leading the way nationally in this regard.

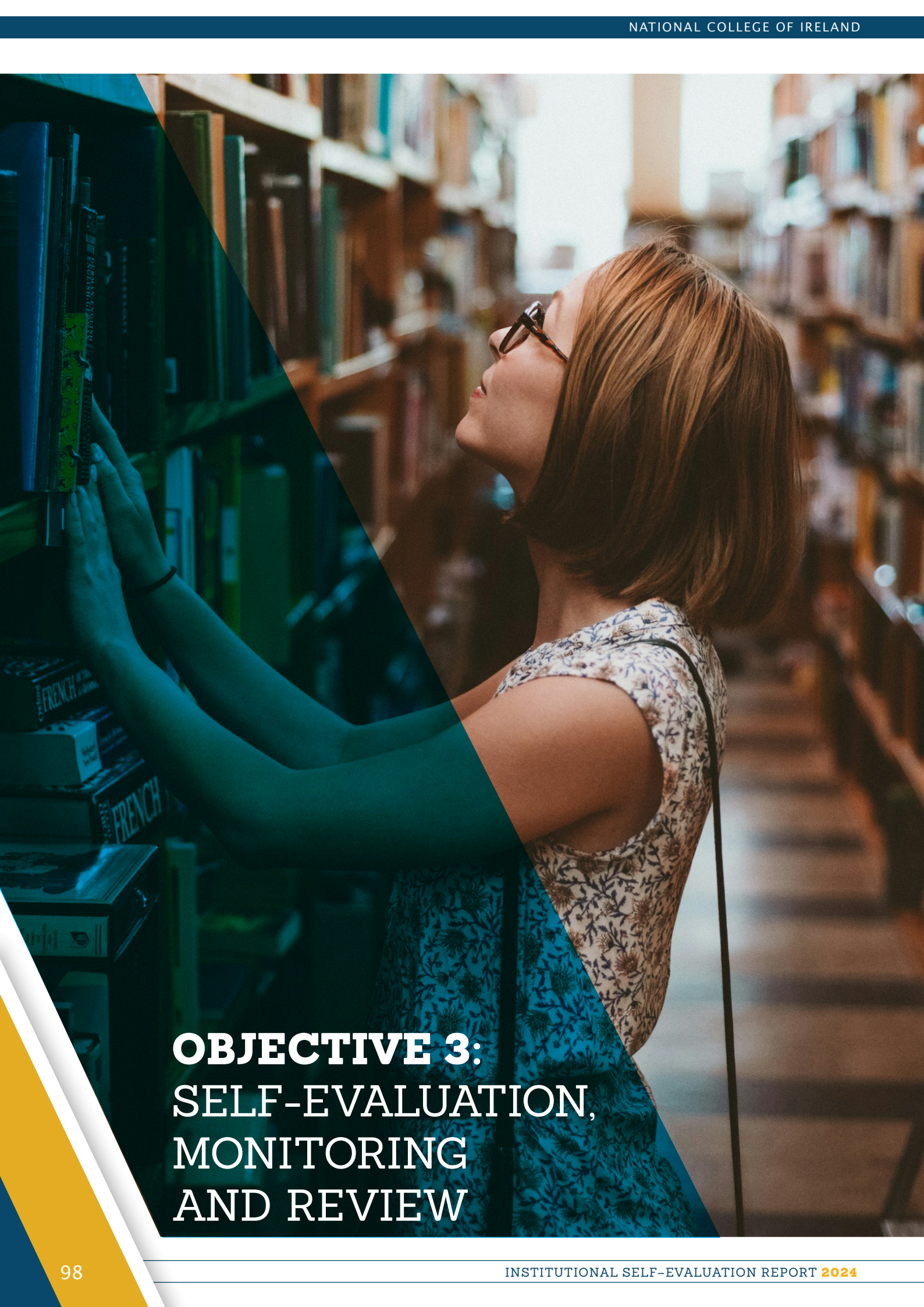
In line with our Strategic Plan objectives, we have identified that our grading processes are onerous given the growth in size and complexity of our programmes and our learner population. The planned review will include consideration of the scalability and sustainability of our existing internal moderation processes, which have created a burden in some programme areas where learner numbers are particularly high. We will also utilise the planned review to explore efficiencies in roles, responsibilities and the exchange of data around assessment and examinations to enhance efficiencies. In a broader sense, we know from student feedback nationally as well as internally, that the availability of lecturer feedback to inform learner academic progression on their programmes is a much-valued resource. It is hoped efficiencies in the grading process might lead to the greater utilisation of faculty time providing learner feedback on assessments completed. These areas for enhancement have been identified and will be addressed going forward under the auspices of the Assessment sub-committee of the TLAC, reporting through to the Academic Council.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

We have identified the review and refresh of our assessment and examination structures as a strategic priority area for 2024/25. Delivery of this work will be impactful not only in terms of efficiencies, but also to enhance the quality and academic integrity of the learner experience. Progress in this work will be monitored through the Executive Strategic Implementation Plan.

We will continue to improve the quality and impact of our assessment infrastructure by:

- Completing a holistic refresh of our assessment and examination policies to reduce pressures and burdens on faculty, staff and students where possible.
- Identifying system integration opportunities within annual IT prioritisation and financial planning processes.
- Support faculty in assessment design and redesign activities to inform programme validation, review and revalidation activities across the PLM structure.
- Analysing data on pass rates data internally and externally to reassure internal and external stakeholders of the robustness across our assessment practices.

A photograph of a woman with short brown hair and glasses, wearing a patterned sleeveless top, reaching up to a high shelf in a library. The shelves are filled with books, and the scene is dimly lit with warm tones. A large, dark teal diagonal shape overlays the left side of the image, and a yellow and white diagonal shape is in the bottom left corner.

OBJECTIVE 3: SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of our QAES confirms the importance of critical self-evaluation in our quality review processes and outline the mechanisms to be used for reviews of our academic and non-academic programmes and services. This section of our report will focus on providing a more in-depth overview of these processes. Examples of the reviews completed over the past five years have been referenced within Objective 1 and Objective 2, alongside arrangements for the monitoring of our agreements with other education partners.

PROGRAMME MONITORING AND REVIEW

Within the last two years, the PLM-ESG has approved amendments to several programme quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms, including:

- A pilot refresh of the Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) process.
- A refresh of our processes for Programme Teams to propose Major or Minor Changes to current programmes or modules, in line with QQI Guidelines, and,
- A refresh of our student module survey process.

Annual Programme Monitoring (APM)

We refreshed and relaunched a pilot of our APM in 2022/23, taking account of feedback gathered from key internal stakeholders to ensure we minimised burden and maximised the value and impact of the process on programme management and quality. With support from academic leaders, 12 programmes were selected to take part in the pilot. The refreshed APM is recognised as an annual opportunity for programme teams to reflect and assess on the performance of their programme and identify any changes needed to enhance the teaching, learning and assessment experiences.

In line with feedback from the 2019 Re-engagement Panel, the refreshed APM process includes pre-populated datasets which inform self-evaluative discussions amongst the programme team. This results in an Annual Programme Monitoring Summary Report which includes any agreed actions to the programme, which is submitted to School/CELL leadership teams as well as QIE. An annual analysis of the outcomes of APMs is then prepared by the QIE Director and submitted to the Academic Council. Key inputs to inform effective self-evaluations undertaken by each programme team are outlined below:

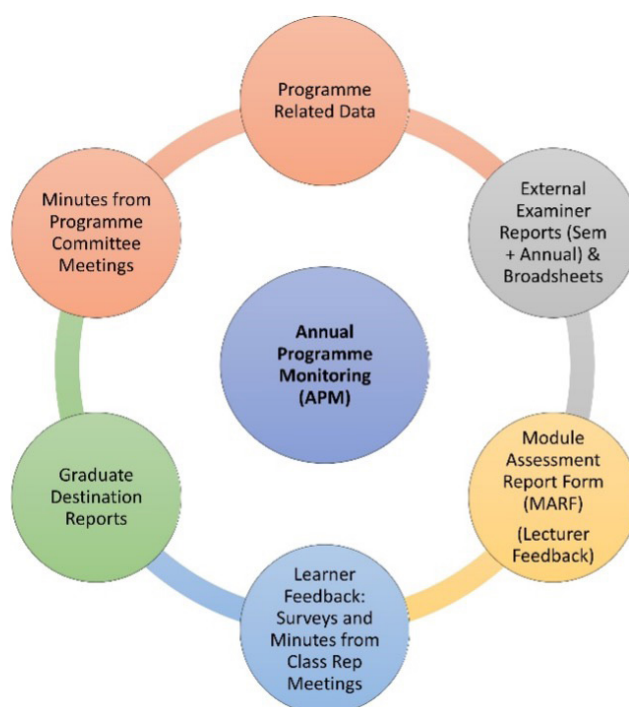


Figure 50: Inputs to the Annual Programme Monitoring Process

In November 2023, feedback received from programme directors that participated in the APM pilot was largely positive; the programme teams valued the structured approach to review and particularly appreciated the new Module Assessment Report Form (MARF) which was designed for lecturers to provide their feedback on the delivery of their module in the previous academic session. The feedback also highlighted some gaps, such as the need to ensure that documented minutes are produced in a standardised way from all Programme Committee meetings while other feedback highlighted issues requiring more strategic attention such as the need for improvements to the timetabling process. This work is already well advanced, and changes are being remedied for the post-pilot full roll-out of the APM process in Autumn 2024.

MODULE STUDENT EVALUATION SURVEY

The learner voice is a key part of the APM dataset. A refreshed Module Evaluation Student Survey (shorter survey than previously used with revised standardised questions) was approved by Academic Council in February 2023 and implemented, as a pilot, in April 2023. 270 modules across 15 pilot programmes were surveyed. Named module lecturers (and the respective Dean/ Director of CELL) were given access to view or download reports containing the results, via the EVASys online survey platform and asked to discuss these with their Deans/Director of CELL. 29% of the cohort of module lecturers on the pilot (32 faculty/AF) responded anonymously to a post-pilot review survey. 84.4% of respondents agreed that the core questions in the module evaluation survey were useful for getting feedback from learners about the module.

5-YEARLY PROGRAMME REVIEWS

Under Objective 1E, we set out the Programme Lifecycle Management (PLM process) which has four key stages. The final stage in the PLM is the five-yearly review by the programme team of the programme's performance throughout the validation period. The self-evaluation completed as part of APMs provides the core evidence set for 5-yearly reviews.

A standard template is provided by QQI for this exercise, which is aligned to the QQI HET Programme Review Manual, with a specific set of review objectives. The result of this 5-year review informs a decision made by the programme team, academic leaders, and in turn, PLM and Academic Council, as to whether the programme should remain in the NCI portfolio and be approved for revalidation, or whether it will be retired or repositioned. The five-yearly programme review report is key document for the QQI revalidation panel and discussed in detail at the start of each revalidation event.

In the past four academic years alone, NCI has completed in-depth reviews of 55 programmes, spread across 23 Independent Panel events. The 2019/20 – 2023/24 period has been very successful – in fact we have enjoyed a 100% success rate. This has been an intense but highly productive period of reflection and review across a large volume of our programmes.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF PROGRAMME REVIEW REPORTS

At the request of the Governing Body, in 2023, a thematic analysis of recurring quality themes and feedback from Independent Programme Evaluation Panels was prepared and considered by both Academic Council and Governing Body. For the purposes of this self-assessment process, this analysis was updated in 2024, to encompass learnings from 4 panels completed in 2023/24.

COMMENDATIONS

The chart below shows the Commendations made by the range of panels, organised into thematic areas. It is evident that a large portion (31%) of QQI panel commendations received between 2019-2024 related to the high quality of our student-centred approach. With over 55 programmes under discussion, we are confident that this is a representative sample and demonstrates our student-centred commitments explicit to our peers. We take these commendations as welcome recognition of the contribution of our staff, in particular our learner support teams, to the quality of the NCI learner experience.

Examples of relevant Panel commendations include:

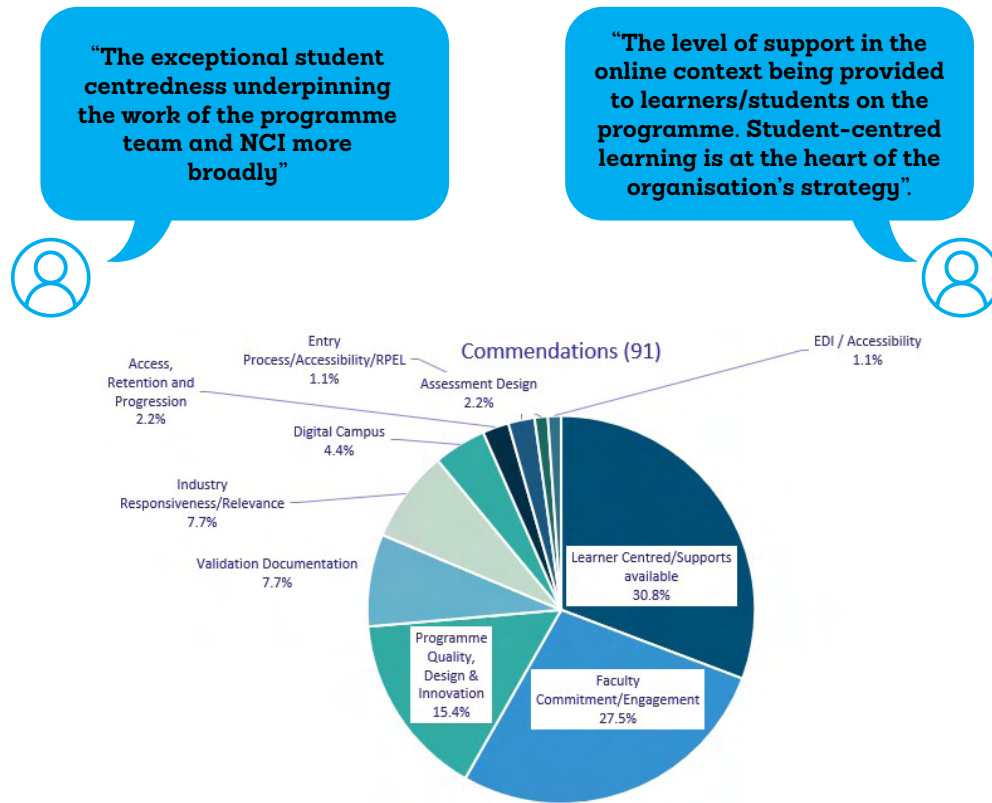
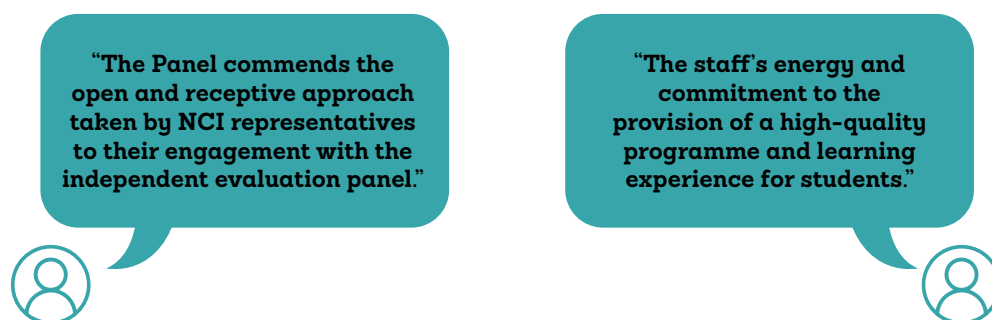


Figure 51: QQI Panel Commendations 2019-2024

Commendations are also cited for the level of commitment and engagement demonstrated by our faculty to our students and throughout the review process. Panel Chairs, in their oral feedback at the close of panel events, frequently remark on the open spirit of engagement and discursive approach taken by NCI's faculty and professional support staff. Examples of relevant Panel commendations about our faculty and staff include:



Over 15% of the Panel commendations related to Programme Quality, Design and Innovation, but if we bring together all the remaining categories (except for Validation Documentation), as also relevant to the quality of the programme, this rises to 33%. It is especially gratifying for programme teams to receive formal commendations from external peers, on the quality of the programme, in its widest sense. Examples of commendations given include:

"The panel commends the considered integration of sustainability to the curriculum."



