

Annual Quality Report
National College of Ireland
PART A: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM
Reporting Period 2019-2020

PREFACE

The Annual Quality Report (AQR; formerly AIQR) forms part of Quality and Qualifications Ireland's (QQI) quality assurance (QA) framework of engagement with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The AQR provides documentary evidence of the development and evolution of each institution's internal quality system. It provides QQI with assurance that internal QA procedures have been established and are being implemented consistent with regulatory requirements.

The AQR, particularly part A, should assist with document management in the institutional review process and will facilitate institutions in providing review teams with procedural QA documentation in preparation for the external review process. It is an important part of the evidence base considered by external review teams as part of QQI's CINNTE cycle of institutional reviews, demonstrating that the institution's internal QA system is aligned with QQI's Core and relevant Sector- and Topic-specific Statutory QA Guidelines, and with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area 2015 (ESG). It enables the review team to satisfy itself of compliance with these requirements for the purpose of the institutional review process.

Each AQR is published in full on QQI's website, providing transparency on the HEIs' assurance and enhancement of quality to external stakeholders. (As such, institutions should ensure that their submissions do not contain any data that they consider to be commercially sensitive.) Collectively, the AQRs comprise a single national repository of quality assurance practice in Irish higher education institutions.

Each year, QQI produces a synthesis report of the key themes highlighted across the AQRs, primarily arising from Part B of the reports.

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PART A: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM

Table 1

| Table 1 Mapping of ESG (2015) to QQI QA Guidelines (QAG) | | | | |
|--|---|--|------------------|---|
| AQR Part A Section | QQI QAG Core Sub-section No. | QAG Core Sub-section Title | ESG Standard No. | ESG Standard Title |
| 1.0 - Internal QA Framework | 2.1 | Governance and Management of Quality | 1.1 | Policy for Quality Assurance |
| | 2.2 | Documented Approach to Quality Assurance | | |
| 2.0 - Programme Development and Delivery | 2.3 | Programmes of Education and Training | 1.2 | Design and Approval of Programmes |
| 4.0 - QA of Research Activities and Programmes | | | 1.9 | On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes |
| 8.0 - Monitoring and Periodic Review | | | | |
| 5.0 - Staff Recruitment, Development and Support | 2.4 | Staff Recruitment, Management and Development | 1.5 | Teaching Staff |
| 2.3 - Teaching, Learning and Assessment | 2.5 | Teaching and Learning | 1.3 | Student-centred Teaching, Learning and Assessment |
| | 2.6 | Assessment of Learners | | |
| 3.0 - Learner Resources and Supports | 2.7 | Supports for learners | 1.6 | Learning Resources and Student Support |
| 6.0 - Information and Data Management | 2.8 | Information and Data Management | 1.7 | Information Management |
| 7.0 - Public Information and Communication | 2.9 | Public Information and Communication | 1.8 | Public Information |
| 2.0 - Programme Delivery and Development | 2.10 | Other Parties Involved in Education and Training | 1.9 | On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes |
| 8.0 - Monitoring and Periodic Review | | | 1.2 | Design and Approval of Programmes |
| 9.0 - Details of Arrangements with Third Parties | | | | |
| 2.0 - Programme Development and Delivery | 2.11 | Self-evaluation, Monitoring and Review | 1.9 | On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes |
| 8.0 - Monitoring and Periodic Review | | | 1.10 | Cyclical External Quality Assurance |
| 4.0 - QA of Research Activities and Programmes | QAG for Providers of Research Degree Programmes | | | |

Introduction and Overview of Institution

This is the AQR for the National College of Ireland (NCI) for the reporting period 1st September 2019 - 31st August 2020. It was submitted to QQI on 19th February 2021 by Mrs Karen Jones, Director of Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (QIE). The AQR was approved by Academic Council in February 2021 following consultation with the Executive. It was also submitted to the March 2021 meeting of the NCI Governing Body. Case studies presented in the rear of this report have been span eight different teams across NCI, exemplifying our the whole of institutional approach to quality.

NCI's mission is to change lives through education. Since its foundation in 1951, NCI has developed and evolved in response to various internal and external environmental stimuli. NCI has been committed to supporting the development of Irish society by promoting the principles of access, opportunity and excellence in education. NCI endeavours to look beyond the mainstream and to bring innovative learning to all areas of Irish society. This is rooted in the belief that learning does not only take place in the classroom, but also in the workplace and in the community.

In line with its mission of widening access to education, the College places a strong emphasis on the needs of the learner and provides a range of learning options that extend beyond traditional classroom dynamics. From its inception, NCI has been committed to offering access to further education to those who might not otherwise have enjoyed the opportunity. NCI has always demonstrated a nimbleness, responsiveness and resilience that has allowed the College to adapt and respond to changing national and stakeholder needs. Across successive decades, changes in the College closely reflect larger changes in Irish life. One of the defining characteristics of the College is its ability to re-invent itself. This ability requires close engagement with the communities it serves and industry but also allows for responsiveness to the evolving needs of these important stakeholders.

Although a company limited by guarantee, NCI is a not-for-profit College and a registered charity. NCI is partially funded via a core grant through the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and a free fees allocation received for a 'capped' number of undergraduate full-time learners. All other funding comes from registration and tuition fees from self-funded or employer-funded learners and labour market initiatives funded by the HEA. In addition, the College has a modest level of commercial income.

At the time of reporting, NCI has approximately 5,500 learners enrolled on programmes clustered within two Schools - Business and Computing. NCI offers 120 full-time and part-time QQI accredited programmes, across Business, Computing, Education, ICT and Psychology at Levels 6-9 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). In addition, from October 2019 onwards, Level 10 Research Degrees are available through a Memorandum of Agreement with Maynooth University. NCI also offers programmes awarded by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). Several of our programmes are recognised by professional bodies, including the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) and the Teaching Council of Ireland for Further Education teachers. NCI is also the largest provider in Ireland of Chartered Institute of Professional Development (CIPD) accredited programmes in Human Resource Management.

NCI's Academic Strategy 2019-2024

NCI's [Academic Strategy \(2019-2024\)](#) is the road map for the continuance of our journey and outlines the overarching academic framework for the College. It outlines a direction of travel for NCI and is a clear articulation of our academic aspirations for not only the next five years but beyond. This strategy prompts us to look to a future NCI with an enhanced role and impact on the HE landscape within the region of Dublin, nationally and internationally. It exhorts us to reimagine NCI as a college with a vibrant undergraduate and postgraduate community, encompassing an expanded academic portfolio of learning, teaching, research and community offerings.

Academic DNA

Our academic DNA (shown below) has been articulated to clearly demonstrate the values and imbued characteristics distinctive to the NCI experience and to the NCI graduate.

These are areas in which NCI strives to excel and, in turn, seeks to embed across all staff, students and graduates.

These attributes of the NCI graduate are aligned with the College's vision, mission and values, and form the foundation of the academic strategy 2019 - 2024.



Strategic Themes and Goals 2019 - 2024



Our six strategic themes guide our approach to achieving our strategic goals. Our commitment to this academic strategy is collective - the entire college is responsible for its delivery and achievement.

We will monitor and report on progress against our KPIs and targets annually. We anticipate that, over time, the aims and objectives for each of the strategic goals will remain essentially the same, with the strategies, KPIs and targets being modified in response to changes in the environment in which we operate and changes in our ongoing performance.

NCI successfully completed the QQI Re-Engagement process in June 2019, wherein NCI's Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES) and Handbook were formally approved. Further detail on NCI's Re-Engagement with QQI can be found in [Re-Engagement Panel Report](#). This is NCI's first AQR for QQI.

1.0 Internal QA Framework

Throughout Part A, unless specified, there have been no material changes to NCI's QAES policies and procedures since they were formally approved on 13th June 2019 following NCI's successful reengagement with QQI. Each QAES chapter aligns with ESG Standards and Guidelines, QQI Core and Sector Specific QA guidelines. As indicated in Part B, a wholesale review and refresh of the QAES is scheduled to be completed in the next reporting period.

1.1 Governance and Management of Quality

NCI's governance and management structures, including roles and responsibilities for quality are outlined in Chapter 2 of the QAES. The QAES chapters indicated below also identify the opportunities and mechanisms for learners and staff to inform and engage in NCI's academic governance and quality management structures.

| NCI Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES) | |
|---|---|
| Relevant Handbook Chapters Approved by QQI in the 2019 Revalidation Process | Material change made and approved within 2019/2020 reporting period |
| Chapter 1: Introduction | No material changes |
| Chapter 2: Quality Assurance and Enhancement System | No material changes |
| Chapter 5: Learning and Teaching Environment | No material changes |
| Chapter 7: Support Services for Learners | No material changes |

1.2 Linked Providers, Collaborative and Transnational Provision

NCI is not a Designated Awarding Body (DAB), therefore there are no linked providers involved in the delivery of the College's programmes and the College is not involved in making any Joint Awards. The policies and procedures for collaborative and transnational provision are contained in Chapter 3: Section 6 and 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*. NCI does not have any arrangements for the transnational delivery of programmes. Further details on active articulation arrangements and collaborations are presented in AQR Section 9.3.

| NCI Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES) | |
|---|---|
| Relevant Handbook Chapters Approved by QQI in the 2019 Revalidation Process | Material change made and approved within 2019/2020 reporting period |
| Chapter 3: Programme Development, Validation and Evaluation | No material changes |

2.0 Programme Development and Delivery

2.1 Programme Development and Approval

The policies and procedures for the development and approval of programmes are contained in QAES Chapter 3 and are aligned with QQI's guidelines to reflect the devolved responsibilities conferred to NCI in 2018. While there have been no material changes during the reporting period to the policies and procedures for the development and approval of academic programmes, NCI reviewed and revised the policies and procedures for the design, delivery and management of apprenticeship programmes in preparation for the validation of the BA (Hons) in Recruitment Practice. These policies and procedures are now aligned with the following regulatory and quality assurance guidelines:

- QQI's *Topic-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programme* (June 2016)
- SOLAS Handbook for Developing a National Apprenticeship (May 2017)
- SOLAS Apprenticeship Code of Practice for Employers and Apprentices

The updated policies and procedures relating to the provision of apprenticeship programmes were submitted to a QQI validation panel as a draft in December 2019 and received Academic Council approval in April 2020.

| NCI Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES) | |
|---|--|
| Relevant Handbook Chapters Approved by QQI in the 2019 Revalidation Process | Material change made and approved within 2019/2020 reporting period |
| Chapter 3: Programme Development, Validation and Evaluation | No material changes |
| Chapter 12: Provision of Apprenticeship Programmes | Significant revisions completed in 2019 and approved by Academic Council in April 2020 |

2.2 Admission, Progression, Recognition & Certification

The policies and procedures relating to admission, progression, recognition and certification are contained with Chapters 4 and 6 as outlined below and are aligned with QQI's *Policy Restatement on Access, Transfer and Progression* (2015).

| NCI Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES) | |
|---|---|
| Relevant Handbook Chapters Approved by QQI in the 2019 Revalidation Process | Material change made and approved within 2019/2020 reporting period |
| Chapter 4: Assessment | No material changes |
| Chapter 6: Admission, Registration and Curriculum | No material changes |

2.3 Procedures for Making Awards

Chapter 4: Assessment contains the policies and procedures relating to the authentication and approval of assessment results (Section 4.4 and Section 4.11, respectively) and the certification of higher education awards (Section 4.18).

| NCI Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES) | |
|--|--|
| Relevant Handbook Chapters Approved by QQI in the 2019 Revalidation Process | Material change made and approved within 2019/2020 reporting period |
| Chapter 4: Assessment | No material changes |

2.4 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Despite deploying a range of short-term alternative teaching, learning and assessment practices in line with QQI's *Guiding Principles for Alternative Assessments* between April 2020 - August 2021, no material changes were made to NCI's QAES in the reporting period. NCI's longstanding experience in blended delivery, which eased the transition to online teaching, learning and assessment throughout the COVID crisis, is based on policies aligned with QQI's *Topic-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes*.

| NCI Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES) | |
|--|--|
| Relevant Handbook Chapters Approved by QQI in the 2019 Revalidation Process | Material change made and approved within 2019/2020 reporting period |
| Chapter 4: Assessment | No material changes |
| Chapter 5: Learning and Teaching Environment | No material changes |
| Chapter 13: Technology Mediated Learning | No material changes |

3.0 Learner Resources and Support

The general policies and procedures relating to physical and digital learner resources and supports are contained in the chapters outlined below. Policies outlined in Chapter 7 (Section 12) outline the specific supports for international learners aligned with QQI's *Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners*.

| NCI Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES) | |
|--|--|
| Relevant Handbook Chapters Approved by QQI in the 2019 Revalidation Process | Material change made and approved within 2019/2020 reporting period |
| Chapter 4: Assessment | No material changes |
| Chapter 5: Learning and Teaching Environment | No material changes |
| Chapter 7: Support Services for Learners | No material changes |
| Chapter 12: Apprenticeships | Significant rewrite approved in April 2020 as outlined in 2.1 above |

| | |
|--|---------------------|
| Chapter 13: Technology Mediated Learning | No material changes |
|--|---------------------|

4.0 QA of Research Activities and Programmes

The quality assurance of research activities and programmes at NCI is fully integrated into the College's overall QAES, governing all programmes of education and training and the provision of services to students. The policies and procedures contained in Chapter 11 are aligned with QQI's *Topic-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Research Degree Programmes* (2017).

