

# National College of Ireland

## Quality Assurance Handbook



### 1 Introduction

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## 1.1. INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance can only be achieved by ensuring that individual staff members, each working as a member of a team, have a role and duty in setting the highest academic quality standards. To this end, the Academic Council has approved the processes and procedures involved in implementing programme quality assurance in the College and these are kept under continuous review.

This handbook is the documented Quality Assurance & Enhancement System (QAES) and should always be viewed as a working document which is reviewed and updated periodically in the light of experience in implementing its procedures and feedback received from staff, learners and outside interests.

Achievement of academic excellence is a complex process involving all members and levels **of the College's staff. The underlying aim of the QAES is to achieve the highest standards** for all programmes and services offered by National College of Ireland (NCI). These must bear comparison to the best available, both nationally and internationally, and this handbook sets out processes and procedures to ensure that best practice and highest standards are **the norm for all of the College's activities.**

The College's determination to deliver fully on the contract that exists between it and its learner body is the main thrust in the development and implementation of academic quality assurance procedures. It is recognised that this can only be achieved through the awareness, consent and co-operation of all members of the College acting in partnership towards a common goal. It also requires the support and encouragement of external bodies such as government agencies, semi-state agencies, business and the wider community.

All members of the College are invited to recommend improvements in the policy and practice arising from their experience. They can do so at official interaction with the sub-committees of Academic Council; by informing their line manager, who will forward recommendation to the Director of Quality Assurance and Statistical Services; or by writing directly to the Director of Quality Assurance and Statistical Services.

## 1.2. CONTEXT

NCI is primarily a teaching institution but has a growing research profile. It provides programmes from Level 6 to Level 10 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) as well as programmes from awarding bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) and Institute of Commercial Management (ICM). Its academic programmes are validated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and have professional recognition by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), the Teaching Council of Ireland, the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) and a number of professional accountancy bodies.

NCI offers programmes on a full and part-time basis, using traditional face-to-face, blended and online delivery. Programmes are delivered at its main campus in the IFSC (Dublin) or at approved off-campus or in-company locations. NCI has a long tradition of providing employer-led education and training, and continues to collaborate with employers through a variety of means, including the provision of statutory apprenticeships. The College has also

recently signed a Memorandum of Association with Maynooth University to provide Masters and PhD programmes by research that will be awarded by MU.

### 1.3. NCI PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY ASSURANCE & ENHANCEMENT

NCI is committed to a quality assurance and enhancement system (QAES) that is appropriate to the functions, structures and size of the organisation. In developing and documenting the **system, the principle of the 'enabling' policy has been used.** These principles are consistent with the context in which NCI works and references the quality assurance principles of QQI and of the European Standards and Guidelines. In doing so, the QAES:

- Is informed by and is consistent with NCI's mission, values, strategy and resource model.
- Strives for continuous improvement through documentation, planning, monitoring, evaluation and action
- is cognisant of national and international standards and best practice
- is compliant with legislation and policies & guidelines of its awarding and accreditation bodies
- Values inclusivity, diversity, collegiality, accountability and transparency

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#### 1.3.1 NCI Mission & Values

In supporting NCI's mission 'to change lives through education', the QAES is reflective of the vision and values of the College.

##### Vision

NCI will provide an inspiring educational experience that is innovative, responsive and enterprise focused.

##### Values

- Inclusivity - we strive to break down barriers in third-level education; we value diversity and inclusiveness in all that we do; we provide the support that people need to participate fully in life at NCI
- Community - we are an interdependent learning community that shares a common set of principles where individuality and freedom of thought and expression are valued; each of us is encouraged to fulfil our ambition and realise our potential
- Integrity - in our individual and collective roles, we take responsibility and are accountable for our actions; we demonstrate respect and mutual regard for each other
- Dynamic - we are responsive to the needs of our students, colleagues and partners and an ever-changing society; we act in an innovative and flexible manner
- Learner Centred - we place the learner at the heart of everything we do; our combined energies are focused on their individual and collective, life-long needs
- Excellence - as an institution, we aspire to professional excellence in everything we do; we foster excellence in our learners through their learning experiences

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### 1.3.2 Continuous Improvement

The QAES strives to be enhancement-led and to use the outputs of its processes to provide action plans for programme committees, schools and services to maintain excellent standards and, where relevant, improve existing practice. In documenting and publishing the system, users are guided through the agreed policy and the authorised processes to be used.