"The panel commends the innovative nature of the programme and welcomed the courageous initiative of attempting to offer a QQI approved course within the senior cycle of 2nd level schooling."



CONDITIONS

The chart below shows the Conditions made by the range of panels, organised into thematic areas. Panel conditions are requirements for programme teams to address prior to the Panel agreeing to allow the programme to proceed to QQI for validation. A significant portion (33%) of Panel conditions related to Programme Design. The most notable areas for improvement within Programme Design are Learning Outcomes and Student Effort. Panels emphasized the need to revise learning outcomes across specific modules to ensure clarity and measurability, and to align them appropriately with programme objectives and Award standards. Additionally, clearer articulation of learner effort, consistency in workload distribution, and better monitoring plans for learner wellbeing were stressed to ensure that educational demands are both reasonable and transparent.

Examples of Conditions given include:

"Ensure that the MIPLOs reflect the programme concept as stated and ensure that they are mapped appropriately to the awards standards and to MIMLOs of mandatory modules that do not depend on elective choices."



"It is a condition of validation that the learner effort hours allocated to work-based learning effort be reassigned to independent learning."

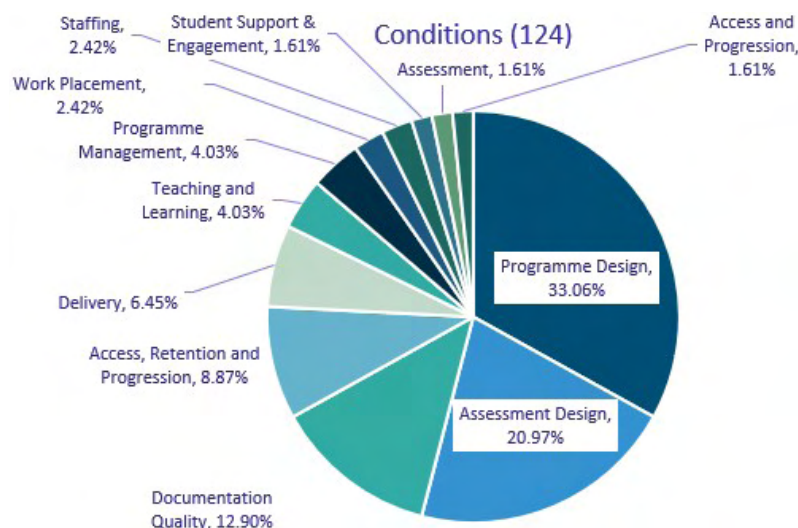


Figure 52: QQI Panel Conditions for Improvement

Assessment Design is another critical area highlighted by the panels, accounting for a significant portion of the conditions. The balance between formative and summative assessments and the clarity of these assessments for learners were identified as key issues. Panels stressed the need to diversify assessment methods to avoid overdependence on class tests and final exams, ensuring a balanced and comprehensive assessment strategy. Moreover, providing clearer communication and detailed guidelines for assignments and assessments was emphasized to ensure transparency and fairness for learners. Examples of Conditions given include:

"Review the balance of assessment methods to avoid an overdependence on class tests and final exams, particularly at award stage."



"Provide an assessment schedule, which clearly identifies workload, integration, and shows percentage allocations and submission dates across the year for both programmes. In doing this, the assessment types and overall workload of the modules should be reconsidered."



A notable proportion (13%) of Panel conditions related to Documentation Quality. Panels highlighted the need to ensure the clarity and consistency of module descriptors, as well as accurately reflecting the delivery modes and assessment methods within programme documentation. Conditions emphasized removing ambiguous references and ensuring all documentation is precise and aligned with current Award standards. Examples of Conditions given include:

"Review all module descriptors to ensure that module assessment methods are communicated in a consistent way, to students on a programme."



"The panel found some descriptions of the intended delivery approach confusing. The provided documentation outlines a 100% online delivery approach ... and, in other sections, alludes to a blended learning approach."



RECOMMENDATIONS

The chart below shows the Recommendations made by the range of panels, organised into thematic areas. Recommendations are suggestions to be considered by the NCI programme team, but are not conditions for a successful validation. A considerable proportion (38%) of the Panel recommendations centred on Programme Design. The primary areas for enhancement include refining learning outcomes, adjusting learner workload, and updating module content. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that learning outcomes are clear, measurable, and aligned with programme objectives. Adjusting the volume of content and pacing to accommodate diverse learner needs was also recommended.

Examples of relevant Panel recommendations include:

"Review the learning outcomes for diversity of active verbs across the suite of programmes."



"Consider reducing the volume of content or extending the length of the programme as students commented that there was a lot of content to get through."



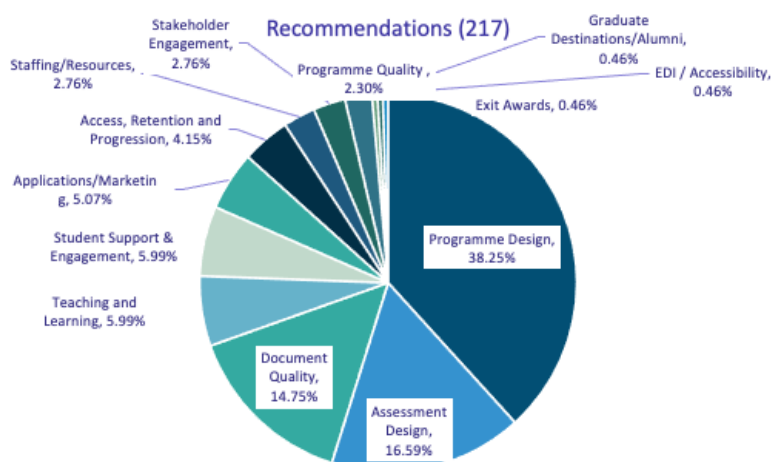


Figure 53: QQI Panel Recommendations for Enhancement

Assessment Design accounted for about 17% of the recommendations. Key suggestions involved balancing formative and summative assessments and providing clearer guidelines for learners. The aim is to diversify assessment methods to avoid overdependence on traditional exams and ensure comprehensive evaluation strategies. Examples of relevant Panel recommendations include:

“Review all module descriptors to ensure that module assessment methods are communicated in a consistent way, to students on a programme.”



“Consider more problem-based learning options as part of module assessment strategies, where appropriate.”



Documentation Quality was highlighted in 15% of the recommendations. The main areas for improvement involve ensuring clarity and consistency across all module descriptors and programme documentation. This includes clearly defining delivery modes and assessment methods and eliminating ambiguous references. Examples of relevant Panel recommendations include:

“Review each module descriptor to ensure module content is fully articulated and complete.”



“The panel recommends that all programme-related materials are communicated in plain language for students to ensure they are clear on all content and expectations throughout their studies.”



In June 2023, the Academic Council agreed that QIE should conduct more regular reviews of recurring quality-related themes identified through intensive programme review processes to enable recurrent themes to inform decision-making, policy and practice at a programme, school and institutional level. The analysis has highlighted several recurring themes for which NCI has been commended by QQI Reviewers, such as innovative programme design, exemplary staff commitment, and high-quality student-centred support services. However, the report also identified key areas for improvement, specifically in assessment design, learning outcomes, and documentation quality. To address these issues, the Academic Council has proposed targeted workshops and strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing programme quality and supporting learner success.

The Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Committee, along with its three sub-committees on Assessment, the Learning Environment, and Digital Learning, is reviewing recurring programme and assessment quality themes and to identify and agree on actions across the College. This is particularly relevant for any policy, or procedural changes needed to maintain quality as programmes and modules are delivered. This process will also incorporate the analysed outcomes of the Annual Programme Monitoring process.

ADMINISTRATIVE/SERVICE SELF-EVALUATION AND REVIEWS

The NCI Administrative/Service Review Process was developed and piloted by the QIE Team in 2020. It was designed as a self-assessment process that enables staff in non-academic units to critically review the fitness for purpose, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of our services, policies, procedures and processes. The primary outcome of an Administrative /Service Review is for the team undertaking the self-assessment to have confidence in the effectiveness of their activities and help identify aspects working well and those that require further improvement. The process reinforces staff capabilities in critical self-reflection and strengthens our ability to make informed short, medium and long-term decisions. The process was designed for use in non-academic areas and helps us organisationally:

- Ensure effectiveness in managing and monitoring the impact of policies, procedures and processes on the learner experience, retention and success as well as enhancing operational consistency.
- Identify and disseminate good and innovative practices that could be seen as exemplars to other areas of NCI.
- Identify opportunities for further improvement that will impact on the quality of stakeholder experiences.
- Review the quality of the NCI stakeholder experiences across differing levels, lengths and locations of engagement.
- Document policy and procedural alignment with internal and external compliance requirements and standards, including those of the HEA and QQI.

The process can be tailored to meet the scope of any self-assessment process via consultation with the QIE Director. The five stages of the process are as follows:

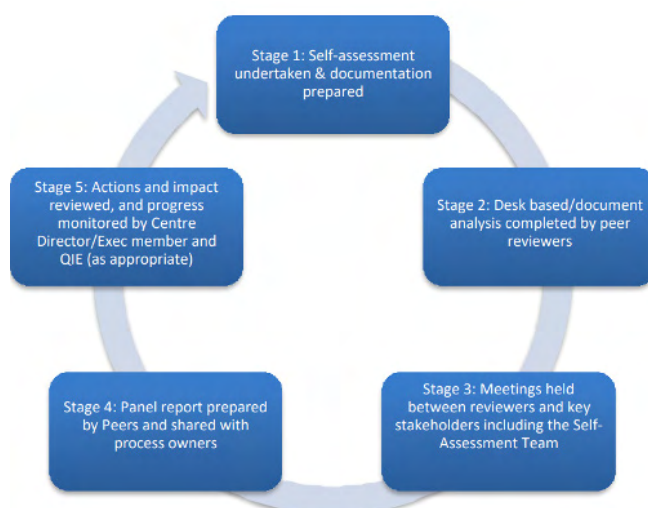


Figure 54: Administrative/Service Review Process and Outcomes

As with our academic programme review process, a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) forms the core document within this review process. The SAR is a self-reflective and critical evaluation completed by a small team of individuals within the unit/centre responsible for the policy/procedure/process under review. Like a SWOT analysis, the SAR is developed usually by one individual within the Self-Assessment Team to provide a self- critical account of the effectiveness and consistency with internal and external

requirements (as appropriate) of the policy/procedure/procedure under review. A SAR template document is provided to aid discussions. However, in instances when assessing the evidence behind external compliance – such as the QQI Code of Pastoral Care for International Students as outlined below – it suggested a customised template be used to underpin the evidence collection and critique process.

Examples of this methodology being used by two of our professional service teams are provided below. In each instance, the Panel reports and agreed action plans were submitted and approved by the Executive Group, with progress monitored by QIE. The next team scheduled to complete this self-assessment process is our Library team, who will complete the process in 2024/25.

INTERNATIONAL OFFICE SELF-ASSESSMENT

In 2021/22 our International Team completed a self-evaluation against the QQI Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Students.

The self-evaluation considered:

- NCI's evidence of compliance with The Code
- What could be cited as examples of best practices in key processes
- Opportunities for further enhancement in existing service provision

To ensure the robustness of the self-evaluation process, the outputs were considered by a panel of peer reviewers, consisting of two internal and two external experts. The aims of this process were to provide an additional level of support and guidance to NCI and the International Office to help the prioritisation of actions and services to enhance compliance levels and improve the overall quality of the NCI international student experience. The panel commended the comprehensive and robust self-evaluation completed by the International Office. The self-evaluation and proposed action plan were considered suitably evaluative, addressing all the main areas for compliance, and highlighted areas of improvement considered to be fully compliant.

In addition to the actions proposed by the NCI Team, the following high-level recommendations were proposed by the panel for NCI to continue to improve service quality and effectiveness for NCI's international students:

- Utilise the new NCI Strategic Plan to reinforce NCI's holistic commitment to internationalisation.
- Map the international learner journey at NCI to streamline services and ensure quality and consistency across the entire international learner experience.
- Systematically capture and analyse qualitative and quantitative data, including formal and informal learner feedback, at key points across the international learner lifecycle.
- Review and combine all relevant policies and procedures relating to international learner admissions and fees into a single 'user-friendly' document with the aim of increasing transparency, consistency and understanding across staff and students.
- Secure IT solutions to enhance the scalability and sustainability of key activities conducted by the International Office to ensure the consistent experience of students in their interactions with the College.
- Engage staff from the International Office in decision making, policy developments and the programme lifecycle management process to ensure the needs and experiences of international students and the expertise of the staff inform effective decision making.

Progress against the action plan was reviewed quarterly by the QIE Director and the International Director, and annual progress reports provided to the Executive. The completion of this process and its actions enables us to have confidence in our ability to engage with the TrustEd Ireland/IEM process throughout 2024/25.

CENTRAL TIMETABLING OFFICE (CTO) SELF-ASSESSMENT

In 2022, NCI's Registry, academic administrative supports and the CTO teams were in a period of transition. Organisational and personnel changes were undertaken across several key roles, in addition to the inherent complications of scheduling within the evolving post-Covid restrictions environment. Informal and formal feedback from staff, academic leaders and students (directly and through the NCI Students' Union) between September and October 2022 identified negative experiences and challenges around the publication of Semester 1 2022 timetables. While there was understanding across stakeholders that a series of challenges were experienced within and beyond NCI impacting on the quality of the services provided by CTO and the overall staff and learner experience, a pressing need was clear to ensure these problems were addressed and suitable sustainable solutions identified and applied in 2023.

CTO completed the self-assessment process within 2022/23 which included a site visit from a panel of two external peers from the Irish HE sector to:

- Ensure that CTO and its output was efficient, effective and responsive to stakeholder needs and experiences.
- Commend examples of good practice and innovations in service provision completed or proposed by CTO.
- Provide recommendations for further consideration and action by CTO and other identified stakeholders to allow for further enhancements in service provision.

In addition to supporting the actions proposed by the CTO team in the self-assessment report, the following recommendations were proposed by the Panel:

- CTO should transition to the production of an annualised timetable.
- For the timetable to be produced in a more efficient manner, necessary data on modules, their methods of delivery and programme-instance type need to be captured accurately in Quercus. Once verified as accurate, this information can be integrated with the timetabling software (Syllabus+) which will allow for efficient production of timetables.
- The roles and responsibilities of the CTO unit, Academic Operations Team and NCI's Academic Leadership Team in the construction and production of timetables need to be clarified, approved and communicated.
- CTO unit should review and where appropriate update CTO policies, with key stakeholder involvement.
- CTO unit should communicate more clearly to staff and students on the expected publication date of timetables. Where a change must occur to the published timetable, this change should be communicated to staff and students in a timely manner

The outcomes and actions arising from this review were approved by the Executive Group and implemented throughout 2023/24. The annualised timetable model will be applied throughout the 2024/25 to our School of Computing and CELL, with the annualization of the School of Business completed in advance of the 2025/26 academic year. Feedback from faculty and students was secured in April/May 2024. Feedback on the changes proposed has been largely positive, particularly around the benefits of annualization.