NCI entered into a non-exclusive academic association with Maynooth University in October 2019, with the objective of enhancing the research capabilities of both institutions in subject disciplines offered by both institutions through the co-delivery and supervision of PhDs. Changes to the QAES were not required in the reporting period but will be actioned in the QAES refresh alongside the development of the new NCI Research Strategy in 2021.

| NCI Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES) | |
|--|--|
| Relevant Handbook Chapters Approved by QQI in the 2019 Revalidation Process | Material change made and approved within 2019/2020 reporting period |
| Chapter 11: Research | No material changes |

5.0 Staff Recruitment, Development and Support

In line with the appointment of a new Director of Human Resources and a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager in 2019, two new sub-policies - a Flexible Working Policy and an Equality, Diversity and Inclusions Policy - were prepared and approved in the 2020/21 reporting period. Commitments to Athena Swan Principles in 2019/2020 helped NCI achieve the Athena Swan Bronze Award in 2020/21.

| NCI Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES) | |
|--|--|
| Relevant Handbook Chapters Approved by QQI in the 2019 Revalidation Process | Material change made and approved within 2019/2020 reporting period |
| Chapter 8: Staff Recruitment and Development | No material changes |

6.0 Information and Data Management

The appointment of a new Information Governance and Data Protection Officer in 2019 saw the development of a range of new policies approved throughout 2019-2020. These include:

- The privacy statement policy
- The data breach incident procedure
- The personal data risk classification scheme
- The Portable Storage and Bring Your Own Device policies
- The Bring Your Own Device Policy

QAES will be updated in the next reporting period as part of the wider refresh of the QAES handbook to incorporate these new policies. Chapter 9, which includes the NCI Data Protection Policy and Privacy

Statement, complies with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), while the Freedom of Information Publication Scheme and the Freedom of Information Request Procedure meet the responsibilities and requirements set out in the *Freedom of Information Act* (2014).

| NCI Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES) | |
|--|--|
| Relevant Handbook Chapters Approved by QQI in the 2019 Revalidation Process | Material change made and approved within 2019/2020 reporting period |
| Chapter 9: Information Governance and Compliance | No material changes |

7.0 Public Information and Communication

Public information and communication about NCI's programmes of education and training are indicated in Chapter 6 (Section 2) and within Chapter 10. It is coordinated and monitored by the Marketing and Student Recruitment Department (MSRD), who ensure accuracy and consistency across all media platforms.

| NCI Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES) | |
|--|--|
| Relevant Handbook Chapters Approved by QQI in the 2019 Revalidation Process | Material change made and approved within 2019/2020 reporting period |
| Chapter 6: Admissions, Registration and Curriculum | No material changes |
| Chapter 10: Public Information | No material changes |

8.0 Monitoring and Periodic Review

The policies and procedures relating to the monitoring and periodic review of NCI's programmes of education and training are outlined in the Chapters below. In response to the 2019 Re-Engagement process, a review and refresh of the NCI Annual programme monitoring and evaluation process will be undertaken in the next reporting period and the QAES will be updated accordingly. Monitoring and Periodic Reviews of programmes are explicit features of NCI's Programme Lifecycle Management structure launched in the 2020/21 Academic Year.

| NCI Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES) | |
|--|--|
| Relevant Handbook Chapters Approved by QQI in the 2019 Revalidation Process | Material change made and approved within 2019/2020 reporting period |
| Chapter 2: Quality Assurance and Enhancement System | No material changes |
| Chapter 3: Programme Development, Validation and Evaluation | No material changes |
| Chapter 4: Assessment | No material changes |
| Chapter 5: Learning and Teaching Environment | No material changes |

9.0 Details of Arrangements with Third Parties

9.1 Arrangements with PRSBs, Awarding Bodies, QA Bodies

| Type of arrangement | Total Number |
|---------------------|--------------|
| PRSBs | 9 |
| Awarding bodies | 2 |
| QA bodies | 1 |

| | |
|---|--|
| 1. Type of arrangement - Awarding Body & QA Body | |
| Name of body: | Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) |
| Programme titles and links to publications | Validated programmes and corresponding publications can be accessed here . |
| Date of accreditation or last review | 13 th June 2019 |
| Date of next review | TBC |

| | |
|---|---|
| 2. Type of arrangement - Awarding Body | |
| Name of body: | Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) |
| Programme titles and links to publications | Award in Coaching and Consulting Award in Digital and Blended Learning Award in Employment Law and Employee Relations Award in Reward Management Certificate in Human Resource Management Certificate in Learning and Development Diploma in Human Resource Management Diploma in Learning and Development |
| Date of accreditation or last review | 2015 |
| Date of next review | 2021/22 |

| | |
|--|---|
| 3. Type of arrangement - PSRB | |
| Name of body: | Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) |
| Programme titles and links to publications | BA Hons Accounting and Finance (PG21951) BA Hons Accounting and Finance (PG22719) 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 | N/A |
| Date of next review | N/A |

| | |
|--|--|
| 4. Type of arrangement - PSRB | |
| Name of body: | Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI) |
| Programme titles and links to publications | BA Hons Accounting and Finance (PG21951) BA Hons Accounting and Finance (PG22719) 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 | N/A |
| Date of next review | N/A |

| | |
|--|--|
| 5. Type of arrangement - PSRB | |
| Name of body: | Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) |
| Programme titles and links to publications | Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in HRM Strategy and Practice (PG21802) Postgraduate Diploma in HRM (PG21880) |
| Date of accreditation or last review | Reviewed Q3 2015 |
| Date of next review | 2021/22 |

| | |
|--|--|
| 6. Type of arrangement - PSRB | |
| Name of body: | Certified Public Accountants (CPA) |
| Programme titles and links to publications | BA Hons Accounting and Finance (PG21951) BA Hons Accounting and Finance (PG22719) 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 | |
| Date of next review | 2021/2022 |

| | |
|--|---|
| 7. Type of arrangement - PSRB | |
| Name of body: | Institute of Commercial Management (ICM) |
| Programme titles and links to publications | Diploma in Marketing Advertising and Public Relations |
| Date of accreditation or last review | N/A |
| Date of next review | Arrangement ended within the reporting period. Programme no longer offered by NCI |

| | |
|--|---|
| 8. Type of arrangement - PSRB | |
| Name of body: | Mediators' Institute of Ireland (MII) |
| Programme titles and links to publications | Masters in Human Resource (PG21879) 1 module - Mediation - accepted for MMI Membership |
| Date of accreditation or last review | N/A |
| Date of next review | MII re-accreditation process to be completed aligned to the revalidation of the MSc in Human Resource Management in 2021/22 |

| | |
|--|--|
| 9. Type of arrangement - PSRB | |
| 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 | November 2019 |
| Date of next review | Interim review January 2022 |

| | |
|--|---|
| 10. Type of arrangement - PSRB | |
| 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 | May 2020 |
| Date of next review | TBC |

| | |
|--|--|
| 11. Type of arrangement - PSRB | |
| 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 | May 2020 |
| Date of next review | TBC |

9.2 Collaborative Provision

| Type of arrangement | Total number |
|------------------------------|--------------|
| Joint research degrees | 0 |
| Joint/double/multiple awards | 0 |
| Collaborative programmes | 6 |
| Franchise programmes | 0 |
| Linked providers (DABs only) | 0 |

| | |
|--|---|
| 1. Collaborative provision | 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. |
| Name of body (/bodies): | SIPTU College |
| Programme titles and links to publications | Certificate in Trade Union Studies (PG24390) |
| Date of last review | 27 th May 2020 |
| Date of next review | TBC (Q2 2025) |

| | |
|--|---|
| 2. Collaborative provision | 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. |
| Name of body (/bodies): | Quality Matters/The Wheel |
| Programme titles and links to publications | Certificate in MIS and Social Impact Measurement (PG22529) Certificate in Non-Profit Leadership and Management (PG22526) Certificate in Project Management and Implementation Science (PG22528) Certificate in Social Enterprise and Entrepreneurship (PG22527) |
| Date of last review | 20 th July 2016 |
| Date of next review | TBC (2021/22 academic year) |

| | |
|--|---|
| 3. Collaborative provision | These programmes were co-designed by the Irish League of Credit Unions and the School of Business. Once validated by QQI, NCI is responsible for the delivery and monitoring of the programmes. |
| Name of body (/bodies): | Irish League of Credit Unions |
| Programme titles and links to publications | Certificate in Credit Union Business (PG23937) Diploma in Financial Services for Credit Unions (PG23938) |
| Date of last review | 20 th December 2018 |
| Date of next review | TBC (2022/23 academic year) |

| | |
|--|--|
| 4. Collaborative provision | 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. |
| Name of body (/bodies): | Department of Social Protection (DSP) |
| Programme titles and links to publications | 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 last review | 25 th September 2018 |
| Date of next review | TBC (2022/23 academic year) |

| | |
|--|--|
| 5. Collaborative provision | NCI is the Coordinating Provider for the provision of this apprenticeship programme. |
| Name of body (/bodies): | Financial Services Ireland |
| Programme titles and links to publications | Higher Certificate in International Financial Services (PG23383) Higher Diploma in Science in Financial Analytics (PG23405) |
| Date of last review | 19 th July 2017 |
| Date of next review | TBC (2021/22 academic year) |

| | |
|--|--|
| 6. Collaborative provision | NCI is the Coordinating Provider for the provision of this apprenticeship programme. |
| Name of body (/bodies): | National Recruitment Federation |
| Programme titles and links to publications | Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Recruitment Practice (PG24255) |
| Date of last review | 11 th June 2020 |
| Date of next review | TBC (2022/23 academic year) |