The QAES assists the overall planning processes of the College, highlighting areas of new programme and service development, and the resources required to implement them and to maintain those already in place. By monitoring existing activity, the system can also identify issues that can be remediated quickly and highlight areas of good practice for sharing across programmes and services. These can in turn be further developed through evaluation for medium and longer term development.

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### 1.3.3 Cognisant of National and International Standards and Best Practice

The College recognises that it takes its place in a global education environment and looks to safeguard its reputation, and that of the Irish education sector, through the implementation of the recommendations and guidelines of its stakeholder groups.

The QAES is used to inform policy and practice through representation on national groups, attendance at seminars, conferences and benchmarking through programme and service development and evaluation.

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### 1.3.4 Compliant with Legislation, Policies & Guidelines of its awarding and accreditation policies

As a provider of education and an employer, NCI ensures that all policy and activities are drafted and implemented in accordance with the current legislation in which it operates. This includes but is not limited to employment legislation, equality legislation, data protection legislation, education legislation.

The QAES is continually reviewed and updated based on published guidelines and policies of its awarding and accrediting bodies. As a provider coming voluntarily to QQI and due to the **breadth of provision**, NCI's QAES takes its reference from the following QQI policy and guidelines:

1. Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines
2. Sector-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Independent/Private Providers
3. Topic-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes
4. Topic-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Research Degree Programmes
5. Topic Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning
6. Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes and Joint Awards
7. Required Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression of Learners

The following sectoral documents were also consulted: Provision of Education to International Students: Code of Practice and Guidelines for Irish Higher Education Institutions

(IHEQN), Association for Higher Education Access & Disability (AHEAD) and Disability Advisors Working Network (DAWN).

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### 1.3.5 Adherence to College Values

NCI's quality assurance and enhancement activities are underpinned by the principles of consultation, accountability and transparency. The College values the contribution of its learners to policy and practice and has committed to the principles of student engagement in its quality-related activities. Diversity of opinion is also welcomed so that existing policy and processes are challenged to mitigate against complacency or group-think.

NCI values a culture of self /open disclosure where adherence to policy or procedure has not been complied with. This allows the open evaluation of the reasons for non-compliance which may have arisen through poor communication, gaps in training or a flaw in the policy or procedure itself. NCI also commits to the publication of the outcomes of its quality assurance and enhancement activities on its website and, where relevant, QQI's.

NCI will publish the outcomes of its quality assurance activities in the spirit of openness and transparency and to underpin public confidence in its activities.

## 1.4. RESPONSIBILITY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

NCI recognises its responsibility for its internal quality assurance and provision of services and programmes of learning. Effective quality assurance is an institution-wide responsibility. However, the Director of Quality Assurance and Statistical Services (DQASS) has specific responsibility for ensuring that the policies and procedures are effective at all times. The DQASS will ensure that a culture of continuous improvement is fostered within the College and that College managers are complying with the standards as laid down in the QAES.

The DQASS reports to the Vice President Academic Affairs & Research (VP) and has the authority to report Quality Assurance related issues directly to the President of the College. The responsibility for ensuring the quality management of the academic processes in accordance with NCI policy lies with the Deans of School, Heads of Function and programme committees of the college. Individual members of staff/faculty are required to co-operate with these quality management procedures within the academic structures.

## 1.5. GOVERNING BODY STATEMENT OF QUALITY SERVICE STANDARDS

NCI will publish and update a detailed Quality Assurance Manual that states the nature and quality of service which the public can expect, and will publish the same on the website.