EVALUATION

We have had notable success in recent years across all self-evaluations of our programmes and support services. We have learned much from these processes. In addition to the critiques from external peers, the processes provide valuable opportunities to review and reflect on our own efficiencies and effectiveness. They have proven to be labour intensive but valued learning and team building opportunities.

In terms of our programme reviews, we are confident that our processes of programme review and revalidation are well managed and are working well. We remain committed to reviewing the recurrent themes and learning from these processes to identify opportunities to benchmark against good practice internally and externally. The move

to providing programme teams with pre-populated templates took time, but the benefits are clear in terms of efficiencies. NCI's QIE office has made significant strides in recent years in the provision of five-year standardised datasets on key programme metrics such as applications v admissions; learner demographics, grade classifications and learner completion rates. This work has been given extra focus since 2023 through the establishment of the MIS (Management Information Systems) Project Team who have been vital to ensuring we have robust, accurate and complete data to underpin programme reviews. This work will continue throughout 2024/25.

Access to and reflection on learner feedback is a critical part of the process of programme review. We have significantly strengthened our processes in recent years, both of Class Rep liaison mechanism which has benefitted through the NCI-NCISU Partnership Agreement, and lecturers have benefitted from the re-introduction of refreshed Module-Level Student Evaluation surveys, in 2022-23. However, we know that we need to do more to embed these feedback mechanisms as useful opportunities for students and for lecturing staff, and to "Close the Loop" more fully on learner feedback at programme as well as at module levels. This requires the QIE team, working with the Schools and CELL, to carry out more systematic analysis and evaluation of recurrent – and once-off – issues and themes identified by students and to more frequently report and discuss these issues with Programme Committees. At institutional level through the Programme Lifecycle Management Committee and the relevant Academic Council sub-committees, particularly the Teaching, Learning and Assessment committee, these academic policy and procedural changes can be agreed and their implementation can be overseen.

In relation to stakeholder inputs to the quality of our programmes, we are confident from our experience and from staff views, that we have good practices in place, and have an enviable bank of employer contacts from the business, industry and community sector, facilitated by our Careers Service. We also know however that we must strengthen external business/industry/community stakeholder views on our programmes to facilitate in-depth programmatic review on the five-yearly cycle. As part of our stakeholder review for CINTE, we carried out a short survey of Industry representatives who participated as experts on Independent Programme Review and (Re)Validation Panels over the 2021-2024 period. We wanted to obtain their feedback on the quality of the programme review and evaluation panel process and obtain suggestions on improvements. 43% of those surveyed took the time to answer our questions. We were pleased that 72.7% rated the quality of their experience with NCI as very good and believed that their inputs had been impactful on the review and evaluation process. The high response rate to the survey indicates that industry colleagues are willing to share their views, and that we could be gaining their insights on a more systematic basis. While NCI's students benefit from Associate Faculty who can bring real-world business insights to the classroom, the QIE office aims to work with the Careers Service and the Schools to implement a more strategic engagement strategy with our wide-ranging industry partners.

In terms of our Administrative and Service Reviews, the methodology has been effective in two key service reviews. The use of external peers within the process proved to be particularly valuable for the teams involved. This not only provided affirmation or new ideas but also added networking opportunities, strengthening connections between NCI service leads and their counterparts in the sector. We will continue to keep the methodology under review as we plan for a Library Services Review in 2024/25 and will adapt it according to need.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The combination of self-evaluation and peer review has been invaluable for us to continuously enhance our programmes and provision over the past 5 years. We will continue to seek opportunities to minimise burden and maximise value and impact as we continue to ensure self-reflection remains a core element of quality assurance and enhancement at NCI.

We will continue to improve the quality and impact of our self-evaluation, monitoring and review processes by:

- Ensuing robust qualitative and quantitative data underpins all formal self-assessment and review processes by our programme and administrative teams.
- Analysing and reporting on recurrent themes and trends arising from self-assessment and peer reviews to ensure our policies, practices and programmes are based on identified best and impactful practice.
- Improve coordination between QIE, the Careers Service, Schools and our Marketing and External Engagement departments, to more strategically engage with external stakeholders and peers, particularly business, industry and community sector representatives, nationally and internationally.
- Ensuring that the voice and experiences of our students inform our self-assessment, monitoring and review processes.



CONCLUSION

NCI is a distinctive Higher Education Institution in the Irish sector with a maturity of academic provision, research activity, governance oversight and quality assurance processes. This profile supports our strategy for growth, and our stated ambition to become a HEA-designated institution of Higher Education, with Delegated Authority from QQI to award our own degrees and other qualifications.

We believe this ISER demonstrates the overarching effectiveness of our quality, management and governance structures. This CINNTE Review process has enabled us to review our strengths as well as our internal and external challenges, through open and honest conversations.

During the CINNTE self-reflection process, NCI's staff responded in large numbers to our consultation activities. When asked the question "In your experience and opinion, what are the most important attributes of NCI?" staff selected their top three attributes from a range of nine options. The top three selections were "NCI's Mission to change lives through education": "NCI's commitment to students' learning and wellbeing" and "NCI's commitment to widening access through flexible Higher Education Options". These responses demonstrate a clear-sightedness on the part of staff about the College's mission and values relating to student-centred, accessible Higher Education. A view also came through that while NCI was already punching above its weight in the Irish sector, it has considerable ambitions for the further development of our students, programmes, research and external engagements, albeit with limited resources.

Arising from the CINNTE review process, we have identified three overarching self-evaluation themes that summarise the journey that we are on, in the context of our 2022-27 Strategic Plan. Figure 55 illustrates the three interdependent themes of **Accessibility**, **Sustainability** and **Scalability**.

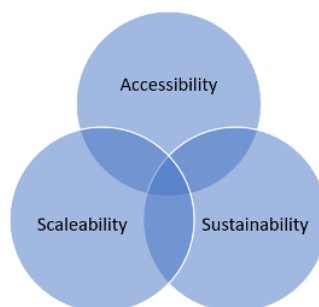


Figure 55: CINNTE Evaluation: Overarching themes

NCI will continue to prioritise accessibility to and widening participation in Higher Education. We wish to expand upon our current, already extensive accessibility routes, to provide even greater opportunities for individuals to change their lives through education. However, in doing so, and in charting our future growth pathways, we recognise that we must seek to grow sustainably in terms of programme and learner numbers, research outputs and in collaborations and partnerships. Our twin-track focus on accessibility and sustainability presents real opportunities for us, as an agile and dynamic, independent institution but we must also address the scalability challenges that sustainable growth poses in terms of our resources and our systems and supports for students, for staff, for research and for community engagement.

We will continue to improve our efforts to monitor, review and evaluate internal and external feedback from a wide range of voices and sources, to enhance quality across our services in sustainable ways. The CINNTE review has shown us that more work is needed to make our decision-making processes more transparent, and to communicate how the day-to-day work of College life is contributing to our strategic goals. The success of our dynamic and agile approach will be realised through our students and graduates, our excellent academic and professional support staff and NCI's resultant impact on our community and on wider society and the economy. This ISER will be invaluable internally as we review our progress and priorities against our 2022-2027 Strategic Plan, which will sustain the College into the future.



APPENDIX A

CASE STUDIES

LIST OF CASE-STUDIES

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APPENDIX A1:

REFLECTION ON NCI-NCISU PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

The [NCI-NCISU partnership agreement](#) was signed in 2022. Only two academic years on, in this case study the NCI Student's Union President, Tre Roberts, reflects on the benefits of the partnership approach.

OVERALL OUTCOME

Overall, the partnership agreement has had a significant and beneficial impact on the learner experience at NCI. The effective, more structured collaboration between the Union and the College has resulted in the best outcomes for students. The opportunity for the Union to bring fresh perspectives and trends to the table, combined with the experience and expertise provided by the College staff, has been particularly successful.

While the partnership has been overwhelmingly positive, there are always areas for improvement. Future steps will involve continuous feedback loops and the proactive addressing of emerging issues, to maintain and enhance the learner experience further.



NCISU President 2021-22, Conor Reilly and NCI President, Prof. Gina Quin, at the launch of the Agreement in [June 2022](#).

SPECIFIC THEMES

1. Student-Centred Approach

Over the past year 2023-24, the partnership has deepened the NCI-NCISU student-centred approach. The needs of students have been consistently prioritised in decision-making processes. For example [Learner Voice](#) surveys conducted to gauge the level of learner empowerment have yielded positive feedback, with students expressing that they feel they have a significant voice within both the Union and the College. This empowerment has been evident in how students have guided decisions impacting their academic and extracurricular experiences.

2. Mutual Respect and Constructive Dialogue

The College and the Union have maintained open communication channels, ensuring effective and professional dialogue. Regular updates are provided to students through various communication channels, such as NCI and NCISU social media, and NCI Learner Services' Staff and Learner communications.

NCI Learner Services team have facilitated the Union's communication with the entire learner body, enhancing transparency. When differences in perspectives arose, both parties have approached these situations by weighing up the pros and cons and reaching mutually beneficial agreement.

3. Building Trust and Openness

Trust and openness are fundamental to the partnership. Measures to enhance transparency in processes and practices have been implemented, fostering an environment of open dialogue. Specific examples of successful trust-building include the collaborative planning and execution of events, such as EID, HOLI, EMPOWER and events such as [The Annual Clubs and Societies Awards Ball 2024](#) in conjunction with NCI International Team and NCISU.

4. Empowering Students in Decision Making

Students have been given numerous opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. These include providing feedback, taking part in the 2024 Review of NCI's Academic Operations unit, collaborating on events, choosing timetables, and participating in various surveys. Co-creation and co-design activities have led to positive outcomes, ensuring that learner engagement is genuine and not tokenistic.

5. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

The Union, supported by the College, has launched several initiatives to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion. Welfare campaigns and events like RAG Week, where staff and students raised money for a learner mental health charity, have had a tremendous impact, fostering a more united community. These initiatives have helped embrace diverse perspectives and promote equal opportunities within the learner and staff community. [NCISU Newsletter VI](#).



6. Learner Voice

To ensure that learner voices are heard, formal mechanisms such as surveys and informal mechanisms like focus groups have been put in place. Learner feedback is always used to inform decision-making and is discussed at NCISU Class Representative Council and NCI Academic Council. Notable changes resulting from learner feedback include the acquisition of the new Spencer Dock facility, which has significantly improved study spaces and library facilities. [Your Learner Voice - NCISU](#).

7. Funding and Resources

The financial support from the College, as part of the Partnership Agreement, has been effectively used by the Union. This support has enabled the refurbishment of the Union space, the hosting of campaigns that support learner mental health, and assistance with academic issues. It has also ensured that Learner Union officers are adequately supported. With a Union administrator in place and regular advice from the College's Finance Director, financial management has been smooth, allowing the Union to fulfil its mission effectively.

APPENDIX A2:**PROGRAMME INNOVATION THROUGH ACCELERATED UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES: THE BA (HONS) IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT****INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

National College of Ireland has a long history in tailoring education opportunities for individuals in the workplace who want to study part-time. The highly successful NFQ Level 6 Certificate in First Line Management (CFLM) was the starting point on many educational journeys and supported those entering or aspiring to managerial positions. Over time, as new entrants to the business workplace arrived with third level qualifications, feedback from learner focus groups confirmed that there were those who would like achieve a Bachelor's degree in less than the traditionally three-year timeframe.

The School of Business at NCI sought a means to facilitate this emerging requirement. The concept of presenting one module at a time was seen as an attractive option. The team also explored a move away from traditional academic calendars towards extending delivery across more of the year.

This marriage of the idea of delivering one module at a time and extending delivery across the calendar year provided the model for what has become "accelerated delivery". A learner entering Stage 1 of the programme can expect to complete the degree within two calendar years, across three academic stages. Each stage is delivered in two blocks of three or four modules, depending on whether the modules are of 5 or 10-ECTS. The new programme admitted 57 first enrolments in 2016; 37 of these completed Stage 3 and graduated in 2018. Many of those who did not complete Stage 3 exited with Level 6 or 7 awards and some have come back later to complete their degrees.

OUTCOMES / BENEFITS

Learner feedback has been consistent: the course and schedule is challenging, but worth it in the end. Facilitated focus group discussions with graduates indicate that many graduates have developed or changed their careers because they achieved the degree. Tight deadlines are quoted as an augmented benefit in preparation for taking on more responsible positions in the workplace.

Each cohort has elected class representatives who have been active in their advocacy on behalf of the learner body. This feedback mechanism has allowed the programme team to keep pace with issues and ensure delivery in line with requirements.

Some changes that have been made include:**Repeat Assessment**

Initially repeat assessments were scheduled to occur during the block. This put unnecessary pressure on students, and this was altered to have a repeat assessment window at the end of each block.

Maths anxiety

Notwithstanding solid support from NCI's Maths Support service, statistics modules proved difficult for the early cohorts as many students hadn't studied this subject for many years. On re-examination of the module during programme review in 2022, the programme team opted to move the statistics modules to occur back to back at the end of one and the start of the next block, with a logical flow from one to the next. Feedback to date is very positive

A Blended learning programme

When Covid-19 struck, this programme, like all others, was moved to online delivery. This proved to be a satisfactory arrangement such that the programme team proposed a Blended model for 2022 revalidation, with the traditional Monday and Wednesday lectures remaining online with the Saturday schools being retained as on-campus, face-to-face events, to allow for a fuller on-campus interaction between students. Once again this has proven to be a success with both two post-Covid restrictions cohorts.

CHALLENGES

Like most third level institutions NCI's academic operations are based around Stages mapping to two-semester academic years. The impact of three stages within two academic years was initially underestimated. For example, exam board processes for learner progression from stage to stage had to be reconfigured to facilitate the BA (Hons) in Business Management.

FUTURE PLANS

The Programme Director and team will continue to engage with learner and programme team feedback, as well as industry, to ensure the continued relevance of this innovative degree. We are also actively addressing how to cater for Artificial Intelligence and its impact on the course. In line with the College approach, we will explain and use this resource with our students, aiming to uphold assessment integrity.

APPENDIX A3: ATHENA SWAN RENEWAL

OVERVIEW

NCI is a proud Athena Swan Bronze Award Holder, which was first achieved in April 2020. In May 2024 we completed our application for renewal of this bronze award.

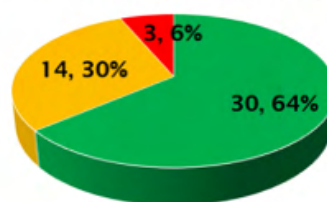
The Athena Swan Charter was established in 2005 in the UK to encourage and recognise commitment to advancing the careers of women in higher education and research. The Athena Swan Charter was launched in the Republic of Ireland in 2015 and redeveloped 2021 it supports higher education institutions develop impactful and sustainable gender equality work and build capacity for evidence-based equality work across the equality grounds enshrined in Irish legislation. NCI signed up to the new charter in December 2021

Engagement with the charter is a key pillar of Ireland's national strategy for gender equality with progress linked to institutional eligibility for funding from Ireland's major research agencies.