9.3 Articulation Agreements

| | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| Articulation agreements - Total number | 9 (3 International and 6 Domestic) |
|---|------------------------------------|

| | |
|--|---|
| 1. Articulation agreement: | |
| Name of body (/bodies): | Hebei University |
| Programme titles and links to publications | Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Human Resource Management (PG22723) |
| Date of agreement/arrangement or last review | Reviewed May 2017 |
| Date of next review | TBC (2021/22) |
| Detail of the agreement | Students complete three years of the Bachelor 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: | |
| Name of body (/bodies): | Yunnan Normal University |
| Programme titles and links to publications | Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Accounting and Finance (PG22719) |
| Date of agreement/arrangement or last review | Reviewed May 2018 |
| Date of next review | TBC (Q2 2022) |
| Detail of the agreement | Students complete three years of the Bachelor Degree in Accounting in Yunnan Normal University before completing Award Stage in Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Accounting and Finance. |

| | |
|--|--|
| 3. Articulation agreement: | |
| Name of body (/bodies): | Nanchang Hangkong University |
| Programme titles and links to publications | Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Computing (PG24355) |
| Date of agreement/arrangement or last review | Commencing September 2021 |
| Date of next review | TBC (Q3 2025) |
| Detail of the agreement | Students complete three years of Bachelor Degree in Network Engineering in Nanchang Hangkong University before completing Award Stage in Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Computing. |

| | |
|--|--|
| 4. 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 agreement/arrangement or last review | Reviewed October 2015 |
| Date of next review | TBC (2021/22 academic year) |
| 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: | |
| Name of body (/bodies): | Rathmines College of Further Education |
| Programme titles and links to publications | Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Computing (PG24355) |
| Date of agreement/arrangement or last review | Reviewed April 2020 |
| Date of next review | TBC (2024/25 academic year) |
| 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: | |
| 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 agreement/arrangement or last review | Reviewed October 2015 |
| Date of next review | TBC (2020/21 academic year) |
| 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: | |
| 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 agreement/arrangement or last review | Reviewed April 2020 |
| Date of next review | TBC (2024/25 academic year) |

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| 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: | |
| 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 agreement/arrangement or last review | Reviewed October 2015 |
| Date of next review | TBC (2020/21 academic year) |
| 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: | |
| 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 agreement/arrangement or last review | Reviewed October 2015 |
| Date of next review | TBC (2020/21 academic year) |
| 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. |

[Higher Education Institution]
2021

Annual Quality Report
National College of Ireland
PART B: INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE
ENHANCEMENT & IMPACT
Reporting Period 2019-2020

PART B: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM

1.0 Quality Implementation and Developments

1.1 Strategic QA Updates

Academic Strategy 2019 - 2024 Launched

NCI's [Academic Strategy \(2019-2024\)](#) was approved by the Governing Body in May 2019 and launched during the reporting period. Several internal plans and strategies, including the [Early Learning Initiative \(ELI\) Five Year Plan \(2020-2025\)](#) and the [Quality Improvement and Effectiveness Plan \(QIEP\)](#), were prepared in response to demonstrate alignment to the delivery of the strategic themes and goals of the Academic Strategy. The QIEP was also designed against the outcomes of the 2019 QCI Re-Engagement Process. QIE activities against the Academic Strategy themes within this reporting period include:

| No | Strategic Theme | Action | Impact/Outcome |
|----|--------------------------------|--|---|
| 1 | Outstanding Student Experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supported NCI's engagement with the NStEP initiative and co-designed and delivered training with the NCI Students Union for student representatives 2019-2020 Managed NCI's engagement with Student.Survey.ie, resulting in an increase in participation from the previous reporting year Managed the NCI participation in the INDEX survey to enhance investment in NCI's digital infrastructure Conducted a survey in April 2020 of the student experience following the March 2020 COVID lockdown Academic Risk Register and COVID Management and Mitigation Action Plan launched to ensure continuing quality in teaching, learning, assessment and support structures throughout the COVID crisis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforced the importance of empowering and engaging students to inform effective decision-making in NCI Outcomes of the student voice arising from student surveys conducted in the reporting period analysed and used to trigger discussion and action at an Executive, Academic Operations Committee and Academic Council level COVID alternative arrangements monitored quarterly by Academic Council and reported to the Executive and Governing Body. |
| 2 | Global Impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participated in the HEA's Review of NCI's engagement in the Erasmus+ Programme | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informs NCI's planning and commitments as signatories to the post Erasmus + programme to be undertaken 2021-2027. |
| 3 | Lifelong Learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitored the temporary redesign of NCI's policies and procedures within the COVID crisis to ensure alternative arrangements built upon existing investments and experiences in blended and online delivery. Engaged in discussions with QQI on the validation and revalidation of NCI's part-time and blended delivery programmes designed to maximise access for life-long learners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCI's relatively smooth transition to fully online COVID alternative teaching, learning, support and assessment practices noted in student and staff feedback. NCI in dialogue with QQI to pilot 100% online programmes - including new micro-credentials - in the next reporting period |
| 4 | Socially Engaged | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provided guidance to programme teams undergoing programme validation and re-validation to embed explicitly ethics, data | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides evidence of NCI's impact and commitments to Athena Swan, ethics, social engagement and good |


| | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|---|---|
| | | <p>governance and diversity/inclusion into the curriculum design process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contributed to the final draft of the ELI Strategy 2020-2025 which included the establishment of a new Centre for Expertise, Research and Innovation (CERI) in January 2020. | <p>governance in alignment with NCI's DNA commitments</p> |
| 5 | Enterprise Focused | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed a wholesale refresh of the NCI Policies and Procedures for Apprenticeship programmes to support the validation of the new BA (Honours) Recruitment Practice apprenticeship programme | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures alignment with QQI and SOLAS guidelines and requirements for the National Apprenticeship Programme |
| 6 | Recognised and Respected | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Memorandum of Agreement signed with Maynooth University in November 2019 for the delivery of Level 9 programmes QIE team members participated as panel members, chair and secretary on QQI Re-engagement panels, validation and revalidation panels QIE team members participated in national consultations, events and launches including QQI, NStEP, Student.survey.ie and the INDEx Survey QIE Director also a member of the QQI instigated National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) President member of QQI POAC Vice-President became President Elect of the International Association of Jesuit Business Schools and Council member of the Irish Academy of Management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides greater opportunities for NCI learners to progress to Level 9 and be co-supervised and supported by NCI staff and support services. Ensures NCI actively engages with, informs and is informed by experiences across the HE sector nationally and internationally Enables NCI to refresh and benchmark communications, practices and policies for academic integrity against national and international best practice exemplars. |

COVID 19 Alternative Arrangements

Semester 2 of the 2019/20 academic year saw the implementation of a wide range of alternative arrangements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. An NCI Academic Risk Register and COVID-19 Contingency Mitigation and Management Action Plan was developed, mapped against QQI's *Guiding Principles for Alternative Arrangements*, published in March 2020. It was designed to inform and capture Executive Group actions and decisions, and to ensure the continued quality of teaching, learning, assessment activities and support practices throughout and beyond the crisis. The Academic Risk Register was approved by the Executive Group on 9th April 2020, ratified by Academic Council on 22nd April 2020 and the Governing Body Risk Committee on 12th May 2020. The Register was updated monthly following decisions made within Academic Operations Committee and the Executive Group, and monitored quarterly by the Academic Council and Governing Body Risk Committee.

NCI provided regular updates to QQI highlighting the different COVID-19 contingency arrangements implemented during [Semester 2 of the 2019/20 academic year](#) and during [Semester 1 of the 2020/21 academic year](#). Guidance was published on the NCI website under COVID-19 FAQs to enhance clarity and consistency of communications with key stakeholders. NCI also contributed to QQI's *The Impact of COVID-19 Modifications to Teaching, Learning and Assessment in Irish Further Education and Training and Higher Education (2020)* on the sector's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The need to prioritise and pivot resources to support alternative arrangements throughout the crisis did negatively impact on planned activities, including revalidations. However, as reported in Sections 2 and 4 below, there were many positive activities initiated and innovations undertaken in response to the crisis.

1.2 Update on Planned QA Objectives identified in response to QQI-Re-engagement

| QQI RE-ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN 2019-2020 Progress Report | | |
|---|--|---|
| |  | |
| QQI Report Advice | Actions and Timelines to implementation | |
| Theme | Actions Proposed | Progress Update |
| Academic Governance | A Quality Improvement and Effectiveness Plan (QIEP) 2020-2024 to be launched following Executive Team approval. | In Progress. Reprofiled for launch in next reporting period due to COVID-19 prioritisation |
| | Academic Council (AC) self-assessment undertaken and AC Terms of Reference/Membership refreshed in advance of a wider refresh of the NCI academic governance structure. | Completed |
| | Academic governance refresh process completed, undertaken through co-design approach with staff and students. | In Progress. Reprofiled for launch in next reporting period due to COVID-19 prioritisation |
| | Renew NCI's subscription to the National Student Engagement Programme NStEP) and co-deliver NCI Class Rep Training with the Students' Union 2019/2020. | Completed |
| | Student Voice structures reviewed and refreshed through a co-design process with staff and student representatives. | In Progress. Reprofiled for launch in next reporting period due to COVID-19 prioritisation |
| | College data and reporting systems reviewed and refreshed to enhance data accuracy, completeness, accessibility and utilisation within decision-making at a programme and institutional level. | In Progress. Reprofiled for launch in next reporting period due to COVID-19 prioritisation |
| Programme Management Lifecycle | Develop and launch a new Programme Management Lifecycle (PML) structure to ensure all NCI programmes are alignment with institutional strategic objectives, and can evidence financial viability, sustainability, relevance and responsiveness to stakeholder needs. | In Progress. Reprofiled for launch in next reporting period overseen by new Executive Sub-Group |
| | Refresh and relaunch the NCI annual programme monitoring structure to strengthen evidence of programme health, relevance, quality and impact. The outcomes of which will be analysed annually at an institutional level and inform Academic Council and Executive decision making and investments. | |
| | Review of Assessment and Examination Policies and Procedures completed by a working group of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee and outcomes implemented thereafter. | |
| Compliance | New Regulatory Framework to be designed and launched to increase awareness and understanding of compliance obligations on staff and students alongside minimise risks. | In Progress. Reprofiled for launch in next reporting period due to COVID-19 prioritisation |
| | NCI staff recruitment policies and procedures to be regularly reviewed (at least annually) to ensure continued compliance with Garda vetting regulations. | Completed |
| Collaborations | Establish and maintain a collaborative partnership register that includes a copy of each partnership contract. | In Progress. Reprofiled for launch in next reporting period due to COVID-19 prioritisation |
| | Collaborative Partnership Guides prepared and published for use by internal and external stakeholders. | |

1.3 Governance and Management

1.3.1 QA Governance Meetings Schedule

| Body | Meeting Dates |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Governing Body | 18 th October 2019 |
| | 6 th December 2019 |
| | 30 th January 2020 |
| | 13 th March 2020 |
| | 22 nd May 2020 |
| | 29 th July 2020 |
| Academic Council | 9 th October 2019 |
| | 4 th December 2019 |
| | 22 nd April 2020 |
| | 1 st July 2020 |
| Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee | 6 th November 2019 |
| | 12 th February 2020 |
| | 25 th March 2020 |
| Research Committee | 27 th November 2019 |
| | 17 th April 2020 |
| | 26 th June 2020 |

1.3.2 QA Leadership and Management Structural Developments

In January 2020, the NCI Executive Team approved a business case to restructure and relaunch the QASS Team into the Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (QIE) Team. This repositioning was approved following consultation with key internal stakeholders, including Academic Council, to enhance NCI’s ability to evidence programme and institutional relevance, currency, quality and impact. The repositioning reflects a maturity in NCI’s quality culture following the successful outcome of NCI’s reengagement with QQI in Q2-Q3 2019..

The QIE Team is led by a new Executive Director, who joined NCI in August 2019. QIE in NCI is structured around four key themes that enhance a culture of continuous quality improvement.

Key priorities and deliverables of the QIE Team are presented in a Quality Improvement and Effectiveness Plan (QIEP) mapped against the NCI Academic Strategy (2020-2024) and the commitments outlined in QQI Re-Engagement Action Plan. These include a refresh of the academic governance structure and stakeholder engagement activities to inform effective and timely decision-making.