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### 1.5.1 The Learner's Charter

A detailed commitment by the College and all its learners on quality learning as follows;

The National College of Ireland Will	The Learner will
Provide quality education at a time and place that the learner.	Take charge of their own learning and produce work to the best of their ability.
Provide a learning environment and	Participate actively in all learning

The National College of Ireland Will	The Learner will
resources that support and stimulates the learner and enables them to realise their full potential.	activities.
Provide an environment that promotes continuous improvement.	Ensure a minimum attendance rate of 70% at all lectures, tutorials and class work.
Provide the learner with programmes of the highest academic quality.	Make effective use of the facilities and resources provided and plan their use of resources in a responsible and considerate way.
Provide the learner with accurate information about all programmes and expectations.	Comply with assessment regulations and use assessment feedback to inform their continued learning.
Provide an assessment of learning that is fair, valid and timely.	Participate in programme-related committees and reviews through their learner representative network and provide honest and constructive feedback within the opportunities provided.
Provide the learner with the opportunity to evaluate their programme and constituent teaching activities in confidence.	Support and respect the rights of fellow learners, faculty and staff.
Provide the learner with skilled, qualified supportive staff who will treat you with dignity and respect and be responsive to your learning needs and concerns.	Abide by all College rules regulations.
Provide a fair and consistent enforcement of all College rules and regulations.	Identify problems or concerns they may have and address them to the appropriate people in a timely and constructive manner.
Provide the learner with a healthy and safe environment that promotes a positive learning experience.	Treat all members of the College community with the dignity and respect.

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### 1.5.2 Equality/Diversity

Ensure the rights to equal treatment, established by equality legislation, and to accommodate diversity, so as to contribute to equality for the groups covered by equality legislation on the grounds of gender, marital status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveler Community.

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### 1.5.3 Access

Identify and work to eliminate barriers to access to services for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and for those facing geographic barriers to services.

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#### 1.5.4 Physical Access

Provide clean, accessible public offices that ensure privacy, comply with occupational and safety standards and, as part of this, facilitate access for people with disabilities and others with specific needs.

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#### 1.5.5 Information

NCI will take a proactive approach in providing information that is clear, timely and accurate, is available at all points of contact and meets the requirements of people with specific needs. Ensure that the potential offered by Information Technology is fully availed of and that the information available on NCI web sites follows the guidelines on web publication. The College will also continue its drive for simplification of rules, regulations, forms, information leaflets and procedures. Comply with requirements of the Freedom of Information Acts.

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#### 1.5.6 Timeliness and Courtesy

Deliver quality services with courtesy, sensitivity and minimum delay, fostering a climate of mutual respect between provider and customer. Give contact names in all communications to ensure ease of ongoing transactions.

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#### 1.5.7 Complaints

Maintain a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with complaints about quality of service provided.

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#### 1.5.8 Appeals

Similarly, maintain a formalised, well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple to use system of appeal/review for students and customers who are dissatisfied with decisions in relation to services.

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#### 1.5.9 Consultation and Evaluation

Provide structured approaches to meaningful consultation with, and participation by, the learner and customers in relation to the development, delivery and review of services. Ensure meaningful evaluation of service delivery.

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#### 1.5.10 Choice

Provide choice, where feasible, in service delivery including payment methods, location of contact points, opening hours and delivery times. Use available and emerging technologies to ensure maximum access and choice and quality of delivery.



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#### 1.5.11 Better Co-ordination

Foster a more co-coordinated and integrated approach to delivery of public services.

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#### 1.5.12 Staff

Ensure all staff are recognized as internal customers and that they are properly supported and consulted with regard to service delivery issues.

### 1.6. THE QUALITY ASSURANCE HANDBOOK

The following chapters outline the structures, policies and associated procedures of the Quality Assurance & Enhancement System (QAES) at NCI and how it operates across multiple functions of the College. This handbook, therefore, incorporates the themes of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and, in particular, **those of Quality and Qualifications Ireland's (QQI) Core Guidelines for Quality Assurance**, as outlined below. The chapter summaries highlight the main areas addressed by **the chapter and how they meet QQI's Core Guidelines and where appropriate topic specific guidelines for quality assurance**. Due to the complexity and breadth of provision at NCI, these guidelines are dealt with in many areas and are cross referenced appropriately throughout the handbook.