OUTCOMES/ BENEFITS

Since achieving our first Athena Swan award we have made considerable progress in our 2020-2024 action plan, the cornerstone of the award. This plan had 47 specific actions; 94% of these actions are either achieved or significantly progressed. These include the development of; remote and hybrid working methodologies; the NCI Framework for Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment, the autism friendly campus accreditation, the creation of a sensory room for students and staff, training in unconscious bias, inclusive leadership, consent and disability in the workplace, the implementation of a SU strategic partnership, and specific initiatives including the menopause workplace guide, and Brigit's Basket (the provision of free period products for all in NCI, February 2022).

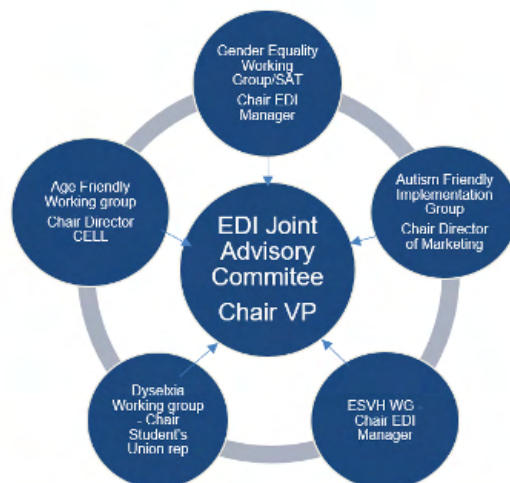
2020-2024 Action Plan (AP1)



■ Implemented ■ Underway ■ No progress/fundamental change

NCI's Bronze renewal process was formally launched November 5th 2022 with a Self-Assessment Team (SAT) formed. This SAT included academic and support staff, as well as the SU, and was chaired by the EDI Manager and supported by the EDI Joint Advisory Committee, that has GB representation.

In the preparation of the 2024 application, the SAT undertook an equality and culture survey and focus groups. Consultations were also held with specific structures

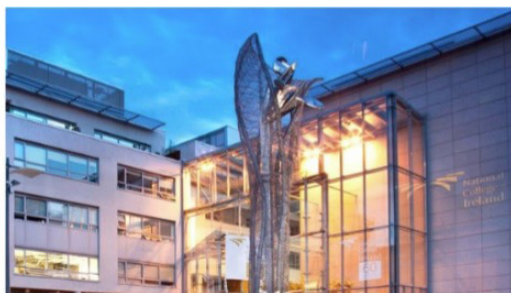


Equality infrastructure in NCI

and departments within the College, including Academic Council, the senior management team, ELI, HR, the Senior Academic Leadership Team (SALT) and QIE, as well as the President and VP to evaluate the 2020-2024 and develop the 2024-2028 action plans.

NCI Framework for Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment

Learn how NCI and NCISU are working together to implement the framework for consent to protect students and staff against sexual harassment.



FUTURE PLANS

The completed Athena Swan application contains a new, comprehensive action plan for the period 2024-2028.

This consultative and reflective process identified areas where further progress is required. Key priorities identified include, developing an EDI strategy, embedding EDI practice in curriculum development and review, progressing anti-racist policy and practice, developing our autism campus initiative and data collection.

The NCI action plan has seven thematic areas:

- 1) Leadership and Accountability
- 2) Data Capture
- 3) Analysis and Reporting Positive Culture and eliminating discrimination and unfair treatment including sexual violence and harassment.
- 4) Staffing & Recruitment
- 5) Teaching and Research
- 6) Community and Outreach
- 7) Intersectionality & additional equality grounds

The action plan is informed by national policy and institutional initiatives within NCI. These include:

- Report of the Expert Group: 2nd HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions
- Anti-racism principles for Irish Higher Education Institutions



We look forward to implementing our new action plan, which is ambitious but achievable, and has the full support of NCI's Governing Body and Senior Management Team. We will work to embed our achievements to date and develop an intersectional and coherent approach to equality issues.

APPENDIX A4:**HYBRID WORKING POLICY
POST-COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS****OVERVIEW**

This case study discusses the evolution of Hybrid working arrangements and policy at NCI, and our plans going forward.

NCI staff have been working in a hybrid format since March 2020. As we resume a more 'normal' approach to life and leave behind the government restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, we knew that we needed to decide on the best approach for NCI into the future.

In 2022, the HR Team were tasked by the President to carry out a review of hybrid working, capturing a college-wide outlook. A Working Group of 23 members was formed and six key themes were identified, for further exploration:

- 1) H&S, Employment Law/ GDPR obligations
- 2) Academic Delivery/ Academic Staff requirements
- 3) Staff Survey & Management Consultation
- 4) Space Utilisation
- 5) Culture/ Engagement/ Collaboration
- 6) IT/Admin Process/Systems

Individuals put themselves forward for thematic working groups, and appointed Chairpersons for each. The common remit across all groups was to research practices and processes at other HEIs and similar-sized organisations, and to address and report back on the following questions:

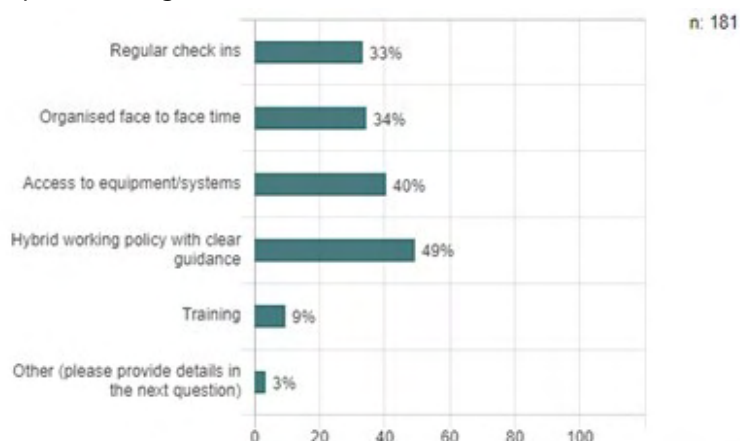
- What are the challenges with hybrid working?
- What are the opportunities?
- What are external companies doing to address this hybrid working /best practice?
- Observations from the group and recommendations.

OUTCOMES/ BENEFITS

From an HR perspective, successful policy depends on the consistency and fairness in implementation. For our Hybrid Working policy to be successful, we must develop measures and metrics to demonstrate staff contributions, such as performance management, rather than presenteeism, to avoid reinforcing inequalities among staff.

Staff were asked;**What supports do you feel are needed for hybrid working for you?**

Respondents could give more than one answer. The most significant answer was, Hybrid working policy with clear guidance (49%)



6: Outcomes of staff survey on Supports needed for Hybrid working

Having taken staff responses on board, HR then went on to develop a Hybrid Working Policy which included mechanisms for training, setting up home working stations and an increased focus on staff engagement to ensure that NCI provides a hybrid work environment that promotes an equitable working culture for all staff.

The consultation led to the creation of a Hybrid working model options for departmental and School/CELL teams:

Option 1: 2 days on site / 3 days working from home per week

The team chooses 2 days on-site and 3 days remote working. 2 days on-site allows the team to optimally work collaboratively.

Option 2: The Department Roster

This option allows the team to roster their attendance across the entire week. There must be on-site presence by the team each and every day.

Option 3: Academic Faculty:

Onsite and hybrid working will be determined by in-person teaching requirements and academic work.

Suitable role: defined as a role which the relevant manager in NCI determines can be carried out effectively and productively from the staff member's home in accordance with the terms of this policy.

This hybrid model gave clear guidance to Managers and their teams on how Hybrid working would operate in NCI. The documented policy and staff training followed.

FUTURE PLANS

We have committed to a full review of the Hybrid Working model and policy in June 2025 (see Athena Swan Action plan). A review of hybrid work would involve:

- a comprehensive evaluation of the hybrid working model to assess its effectiveness and identify areas for improvement
- explore the effectiveness of management practices in a hybrid environment, including how managers are supporting remote teams and maintaining a cohesive College culture.

The findings from this review will inform any necessary adjustments to optimize the hybrid work model for better alignment with both employee needs and College objectives.

APPENDIX A5: RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) AT NCI

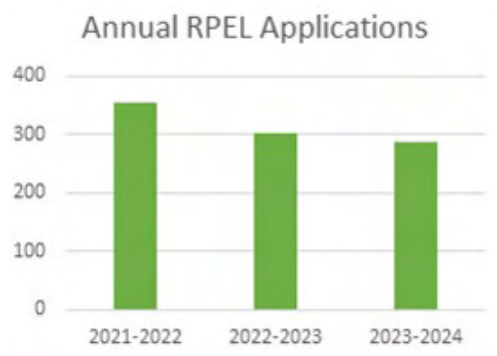
OVERVIEW

Informed by national good practice, NCI greatly values the life, formal learning and workplace experiences of individuals and seeks to recognise experience and achievements gained in these contexts. This knowledge is evaluated by the College through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process. RPL may be used as a supplement or alternative to formal learning for programme admission or module exemption. RPL in NCI recognises both the recognition of formal learning already achieved in further or higher education (RPL) as well as lifelong experiential learning in non-formal, or informal learning environments (RPEL).

- **Use of RPEL to Satisfy Entry Requirements:** it is reasonable to assume that there are potential students for many of our courses who, although not meeting the specific entry requirement (e.g. a level 5 qualification on the NFQ), have sufficient experience and competence to be successful learners. RPEL can be used to support entry for these students.
- **Use of RPL for Partial Entry:** there have been cases where applicants with a Bachelor's degree at Ordinary level (NFQ Level 7). have been admitted to a course that requires a honours bachelor's degree (NFQ L8) where they only have a In this case RPL can be used as a supplement to fill the qualification gap.
- **Use of RPL for Advanced Standing / Entry:** In some cases, it has been justified to grant an applicant an exemption from an entire programme stage (the individual then enters an undergraduate degree at the second stage)
- **Exemption from modules:** RPL may also be used for exemption from one or more modules in a programme.

RPEL APPLICATION NUMBERS

As can be seen in Graph 1.1, RPEL applications in NCI are generally consistent year on year, with an average of 315 applicants per year.



7: Graph 1.1: RPEL Applications to NCI

NCI RPL SUPPORTS FOR APPLICANTS

The RPL team offers Workshops and Mentoring support services to prospective applicants.

RPEL Workshops

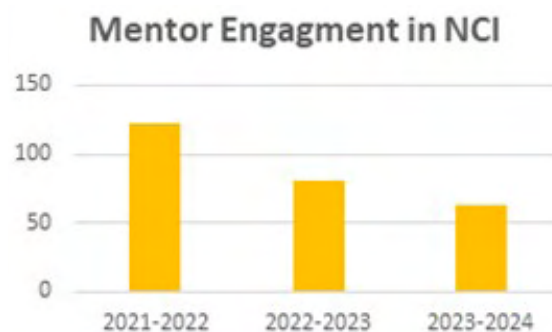
These workshops are offered to applicants who are at any stage of the RPL process and are carried out across the three semesters. For the 2023-2024 academic year, there were 44 individual applicants who engaged with the service. This is in contrast to 46 individuals in 2022-2023 year and 20 in the 2021-2022 year (Graph 1.2).



8: Graph 1.2: RPEL Workshop attendance in NCI

RPEL Mentoring

In support of workshops, applicants are also encouraged to reach out to the RPEL mentor team, who can be contacted by email at rpel@ncirl.ie. This team is available to provide individualised supports for each stage of the application process, including feedback on draft portfolios. For the 2023-2024 academic year, there were 63 individual applicants who engaged with the service. This is in contrast to 81 individuals in 2022-2023 year and 122 in the 2021-2022 year (Graph 1.3).



9: Graph 1.3: Mentor Engagement in NCI

It is worth noting that not all applicants utilise the RPEL supports in NCI. For example, as of July 2024 there are currently 50 RPEL applicants in the 2024-25 recruitment cycle, who have watched NCI RPEL videos and completed the process independently without seeking further supports.

Staff Supports and Experience

In relation to staff support and training, each year, the RPEL team provide staff workshops on "How to Assess an RPEL Application in NCI". Most typically at NCI, applicants avail of our RPEL process to support entry onto a programme of study. There are cases where students request exemption from a module(s), through an RPEL portfolio, however this is not common.

BENEFITS OF RPL IN NCI

Below is a summary of some of the perceived benefits of RPL in NCI:

- **Providing access** to higher education for individuals who have gained knowledge and skills through experiential learning,

- **For migrating workers and students** providing opportunities to work and access to higher education because of their prior learning,
- **For those who want to broaden their career** but are hindered by previous qualifications that need adjustments. RPEL can discover what needs to be adjusted.
- **For returning students** to complete a programme they had begun earlier and deferred/withdrew, and additional experiential learning has taken place in between..

PROGRAMME DIRECTOR INSIGHT:

“For the Post Graduate Diploma in Educational Practice for Further Education, we typically have two types of application that proceed through the RPEL route. The first is an applicant who does not have the required 2:2 at L8 (*Level 8 degree on the Irish NFQ*). In such cases applicants are asked to provide evidence via the standard RPEL form/portfolio. The programme receives a small number of applicants with a level 7 degree each year who normally proceed through RPEL successfully. The second form of applicant concerns those querying exemptions from elements of the programme. While students can of course apply for exemptions it is recommended that they undertake the programme as it stands, as it really is the best possible preparation for their careers as FET (Further Education and Training) teachers. Again, those querying exemptions represent a very small proportion of overall applications each year.”

Programme Director – NCI Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Practice For Further Education.

FUTURE PLANS

UDL focus – we plan to adapt our RPEL portfolio requirements to be more UDL friendly. Applicants will be facilitated to demonstrate the achievements of learning through multi-modal mechanisms, whether they be existing online portfolios, created audio clips, or video web links.

APPENDIX A6:

EARLY LEARNING INITIATIVE: PARENTCHILD+ : BUILDING CAPACITY NATIONWIDE

OVERVIEW

ParentChild+ is a home visiting programme that supports parents from marginalised communities to improve their children's social, language and thinking skills from an early age and thereby, ensure that children enter school ready to learn, with the skills they need to be successful throughout their education.



CHELLE Moore of the National College of Ireland, and the ParentChild+ team of Susan Speirs, Coordinator Shauna Somers, Susan Aston, and GRD Team Leader James Applegate at the PCP graduation which took place in Tuam Library last week.

NCI's Early Learning Initiative (ELI) holds the national licence for the programme. It supports, monitors and evaluates implementation, partnering with community organisations to deliver **ParentChild+**.

Home Visitors and coordinators are employed from the local community, and many were originally parents on the programme. This has brought considerable value to both the delivery of home visiting and to creating transformational change in the local community. Building capacity in ParentChild+ community organisations through on-going support and training is a key focus of ELI as the program expands nationwide (14 sites).

OUTCOMES/ BENEFITS

- 20% of Home Visitors were originally parents on the programme.
- 50% of coordinators were originally Home Visitors.
- Two previous parents on the programme became Home Visitors, moved up to coordinator level and are now managing their own sites.

ELI's National Office includes Admin, Finance, Research Team and **ParentChild+** senior staff who have a considerable skill set to complement the CPD and support mechanisms that are in place for every community organisation that delivers **ParentChild+**.

We seek to continually improve the quality of our practices and embed excellent programme standards and fidelity practices. Each delivery site is provided with a tailor-made support plan to ensure site staff understand, implement and improve quality practices nationwide.