1.4 Internal Monitoring and Review

1.4.1 Overview of Periodic Reviews

| Unit of review for which report has been published during reporting period | Date of completion/reason for conducting review (if not planned) or non-completion (if planned but not conducted) | Links to relevant publications |
|--|---|---|
| Programme Validation: | | |
| BA (Hons) in Recruitment Practice (<i>Internal Panel</i>) | 18 th September 2019 | Internal Review Panel Report |
| BA (Hons) in Recruitment Practice (<i>QQI Validation Panel</i>) | 26 th February 2020 | Independent Evaluation Report |
| Certificate in Computing | 5 th February 2020 | Independent Evaluation Report |
| Programme Review and Revalidation: | | |
| MSc & PGDip in Cloud Computing | 29 November 2019 | Independent Evaluation Report |
| BSc (Hons) in Computing | 5 th February 2020 | Independent Evaluation Report |
| Higher Certificate in Science in Computing | 5 th February 2020 | Independent Evaluation Report |
| Higher Diploma in Science in Computing | 5 th February 2020 | Independent Evaluation Report |
| BA (Hons) Early Childhood Education | 21 st February 2020 | Independent Evaluation Report |
| MA & PGDip in Educational Practice | 2/3 rd March 2020 | Independent Evaluation Report |
| Certificate in Business Analysis | 20 th May 2020 | Independent Evaluation Report |
| Certificate in Trade Union Studies | 27 th May 2020 | Independent Evaluation Report |

| Thematic/Department/Support Service Review: | | |
|--|--|-----|
| HEA Review of NCI's engagement in Erasmus+ Programme | Jan 2021 | N/A |
| Administrative Team Review | 2019/2020 Confidential report. Outcomes enacted in next reporting period. | N/A |
| Academic Governance Review | 2019/2020 In progress. Due to be completed in next reporting period. | N/A |
| Student Voice Structure Review | 2019/20 In progress. Due to be completed in next reporting period. | N/A |

1.4.2 Expert Review Teams/Panels¹ involved in IQA

(i) Expert Review Team/Panel Size and Related Processes

| | Total | Academic Schools/ Department | Professional Services/ Support Unit | Approval/Review of Linked Provider | Programme Validation | Programme Review & Revalidation | Other |
|---|-------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|-------|
| Number of review/ evaluation processes | 8 | | | | 2 | 6 | |
| <i>of those:</i> | | | | | | | |
| On-site processes | 6 | | | | 6 | | |
| Desk reviews | | | | | | | |
| Virtual processes | 2 | | | | | 2 | |
| Average panel size for each process type* | 5 | | | | 5 | 5 | |

* excluding secretary if not a full panel member

(ii) Composition of Expert Review Teams/Panels involved in IQA

| Type of Expert/ Role on Panel | Total | Gender | | | Internal | National | International | | | Institution Type | |
|----------------------------------|-------|--------|--------|-----------------------|----------|----------|---------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------|
| | | Male | Female | Other, or unspecified | | | UK, incl. NI | Other European | Outside of Europe | Similar | Different |
| Chair | 8 | 6 | 2 | | 1 | 7 | | | | 4 | 4 |
| Secretary | 8 | | 3 | | 1 | 7 | | | | 5 | 3 |
| Academic/ Discipline Specific | 15 | 2 | 13 | | | 9 | 4 | 2 | | 1 | 14 |
| Student Rep | 6 | 3 | 3 | | | 6 | | | | 1 | 5 |
| QA Expert | 1 | | 1 | | 1 | | | | | 1 | |
| External Industry /Third Mission | 10 | 7 | 3 | | | 10 | | | | | 10 |

¹ QQI acknowledges that the terminology used to describe the groups of individuals that conduct peer review/evaluation varies from institution to institution.

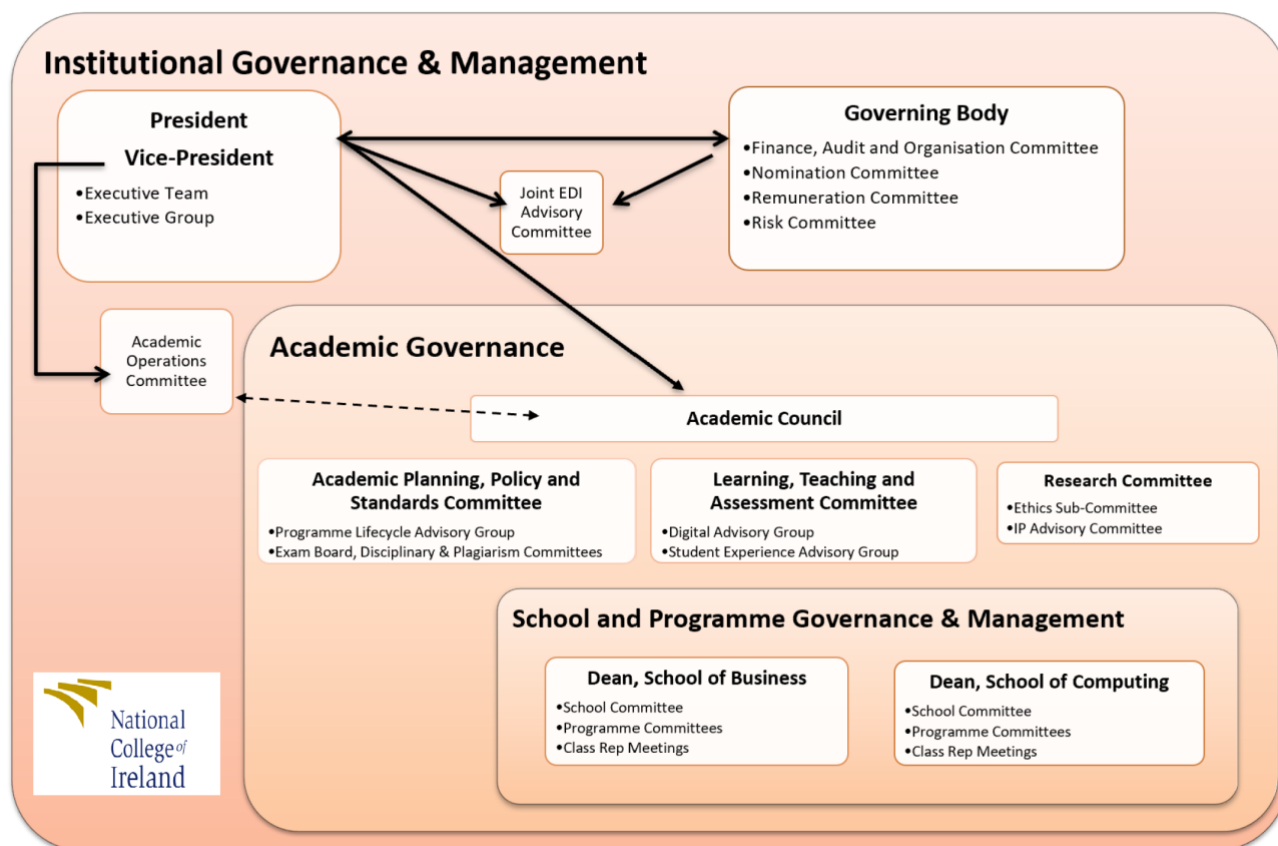
2.0 IQA System - Enhancement and Impacts

Governance and Management of Quality

In December 2019, Academic Council approved a commitment to refresh the NCI academic governance structure as a key commitment within the QQI Re-Engagement Action Plan. A self-assessment review conducted by Academic Council in January 2020 instigated this process, resulting in a refreshed Terms of Reference and Membership being approved by Governing Body in May 2020. The refresh provided an opportunity to clarify the role 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. Slower progress than anticipated was made with respect to the refresh of the three Academic Council sub-committees due largely to the COVID crisis. This included no meetings by the Academic Planning, Policy and Standards Sub-Committee within the reporting period. Each of the sub-committees will be refreshed within the next reporting period with a view to increasing consistency, visibility and connectivity.

The governance and management structure approved by Academic Council is outlined below:

NCI Academic Governance Structure (Refreshed)



At its June 2020 meeting, Academic Council noted the need to update the NCI QAES to maintain accuracy and currency with internal and external developments, requirements and needs. A minor update was proposed in advance of the 2020/21 Academic Year. Given the importance of consultation with key stakeholders within the review process, Academic Council approved in October 2020 that this review process should be completed over a 12-month period, led by the QIE Director, for approval at the June 2021 Academic Council meeting.

Programmes of Education and Training

A substantial schedule of programme validations and revalidations was undertaken within the reporting period as highlighted in Section 1.4. The successful validation of Ireland's first QQI Level 8 Honours Degree in recruitment (BA (Hons) in Recruitment Practice) was a significant achievement and the result of a close working relationship with the recruitment industry Consortium Steering Group.

Six panel events were held between September 2019 and March 2020, with two revalidation panels being held via Zoom following COVID lockdown restrictions. The Zoom panel meetings were carefully facilitated by the QIE Specialist and informal feedback from panellists and NCI participants was positive about the experience. The shift to online panels highlighted a need for greater guidance to be provided to revalidation participants, resulting in briefing notes being prepared and supplied to NCI staff, students and panel members to provide clarity and guidance on the revalidation process and the roles and responsibilities of those involved. These guidelines will be further enhanced and aligned in the next reporting period with the new QQI revalidation and validation templates published in July 2020. While informal feedback was obtained on the experience of participating in a revalidation process, NCI did not collect formal feedback from participants to enhance future revalidation and validation activities. This will be introduced in the next reporting period.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

NCI's longstanding experience and investments in blended and online teaching, learning and assessment practices and cloud computing were pivotal in our ability to respond rapidly to the emerging COVID crisis in March 2020. Our IT infrastructure was in place and active prior to the crisis, including the use of SharePoint and Microsoft Teams, which was swiftly utilised to support the transition for staff and students to online teaching, learning, assessment activities and support services provision. Our Online Academic Programme Supervisor and Teaching Enhancement Coordinator underpinned and reinforced the transition with mandatory training and guidance provided to all Faculty to support the transition to high quality online delivery. Specific attention and IT solutions were also implemented to maintain integrity within online assessments and examinations. These initiatives were accompanied by increased staff engagement, increased communications from President, VP, Deans and increased HR supports and increased interdepartmental communications, including NCI Student's Union.

An April 2020 student survey was undertaken at the request of the Registrar as part of the COVID-19 mitigations. The survey was open over a two-week period to take the 'pulse' of students and inform immediate communications and actions throughout the May assessment period. 614 students completed the survey, which equates to an 11% response rate. Overall, respondents were positive in confirming access to suitable devices and spaces to support studying from home. They also indicated feeling well informed about the alternative teaching and assessments arrangements imposed due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, they indicated the need for more targeted communications around who to speak to if their internet connectivity fails when they are completing an online assessment or submitting an online assignment. To minimise anxiety in this regard, the Registrar worked closely with the Deans, Directors of Learning and Teaching, Marketing, QIE, and Examination Office staff and IT services. Targeted communications on academic integrity and exam rules and supports were published by the Examinations Team with a co-ordinated campaign led by the Students' Union President to provide reassurance and guidance to students.

Information and Data Management

In May 2020, the QIE Director led the launch of a new NCI Project Steering Group (PSG). Established as a sub-committee of the Executive's Academic Operations Committee, the PSG was designed to enhance institutional effectiveness; evidence-based decision-making and the achievement of NCI's

strategic goals and themes as outlined in the Academic Strategy 2019-2024. The PSG will consider new project proposals - identified within the NCI annual budgeting process (Q1) and make recommendations to Academic Operations Committee and/or the Executive on how each new project addressed a business opportunity or strategic theme, supported by robust analysis of requirements, cost, benefits and risks. The PSG's role is to enhance accountability, connectivity, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness in decision-making and strengthen NCI's ability to allocate resources towards the areas of biggest operational, academic and strategic impact.

Investment was also made in the reporting period to dedicate a resource within the IT Team to coordinate a review and refinement of NCI's data management and reporting systems. The cross-institutional project, which included the QIE Team, sought to clarify reporting needs and requirements for internal and external stakeholders with a view to the utilisation of data from a 'single source of truth'. This work will continue to be refined and reinforced within the next reporting period and the outputs will be used for NCI's proposed Programme Lifecycle Management (PLM) process - including validations and revalidations, as well as within annual internal and external reporting.

