# Provider Response to Reengagement Panel Report

## 1. Details of Reengagement Panel Visit

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| Provider Name | National College of Ireland |
| Provider Address | Mayor Square, IFSC, Dublin 1 |
| Date of Reengagement Panel Visit | 13th March 2019 |
| Outcome of Reengagement Panel Visit | Approval with Specific Advices |
| Date of Provider Response | 18th April 2019 |
| Date of Approval by QQI | 13th June 2019 |

## 2. Provider Response to Reengagement Panel Report

National College of Ireland (NCI) welcomes the report of the Reengagement Panel and is particularly pleased that the Panel has acknowledged the College's strengths in the provision of a high-level of tailored supports for students from induction through to completion; our commitment to developing pedagogy that is responsive to student and industry demands; and the degree to which our staff demonstrated their confidence with the quality assurance system in place during the site visit. The College also appreciates the Panel's acknowledgement of our intention to further support PhD research activities and to enhance our profile through research awards.

Given the breadth of NCI's provision and scope, we are also pleased that the panel has commended the clear presentation of the Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) and in accordance with the recommendation of the panel, the College will continue to refine its contents and presentation as well as ensure that it is version controlled in all of its iterations. This positive external evaluation of NCI's Quality Assurance & Enhancement System (QAES) at this juncture in the College's development provides a firm platform for the QAES to be used as a live resource for its stakeholders and to be further refined and enhanced as the College implements its new academic strategy.

We sincerely thank the members of the Panel for their specific advices, which are welcomed without reservation. The constructive and collegial nature of the engagement of the Panel with us during the meeting provided additional value to the process. NCI's responses to the specific advices provided by the Panel are outlined below.

### Specific Advice 1
*While the College follows Garda vetting regulations, the Panel advises that NCI adopts a universal approach to Garda vetting rather than focusing on those staff members likely to come into contact with younger students.*

We note the Panel's advice and will explore the available options. The safety and wellbeing of our learners and staff are central to the values of NCI. The College's policy is that those who are teaching on full-time programmes and involved with minors and vulnerable adults are

Garda vetted, i.e. all full-time staff of the College. This policy was developed according to the advice of An Garda Siochána, who only vet those who will definitely come into contact with minors and vulnerable adults as part of their job rather than those who potentially might do so. NCI will review this policy in light of the Panel's recommendation and liaise with An Garda Siochána to ensure it is in adherence with statutory regulations and sectoral standards of best practice.

## Specific Advice 2

*Consider a process for election of faculty onto committee structures to ensure staff experience is reflected and utilised and to ensure representativeness of committee structures.*

We recognise that the size of the College has previously impacted on the design of the committee structures and their ability to accommodate wider representation. The composition of Committees will be revisited over the next academic year to ensure improved representativeness and broaden the number of ex-officio members with elected and appointed members.

## Specific Advice 3

*Consider the potential benefits of involving the Students' Union in the training of class representatives.*

The Students' Union is currently involved in the recruitment and training of class representatives. NCI has been involved in the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) since its inception in 2016 and the NStEP project intended to develop national guidelines on the role, recruitment and retention of class representatives. These guidelines were published at the NStEP Conference in March 2019 and will be implemented by NCI in the 2019/20 academic year. A Student Engagement Working Group has also been established in NCI, which is chaired by the Quality Officer and consists of representatives from the Students' Union, Learning Support, Student Experience and the College's constituent academic departments. This working group's objectives are to use the feedback from the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) to inform NCI's quality enhancement activities, to improve the College's class representative system and embed it within the QAES, and to develop a Student Success Strategy, due for implementation in September 2020.

## Specific Advices 4 & 5

iv.   *Review the terms of reference of the Academic Council to ensure that its ultimate authority in academic decision-making is reflected appropriately; and*

v.   *In reviewing the effectiveness of the governance system, consider opportunities for rationalisation that may emerge.*

These recommendations will be considered in conjunction with Recommendation 2. NCI recognises the ultimate authority of Academic Council for all academic decisions. The sections of the QAH relating to Academic Council will be reviewed and revised accordingly to remove any ambiguities, with particular attention paid to work-flow charts and terms of reference that describe Academic Council and outline its primary role in academic decision-making. The College will also seek to utilise opportunities for rationalisation that arise during reviews of the effectiveness of governance structures as recommended by the Panel.

## Specific Advice 6

*Ensure the governance system continues to keep the sustainability of quality assurance systems under review as the College grows and diversifies.*

The incoming Director of Quality Assurance & Statistical Services (DQASS) will be asked to monitor this recommendation and to advise the College Executive and Academic Council on the resourcing required to maintain and sustain the QAES as presented to QQI during the re-engagement process.