With funding from [ReThink Ireland](#), NCI consulted with ELI and Home Visitors, to develop two QQI-accredited Home Visiting microcredential courses in 2021:

- [Certificate in Curriculum and Pedagogical Practice for Early Childhood Home Visiting](#) (Level 6)
- [Certificate in Leadership, governance and Change Management in Early Childhood Home Visiting](#) (Level 7)

So far:

- 62 students have completed the Level 6 certificate
- 23 students have completed the level 7 certificate

FUTURE PLANS

Plans to grow **ParentChild+** and other parenting support programs around Ireland are continuing with a new national ParentChild+ strategy in place. Aligned with this, we are evolving the support and training offering for national sites and staff.

Community Action Research is a key factor in quality planning with mechanisms for data collection at key intervals throughout support and training sessions. This informs future practice. A new staff member, a veteran Home Visitor, has now transferred to the national office to help sustain the increase in demands in support and training as ParentChild+ continues to scale up and scale deep.

ELI continues to strive for excellence, affording opportunities for Home Visitors and coordinators to return to education through CPD and accredited courses. As many of the staff continue with their educational and career advancement, ELI endeavors to support staff through their journeys. This continuous development boosts staff morale and engagement while also improving the quality practices of the programme to deliver this valuable service to venerable families throughout Ireland.

APPENDIX A7:

OPENING THE DOOR BETWEEN CORPORATES AND COMMUNITY — RESTORATIVE CONVERSATIONS WITH ARTHUR COX

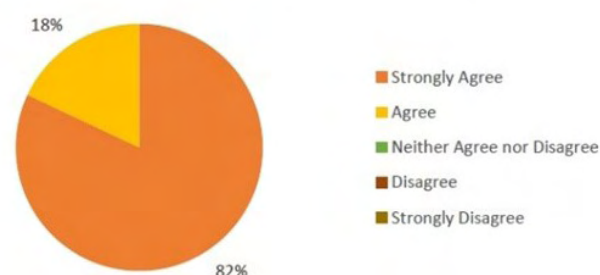
OVERVIEW

The Early Learning Initiative (ELI) at National College of Ireland has partnered with Arthur Cox on the **'Opening the Door Between Corporates and Community'** project since 2017. This project brings together young people aged 12-15 (from Belvedere Youth Club, a local youth service), and corporate volunteers (from Arthur Cox, a longstanding corporate partner of ELI) to develop relationships, skills, and social capital, over several weeks. What began as a restorative practice pilot programme has since developed into an integral part of the restorative practices strategy, to ensure restorative approaches and practices are embedded across the College, corporate organisations, and community that ELI work with.

Restorative Practices (RP) is an approach to building and maintaining interpersonal relationships, resolving conflict and repairing damaged relationships. One of the recommendations in the 2017 [Mulvey Report](#) and aligned with the NEIC's vision to make NEIC a safe, attractive and vibrant living and working environment, RP is a values-based approach where people from all backgrounds are supported in finding space and freedom together, and through this, discern ways to build new understandings and dissolve conflict where necessary. Applying a restorative practice framework to a project, or within an organisation, can empower people of all ages by providing life skills and strengthening people's ability to express themselves safely and imaginatively.

At the heart of any restorative practice encounter is a sincere simplicity, that all people are worthy and relational. Thus, the essence of this 'Restorative Conversations with Arthur Cox' initiative is to give young people and corporate volunteers practical experiences – of building relationships and dealing with misunderstanding and conflict – that provide new opportunities, beyond distrust, conflict and the unknown.

'Restorative Conversations' as an Enjoyable Experience for Corporate Volunteers



Feedback from corporate volunteers who participated in Opening the Door Between Corporates and Community, in response to the question 'was participating in Opening the Door an enjoyable experience?'

OUTCOMES/ BENEFITS

One of the goals of this RP project is that it encourages young people to reflect on potential new opportunities and possibilities that may lie ahead of them, and how many different careers are available to them within their community. One young person talked about Arthur Cox opening a new door for him, *"I always wanted to work in a big office and wear a nice suit, and I didn't think this was possible because of where I come from"*. Another young person talked about how being invited to a place like Arthur Cox and

being treated well and feeling respected, without expecting anything in return. *"In the inner city there is a great community, but people don't give me anything unless I have something to offer them".* For this young person, Arthur Cox provided him with *"the 'thing' that I don't think I could repay, however they did not expect anything in return."*



A group photo of participants involved in the expanded Opening the Door programme in 2019, with corporate volunteers from Kennedy Wilson and young people from East Wall Youth.

The divides that exist in communities have a tremendous impact on the life course of young people. In these situations, it is often incredibly difficult to thrive – facing fear, mistrust, and isolation – and in such a context it is often impossible to imagine a new and shared future that is very different from their current reality. When a young person, despite always wanting to work in a big office and wear a nice suit, feels that this is not possible “because of where I come from” then we must consider the serious consequences of those feelings e.g., exclusion and marginalisation on youth perceptions, behaviour, and community connectedness and a sense of belonging.

This project has twice been nominated for the Chambers Ireland Sustainable Business Impact Awards:

Chambers Ireland Sustainable Business Impact Awards 2020

Category: Excellence in Community – Partnership with Charity – LIC
Arthur Cox – The Opening Doors Partnership with the Early Learning Initiative

Chambers Ireland Sustainable Business Impact Awards 2021

Category: Community – Volunteering – LIC
Arthur Cox – Arthur Cox's Innovative Virtual Engagement with The Early Learning Initiative

SBIA PARTNER PROFILE
ARTHUR COX

Arthur Cox's Sustainable Business Journey

An evolving approach to corporate responsibility builds on the rich heritage of giving back to the community that dates back to the founder of law firm Arthur Cox

Despite the pandemic, over the past year, Arthur Cox has managed to achieve a great deal in the sustainable business arena across all of its core pillars – climate, people, work, volunteering, workplace and the environment. The firm is pleased to be shortlisted in three categories for this year's Chambers Ireland Sustainable Business Impact Awards.

Geoff Wilson, Managing Partner at Arthur Cox, says: "Our exceptional commitment to corporate responsibility and sustainability have evolved in business, as has our approach. We want to build on the solid foundation of our rich heritage of giving back to the community. In 2020 we took the decision to evolve our CSR programme into something more. We are now committed to taking responsibility for our impact on society and to integrate sustainable and responsible business practices into all of our decision making as a firm."

VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING
 Since April 2020, Arthur Cox has continued to work with its long-term volunteering partner, the Early Learning Initiative (ELI), on an innovative virtual engagement programme. By providing online, Arthur Cox volunteers have continued to help many young people in disadvantaged communities to progress in their educational journey.

"Our most children and young adults value both the support and

direction to enable them to stay in school and remain focused," says Jean Maxwell, Sustainable Business Manager at Arthur Cox. "The past year has been particularly difficult due to school closures, but we were delighted to continue working with ELI to make a real impact. Our volunteers have engaged in activities that have helped young people with the language, social, literacy and numeracy skills they need to succeed in education."

LEGAL EDUCATION
 The Arthur Cox Virtual Legal Education Programme partnered with 2422 schools in disadvantaged communities to deliver interactive legal education training. To date, four 1000 schools and over 100,000 students have benefited from this online interactive project, delivered by a team from the firm's pro bono practice. The programme provides students with awareness, knowledge and understanding of rights and legal issues, together with the confidence and skills they need to deal with disputes and gain access to justice.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION
 The firm recognises the importance of equality, diversity, skills and employee engagement to ensure its success as a business. Arthur Cox was one of the first Irish law firms to introduce a formal initiative for gender diversity almost 20 years ago. The Women in the Firm initiative proactively supports the career paths and progression of women within Arthur Cox, by delivering initiatives to support women's career development and build their management expertise. The firm also seeks to develop an understanding of the barriers contributing to current imbalances, then building commitment to action for change and implement measures to accelerate progress towards gender balance.

On the firm's future sustainability goals Wilson says: "Our focus continues to be on building a long-term sustainable business for our employees, customers and communities for the future. We are proud of the progress we have made to date and the actions we are taking to further progress sustainability, both inside and outside our firm. We acknowledge that there is more to be done as we progress on this journey and we commit to playing our part in building a more sustainable future for all."

Arthur Cox has published its first Sustainable Business Impact Report 2020/21. Some of the milestones achieved in the last year include 10,000 hours dedicated to Pro Bono work, €150,000 raised for the Covid-19 Project, and a firm commitment to being carbon negative by 2030.

Learn more about Arthur Cox's Sustainable Business activities here: www.arthurcox.com/about-us/Discover-our-sustainable-business/

Excerpt from the Chambers Ireland Sustainable Business Impact Awards 2021 brochure featuring Arthur Cox's Innovative Virtual Engagement with The Early Learning Initiative (as part of the Opening the Door programme) which was nominated for the 'Community – Volunteering – Large Indigenous Company' award.

FUTURE PLANS

Since 2017, 115+ young people have engaged with this project, expanding to other corporate organisations supporting Early Learning Initiative since 2019, and continuing to engage in an online capacity during Covid-19. In 2023/24 this project returned to in-person delivery with plans for 2024/25 to include:

- Extending the programme by a number of weeks
- Engaging with parents/guardians to encourage them to use the same practice
- Extending the programme beyond its current corporate organisation involvement and to other areas and with other youth services in the North East Inner City
- Adding a mentoring/role modelling element to the programme
- More 'practise' using restorative practices for corporate volunteers so that they, and the young people, can take ownership of the project ensuring sustainability and growth.

The project demonstrates that the corporate world is accessible for everyone. This forms part of a commitment to restore potential within a community that has high unemployment rates and with very little emphasis placed on educational progression. Before the Opening the Door programme, the young people often viewed the corporate world as one that is unattainable or 'not for them'. Arthur Cox has, in turn, gained an insight into the challenges facing this community and re-examined their perceived view of their situation.

The creation of these shared spaces, to allow young people to find, express and amplify their voices, will ensure the establishment, over time, of a normal, civil society – in which all individuals are considered equal, where differences are resolved through dialogue, and where all people are treated fairly. Communities, whether corporate or collegiate, can and should support the creation of these shared spaces.

APPENDIX A8: ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY AND GUIDELINES

OVERVIEW

This case study illustrates a comprehensive initiative to enhance academic integrity at National College of Ireland (NCI). We aim to foster a robust culture of academic integrity, on a continuous cycle, ensuring that students and staff are well-equipped to uphold the highest standards of honesty and ethical behaviour in their academic pursuits.

The initiative addresses the growing challenges posed by academic misconduct, especially with the advent of Large Language Models (LLMs) and Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT. It involves the revision and implementation of new policies, procedures, guidelines, and training programs for both staff and students, aligning with [National Academic Integrity Network's \(NAIN\) guidelines](#).

BACKGROUND

The College Registrar initiated a policy review in 2023. This began with a focus on AI in July 2023, with documentation being made available to staff and students in September 2023, consisting of:

- [Policy on Assessments and use of AI Generated Material such as ChatGPT.](#)
- [A Learner Guide](#)
- [Updated Assignment Cover Sheet](#)
- [Staff Advisory Guidelines](#)

The policy and additional staff and learner guides focused on balancing the positive use of AI tools, the ability for learners to document their use of AI, the thoughtful design of Assessment instruments to support academic integrity in the light of AI, and guidance for staff on how to identify AI misuse in assignments. Staff were offered practical training on the new policy via hands on Assessment Redesign workshops through Oct-Nov 23, where staff were presented with a practical framework to both review and redesign their assessments.

NCI Academic Integrity Policy Review

This case study outlines NCI's proactive measures to combat academic misconduct in the face of evolving technological tools. Through revised policies, comprehensive training, and ongoing evaluation, NCI aims to foster a robust culture of academic integrity, on a continuous cycle, ensuring that students and staff are well-equipped to uphold the highest standards of honesty and ethical behaviour in their academic pursuits.



10: Stages of Academic Integrity Policy Review

Following this stage, a project team made up of members of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment sub-committees was established in March 2024. NCI's broader academic integrity policy was then updated for presentation to the Academic Council in June 2024. It is planned to launch this policy for Academic year 2024/25.

OUTCOMES/ BENEFITS

Policy Clarity and Accessibility: The revised policy is user-friendly and adheres to NAIN guidelines, making it easier for students and staff to understand and follow.

Enhanced Support and Training: New training programs and support systems for students and staff, ensuring widespread awareness and understanding of academic integrity principles.



11: NCI Academic Integrity Hub on Moodle

Structured Misconduct Evaluation: The policy includes a framework of levels for evaluating the severity of academic misconduct, enabling fair and consistent enforcement; using [NAIN's Academic Misconduct and Case Management Guidelines](#).

AI and Plagiarism Policies: Clear policies regarding the use of AI in assignments and plagiarism, addressing contemporary challenges in academic integrity.

FUTURE PLANS

- **Training and Webinars:** A working group on staff training is being coordinated by NCI HR department, with the remit to implement Academic Integrity Training for Faculty/Staff for the academic year 24/25.
- **NCI Student's Union President and Vice President for Academic Affairs involvement** to create a united front with the learner community.
- **Review and Feedback:** annual policy review plus fuller evaluation of implementation and effectiveness in summer 2025.
- **Resources:** Utilizing platforms such as Epigeum to build a culture of academic integrity, incorporating new Turnitin features, and maintaining an Academic Integrity support hub on Moodle, NCI's VLE.
- **Promotional Events:** Presenting the revised policy during Academic Integrity Week in October 2024.

APPENDIX A9: CAREERS NETWORKING FOR LEARNER SUCCESS

OVERVIEW

In 2023, NCI had 1,058 graduates from our full-time degrees: 434 undergraduates and 624 postgraduates. 210 of the 434 undergraduates were in receipt of a SUSI Grant and when surveyed, over 50% self-identified as first-generation college students. 592 of the 624 masters' graduates were non-EU nationals. One common thread across this learner community is low social capital – they often have limited or no professional networks available to them and may find themselves at a disadvantage in a graduate recruitment market.

To better support these students as they consider their options post-study, the NCI Careers team moved away from presentation style events, to instead focus on building connections through partnerships with employers from a variety of sectors, and developing networks that should serve our alumni throughout their career. In 2023, we had over 50 employers attend nine large scale structured networking events.



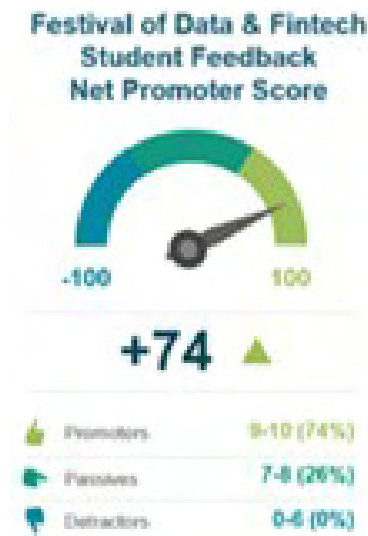
12: A typical Careers structured Networking event

In the 2023-24 year, we ran:

- Festival of Data Analytics with VHI, PwC, FiServ, Expleo Group.
- Festival of Cybersecurity with HSE, Cubic Telecom, US Bank and IBM
- Festival of Business, with AIB, BDO, Cronin & Co, Circle K, Crowleys DFK, DAA, Ding, Enterprise Mobility, Grant Thornton, Europ Car, Grifols Worldwide Operations Limited (GWWO), Hays, Jameson, Permanent TSB, Peter Mc Verry, Ryanair, SAP, St Vincents Hospital, State Street, Office of the Comptroller & Auditor General, Trane, UniPhar, Vodafone and Whelan Dowling Associates
- Festival of Psychology with DePaul, Peter McVerry Trust, St Margarets Network. Jonix, Spunout, SVP, PSI, Enterprise Mobility and IACP
- Festival of Cloud Computing with WS, Salesforce, Primark, ESB and EY
- Festival of HR with VHI, ElectroRoute, Peninsula, For Purpose, Ryanair, CIPD, Hays
- Festival of Marketing with Enterprise Mobility, Hays, Hubspot, Jameson. IAPI and For Purpose
- Festival of Artificial Intelligence with VHI, PwC, Laya and BNY Mellon

OUTCOMES/ BENEFITS

We survey employers and students after every event and measure success using a Net Promoter Score (NPS).