February 2020 saw NCI participate in the 2020 Student Survey.ie (formerly ISSE). The survey was conducted over a three-week period coordinated by the QIE Specialist. A 23% response rate (888 students) was achieved, a 1% increase on the previous year's response rate. An analysis of NCI's outcomes from the 2019/2020 student survey as well as the 2019 Irish National Digital Experience (INDEx) Survey was scheduled to be completed in March 2020 to inform effective decision-making. This analysis was postponed to the next reporting period due to COVID prioritization and capacity pressures within QIE. The next reporting period will also include a five-year thematic analysis of recurrent trends arising from engagement in the ISSE 2016-2020. The QIE Director joined the National Student Survey.ie Analysis and Impact Group to enhance the effectiveness and impact of the survey at a national and institutional level.

Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

As identified in Section 1.4, a review of the NCI Student Voice structure was instigated. Guidance and training was secured from Maynooth University Innovation Lab (Mi:Lab) to adopt a human-centred design approach to exploring and tackling challenges to ensure the student voice is effective in demonstrably informing decision-making. A cross-institutional Learner Voice Steering Group of staff and student representatives was established, chaired by the QIE Specialist, and will conclude its work in the next reporting period. While progress was hindered by COVID, the work of the group will seek to maximise visibility and ensure that the student voice - whether received through formal or informal channels - is triangulated to inform decision-making at a programme and institutional level.

A human-centred design approach will also underpin the governance refresh initiated in the reporting period to be completed within 2020/21. Academic Council also approved a review and refresh of the NCI QAES at its June 2020 meeting. This will be undertaken through extensive consultation with key stakeholders internally throughout the next reporting period for approval by Academic Council in June 2021.

An external consultant from the UK led a review of NCI's administrative structures in 2019 with a view to informing decision making and operational planning. The outcomes of the review were considered by the Vice-President, Registrar and Director of Human Resources in advance of wider consultation being undertaken with key stakeholders. The impact of the review will be implemented and discussed in the next reporting period.

2.1 Initiatives within the Institution related to Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity Networking

NCI is a member of the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN). Launched in Q4 2019, the Network was established to inform QQI's planning around the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019*, which empowered QQI to prosecute those who facilitate academic cheating. The NAIN was also designed to enhance sector-led consistency in academic integrity practices, guidance and controls for use across the sector from 2020 onwards. NCI staff also engaged in a range of national, European and international conferences, webinars and networks throughout 2020 to benchmark academic integrity policies and procedures, including the work of the International Centre for Academic Integrity.

COVID-19 Contingency Management and Risk Mitigations

NCI's Academic Risk Register and COVID-19 Contingency Management and Mitigation Plan was designed and launched in April 2020 to monitor a wide range of actions to mitigate risks around the COVID crisis. Mapped against QQI's *Guiding Principles for Alternative Assessment* (March 2020), the Register included a range of measures and mitigations for minimising risks throughout the crisis - around academic integrity within online assessments and examinations. Mitigations included:

- (i) The Learning and Teaching Director, as Chair of the Learning and Teaching Committee, worked alongside the IT Manager to ensure academic integrity controls were in place within Moodle and Turnitin for online assessments and examinations from May 2020 onwards.
- (ii) Utilising NCI experiences in online proctoring for online assessments and examinations.
- (iii) Benchmarking against existing NCI, national and international best practice.
- (iv) Communicating expectations, supports and penalties to staff and students accordingly.
- (v) Agreeing and embedding an Academic Honesty self-declaration statement as part of all online assessment submissions and examinations.
- (vi) Providing staff training and guidance on existing NCI academic integrity policies, procedures and controls.
- (vii) Engaging with the NCI Students' Union to jointly produce a video on academic integrity.

A communication campaign for staff and students was launched in May 2020 to reaffirm expectations for learners to behave at all time with academic integrity, and to inform them of the new laws in relation to provision of cheating services. The campaign included messages from the President, Vice-President, Deans and Students' Union President via email and the NCI Website. The NCI Students' Union President jointly launched a video to help students avoid unintended cheating, emphasising how and where to seek support if struggling to meet assessment requirements. The Executive agreed the campaign would be refreshed in 2020/21 to underpin the October 2020 National Academic Integrity Week.

Data on academic integrity experiences and disciplinary cases throughout 2019/2020 was presented and discussed at the Semester 3 internal and QQI Exam Boards by the Registrar. There was no noted increase in disciplinary cases during the reporting period. Data would remain under review throughout 2020/21. The NCI Academic Integrity policies and procedures were identified as needing updating in 2020/21 to align with COVID-19 experiences and national benchmarks, particularly the work published

by the NAIN. It was agreed the update would be completed within the system-wide review of the NCI Quality Assurance and Enhancement System in the next reporting period.

Teaching and Assessment Design

Within the reporting period, the Teaching Enhancement Team and the Online Academic Programme Supervisor (School of Computing) assisted and guided programme teams on the importance of ensuring academic integrity was embedded into assessment design at the time of validation/revalidation. These resources are, however, quite limited. Within the 2020/21 budgeting and planning process, the Executive will consider expanding resources to support excellence in online teaching, learning and assessment design and delivery excellence from 2021 reflecting on COVID-19 alternative teaching, learning and assessment experiences. The possibility/desirability of QQI validated programmes being available for 100% online delivery from 2021 onwards will be influential in resource-allocation.

Student Support and Guidance

The NCI Library Team implemented a significant programme of work throughout 2019/2020 to support students to meet NCI and national academic integrity expectations. The work of the Library was recognised internally, as winners of the 2019 Presidents Award for Contribution to Student Experience, presented at the November 2019 Graduation Ceremony. The Library Team also received the award for Best Library Team at the Education Awards in February 2020.

The Library allocates significant resources to supporting academic integrity in NCI through LibGuides, LibChats and the [NCI Referencing Guide](#), now in its 5th edition. The guidance and support from the Library Team will continue to be a key resource in the next reporting period, with guidance refreshed to reflect the updates to the NCI academic integrity policy and NAIN publications as appropriate in 2021.

NCI and NCI Students' Union working in partnership

The NCI Students' Union President played a key role in promoting academic integrity within the reporting period. The President is also a member of the NAIN and has worked closely with the Registrar, QIE and NCI's student support and school teams to ensure students are aware of the supports available to them to avoid plagiarism. The Students' Union President is also a member of an NCI Learner Voice Steering Group, which began work in 2020 to enhance the accessibility, transparency and consistency of information provided to students on a range of student voice initiatives. This includes clarifying NCI expectations, policies, procedures and support for academic integrity. The Students' Union and NCI Registrar are presently looking to formalise partnership working relationships, expectations, priorities and reporting arrangements within a Memorandum of Agreement which will be approved in the next reporting period.

3.0 QA Improvement and Enhancement Plans for Upcoming Reporting Period

3.1 QA and QE supporting the Achievement of Strategic Objectives

| No. | NCI Strategic Theme | Relevant objectives | Delivery Lead(s) & Oversight | Planned actions and indicators |
|-----|--------------------------------|---|--|---|
| 1 | Outstanding Student Experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote and recognise students' participation in college-wide activities, which can contribute towards enhancing the college community at NCI, including student representation roles, work experience and helping with a peer-assisted learning scheme Combine our recognised teaching excellence with an outstanding student experience both on-campus, off-campus and online | <p>QIE Specialist & NCISU President</p> <p>Learning & Teaching Committee</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake a student-centred design approach to refresh the NCI Student Voice structure prior to relaunching in 2021. Engage with NStEP and the Students' Union to support the recruitment, training and participation of student representatives within QA & QI processes at NCI. Ensure to the learner voice, gathered through Student.Survey.ie and internal feedback structures is used to monitor the quality of the student experience and inform effective decision-making and appropriate actions. Refresh the annual programme monitoring process to review evidence of consistency of teaching, learning and assessment practices across all validated modes of delivery. |
| 2 | Global Impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that internationalisation, through our International Office, has an appropriate presence and position of influence throughout the college and academic structures Build on the success of our Chinese collaborations, by expanding our academic partnership portfolio across all regions in which we are active Create new support initiatives and advance our existing supports for our international students, alumni and stakeholders | <p>QIE Director & International Director</p> <p>Programme Lifecycle Management Executive Sub-Group</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Review and refresh the terms of reference, membership and effectiveness of the NCI academic governance to maximise efficiency, transparency and impact. Contribute to the design and implementation of the 2021-2024 NCI International Plan, ensuring NCI and National QA requirements and expectations for academic partnerships are clearly articulated and met in partnership agreements. Collaborative Partnership Guides prepared and published for use by internal and external stakeholders. Thematic Review of NCI's International Team and services against the QQI Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Learners completed in 2021. |
| 3 | Lifelong Learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a suite of online programmes, both fee bearing and free, which allow | QIE Director & Deans | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Proactively participate in QQI pilots to validate fully online programmes in response to external stakeholder needs. |

| | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--|---|---|
| | | <p>access to those who otherwise would not be able to avail of an NCI education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to understand and develop educational opportunities for those who are looking to reskill, upskill or avail of education that would not be widely available or affordable to them | <p>Programme Lifecycle Management Executive Sub-Group</p> | <p>3.2. Refresh the NCI QA Handbook (QAES) to include new policies and procedures for ensuring the quality of fully online programmes.</p> <p>3.3. Proactively participate in QQI pilots to develop and validate micro-credentials in response to sector, government and COVID-19 recovery plan needs to upskill/reskill the workforce. This includes the development of P-Tech and ELI micro-credentials in 2021.</p> |
| 4 | Socially Engaged | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed our commitment to social responsibility and sustainability in our curricula, policies, strategies and procedures • Demonstrate and report our main social, environmental and economic impacts | <p>QIE Director</p> <p>Academic Policy and Standards Committee</p> | <p>4.1. Develop and implement a new NCI Programme Lifecycle Management Structure (PLM), which requires programme teams to evidence a commitment to social responsibility and sustainability within new validated and revalidated programmes.</p> <p>4.2. Enhance the accessibility, transparency and utilisation of qualitative and quantitative data to inform effective decision-making and reporting on NCI's responsiveness, relevance and impact to external stakeholders.</p> <p>4.3. Support the gathering and utilisation of evidence of NCI's impact in the community - including the impact of the ELI 5 year plan, the work of the CERl research centre and the impact of micro-credentials for ELI professionals and the P-TECH Initiative.</p> |
| 5 | Enterprise Focused | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to ensure that all programmes are developed to meet current and future workforce demands • Derive maximum benefit from external expertise and participation in national and international networks | <p>QIE Director & QIE Specialist</p> <p>Academic Policy and Standards Committee</p> | <p>5.1. Refresh guidelines and templates for programme validation and revalidation to require robust evidence of programme currency, relevance and demand.</p> <p>5.2. Refresh and relaunch the NCI annual programme monitoring policy and procedures to require evidence of relevance, currency and alignment with government, industry and business needs.</p> <p>5.3. Participate in national and European networking and peer review activities to enhance benchmarking and identify peer reviewers to participate in NCI programme validations and revalidations.</p> |
| 6 | Recognised and Respected | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that both schools, all centres and any other departments actively look for accreditations that improve our profile and allow benchmarking against similar organisations | <p>QIE Director</p> <p>Academic Council</p> | <p>6.1. Identify and implement QIE commitments and actions as articulated in NCI's Athena Swan, ASiAM and QQI Re-Engagement applications and action plans.</p> <p>6.2. Support the School of Business progress towards AACSB accreditation and alignment with professional body requirements in annual programme monitoring and (re)validation processes.</p> |

3.2 Reviews planned for Upcoming Reporting Periods

3.2.1 Reviews planned for Next Reporting Period

| Unit to be reviewed: Sept 2020 - August 2021 | Date of planned review | Date of last review |
|---|------------------------|---------------------|
| Programme Validation | | |
| School of Business: | | |
| Educational Practice for P-TECH (Micro-Credential) | March 2021 | N/A |
| Strategies of Learning and Teaching for P-TECH (Micro-Credential) | March 2021 | N/A |
| Programme Title TBC - Early Learning Initiative (Micro-Credential) | April 2021 | N/A |
| School of Computing: | | |
| Certificate in Emerging Digital Technologies | 16 September 2020 | N/A |
| Software Development Fundamentals (Micro-Credential) | October 2020 | N/A |
| Data Governance and Cyber Security (Micro-Credential) | February 2021 | N/A |
| MSc/PGDip in Artificial Intelligence | September 2021 | N/A |
| Programme Review and Revalidation | | |
| HDip Data Analytics | 28 October 2020 | 2016 |
| <p><i>Note: Within 2021/22, Programme Reviews (self-assessments by programme teams) will be conducted across 42 programmes as part of preparations for programme revalidation. Approximately 15 Peer Review panels are scheduled to be held in 2022 or 2023 following approval to proceed to revalidation by the NCI Executive.</i></p> | | |
| Thematic/Department/Support Service Review | | |
| Academic Governance Structure | Sept 20 - Aug 21 | N/A |
| Student Voice Structure | | 2018/2019 |
| Review and Refresh of Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES) | | |
| Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) Analysis 2016 - 2020 | December 2020 | N/A |
| International Team against QQI Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Learners | March - Aug 21 | N/A |

3.2.2 Reviews planned beyond Next Reporting Period

The reviews planned beyond the next reporting period are outlined in NCI's [Programme Revalidation Schedule \(September 2021 - August 2023\)](#).