## Specific Advice 7

*Consider potential matters of document control arising from the presentation of the College's QA Handbook in different formats.*

The document control policy will be reviewed and revised accordingly to clearly state the primacy of the QAH over any extracted documentation. The QAH is currently version controlled by the Quality Assurance and Statistical Services (QASS). The College has recently migrated to Microsoft Sharepoint for document management and all staff are in the process of receiving training in its effective application. This document management system will ensure that the QASS Office has ultimate authority over version control of the QAH while also ensuring that staff only have access to the authorised versions of the College's Quality Assurance policies and procedures.

## Specific Advice 8

*In the best interests of applicants, consider revising the point at which the College makes the decision to withdraw a programme (currently one month), and whether adequate market research is conducted in advance to minimise the need for such withdrawals*

As NCI has expanded its Higher Education and Training provisions, the quality of the market research and viability studies conducted as part of our programme development process has improved significantly. Nevertheless, analysis of applicant and registration data has revealed that one of the primary reasons for successful applications not reverting to registrations is primarily due to the precarious nature of state funding for part-time programmes, which comprise a significant proportion of the College's programmes. While there is often a market for a programme, applicants' ability to independently finance their studies is often limited without state support. Late withdrawals of applications en-masse due to a lack of state funding means that a programme is no longer viable for a particular intake. NCI appreciates this recommendation of the Panel and will continue to strive to ensure that the decision to withdraw a programme prior to commencement will be made in an appropriately timely manner and that applicants are informed so that the decision does not negatively affect their ability to apply to other programmes in NCI or in another HET provider.

## Specific Advices 9 & 10

ix.     *Consider automating the pre-population of the Annual Monitoring Report template to support programme teams in conducting the annual review and to create process efficiencies; and*

x. *Continue to evolve institutional management data to fully support QA and seek opportunities to leverage in-house ICT expertise in doing so. The establishment of a Data Strategy Committee might assist in gaining support within the College for this approach.*

The College recognises the importance of ongoing programme monitoring and the value that effective learning analytics plays in creating process efficiencies and supporting quality assurance and enhancement activities. These recommendations will be considered as part of the implementation of the College's Academic Strategy and Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy, with the aim of embedding learning analytics in programme reviews and academic decision-making processes. This will include consideration of an additional dedicated role to manage the College's data requirements. Within our current resource base, we will continue to endeavour to automate as much of the annual monitoring process as possible. We also await sectoral agreement of key performance indicators concerning retention, progression and completion, which will contribute to the College's quality assurance monitoring and quality enhancement activities.

### Specific Advice 11
*Whilst the QA procedures for Programme Development, Validation and Evaluation are comprehensive, there may be future opportunities to further capture in this documentation the richness and added-value that was articulated to the Panel by NCI staff of some of these processes, including programme review.*

NCI is due to begin a period of programmatic review from Q3 2019 – Q4 2020, during which the School of Computing's undergraduate programmes, the School of Business' postgraduate programmes and the College's teaching and learning programmes will be reviewed for viability and updated according to stakeholder engagement and QQI's revised statutory guidelines. The programme review process will be used as a case study to ensure that this added-value of the College's robust Programme Development, Validation and Evaluation procedures are captured in the related documentation submitted to QQI. This review process will also be used to establish institutional guidelines for future programme validation and revalidation events.

### Specific Advice 12
*Consider the value of psychometrics to enhance evidence of the reliability of assessment, particularly in the context of increased online assessment.*

This recommendation will be considered as part of the implementation of the College's Learning, Teaching & Assessment strategy and in upcoming programme reviews as mentioned above.

### Specific Advice 13
*Continue to develop and progress policies and practices that will meet the College's GDPR obligations.*

The College has already made significant improvements within its existing resource base to ensure its compliance with GDPR regulations. These will be further enhanced by the

recruitment of a dedicated Information Governance & Compliance Officer. This position is expected to be filled in Q3 2019.

## Specific Advices 14 & 15

xiv. *Extract the QA policies and procedures on collaborative programme development into its own section of the QA Handbook; and*

xv. *Consider developing a guide to the QA Handbook for collaborators.*

These recommendations are noted and will be implemented in Q3 2019. As NCI continues to expand its collaborative and apprenticeship provisions, the QASS Office recognises the need to make the QAH readily accessible to all relevant stakeholders and to ensure adherence to the College's Quality Assurance policies and procedures. The development of user-guides in particular areas will be considered by the QASS Office.

## Specific Advice 16

*The effectiveness of the College's evaluation activities could be enhanced by live quality action plans, which are addressed to the appropriate level at which actions can be taken (i.e., the Programme Committee), and feed into a strategic Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) at College level.*

The incoming DQASS will be asked to progress this recommendation with the support of the Deans and Vices Deans of School. Progress on this will be supported by the finalisation of the administrative support structures within the Schools, which is expected to be completed during Q3 2019.