13: Learner Net Promoter Score (NPS)



14: Employer Net Promoter Score

- At all events, 100% of employers said that they had met a learner or students they were interested in following up with for application / interview.
- A large number of the Employers involved have since recruited students they met at the networking event in March 2023.
- Students with well below minimum CAO entry points secured internships & graduate roles with EY, Citi, PwC, Accenture etc.

Selected Learner Feedback

"It was 10 times better than a career's fair"

"I benefitted from hearing them talk in person as they gave details you wouldn't find on their website about the graduate programme"

"We got to know what employers are looking for in a candidate, and obviously I get the chance to connect with the recruiters through LinkedIn"

"The events ran by Careers were so helpful and prior to the first event I hadn't heard of the company I now work for. Following a careers event I applied for an internship and still work here now"

Employer Feedback

"This is my second time taking part in an NCI event and I really love how student-focused they are; it's clear the staff have a passion for the student's well-being and growth and that these events are not tick box exercises. I am always happy to work with NCI - I find it very inspiring"

FUTURE PLANS

Our plans for the 2024/2025 academic year are to:

- Introduce more structured networking within the event so that students have a real chance to showcase their skills to employers – e.g. give each table something specific to discuss rather than employers just giving insights to their companies.
- Restructure the team so there is someone within the team who will focus on post-event further deepening of our relationships with employers, working towards more strategic relationships/alliances.
- Expand the networking events adding round- table networking with alumni as an offering to each cohort e.g. Cybersecurity, HR, Marketing, Data etc.

APPENDIX A10: MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS (REPORTING) PROJECT

OVERVIEW

Since 2022, the MIS Project aimed to overhaul the College's data reporting infrastructure, to foster a strategic, data-driven review and decision-making culture. Its ambitious goal is to replace the outdated "Discoverer" reporting platform with a comprehensive range of interactive dashboards, enabling business unit and Executive Group leads to access reports from centrally-held accessible dashboards – moving away from bespoke requests for customised data sets. This will significantly enhance day to day planning work within Schools and Business Units but also, critically, better support Academic Council, Executive and Governing Body reporting and decision-making.

The project obtained Executive approval to support the partial 'buy-out' of two key experts within the College to allow them to focus on the advancement of the project's goal.

This case study highlights the achievements of the MIS Project Team over the past two years. It underscores how the significant progress in data cleansing and establishing foundational data sets not only have been used to support current College initiatives but also lays the groundwork for future advancements in data reporting and decision-making capabilities.

PHASE I PROJECT FOCUS

The College holds over three terabytes of data across multiple business systems. Across 2022-2023, the Head of Admissions & Student Records, the Software Development & Reporting Manager, and the Phase I Subject Matter Expert (Programme Lifecycle Manager, QIE Office) made significant progress in data cleansing and defining the parameters and constraints (business rules) within various data sets in Quercus, the Student Records system.

The project was initially focused on the business requirements of QIE, aiming to provide reliable, standardised data to facilitate reporting on performance metrics at academic programme (course) level. This was a recommendation from the 2019 QQI Re-engagement Report. The project was divided into four phases and aimed to:

- Provide reliable, accurate, and accessible data through interactive dashboards.
- Ensure data integrity and user confidence.
- Build a comprehensive reporting library over time.

OUTCOMES/ BENEFITS

Achievements

1) Process Definitions, Data Definitions & Cleansing

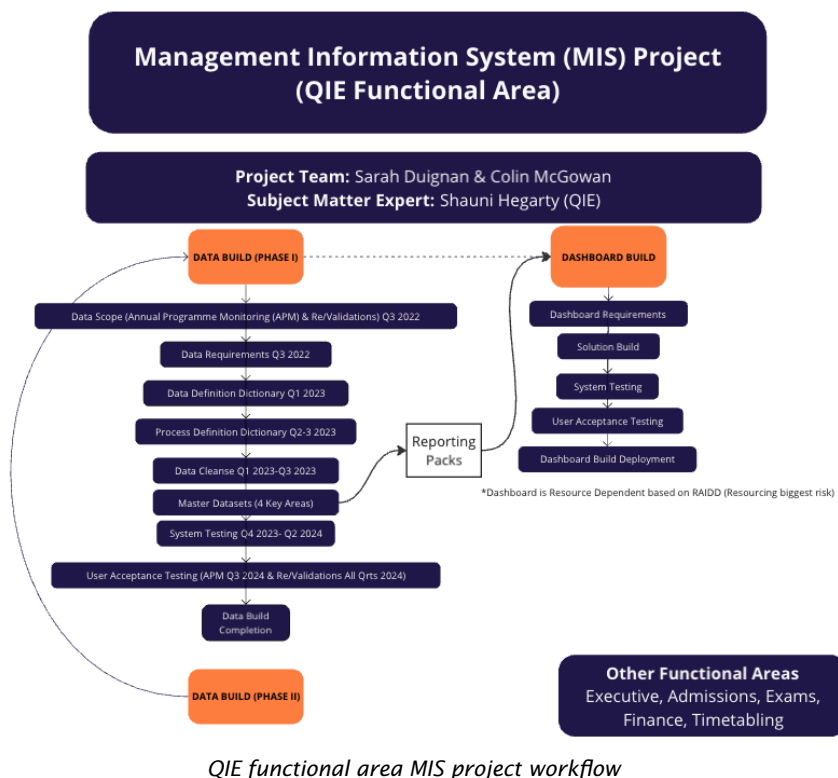
The project team made significant progress in the following areas;

- Data definitions
- Process definitions (Business rule & metrics identification)
- Data standardisation from legacy Quercus system (Classic) to current system (Online).
- Data cleansing
- Supplemental data e.g. embedded programmes structure

2) Master Key data sets in four key areas of student-data:

- Applications
- Enrolments
- Overall Grades
- Completion Rates

- 3) Enhanced Data Utilisation by QIE
 - The (QIE) team leveraged the cleaned data to provide reliable datasets to programme teams for QQI programme review and revalidation processes. This was a fundamental objective of the project in Phase I (Figure 3).
 - The pilot launch of the Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) process in Autumn 2023 included the newly cleansed and clarified datasets for the 2022-23 academic year. Reliable data was extracted effectively, supporting the programme monitoring process.
- 4) Enhanced Data Utilisation Recruitment Report and Annual Admissions Review
 - The Application Master Data subset was used on the back of the MIS project and utilised to re-create the NCI Recruitment Report in a reliable and easily accessible way.



QIE functional area MIS project workflow

LESSONS LEARNED

- 1) **Importance of Data Foundation and Business Rules**
 The success in data cleansing and understanding/defining business rules highlights the critical importance of having a solid data foundation for any reporting and analytics project. Reliable data is essential for building user confidence and ensuring the accuracy of reports.
- 2) **Incremental Progress**
 Incremental progress in foundational tasks can lead to meaningful improvements in data utilisation and yield significant benefits for specific business processes.
- 3) **Resource Commitments**
 As the MIS Project team members are also key leads in other business processes and teams, there have been inevitable constraints on the time that can be allocated to the MIS Project. This makes progress slower than anticipated, however sound progress has been made and the benefits are already being realised in terms of data cleansing and integrity at (academic) programme level. The MIS Project needs to continue to have Executive support and remain on the IT Priority Project list to ensure we can continue to identify and allocate the necessary staff and resource requirements to achieve the project goals in 2024/25 and beyond.
- 4) **Strategic Planning and Phasing**
 A phased approach with realistic timelines, milestones and resourcing, is essential if the goal of the project is to be met. Prioritising critical tasks such as Data Cleansing and ensuring key components are completed first can help manage time and resource constraints effectively while focusing on priorities.

APPENDIX A11: CLOUD COMPETENCY CENTRE COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH AND TRAINING

OVERVIEW

The case study illustrates the role of the Cloud Competency Centre (CCC) as a key driver of academic research. The CCC focuses on advancing research and innovation in areas such as cloud computing, data analytics, and high-performance computing. This initiative aims to address the evolving digital landscape by fostering industry-academic collaborations, developing cutting-edge digital skills, and contributing significantly to both the academic community and the broader industry.



16: The Cloud Competency Centre at NCI

OUTCOMES/ BENEFITS

The CCC has successfully spearheaded several high-impact research projects, each contributing to NCI's strategic research objectives. Key illustrative projects include:

- 1) **DIGITAL4Business:** A 4-year €20m EU-funded project focusing on sustainable digital transformation for European businesses by enhancing advanced digital skills <https://digital4business.eu>.

Contributed significantly to the development of digital skills within SMEs, ensuring long-term competitiveness and growth.

Secured a direct monetary contribution of €1.69 million for NCI, facilitating the creation of a European Master's Programme in advanced digital skills.

- 2) **TRAINRDM:** An EU-funded initiative aimed at enhancing Open Science and Research Data Management (RDM) through innovative training mechanisms <https://rdmtraininghub.eu/>.

Developed a Master of Science degree programme in Open Data Practice, accredited by QQI, positioning NCI as a leader in this field.

The project has been recognised for its outstanding academic contribution and its potential to significantly impact the technology industry by promoting FAIR principles in data management.

- 3) **Smart Pharmaceutical Manufacturing (SPuMoNI):** Focused on data integrity and traceability in the pharmaceutical industry using AI and blockchain technologies <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bdr.2020.100172>.

Recognised as a finalist in the Technology Ireland Industry Awards for its significant contributions to pharmaceutical manufacturing.

- 4) Digital4Sustainability: Secured in 2024 €4 million in funding from the European Commission, with NCI receiving €294,000 directly <https://www.digital4sustainability.eu>

Aims to accelerate the digital and green transition in the ICT industry by developing a Digital Sustainability Skills Strategy and conducting leading research and training programmes.

This project supports firms in leveraging advanced computer systems and digital technologies to achieve sustainability goals, aligning with both NCI's research strategy and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.



President Higgins' visit to Mexico in October 2023. From L-R: Dr Phillip Matthews, former NCI President; H.E. Sonja Hyland, Ambassador of Ireland to Mexico; Unknown individual; President Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland; Sabina Higgins, wife of the president of Ireland; Horacio Gonzalez-Velez, Associate Professor and Founding Head of The Cloud Competency Centre, National College of Ireland.

FUTURE PLANS

The CCC plans to expand its research capabilities and continue developing innovative programmes that address emerging technological challenges. Future initiatives include:

- 1) **Expanding Research Collaborations:**
 - Engaging more with international academic institutions and industry partners to foster innovative research and development.
 - Increasing participation in European and national research projects to leverage additional resources and expertise.
- 2) **Enhancing Digital Skills Projects:**
 - Further developing and refining postgraduate programmes to meet the evolving needs of the digital industry.
 - Implementing new courses and microcredentials focused on cutting-edge technologies and practices.
- 3) **Promoting Open Science and FAIR Principles:**
 - Continuing to advocate for Open Science and FAIR data management principles in all research initiatives.
 - Enhancing the impact of the TRAINRDM programme by integrating new tools and methodologies for research data management.
- 4) **Implementing Digital Sustainability:**
 - Training a new generation of digital sustainability professionals through higher education institutions.
 - Augmenting the capabilities of existing ICT professionals and offering structured learning paths.
 - Assisting non-tech sectors in integrating state-of-the-art digital technologies.
 - Delivering skills intelligence and a long-term skills strategy to ensure sustainable digital upskilling beyond the project's duration.

By maintaining its strategic focus on collaboration, innovation, and education, the CCC aims to sustain its role as a pivotal research entity within NCI and beyond.

APPENDIX A12:**STIGMA AND MENTAL HEALTH IRELAND RESEARCH LAB****OVERVIEW**

A big problem for many people experiencing mental health conditions is stigma. For example, negative attitudes and behaviours towards people experiencing mental health conditions can affect employment, access to accommodation, and the emotional impact of stigma can be a profound source of suffering. In young people, mental health stigma is also a barrier to seeking help, which is particularly concerning given that most mental health conditions develop before the age of 24.

To address this the [SAMI lab](#) was launched in 2021, aimed at investigating all aspects of stigma and mental health. It has attracted both funding and national and international partnerships (see tables 1 and 2) and continues to build interest and momentum. To date the SAMI lab has 5 publications, with another 2 under review (see table 3), and several more in the pipeline.

TABLE 1: FUNDING SECURED TO DATE

Funder	Amount
Esther Ireland	€8,000
SMARDY Project	€2,896

SAMI LAB PARTNERS

Partner	Information about partner
Esther Ireland	<p>An initiative of the HSE Global Health Programme which facilitates and supports Irish health services and institutes to develop linkages and twinning partnerships with counterpart institutions in low and middle-income countries. It aims to make a significant contribution to health outcomes in the global south.</p> <p>Esther Ireland funded SAMI Lab's partnership with Liberia and continues to provide council and support.</p>
The Carter Centre, Atlanta USA	<p>Committed to human rights and the alleviation of human suffering. The Centre seeks to prevent and resolve conflicts, enhance freedom and democracy, and improve health.</p> <p>The Carter Centre contributed to funding the Liberian arm of our collaborative project investigating public stigma towards mental health.</p>
Mother Patern College of Health Sciences, Monrovia, Liberia	<p>Mission is to provide a wholesome education and vocational and technical skills which enable men and women to live in dignity and to contribute meaningfully and professionally to the world of industry and particularly to the rapid development of Liberia.</p> <p>Mother Patern College is SAMI Lab's Liberian partner who undertook the investigation of public stigma towards mental health in Liberia.</p>
Shine, Ireland	<p>A national organisation that works tirelessly to shape better policies and services for all those affected by mental health challenges.</p> <p>SAMI Lab is currently collaborating with Shine through their Headline Programme (below) and aspires to use future research findings to inform Shine's other Programme, See Change, the National Stigma Reduction Programme, which runs the Green Ribbon awareness campaign.</p>

SAMI LAB PARTNERS (CONTINUED)

Partner	Information about partner
Headline	<p>Aims to reduce the media's effect of suicide contagion in Ireland, to reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health difficulties, and to improve representations of mental health challenges in the media.</p> <p>SAMI Lab collaborates with Headline on research investigating the reporting of mental health in Irish Newspaper headlines.</p>
Ana Aslan National Institute of Gerontology and Geriatrics, Romania	<p>Partnered on the HREC Project 201:</p> <p>A collaborative research project between SAMI Lab and Romania, in which we analyse and compare levels and types of stigma towards mental illness that exist in the general population. Data gathered from this study will inform the development of culturally relevant methods of reducing stigma, thus aligning with current governmental mental health strategies in both countries.</p>
The SMARDY project	<p>Aims to develop a research data marketplace for technology transfer built as a software and data carpentry where academia, industry, and government can exchange curated datasets, technology, and tools to foster economic and social development.</p> <p>SAMI Lab provides SMARDY with publicly accessible datasets of our findings, ensuring our data is available to all for further use and analysis.</p>
School of Computing, NCI	<p>Collaboration on a research project investigating stigmatised views of mental health as evident in Twitter data.</p>
School of Psychology, Monash University, Melbourne	<p>Collaboration on neural correlates of delayed perceptual decision-making in ADHD.</p>

SAMI LAB PUBLICATIONS

Mothersill D, Loughnane G, Grasso G, Hargreaves A. Knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours towards schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and autism: a pilot study. *Ir J Psychol Med.* 2023 Dec;40(4):634-640. doi: 10.1017/ipm.2021.81. Epub 2021 Dec 3. PMID: 34857060.