4.0 Case Studies - Responses to the Covid-19 Pandemic



Case Study 1: Learner Pod Initiative, NCI School of Business

Introduction and Context:

The NCI School of Business Learner Pod Initiative was developed to mitigate the lack of social interaction experienced by first year students as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Social distancing requirements coupled with ongoing public health advice meant that face to face orientation was not possible. We know from research and past experience that the initial 8-10 weeks of starting college is when learners are most vulnerable to drop out. This initiative was proposed to minimize withdrawals and help new learners develop a sense of belonging and feel supported by their peers.

The concept of the Learner Pods was to provide a space for learners to come together outside of the classroom, to assist learners to make connections to other learners, to develop informal support networks and to create a sense of belonging and connectedness to their programme of study and hence the wider institution. While some class groups and some pockets of learners were connecting and communicating online, we wanted to ensure that no learner was left behind. This initiative provided an initial touch point to ensure that every learner was given the opportunity to meet and engage with other learners from their programme.

Summary of the Initiative:

The Learner Pod Initiative was approved in 2019/2020 and implemented over Weeks 6 to 8 of Semester 1 2020/21. All first-year students, irrespective of whether they were full-time or part-time learners, or studying on postgraduate or undergraduate programmes, were randomly allocated to a Learner Pod of 8-12 learners from their programme of study. Each pod was invited to a 15-minute Microsoft Teams meeting, which was led by a facilitator who took steps to help pod members bond by conducting icebreaker sessions. The session allowed participants to share their experiences and their concerns. Following the meeting, students were encouraged to stay in touch with their fellow pod members through Microsoft Teams and the individual pod channels were maintained to allow for this ongoing contact. In total, 96 learner pods were created and facilitated through this initiative in Semester 1 2020/21. This represented a significant challenge and resource commitment on behalf of the School.

Key Findings:

Following the launch of the Learner Pod Initiative, feedback presented from pod facilitators, class representatives and individual learners showed that students were appreciative of the opportunity to interact with their classmates in a small group setting and felt better supported by NCI. Prior to the launch of the pod meetings, many student groups, particularly international students, expressed concern in Lockdown 1, at the prospect of isolation due to little interaction with their classmates. While NCI student groups were active on social media platforms within Lockdown 1, students were eager for opportunities to socialize with their peers at a programme level. Postgraduate students also confirmed they benefited from the Pod Initiative by forming study groups with their pod members.

Measuring the Impact:

In addition to monitoring student feedback and engagement data, student withdrawals data was identified as a key data set for measuring the impact of the initiative. The January 2021 examination boards would be used to provide quantitative data in relation to the impact of the initiative on student retention and progression. Pre-exam board data from alternative assessments and online examinations completed in Q4 2020 indicated a positive impact across first year programmes.

Conclusion:

NCI's School of Business will continue to gather and review feedback from students, including through the NCI first year student experience survey, to inform decisions on the continuity of the Learning Pod initiative and its potential scalability both across the institution and beyond the COVID crisis. Evidence to date demonstrates students are welcoming the opportunities provided by the Pods to bring classmates together in the virtual learning environment. The School of Business also intends to consider rolling out more of the postgraduate study groups in response to postgraduate student feedback.

In conclusion, the findings of this initiative demonstrate that the Covid-19 Pandemic has greatly impacted the student experience, particularly in terms of peer socialization. The NCI School of Business response to the need for programme-specific peer interaction through the Pod Initiative has been widely welcomed. Despite the logistical and resource challenges, the initiative has been considered successful in providing students with a means to connect with their peers and as a result, students feel more engaged and less isolated within the virtual College environment.

Case Study 2: Maximising Existing Technology for Fully Online Delivery, NCI School of Computing

Introduction and Context:

Lockdown 1 triggered an immediate need within the NCI's School of Computing (SoC) to deliver a swift but smooth transition for staff and students to a fully online environment. While the SoC has longstanding skills and experience in the design and delivery of blended teaching, learning and assessment materials, the COVID Crisis necessitated finding swift and secure technological solutions and applying them to support the transition of the entire portfolio of programmes to an online environment, raising capacity and capability challenges.

Summary of the Initiatives Undertaken:

The School agreed from the outset to maximise technological solutions throughout the transition process. A multi-departmental approach was triggered in April 2020 requiring engagement with a wide range of teams inside and outside of the School. Intensive communications between several key departments were vital to identify technical and pedagogical concerns, challenges and solutions.

Decisions were made to build upon and expand the use of existing NCI and School technologies as swift, sustainable and scalable solutions to aid the smooth transition from a blended to a fully online environment. The rapid identification of existing IT solutions was made possible by cross-institutional problem solving underpinned by an agreement to employ central process automation where possible, thus minimising burden and inefficiency while maximising effectiveness and impact. The main tools used were as follows:

Microsoft Teams (MS Teams): Previous investments in maximising the use of MS Teams by staff pre-COVID significantly aided the transition to fully online activity.

- The migration to full dependency upon MS Teams was aided significantly by existing familiarity, skills and use of the system. Management, faculty and administrative staff were already proficient in the use of MS Teams as a collaborative portal for working, consultation and meetings. Some team meetings were held on MS Teams in advance of Lockdown 1.
- MS Teams was also elected as the SoC live classroom system. Due to its frequently expanding feature set, MS Teams provided an excellent, stable and secure platform for live classes, with largely positive feedback from staff and students.
- The NCI Teaching Enhancement Team also created a private MS Team site for staff to share knowledge, experiences, flag issues and ask questions of colleagues and the Teaching Enhancement Team. This was an important resource and heavily used by faculty - both full time and associate faculty.
- All SoC staff were required to complete a minimum of 2 hours training in online pedagogy and technical training through MS Teams.
- Additionally, the NCI Teaching Enhancement Team organized ongoing sessions throughout the Crisis aimed at upskilling lecturers in the pedagogy of teaching and assessing in an online environment.

Moodle: As NCI's learning management system, Moodle was utilised as a valued asynchronous resource throughout the crisis.

- Moodle provided a robust and consistent central repository for students to find relevant material for each subject. It also allowed faculty to update and adapt teaching, learning and assessment materials as the crisis continued in line with feedback, NCI and QQI guidelines, and gave both students and staff the ability to interact with materials as needed rather than as scheduled.
- A Teaching Enhancement Moodle Page was also launched so NCI staff would have access to a structured Moodle page containing a wealth of video and text-based guides on online teaching, learning and assessment practices. This was an important, valued and heavily used resource by staff in line with their teaching and assessment needs.

A combination of the two systems was also used to underpin Student Support and Guidance Services across the crisis. A cross-institution collaborative approach was undertaken by the NCI Student Services/Orientation Team, Programme Directors, Programme Co-Ordinators and the Online Academic Programme Supervisor. Technical training via MS Teams was provided in live formats at orientation and supported by asynchronous resources held on Moodle. The ability to deliver high quality orientation and provide support to online learners in line with their needs, was a vital step in supporting the smooth transition from blended to fully online learning.

Online Assessments

QQI's *Guiding Principles for Alternative Assessments*, alongside developments internally and nationally around academic integrity, provided key reference points to ensuring robustness, accuracy and integrity in the migration to online assessments. With the support of the NCI Teaching Enhancement Team, Library, Online Academic Programme Supervisor, IT Department, Central Timetabling and the Examination Office, robust IT solutions were identified and implemented to maintain academic integrity across online assessments and examinations. Specific focus was placed on the ability to provide assessments that could be 'personalised' to students to help assess the authenticity of submitted work. For example, many assessments included a range of 'paths' or requirement sets that differed across of cohort. Many of the practices around online assessment and examinations will continue to be utilised in the post-COVID environment as NCI expands its online and blended portfolio of programmes in line with student and stakeholder needs.

Conclusion:

Students and staff throughout the crisis had many challenges, pressures and stresses upon them. The ability to rely upon familiar and existing technology systems to support the transition to fully online services was considered both an efficient and effective solution. The cross-institutional approach undertaken, united the skills and experiences of a range of NCI departments, which helped us build capacity, capabilities and confidence in staff and students during this challenging time. Increased usage and the creation of additional asynchronous approaches to teaching, learning and assessment practices provided an important solution to allow students and staff to fit their work and study commitments around their increasingly busy and stressful schedules. The School of Computing has identified the creation and use of asynchronous materials will be a key strategy moving forwards in the post-COVID world. The continued use of MS Teams and Moodle for teaching, learning and assessment, in addition to supporting students and staff development practices will also be pursued beyond the COVID crisis.

Case Study 3: Migration to Online Exam Boards

Introduction and Context:

As the COVID-19 outbreak disrupted life in Ireland in 2020, NCI, like all education institutions, had to move its teaching, assessment and administration practices online within a short timeline. The NCI IT Department quickly identified Microsoft Teams as the most suitable platform for this transition. While teaching and assessments quickly got underway online, NCI's Examination Office had to identify what other procedures would need to move online, including the hosting and support of examination boards.

Summary of the Initiatives Undertaken:

In NCI, examination boards take place over the course of a week three times a year. Over 100 courses are presented at three separate boards throughout this week. Moving this process online meant the Examinations Office faced the following challenges and secured the following solutions:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Broadsheets: | <p><u>Challenge:</u> How to ensure broadsheets are accessible. The broadsheets that had been in use for examination boards prior to COVID-19 were not easily readable on a screen.</p> <p><u>Solution:</u> The Examinations Office worked with the IT Department to design a new report that would display accurate information in an easily readable format on screen.</p> |
| Security: | <p><u>Challenge:</u> How to send broadsheets to Programme Directors securely.</p> <p><u>Solution:</u> The Examinations Office decided the best way would be to export the reports into a password protected PDF and send to appropriate Programme Directors for review.</p> |
| Presentation at exam boards: | <p><u>Challenge:</u> How to ensure that everyone could closely follow each broadsheet and facilitate a discussion.</p> <p><u>Solution:</u> It was decided that the Examinations Office would use a SharePoint site in conjunction with MS Teams to host the examination board. All broadsheets and relevant statistical reports were loaded onto a secure SharePoint site that each member of the board was then given access to. Once the meeting started a member of the examinations Team would share their screen and present each broadsheet as the Programme Director was discussing their programme.</p> |

Conclusion:

While it was challenging to adapt to the online environment for examination boards, the COVID Crisis gave the Examinations Office the opportunity to launch an online approach they had wanted to trial for several years to increase efficiency and effectiveness. In previous years, each member of the examination board would receive a hard copy pack containing each broadsheet to be discussed along with any other relevant material. This method was labour intensive and time consuming as there was a high volume of printing conducted by the Examinations Office prior to each examination board along with an equally high volume of shredding happening after each board. With the introduction of online examination boards triggered by the crisis, it demonstrated that there was no longer a requirement for printing and packing broadsheets, and this has allowed for additional time for the Examinations Office and faculty to quality check examination results prior to each board. By hosting the examination boards online, this has increased the engagement and discussions of all members during the examination board and allowed each broadsheet to be displayed clearly and accurately. While triggered by the crisis, this experience and the opportunities provided to explore a paper-less approach has proven to be beneficial to all stakeholders and will be used as the model for future NCI examination boards in the post-COVID environment.