Chapter 2 **documents NCI's QAES in accordance with QQI's Core Guidelines 1: Governance and Management of Quality and 2: Documented Approach to Quality Assurance**, respectively. The QAES and the responsibilities accordingly assigned to particular internal stakeholders is available to the public and forms part of the strategic management of the College. The internal stakeholders involved in the QAES are identified and their responsibilities within the structure of quality management are clearly outlined. This chapter also explains **how QQI satisfies QQI's Core Guideline 11: Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review** by providing the terms of reference and responsibilities of the various internal stakeholders and standing committees involved in the self-evaluation and critical review of programmes in the College and outlines the specific role of the Quality Assurance Office in this regard.

Chapter 3 outlines the procedures through which NCI proposes, develops and reviews academic programmes in accordance with **QQI's Core Guideline 3**, specifically 3.1 Programme Development and Approval and 3.3 Programme Monitoring and Review. Accordingly, NCI programmes, and their teaching, learning and assessment strategies, are designed to ensure that learners achieve specific intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme is clearly specified and communicated, and corresponds with the correct level and associated standards of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) for Higher Education and, consequently, to the Qualifications Framework for European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). **This chapter also outlines NCI's procedures for Collaborative & Transnational Provision in accordance with Core Guideline 10 Other Parties Involved in Education & Training.**

Chapter 4 includes the policies and associated procedures for the administration of **assessments on NCI programmes, demonstrating compliance with QQI's Core Guideline 6:**

Assessment of Learners. These policies and procedures are also informed by QQI's *Assessment and Standards* (2013) to ensure that learners' achievement of intended learning outcomes are fairly and consistently assessed according to the principles outlined therein.

Chapter 5 explains NCI's approach to teaching, learning and the student experience, outlining the College's strategy for enhancing the quality of its provisions in these areas. QQI's Core Guideline 5: Teaching and Learning is at the core of NCI's initiatives to ensure that its learning community is informed by best practices and has access to environments and resources most conducive to enhancing the learning experience and the attainment by learners of a programme's intended learning outcomes.

Chapter 6 also outlines NCI's compliance with QQI Core Guideline 3, specifically 3.2: Learner Admission, Progression and Recognition. Information regarding progression and certification is further supplemented by Chapter 4. NCI's policies and procedures are pre-defined and cover all phases of the student 'life cycle', from admission, progression to completion and certification.

Chapter 7 explains the various services provided to students by NCI and indicates compliance with QQI Guideline 7: Supports for Learners. NCI's commitment to supporting a diverse student body means that a wide range of services must be provided equitably. In addition, student engagement is particularly important as it allows the College to involve learners in assessing the delivery of their programmes and their teaching, learning and assessment strategies, with the aim of ensuring that all programmes meet their requirements and involving them as partners in their own education.

Chapter 8 documents the policies informing NCI's Human Resources strategy and explains how the College adheres to *QQI's Core Guideline 4: Staff recruitment*, Management and Development. NCI's commitment to recruiting the most competent staff is outlined here, in addition to the professional development and progression opportunities to ensure that the most competent staff are retained in the long-term to the benefit of the College and its learners.

Chapter 9 identifies the legislation that applies to NCI's information governance procedures, thus indicating the College's compliance with QQI Core Guideline 8: Information and Data Management. The occasions when the collection, storage and analysis of data, and the individuals associated with these activities, are included here.

Chapter 10 explains the role of the Marketing and Student Recruitment Department as it complies with *QQI's Core Guideline 9: Public Information and Communication*. The policies and associated procedures for ensuring that programme information for both prospective and current students are clearly outlined, in addition to the responsibilities for involved in communicating about or on behalf of NCI.

Chapters 11, 12 and 13 deal with specialist areas of NCI's education provisions, Research, Apprenticeships and Blended Learning, respectively. The policies and associated procedures outlined in these chapters are informed by the Topic Specific Guidelines issued by QQI in each of these three areas.