Hargreaves, A., Mothersill, D., & Loughnane, G. (2023). Stigma: An Investigative Analysis of the Irish Public's Knowledge and Perception of Autism. *IntechOpen*. doi: 10.5772/intechopen.108670

Hargreaves A. (2022) Challenges in using social media as a recruitment platform for an unfunded nationwide online survey: Irish public's perception of the disorders of schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and autism, *SAGE Research Methods, Doing Research Online*. SAGE. ISBN 9781529799781

Hargreaves A, Loughnane G, Nguyen H, Mothersill D. (2022) Online learning predictors of mental health in third-level students during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ireland. *Journal of American College Health.* Jun 21:1-7. doi: 10.1080/07448481.2022.2089852. PMID: 35728258.

Kracen, A., Mothersill, D., McClean, E., & Woods, S. (2023). Demystifying anxiety: A teaching tool to destigmatize mental health and enhance students' resilience. In A. Beyer & J. Cerniak (Eds.), *A psychology toolbox: Creative class activities that support students' growth and development*. The Society for the Teaching of Psychology. <https://teachpsych.org/ebooks/psytoolbox>

Hargreaves A, Loughnane G, Grasso G, Mothersill D (Under Review; IJASS) The relationship between familiarity and stigma associated with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and autism in Ireland: A pilot study

Biabani M, Loughnane G, Bellgrove M. et al. (Under Review; J Neuro) Neurophysiology of perceptual decision-making and its alterations in attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

TABLE 4: SAMI LAB OUTCOMES**Six key research findings:**

- Large differences in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours towards schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and autism in Ireland (pilot sample of 307 adults) (Mothersill et al., 2023).
- Lower knowledge about autism than schizophrenia or bipolar disorder in Ireland (pilot sample of 307 adults) (Hargreaves et al., 2023).
- More positive attitudes and behaviours towards schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and autism among people in Ireland personally affected by one or more conditions (pilot sample of 307 adults) (Hargreaves et al., Under review).
- Issues with individual online learning skills associated with poorer mental health in third-level students in Ireland during COVID-19 (sample of 268 students) (Hargreaves et al., 2022).
- Negative change in social life during COVID-19 associated with poorer mental health in third-level students in Ireland (sample of 268 students) (Mothersill and Nguyen et al., 2024).
- Increased knowledge about anxiety after a short course designed to increase knowledge and reduce stigma in secondary school students (pilot sample of 8 students) (Kracen et al., 2023).

A free teaching tool, Demystifying Anxiety:

The aim of this tool is to increase knowledge about and destigmatise mental health in secondary school students, available to secondary school teachers and other professionals as a free resource, published in A. Beyer & J. Cerniak (Eds.), A psychology toolbox: Creative class activities that support students' growth and development. The Society for the Teaching of Psychology. <https://teachpsych.org/ebooks/psytoolbox>

Dissemination of mental health stigma research to the Irish public:

- 1) SAMI Lab research featured in Irish Tech News: Khandaker, T. E. (2022). 'Novel app launched to test social cognition', Irish Tech News, online article: <https://irishtechnews.ie/novel-app-launched-to-test-social-cognition/>
- 2) David Mothersill interviewed about SAMI Lab research for the United States-based podcast Adam Learns Random Stuff, July 2022: <https://anchor.fm/adam-stone0/episodes/Hearing-the-Heart-in-a-Computerized-Theory-of-Mind-cTOM-With-Dr-David-Mothersill-e1lr51b>
- 3) Short course for secondary school students designed to increase knowledge about and destigmatise mental health, co-delivered by David Mothersill as part of Discover University, a free summer programme that aims to give young people aged 14-17 the opportunity to experience third-level education: <https://www.ncirl.ie/About/Early-Learning-Initiative/Dublins-Inner-City-Programmes/Educational-Guidance/Discover-University>
- 4) Poster Presentation of SAMI Lab research to members of the general public as part of Culture Night 2023: <https://www.ncirl.ie/Events/ArtMID/6569/ArticleID/919/Culture-Night-2023-Changing-Lives-Through-Lifelong-Learning>
- 5) Presentation on SAMI Lab research to staff members of Depaul Ireland as part of their Lunch and Learn series, presentations on SAMI Lab research in February 2023 and July 2024.
- 6) Interactive discussion on Autism and Stigma at the launch of SPARK; a Neurodivergent networking group based in Northern Ireland in May 2024

Finalist for Best Research Project Award at The Education Awards 2023:

<https://www.educationawards.ie/2023-winners>

TABLE 5: SAMI LAB FUTURE PLANS.

- 1) Publication of data from large, nationally representative survey on mental health stigma (1,232 participants), to make the data openly accessible around the world for other researchers to use, through collaboration with the SMARDY project.
- 2) Publication of research examining data from large, nationally representative survey on mental health stigma (1,232 participants) as several papers in high impact academic journals, including research comparing stigma between Ireland and Liberia.
- 3) Acquiring national and European research funding to expand the SAMI Lab to include funded Research Assistant positions, PhD Studentships, and post-doctoral research fellowships.
- 4) Stronger collaborations with charitable organisations such as Jigsaw, the National Centre for Youth Mental Health, and Shine, including See Change and Headline Programmes, in order to disseminate research to the Irish public and help inform stigma reduction interventions and campaigns.
- 5) Further research on both social and neuroscientific issues relating to ADHD, in collaboration with Trinity College Dublin and Monash University Melbourne.



APPENDIX B

Appendix B

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APPENDIX B1:**CURRENT LIST OF NCI PROGRAMMES
LEADING TO QQI AWARDS**

Unit of review for which report has been published during reporting period	NFQ Level	Date of completion	Links to relevant publications
New Programme Validation			
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Digital and Business Skills	8	July-2024	Not yet published
Bachelor of Arts in Digital and Business Skills	7	July-2024	Not yet published
Certificate in Big Data and AI in Business: Strategy and Emerging Trends	9	July-2024	Not yet published
Certificate in Data Governance and Ethics	9	July-2024	Not yet published
Certificate in Data Governance, Ethics and Sustainability	9	July-2024	Not yet published
Certificate in HR Analytics and Evidence based decision making	9	July-2024	Not yet published
Certificate in Operations Management	8	July-2024	Not yet published
Master of Science in Business Analytics for Decision Makers	9	July-2024	Not yet published
Postgraduate Diploma in Business in Analytics for Decision Makers	9	July-2024	Not yet published
Certificate in Curriculum and Pedagogical Practice for Early Childhood Home Visiting	6	April-2024	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Leadership, Governance and Change Management in Early Childhood Home Visiting	7	April-2024	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Educational Practice for P-Tech	9	November-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Science in Open Data Practice	9	November-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Strategies of Learning and Teaching for P-Tech	9	November-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Master of Science in Open Data Practice	9	November-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Postgraduate Diploma in Science in Open Data Practice	9	November-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Digital Capabilities and the Learner Experience	7	September-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Technologies in Assessment, Feedback and Learning Support	7	September-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)

Unit of review for which report has been published during reporting period	NFQ Level	Date of completion	Links to relevant publications
Certificate in Technology Enhanced Learning and Digital Learning Design	7	September-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Bachelor of Arts in Data Science	7	July-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Data Science	8	July-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Professional Employment Law and Practice	7	July-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Professional Human Resource Practice	7	July-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Professional Learning & Organisational Development	7	July-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Diploma in Professional Human Resource Practice	7	July-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Diploma in Professional Learning & Organisational Development	7	July-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Higher Certificate in Science in Data Science	6	July-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Technologies in Teaching and Learning	7	March-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Science in Computing	8	September-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Higher Diploma in Science in Computing	8	September-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Master of Science in Accounting	9	September-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Postgraduate Diploma in Business in Accounting	9	September-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Business Intelligence	9	June-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Sustainable Business Leadership	9	June-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in the Science of Decision Making	9	June-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Postgraduate Diploma in Business in Administration	9	June-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Master of Science in AI for Business	9	February-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Master of Science in Artificial Intelligence	9	February-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Postgraduate Diploma in Science in AI for Business	9	February-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)

Unit of review for which report has been published during reporting period	NFQ Level	Date of completion	Links to relevant publications
Postgraduate Diploma in Science in Artificial Intelligence	9	February-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Data Governance and Cybersecurity	9	April-2021	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Emerging Digital Technologies	7	December-2020	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Software Development Fundamentals	8	December-2020	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Educational Practice in Teaching for Further Education	9	September-2020	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Educational Practice	9	July-2020	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Computing	8	June-2020	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Bachelor of Science in Computing	7	June-2020	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Higher Certificate in Science in Computing	6	June-2020	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Master of Science in Cloud Computing	9	April-2020	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Postgraduate Diploma in Science in Cloud Computing	9	April-2020	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)

(Existing) Programme Revalidations

Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Recruitment Practice (apprenticeship)	8	July-2024
Certificate in Community Welfare Service Provision	7	July-2024
Certificate in Managing Social Protection Services	7	July-2024
Certificate in P-Tech (Pathways in Technology)	6	July-2024
Certificate in Public Employment Services Provision	7	July-2024
Certificate in Social Protection Investigative Work	7	July-2024
Certificate in Social Protection Studies	6	July-2024
Certificate in Social Welfare Appeals	8	July-2024
Certificate in Social Welfare Decision Making	7	July-2024
Higher Certificate in International Financial Services (apprenticeship)	6	July-2024
Master of Science in Data Analytics	9	July-2024

Unit of review for which report has been published during reporting period	NFQ Level	Date of completion	Links to relevant publications
Postgraduate Diploma in Science in Data Analytics	9	July-2024	
Certificate in Non-Profit Leadership and Management	9	November-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Marketing Practice (180 ECTS)	8	July-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Marketing Practice (240 ECTS)	8	July-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Master of Science in Marketing	9	July-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Postgraduate Diploma in Business in Marketing	9	July-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Human Resource Management (180 ECTS)	8	June-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Human Resource Management (240 ECTS)	8	June-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Psychology	8	June-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Business (240 ECTS)	8	April-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Business (180 ECTS)	8	April-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Higher Certificate in Business	6	April-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Master of Science in Cybersecurity	9	April-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Master of Science in FinTech	9	April-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Postgraduate Diploma in Science in Cybersecurity	9	April-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Postgraduate Diploma in Science in FinTech	9	April-2023	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Accounting and Finance (240 ECTS)	8	July-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Accounting and Finance (180 ECTS)	8	July-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Business Management	8	July-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Business Management	6	July-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Diploma in Business Management	7	July-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)

Unit of review for which report has been published during reporting period	NFQ Level	Date of completion	Links to relevant publications
Master of Science in Finance	9	July-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Postgraduate Diploma in Science in Finance	9	July-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in HRM Strategy and Practice	8	June-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Diploma in HRM Strategy and Practice	7	June-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Master of Arts in Human Resource Management	9	June-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Master of Business Administration	9	June-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Master of Science in Entrepreneurship	9	June-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Master of Science in International Business	9	June-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Master of Science in Management	9	June-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Human Resource Management	9	June-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Postgraduate Diploma in Business in Entrepreneurship	9	June-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Postgraduate Diploma in Business in International Business	9	June-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Postgraduate Diploma in Business in Management	9	June-2022	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Data Analytics	8	April-2021	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Higher Diploma in Science in Data Analytics	8	April-2021	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Business Analysis	8	September-2020	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Trade Union Studies	6	September-2020	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Early Childhood Education and Care	8	July-2020	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Education and Care	7	July-2020	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Certificate in Early Childhood Education and Care	6	July-2020	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Higher Certificate in Arts in Early Childhood Education and Care	6	July-2020	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)
Master of Arts in Educational Practice	9	July-2020	Irish Register of Qualifications (iqr.ie)

Unit of review for which report has been published during reporting period	NFQ Level	Date of completion	Links to relevant publications
Differential Validation			
None during the reporting period			
Thematic/Department/Support Service Review			
Review of Academic Operations		April 2024	Internal Report
Central Timetabling Office		March 2023	Internal Report
International Office: Compliance review against draft QQI Code of Compliance for International Learners		2021	Internal Report

APPENDIX B2:

NCI'S LIST OF AWARDING BODY AND PROFESSIONAL, REGULATORY, STATUTORY BODY (PRSB) ACCREDITATIONS; ADVANCED ENTRY/ARTICULATION AGREEMENTS AND COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS⁹

Type of arrangement	Total Number
PRSBs	7
Awarding bodies	1
QA bodies	1

1. Type of arrangement	Awarding body
Name of body:	Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
Programme titles and links to publications	Validated programmes and corresponding publications can be accessed here: https://qsearch.qqi.ie/WebPart/ProviderDetails?providerCode=PA00331
Date of accreditation or last review	13/06/2019
Date of next review	30/06/2024

2. Type of arrangement	PRSB
Name of body:	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)
Programme titles and links to publications	BA Hons Accounting and Finance (PG24995) BA Hons Accounting and Finance (PG24996) Graduates who meet the criteria decided by ACCA may apply for exemptions from the examinations on completion of these programmes.
Date of accreditation or last review	01/01/2023
Date of next review	31/12/2027

3. Type of arrangement	PRSB
Name of body:	Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI)
Programme titles and links to publications	BA Hons Accounting and Finance (PG24995) BA Hons Accounting and Finance (PG24996) Graduates who meet the criteria decided by CAI may apply for exemptions from the examinations on completion of these programmes.
Date of accreditation or last review	01/12/2021
Date of next review	01/12/2026

⁹ This list is an extract from the Annual Quality Report (AQR) submitted in February 2024, therefore some future dates referenced at that time are now already in the past

4. Type of arrangement	PRSB
Name of body:	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)
Programme titles and links to publications	BA(H) in HRM Strategy & Practice (PG24940) Diploma in HRM Strategy & Practice (PG24941) Master of Arts in Human Resource Management (PG24917) Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Human Resource Management (PG24931)
Date of accreditation or last review	07/09/2022
Date of next review	

5. Type of arrangement	PRSB
Name of body:	Certified Public Accountants (CPA)
Programme titles and links to publications	BA Hons Accounting and Finance (PG24995) BA Hons Accounting and Finance (PG24996) Graduates who meet the criteria decided by CPA may apply for exemptions from the examinations on completion of these programmes.
Date of accreditation or last review	01/11/2021
Date of next review	01/11/2026

6. Type of arrangement	PRSB
Name of body:	Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI)
Programme titles and links to publications	Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Psychology (PG23507)
Date of accreditation or last review	30/11/2019
Date of next review	01/01/2024

7. Type of arrangement	PRSB
Name of body:	Qualifications Advisory Board (QAB)
Programme titles and links to publications	Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Early Childhood Education and Care (PG24372)
Date of accreditation or last review	30/05/2020
Date of next review	30/05/2024

8. Type of arrangement	PRSB
Name of body:	Teaching Council of Ireland
Programme titles and links to publications	Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Educational Practice in Teaching for Further Education (PG24375)
Date of accreditation or last review	30/05/2020
Date of next review	