Case Study 4: Norma Smurfit Library Libchat Service

Introduction and Context:

One of the main issues facing the Norma Smurfit Library was how to effectively support and maintain communication links with students and staff in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic from March 2020 onwards. One of the resources we had access to was LibChat - part of the Springshare suite of online resources. LibChat software/facility was purchased as part of the Springshare products in 2019, in the main for the LibAnswers facility which the library used to manage a database of FAQ's for students/staff. We had started to look at the services we could offer via LibChat and had a test system in place. However, once Covid-19 Lockdown 1 occurred in March 2020, we moved LibChat to live student support and have done so ever since mainly on a 6 day per week basis, access hours differ depending on the time of the academic year - generally from 10am to 8pm. LibChat has since become an essential tool for the library in the support of students and staff accessing the services remotely.

Summary of Initiatives Undertaken:

Communications Tools

To enhance communications, a library working group was setup on MS Teams by the Deputy Librarian, which became the main communication tool within the library staff team. Weekly library staff meetings were also held to canvass staff on how they were coping with working remotely, check on workflows and to discuss issues as they came up. Training on MS Teams was also delivered by the Application Support Analyst in NCI's IT Department. This was extremely useful in giving the library staff practical information on how to use MS Teams, and highlighted additional functionality such as the Shift App, which can be used for scheduling the IFSC Library timetable and for LibChat (virtual platform support).

Reference Enquiries

A comprehensive suite of online database and eBook platforms was already in place pre-lockdown, which certainly helped the initial transition to a fully online service. Students and staff were able to remotely browse databases and borrow eBooks, as they would always have done on campus. Students soon referred enquiries through LibChat or via library email, as if they were approaching the circulation desk in the Library. A noticeable drop in reference enquiries per day was seen throughout Lockdown 1, which was attributed to a range of factors including:

- The students were relying on resources they had already acquired from the library before lockdown
- They were relying on lecture notes/information from lecturers during lockdown via Moodle
- The Library had an established online presence in place and the move to largely digital footprint has been underway for a number of years [A-Z Library Resources](#)
- The Library had invested in supporting student learning with a range of Library Subject Guides [NCI Library Online Guides](#)

LibChat

The LibChat service was introduced in March 2020. It allows users to start an instant chat with us by selecting the 'Ask us a question' button on the right of our [website](#), or when using our online resources a 'Do you need help?' pop-up box will appear. Library users are also able to send their questions anytime to LibAnswers via the library's FAQs section.

We received the greatest number of queries in April 2020, reaching 270 queries, followed by May 2020 with 208 queries received. The highest number of weekly queries we received was 83, during the week from April 20th to 26th. The most frequent queries related to eBooks (28%), followed by e-Journals and articles (17%). Non-specified resources 15%; Referencing queries 9%; queries related to physical books/opening hours 8%; technical issues 10% and internal library team chats 2%.

Conclusion:

LibChat is now embedded as one of the core services which the Library will continue to offer to its users - students and staff - throughout and beyond the COVID environment. The ability to maximise and utilise existing tools such as the LibChat Software and MS Teams has been valuable in the ability to pivot communications internally and with users to a fully online environment. Library staff will continue to communicate via MS Teams in the main for library staff meetings, and Shift App via MS Teams will be used for Library Staff Scheduling, both for IFSC Library timetable and for LibChat (virtual platform support).

As a consequence of the Crisis and the different needs of users identified through LibChat discussions, the Library has upgraded a number of key digital resources. Business Source Complete was upgraded to Business Source Ultimate, which gave access to additional resources as well as the Harvard Extended Licence (which includes full access to Harvard top 500 articles). The Library has also subscribed to the newspaper database - International Newsstream - with print copies of newspapers cancelled.

Case Study 5: Using Technology to Manage the Safe Arrival And Welcome Processes For New International Students



Introduction and Context:

Due to COVID-19 and the National Public Health Emergency, NCI signed up to government protocols for the safe arrival of students in August 2020. The protocol was developed by a working group made up of HEIs and government departments over a short period of time in July/August and implemented on time for the September 2020 intake of students. The protocols for new and returning international students included the following:

- Students must not travel to Ireland if they test positive for Covid-19 or have any symptoms, 14 days prior to their travel date.
- All new and returning students must inform their college when they will enter Ireland by confirming their flight and accommodation details.
- Students must confirm and declare that they have suitable accommodation to restrict their movement for 14 days on arrival.
- Students must not use public transport to travel to their accommodation.
- Students must complete a health symptom tracker for the first 14 days when they arrive. If students develop Covid-19 symptoms, their HEI must support the student and ensure they have access to medical care for testing and, if necessary, provide accommodation so they can isolate safely.

Summary of Initiatives Undertaken:

NCI first introduced technology to support the International arrival process using its CRM system (MS Dynamics) in August 2017. This system and associated processes were re-engineered and redeployed to ensure NCI met with the COVID Protocols for both new and returning students. Initiatives included:

- Updating the NCI Arrival Form to a **Starting at NCI / Arrival Form**. Allowing NCI to identify if students were new or returning. For new students we could further identify if they would start online & travel later or arrive on time for their programme of study.
- New workflows were designed to push pre-arrival health surveys to students via email every day for up to 14 days prior to traveling
- Scheduling Airport Pick Ups, assigning students to drivers and emailing the details of the drivers to the students that included the drivers name, contact number and their photo.
- Creating Port of Entry Letters for students to provide to immigration officials.
- Identifying students that started online and for students from visa-required countries, capturing their visa details.
- Tracking the arrival of online students during the semester and scheduling their airport pick-ups.
- Creating new workflows to push post-arrival health surveys to students via email every day for 14 days after they arrived.
- Scheduling a welcome meeting with a peer mentors within a few days of their arrival. The welcome meetings were scheduled based on their arrival status so students who started online had a different meeting with students who travelled to Ireland.

Conclusion:

The repurposing of the CRM system helped provide a robust, accurate and complete mechanism for both supporting learners and providing reassurances to NCI and external stakeholders on adherence to protocols throughout the crisis. The system will continue to be used throughout and beyond the crisis as appropriate.

Case Study 6: Moving Teaching Enhancement Online

Introduction and Context:

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the emergency online pivot in higher education, the Teaching Enhancement function at NCI had a particular role to play in supporting faculty, many of whom had never taught online, to re-think and adapt their teaching and assessment practices. This included helping them to make more effective and consistent use of the College virtual learning environment, Moodle, to support asynchronous learning, and it meant helping them to adapt to using Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) for synchronous learning, an entirely new platform for some. It also meant helping them re-think design for learning and to develop appropriate blends of synchronous and asynchronous activities to support student achievement. At the same time, this has required re-thinking how support for teaching is provided as Teaching Enhancement has also had to pivot to online provision.

Summary of Initiatives Undertaken:

Teaching Enhancement Hub on Moodle

In our pivot, we built on our existing Teaching Enhancement Hub onto Moodle, developing and sharing a series of 'quick guides' to help lecturers think through the options for adapting teaching, learning and assessment activities to the online context. We also used this to curate other resources and emerging practice guidance from national and international bodies, including Quality Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, the Irish Universities Association (IUA) Enhancing Digital Teaching and Learning Project, AHEAD, the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA), and the International Centre for Academic Integrity (ICAI).

With an increased reliance on Moodle throughout the College, we developed a 'Baseline for Connected Learning', a set of good practice recommendations for effective use of Moodle as a core tool for teaching, learning and assessment, supported by MS Teams for synchronous delivery. This was underpinned by development of a Moodle module template, customisable by lecturers, to integrate universal design principles and to promote a consistent student experience across programmes.

Online Teaching Community via MS Teams

Concurrently, we adapted Microsoft Teams as our online teaching community, establishing a range of channels to support ongoing discussion on key topics amongst faculty and this has become a very important channel of communication. We also used Teams to facilitate 'virtual clinics' and to deliver an ongoing series of online workshops for faculty on focused topics, including developing digital content, design for blended learning, student engagement for active learning, managing group work, working with large classes, and assessment design for academic integrity. Delivering workshops in this way has meant that we have been able to record them and share the recordings post-event through a Microsoft Stream channel linked to our Hub as asynchronous learning resources.

Findings:

Changes made in the period have allowed for more flexible engagement by lecturers in professional development and resulted in higher levels of engagement. The numbers attending Teaching Enhancement events have increased and it is clear that moving our workshops online has enabled many more part-time/associate faculty, in particular, to participate directly. Our capacity to record events has also allowed for asynchronous participation, and we can see from monitoring access in Stream that the capacity to

access workshop recordings post-event has been valued. A lively and supportive online community of practice for teaching has also emerged through our use of Teams, which has provided an effective space for faculty to share concerns and good practice and this has proved a very important channel for communicating Teaching Enhancement events and advice in a period of significant change.

Conclusion:

The challenge now for NCI is to build on the experiences and developments achieved so far prior to and throughout the COVID crisis. Undoubtedly, there is a strong desire from staff and students to return to campus and resume the more traditional on campus experiences of the College. However, there is also a growing realisation that the experience of the pandemic has changed our teaching approaches in an irrevocable way. We have found new possibilities for using technology to teach and to carry out assessments in a fully online environment, building on our previous experiences in blended delivery. The insights we have gained are positive and add to the repertoire of approaches available for student success. Equally, being absent from campus has also taught us the value of what is missing when students and teachers are separated. We have learned much this year and our intent is to continue the journey of teaching enhancement to provide quality learning for all our students.

Case Study 7: Supporting the Move to Online Learning and Remote Working



Introduction and Context:

NCI's IT Department operates a centralised model for delivery of all IT Services to students, faculty, and administrative staff. The forced move to on-line delivery and remote working in March 2020 presented multiple challenges to the IT Department and indeed NCI. The successful transition to fully online delivery and remote working was achieved due to significant strategic decisions taken in the five years prior to the crisis. The adoption of a "Cloud First Strategy" by the College enabled the IT team to put the necessary pillars in place to minimise disruption and maintain service throughout the transition. Since the move to fully online delivery in March 2020, over 2300 online learning events have been delivered and more than 100 administrative staff are working remotely with secure access to all necessary systems ensuring "Business as Usual" during these challenging times.

Summary of Initiatives Undertaken:

Despite having some of the pillars in place prior to the pandemic, NCI faced multiple challenges with the rapid shift to remote delivery of all classes and remote working of all staff. NCI's IT Team were able to respond to demands and support a quick and seamless transformation to online learning and remote working as the following pillars were in place:

- Cloud First Strategy - NCI took the decision 4 years ago to phase out their on-site data centre and use Microsoft Azure. Most of NCI's Infrastructure is now located in Azure Infrastructure As A Service (IAAS) which is highly available.
- Resilience - There is no reliance on Infrastructure on site. IT Services are accessible from any location, anytime, any device.
- Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) - NCI's primary method of delivering desktops was via VDI technology. This allowed students to access an NCI desktop from anywhere and from any device.
- Office 365 - NCI are established users of the Office 365 suite of products. This ensured that both students and staff could easily access key business applications from anywhere.
- Single Sign On (SSO) - NCI has long pursued an SSO policy.
- NCI MyApps Portal This portal is a single "Pane of Glass" providing students and staff with access to the standard Office 365 apps, and custom apps such as Moodle, Timetable, CoreHR and the IT Help Center.
- Employee mobility - All NCI faculty are assigned a laptop as their primary device. When the pandemic they were equipped to deliver lectures from home. In the past year NCI had taken the decision to pursue a laptop first policy phasing out the use of Desktops for staff when the pandemic hit, most of NCI's Management layer were equipped with laptops.

There were also immediate challenges that needed to be addressed.

- What technology would be used to deliver lectures remotely?

Prior to the pandemic NCI was delivering a limited number of online/blended programmes using the Adobe Connect platform. With the rapid move to online delivery for all courses across the College, IT had to identify an efficient and cost-effective solution. As all NCI staff and students were already licensed Microsoft Teams was adopted as the College platform for online delivery and remote working. Whilst initially it was thought remote working would be for a limited period, once it became apparent that online delivery and remote working was likely to be extended to the 2020/21 academic year, IT recognised that to provide the level of support necessary to ensure a positive online experience for students and staff a dedicated resource with expertise in Microsoft Teams was needed to support students, faculty, staff and learning, teaching and assessment practices.

- What devices are needed for the large cohort of administrative staff?

When the Government first introduced Lockdown 1 in March 2020, IT had a limited supply of laptops in stock which following engagement with line managers, were assigned to administrative staff based on agreed priorities. IT subsequently secured the investment necessary from the College to procure 100 additional laptops and appropriate peripherals to meet the demands of remote working for all administrative staff. IT took the decision to procure a full dock set-up for each remote user. All staff were assigned a standard configuration of a laptop, a monitor, a docking station, keyboard, and mouse. This accelerated the phasing out of desktop program commenced prior to lockdown. By assigning each member of administrative staff their own laptop, which is now their primary device, staff will be expected to utilise the one device when working from College or from home.

- How will staff access legacy on-premises applications and file shares?

It was decided that a remote desktop system was the best way to allow access to file shares and legacy applications. Citrix Virtual Desktop Infrastructure was used to deliver student desktops, IT took decision that this platform would not be extended to staff primarily due to volume of work and costs. The College required a rapid and secure solution to providing staff with access to legacy applications. As NCI are heavily invested in Microsoft Azure, the decision was made to utilise the new Windows Virtual Desktop to provide the required services to staff. IT built a suite of desktops that provided users with secure remote access to a desktop from where they could access file shares and legacy applications.

- How can effective IT Support be delivered across a geographically dispersed organisation?

NCI recognised that it was vital that all users continued to receive a high level of IT support throughout the crisis. However, the landscape was now very much changed. IT found that the model used to provide on-site support was not as effective in a new online setting. NCI recognised that changes were required. After looking at the market, a decision was made to introduce a Knowledge Base system supported by a ticketing system. The idea was to populate the Knowledge Base system with useful articles and F.A.Q.'s available 24/7. This approach provides staff and students with access to solutions to issues as the issue arises. Additionally, if the user failed to find a solution to their problem or further support is required, the user can create a ticket and a member of IT would engage at earliest opportunity. Positive feedback on the service was noted from staff and students immediately after its launch.

Conclusion:

The IT Department's Cloud First Strategy and focus on cloud services prior to the Crisis enabled a smooth transition to online delivery and remote working without any significant service disruption. NCI's support for the IT Department's investment recommendations over the past five years have aided NCI's resilience and business continuity throughout the crisis and will inform the continuity of online services beyond COVID.

Case Study 8: NCI Students' Union Initiatives on Academic Integrity and Alternative Assessments

Introduction and Context:

Academic Integrity is not a new threat that suddenly hit the doorsteps of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) when COVID-19 disrupted our daily life; but rather the crisis shone a spotlight on how critical it is for HEIs to ensure that all staff and students understand the importance in maintaining a high standard education in everyday teaching and learning. This case study elaborates on initiatives implemented, ideas developed and collaborations between management, academic staff and the Students' Union of the National College of Ireland (NCI) in addressing this, and includes new approaches taken on alternative assessments as a result of the pandemic.

Academic Integrity (AI) comes in many different forms, as explained by Students' Union President in her [blog on the NCI website](#): *"...an act of Academic Misconduct involves instances where students plagiarise, cheat, collude, or purchase academic work online. While Academic Integrity questions the honesty and originality of the academic submissions that account towards a degree."*

In 2019, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) introduced the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Amendment Act 2019. Since this new legislation, which enables QQI to prosecute anyone who assists those in academic misconduct, the topic has been a point of focus for many HEIs around the country.

As with many other HEIs, NCI disciplinary boards reveal that plagiarism is the most common form of academic misconduct. For that reason, the NCI Students' Union took the initiative to try to curb this sort of behaviour among the student body in 2020 and educate everyone on the dangers of contract cheating and plagiarism, the importance of academic integrity, and the supports that are available within the College for any student who may be finding their studies a challenge.

Summary of Initiatives Undertaken by the NCISU:

- **Orientation:** Raised awareness by highlighting the importance of Academic Integrity and the support services available, while reinforcing the message of 'Don't suffer in silence'.
- **Participation:** NCISU is an active member of the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN), and the National Academic Integrity Communication Working Group. NAIN provides advice and guidance to academics and learners in upholding and supporting a culture of academic integrity in higher education and training.
- **#MyOwnWork:** Directly fed into the development of a [National Campaign](#), which highlighted the dangers and consequences of contract cheating.
- **National Academic Integrity Week:** Actively participated in the workshops and conferences of this inaugural campaign, hosted by different HEIs both nationally and internationally.
- **Collaboration:** A group was established within the College to focus on National Academic Integrity Week, including members of the college management team and the Students' Union. The first initiative was the launch of an integrated social media campaign, leveraging NAIN hashtags, and featuring [videos](#) from programme coordinators, the library helpdesk and members of NCISU.

- **Blog:** The Students' Union President highlighted the threats and consequences of contract cheating in her [blog](#) to mark the National Campaign Week.
- **NCISU Academic Integrity Week:** The schedule of events included an online information campaign in partnership with the College to highlight all the support services available to students and reinforce the importance of Academic Integrity; an Online Quiz; a live session with the Library, discussing referencing, research, avoiding plagiarism, and highlighting supports; and a [video launch](#), with prizes offered to encourage participation.
- **Examination period:** Further emphasis was placed on Academic Integrity and supports available to students during these challenging times.

Alternative Assessments:

As a result of the pandemic, traditional ways of assessing and supporting student learning needed to be adapted to maintain high standards in our HEIs and ensure qualification validation. The NCI Students' Union actively engaged with national bodies, such as the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), by directly feeding into a national approach to alternative assessments. At the same time, the Students' Union also engaged with NCI to develop a 'No Disadvantage Policy' during the COVID-19 period, to take into consideration the additional challenges faced by students engaging with online learning and assessments. This corresponded with an increase in queries from students on the new arrangements related to alternative assessments and the need for further communication strategies to align with other HEIs. NCI and NCISU also collaborated on various policy proposals, which include [support services](#), guides and FAQs.

Class-representatives also played a vital role throughout the crisis in being the medium to engage with students on issues that affect them during these unprecedented times. The student voice continues to play an integral part in driving change, upholding academic quality assurance, and supporting peers through their journey in higher education. In this particular [exam](#) period, the Students' Union continued to promote information relating to online timed exams and guidance on alternative assessments, so that students are well informed about new processes and policies, which directly impact their learning experience.

Conclusion:

While we continue to adapt in this ever-changing environment, the needs of the learners and the quality of education provided must remain of paramount importance for all HEIs. This is why further attention is required in continuing to promote, inform and educate on the issue of academic integrity, as well as providing support to cultivate good practices: prevention is better than any cure.

Case Study 9: Student Engagement and Onboarding in the Virtual Environment



Introduction and Context:

Due to Covid-19 and College closure in March 2020, student engagement events could no longer take place in person. Consequently, the International Student Support Team had to move all their communication and activities online. In the following case study, we will outline the steps that have been undertaken to provide the same quality student support and engagement in a new virtual environment.

Summary of Initiatives Undertaken:

Social Media Strategy Revision

Within the first month of College closure, the International Support Team established the following events:

- Virtual Coffee & Chat - Meetings on Zoom to give students a platform to check in and ask questions.
- Netflix Party
- Online Competitions (Virtual Art Gallery, Photo Competition, Talent Show)
- Staff & Student Takeovers
- Instagram Live Chats with current students

In pivoting towards an online service, the International Department revised its social media strategy, focussing firstly on Instagram. This was deemed the most suitable platform for the age range of our target groups which are: Applicants, current students but also alumni.

The focus of the Instagram strategy was threefold:

- Entertainment and Engagement between the International Support Team and Students (Motivation Mondays, Motivational videos and messages, Throwback Thursdays)
- Provision of information about Covid-19 (levels and travel restrictions) and College updates (upcoming virtual fairs and webinars)
- Creation of interest in Dublin and Ireland as a study destination (Fun Fact Fridays, Student Features of local points of interest on weekends)

Consequently, NCI's Instagram following has grown by 20% and performance of posts has reached up to 15% compared to an average Instagram performance of 1 - 3% ([source](#)). Since August 2020, the international team is supported by an international NCI student in their final year of their BA (Hons) in Marketing Practice who has further developed the social media strategy to include: Student top tips, promotional videos, links to resources available to students, student experience accounts.

Virtual Welcome Programme

One of the strongest pillars of support the International Team provides is a welcome programme for each intake in September and January which lasts between 3 and 6 weeks. This welcome programme is organised by the International Support Team but largely hosted by peer mentors. Peer mentors are NCI students in a paid part-time position at the International Office.

Virtual Welcome Programme - September 2020

To be able to replicate the welcome programme in an online environment for the first time in September 2020 the following preparations were made in advance of the September 2020 arrivals:

- Increase in numbers of peer mentors from 12 to 25
- 1 peer mentor role solely dedicated to digital marketing and student engagement
- Preparation of extensive 6-week welcome programme

- Creation of new event: daily 'Meet your Mentors' check-ins. In the absence of face-to-face meetings, we organised daily drop-in sessions for students to ask peer mentors questions about anything relating to life in Ireland and being a student at NCI
- Organisation and facilitation of training day for existing and new peer mentors to brief on new intake approach
- Tailored welcome meetings for students: 1) travelling to Ireland to start their course 2) already resident in Ireland 3) starting their course from their home country
- Preparation of scripts for all upcoming online welcome meetings as well as optional events
- Introduction of 3 peer mentors to September Freshers Facebook Group to engage with students via private messaging
- Decision to use MS Teams as platform to deliver all meetings as this would be the main platform for tuition to be delivered to students. The aim was to familiarise students with the platform before classes started.
- Use of Google Forms to gauge interest in events or if need be crowd control
- Publishing of Welcome Programme on NCI website including links to registration forms.

The welcome programme consisted of just under 120 events, spread out over 6 weeks. It included a mix of the following categories:

1) Pre-scheduled and compulsory to attend

- Welcome Meetings: These are small group meetings which every international student is scheduled for by the international support team. In case of no-shows, students are re-scheduled until they have attended the event. The last welcome meeting is recorded and will be shared with students who did not attend the final meeting. Due to the re-scheduling of students attendance is close to 100%.

2) Highly recommended

- The Essentials & Student Life: These are meetings informing students about student life and establishing themselves in Ireland.

3) Optional

- Know-how events: These are workshops informing students about accommodation, public transport, culture shock and banking.
- Meet-up events: These are networking events including Meet your Mentors, Coffee & Chat, ice breaker games, origami, quizzes, Introduction to Irish Language and Culture as well as virtual escape rooms and a Freshers Party.
- Out & About events: There are interactive virtual tours facilitated by a certified tour guide. Tours included: Tour of Dublin, Tour of Northern Ireland coastline and a tour to the West of Ireland.

Conclusion:

Due to the nature of the original welcome programme, it was possible to move events online without many issues. MS Teams was a useful tool to create online meeting rooms for students to gather. The International Team feel confident that despite the challenges of COVID-19, they managed to create an inclusive environment for international students at NCI. Throughout the crisis the International Team continues to engage with students from the Americas to Europe to Africa to Asia and the feedback so far has been very positive. An analysis of the September 2020 virtual Welcome Programme will be completed in advance of the programme launched for January 2021 entrants.