9. Type of arrangement	PRSB
Name of body:	CIPD
Programme titles and links to publications	Diploma and Certificate in Professional HR Practice Diploma and Certificate in Professional Learning and Organizational Development
Date of accreditation or last review	31/07/2023
Date of next review	

COLLABORATIVE PROVISION

Type of arrangement	Total Number
Joint research degrees	0
Joint/double/multiple awards	0
Collaborative programmes	7
Franchise programmes	0
Linked providers (DABs only)	0

1. Collaborative provision	Collaborative programme
Name of body (/bodies):	SIPTU College
Programme titles and links to publications	This programme is co-designed by SIPTU College and the NCI School of Business. Following QQI revalidation by QQI, the programme is delivered by SIPTU College. NCI is responsible for admissions and enrolments, authentication and certification of assessment results, and programme monitoring and review. A Collaborative Agreement is in place for this programme. Certificate in Trade Union Studies (PG24390)
Date of accreditation or last review	27/05/2020
Date of next review	30/05/2025

2. Collaborative provision	Collaborative programme
Name of body (/bodies):	Quality Matters/The Wheel
Programme titles and links to publications	These programmes are co-designed by Quality Matters/The Wheel and the NCI School of Business. Once validated by QQI, the programmes are delivered by staff provided by Quality Matters/The Wheel, while NCI retains responsibility for managing the delivery and monitoring of the programme. Certificate in Non-Profit Leadership and Management (PG22526)
Date of accreditation or last review	July 2024
Date of next review	31/08/2028

3. Collaborative provision	Collaborative programme
Name of body (/bodies):	Department of Social Protection (DSP)
Programme titles and links to publications	These programmes were co-designed by the Department of Social Protection (DSP). Once validated by QQI, DSP staff are involved in the delivery of the programme, while NCI is responsible for the delivery and monitoring of the programmes. Certificate in Social Protection Studies (PG23734) Certificate in Social Welfare Decision Making (PG23861) Certificate in Community Welfare Service Provision (PG23856) Certificate in Social Protection Investigative Work (PG23859) Certificate in Public Employment Services Provision (PG23858) Certificate in Social Welfare Appeals (PG23860) Certificate in Managing Social Protection Services (PG23857)
Date of accreditation or last review	March 2024
Date of next review	2028-2029, In line with QQI programme revalidation cycle -

4. Collaborative provision	Collaborative programme
Name of body (/bodies):	National Recruitment Federation
Programme titles and links to publications	NCI is the Coordinating Provider for the provision of this apprenticeship programme. Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Recruitment Practice (PG24255)
Date of accreditation or last review	11/06/2020
Date of next review	06/03/2024

5. Collaborative provision	Collaborative programme
Name of body (/bodies):	P-TECH Consortium
Programme titles and links to publications	NCI is the HE Provider for the provision of this NFQ Level 6 programme. The Consortium involves the Department of Education and Skills; Dept. an Taoiseach; NEIC and three second-level schools in Dublin's North-east Inner City. Certificate in P-TECH (Pathways in Technology) (PG24592)
Date of accreditation or last review	06/08/2021
Date of next review	31/12/2024

6. Collaborative provision	Collaborative programme
Name of body (/bodies):	Financial Services Ireland (FSI)
Programme titles and links to publications	NCI is the Coordinating Provider for the Higher Certificate in International Financial Services (IFS Associate apprenticeship programme) and the Higher Diploma in Financial Services Analytics, which are Consortium-led, listed HET apprenticeships under the National Apprenticeship Office.
Date of accreditation or last review	19/07/2018
Date of next review	29/03/2024

ARTICULATION AGREEMENTS

Articulation agreements - Total number **14**

1. Articulation agreement	Articulation agreement
Name of body (/bodies):	Hebei University
Programme titles and links to publications	Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Human Resource Management
Date of accreditation or last review	30/11/2022
Date of next review	30/11/2032
Detail of the agreement	Students complete three years of the Bachelor's Degree in Human Resource Management in Hebei University before completing Award Stage in the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Human Resource Management.

2. Articulation agreement	Articulation agreement
Name of body (/bodies):	Yunnan Normal University
Programme titles and links to publications	Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Accounting and Finance (PG22719)
Date of accreditation or last review	30/07/2022
Date of next review	31/07/2032
Detail of the agreement	Students complete three years of the Bachelor's Degree in Accounting in Yunnan Normal University before completing Award Stage in Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Accounting and Finance.

3. Articulation agreement	Articulation agreement
Name of body (/bodies):	Nanchang Hangkong University
Programme titles and links to publications	Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Computing (PG24355)
Date of accreditation or last review	30/09/2021
Date of next review	30/09/2025
Detail of the agreement	Students complete three years of Bachelor's Degree in Network. Engineering in Nanchang Hangkong University before completing Award Stage in Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Computing.

4. Articulation agreement	Articulation agreement
Name of body (/bodies):	Rathmines College of Further Education
Programme titles and links to publications	Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Business (PG22721) Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Marketing Practice (PG22899) Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Human Resource Management (PG22723)
Date of accreditation or last review	30/10/2015
Date of next review	28/06/2024
Detail of the agreement	Students who attain a Pass Grade in the Advanced Certificate in Business (6M4985) in Rathmines College of Further Education are eligible for advanced entry into Stage 2 of one of the above programmes.

5. Articulation agreement	Articulation agreement
Name of body (/bodies):	Rathmines College of Further Education
Programme titles and links to publications	Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Computing (PG24355)
Date of accreditation or last review	30/04/2020
Date of next review	28/06/2024
Detail of the agreement	Students who attain a Merit or Distinction Grade in the Award in Software Development (6M0691) in Rathmines College of Further Education are eligible for advanced entry into Stage 2 of the above programme, while students who attain a Pass Grade are eligible for advanced entry into Stage 1 Semester 2.

6. Articulation agreement	Articulation agreement
Name of body (/bodies):	Coláiste Dhulaigh College of Further Education
Programme titles and links to publications	Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Business (PG22721) Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Marketing Practice (PG22899) Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Human Resource Management (PG22723)
Date of accreditation or last review	30/10/2015
Date of next review	28/06/2024
Detail of the agreement	Students who attain a Pass Grade in the Certificate in Management (6M4587) in Coláiste Dhulaigh College of Further Education are eligible for advanced entry into Stage 2 of one of the above programmes

7. Articulation agreement	Articulation agreement
Name of body (/bodies):	Coláiste Dhulaigh College of Further Education
Programme titles and links to publications	Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Computing (PG24355)
Date of accreditation or last review	30/04/2020
Date of next review	28/06/2024
Detail of the agreement	Students who attain a Merit or Distinction Grade in the Award in Software Development (6M0691) in Coláiste Dhulaigh College of Further Education are eligible for advanced entry into Stage 2 of the above programme, while students who attain a Pass Grade are eligible for advanced entry into Stage 1 Semester 2.

8. Articulation agreement	Articulation agreement
Name of body (/bodies):	Inchicore College of Further Education
Programme titles and links to publications	Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Business (PG22721) Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Marketing Practice (PG22899) Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Human Resource Management (PG22723)
Date of accreditation or last review	30/10/2015
Date of next review	28/06/2024
Detail of the agreement	Students who attain a Pass Grade in the Higher National Diploma in Business in Inchicore College of Further Education are eligible for advanced entry into Stage 2 of one of the above programmes.

9. Articulation agreement	Articulation agreement
Name of body (/bodies):	Blackrock College of Further Education
Programme titles and links to publications	Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Human Resource Management (PG22723) Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Business (PG22721)
Date of accreditation or last review	30/10/2015
Date of next review	28/06/2024
Detail of the agreement	Students who attain a Pass Grade in the Advanced Certificate in Business (6M4985) or Business Studies/Business and Management (5M2102) in Blackrock College of Further Education are eligible for advanced entry into Stage 2 of the BA in Human Resource Management or the BA Hons Business programme.

10. Articulation agreement	Articulation agreement
Name of body (/bodies):	Coláiste Dhulaigh (CDCFE), Whitehall College of Further Education, Inchicore College of Further Education, Marino Institute, Liberties College
Programme titles and links to publications	Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Early Childhood Education and Care (PG24368)
Date of accreditation or last review	31/07/2015
Date of next review	30/05/2024
Detail of the agreement	Graduates of the Level 6 Major Award in Early Childhood Education and Care 6M2007 are eligible for consideration for advanced entry to year two of the following programme(s) Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Early Childhood Education & Care

APPENDIX B3:

CINNTE ADVISORY GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

Membership and Terms of Reference (as approved by Executive Group in December 2022)

Composition (numbers in brackets denotes the number of individuals)

- Chair: Registrar (1)
- Vice-Deans of the School of Business and School of Computing Vice-Deans and nominee of the Director of CELL (3)
- Director of Student Registry (1)
- Head of Communications (1)
- Director of QIE (1) (overall Project Manager for CINNTE process)
- SU President (1)

The secretariat for the Working group will be provided by a QIE Team member/other assigned by Registrar.

The core group will comprise seven members, including the Chair. Additional colleagues will be invited to join the group, depending on the agenda at hand, for example, Director of IT Services/Heads of IT units; Director of ELI; International Office Director; Digital Design Lead (Sam Cogan), Manager of EDI and Staff Training; Academic Operations Manager; Student Supports & Welfare Manager, and so on.

Terms of reference

- i Advise on and agree the framework/structure of the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) and accompanying Institutional Profile (IP) (facts and figures about NCI)
- ii Advise on and agree the overall Project Plan, including key milestones and deliverables towards completion of the ISER and IP e.g., Case-Studies to include in the ISER
- iii Monitor project progress and escalate issues/obstacles to Executive, as required
- iv Advise on communications and engagement activities with staff, students and external stakeholders and act as champions for scheduled staff and student engagement activities
- v Report regularly to CINNTE and DA Steering group (Executive) with updates to Academic Council and GB Risk Committee
- vi Review iterative versions of ISER and IP and recommend final version to Executive (and from there to Academic Council and Governing Body)

APPENDIX B4:

SUMMARY ANALYSIS OF RECENT EXTERNAL EXAMINER FEEDBACK AND ACTIONS ARISING

Feedback	Details	Actions Taken
Introduction of Practicum-Based Assignments	External examiners suggested incorporating practical assignments to enhance students' real-world experience.	Practicum-based assignments were implemented in the Master of Science in Data Analytics programme.
Consistency in Grade Alignment	Recommendations were made to standardise marking procedures across modules to ensure fairness and consistency in grading.	Standardised marking procedures were implemented in the Higher Certificate in International Financial Services programme.
Content Updates	External examiners emphasised the need to update programme content to reflect current trends and practices in various fields, such as equity, diversity, inclusion, and volunteer management.	New literature and case studies were incorporated into the Certificate in Non-Profit Leadership and Management programme.
Module Material Availability	Feedback highlighted the need for better availability and accessibility of module materials for external review.	Administrative review and improvements in the processes for providing module materials in the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Marketing Practice programme.
Focus on Sustainability	Recommendations to include a more explicit focus on sustainability within the curriculum.	Creation of new modules such as 'Sustainability Strategy and Society' and 'Critical Marketing Studies' in the Master of Science in Marketing programme.
Variety in Assessments	Suggestions were made to increase the variety of assessment methods to better evaluate learner learning outcomes.	A broader range of assessment methods were incorporated into the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Human Resource Management programme.
Linking Research and Teaching	Encouragement to integrate current research activities into teaching.	A wider range of assessment types and the integration of research activities into the curriculum in the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Psychology programme.
Addressing Administrative Processes	Feedback on improving administrative processes related to the provision of assessment materials and handling shared modules.	Thorough review and improvement of administrative processes in the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Business programme.
Supporting Student Success	Identifying and addressing high failure rates in specific modules.	Review and adjustment of assessment strategies to enhance learner support in the Master of Science in Cybersecurity programme.
Review of Specific Modules	Recommendations for the review and modification of particular modules.	Changes to better align with learning outcomes and industry needs in the Master of Science in FinTech programme.
Enhancing Student Engagement	Suggestions for additional touchpoints and support mechanisms, particularly during periods of online learning or disruptions like the COVID pandemic.	Enhanced learner engagement through additional touchpoints and support mechanisms in the Master of Science in Entrepreneurship programme.

TABLE OF ACRONYMS

ACRONYM	MEANING
ABC	Area Based Childhood Programme
ACCA	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
AF	Associate Faculty
AFU	Age Friendly University
AHECS	Association of Higher Education Careers Services
APM	Annual Programme Monitoring
AQ	Academic Quality Review
AQR	Annual Quality Report
AW	In another way
BAU	Business As Usual
BIA	Business Impact Analysis
CAO	Central Applications Office
CELL	Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning
CINNTE	Sure or Certain (Irish Term)
CIMA	Chartered Institute of Management Accountants
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CNÉ	Coláiste Náisiúnta na hÉireann
COI	Conflict of Interest
COVID	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DABS	Digital and Business Skills
DARE	Disability Access Route to Education
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DCU	Dublin City University
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
DLD	Digital Learning Design
DPIA	Data Protection Impact Assessment
DPO	Data Protection Officer
DR	Devolved Responsibility
DSP	Department of Social Protection
ECEC	Early Childhood Education & Care
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EDI	Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion
EG	Executive Group
ELI	Early Learning Initiative
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
ETB	Educational Training Board
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
FT	Full Time
GB	Governing Body of NCI
GPT	Generative Pre-trained Transformer
HCI	Human Capital Initiative
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEAR	Higher Education Access Route
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESIF	Higher Education Strategic Infrastructure Fund
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resource Management
IA	Information Architecture
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers Confederation
IBM	International Business Machines Corporation
ICT	Information & Communications Technology
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
IFS	International Financial Services
IFSC	International Financial Services Centre
IOT	Institute of Technology
IP	Institutional Profile
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education

ACRONYM MEANING

ISER	Institutional Self-Evaluation Report
ISMS	Information Security Management System
ISO27001	An international standard on how to manage information security
IT	Information Technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LLM	Master of Laws
MFA	Master of Fine Arts
MIS	Management Information Systems
NA	Not Applicable
NCI	National College of Ireland
NCIRL	National College of Industrial Relations (historical name for NCI)
NCISU	National College of Ireland Students' Union
NEIC	North-East Inner City (of Dublin)
NFP	Not for Profit
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NORMA	NCI's digital archive of the electronic research produced by National College of Ireland staff and students
P-TECH	Pathways in Technology
PEL	Protection of Enrolled Learners
PG	Postgraduate
PLM	Programme Lifecycle Management
PNTS	Prefer not to say
PRSB	Professional Recognition and Standards Body
PSI	Psychological Society of Ireland
QA	Quality Assurance
QAB	Qualifications Advisory Board
QAES	Quality Assurance and Enhancement System
QAG	Quality Assurance Group
QASS	Quality Assurance Support Service
QIE	Quality and Institutional Effectiveness office
QIEP	Quality Improvement and Effectiveness Plan
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
QUERCUS	Learner Record Management System
RC	Research Centre
RE	Religious Education
RPEL	Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning
SAM	Software Asset Management
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SIS	Learner Information System
SMT	Senior Management Team
SOC	School of Computing
SOB	School of Business
SIEM	Security Information and Event Management
SU	Students' Union
TECH	Technology
THEA	Technological Higher Education Association
TLA	Three-Letter Acronym
TLAC	Teaching and Learning Assessment Committee
TUs	Technological Universities
TY	Transition Year
UG	Undergraduate
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNSDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
VM	Virtual Machine
VMaaS	Virtual Machine as a Service
VP	Vice President
YTD	Year to Date

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