

# **Quality Assurance Handbook**

## **Chapter 1**

Introduction

December 2006

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#### 1.0 Introduction

This Quality Assurance Handbook is a document to facilitate the implementation of policies and procedures that have been accepted by NCI to ensure a quality assured delivery of programmes and services to learners and other stakeholders, internal and external. Procedures outlined in the Handbook must be used in the operational management of all elements of College Life. As such, the Quality Handbook is a 'living' document and will be updated from time to time based on the following principles

- Amendments as approved by Academic Council
- Amendments as approved by Executive Board

Details of the procedures to have amendments incorporated in the Handbook are outlined in Chapter 2.

NCI recognises its responsibility in relation the Qualifications (Education & Training) Act, 1999 and its accrediting bodies, HETAC and FETAC, to maintain, review and enhance these procedures in a cycle of continuous improvement.

## 1.1 Development of the Quality Assurance Handbook

This edition of the Handbook has been updated from the NCI Quality Manual 2004 as approved by HETAC in November 2004, to incorporate changes resulting from

- · Operational review of procedures and policies and
- Legislative changes.
- Reviews of best practice

This review took place during 2006 culminating in the creation of cross functional teams from all functions within the college, administrative and academic to review 5 key areas of the Handbook:

- Quality Assurance Standards
- Programme Development, Review and Evaluation
- Examinations and Award
- Research
- Human Resources

The teams were co-chaired by representatives from the administrative staff and faculty. While a senior member of staff eg Head of Function or Head of School participated in the group that they had a functional interest in, they were not chosen to chair the team.

This process was co-ordinated by the Director of Quality Assurance and Statistical Services (DQASS). Each group was presented with the terms of reference as agreed by the Academic Council sub committee on Academic Quality. The groups met under the guidance of their co-chairs and presented recommendations for amendment to Academic Council sub committee on Academic Quality.

The documentation was updated with the recommendations of the Working Parties. Where recommendations did not appear to be appropriate, the Working Group were asked to provide background documentation e.g. minutes, rationale in order to facilitate a greater understanding of the recommendation prior to its rejection by the DQASS. Recommendations that were not taken on board or where the Working Party raised an issue for discussion were highlighted to staff when the documentation was sent for review and feedback.

The draft documentation was then circulated to all staff.

A series of individual Meetings and presentations were held with key stakeholders (Heads of School, Programme Directors, Faculty, Programme Directors, Programme Coordinators and Learner Life) to review the main issues that arose as a result of the updated documentation. A general staff briefing was then held to brief remaining staff and those unable to attend the specialised briefing.

Further amendments were made to the documentation based on the feedback of the participants at the meetings.

An open invitation was extended to place items for discussion at Academic Council Issues that arose from these recommendations were debated at a joint meeting of Academic Council and the Academic Council sub committee on Academic Quality.

The remaining sections of the Handbook were reviewed and signed off by the President, Registrar and relevant Heads of Function and their teams in conjunction with the Director of Quality Assurance and Statistical Services.

In specific cases ie IT policies and HR policies, the policies have also been signed off at Executive Board and reviewed by NCI legal advisors.

## 1.2 About NCI

National College of Ireland (NCI) is a not-for-profit, state-assisted, third-level learning and teaching institution informed by research and specialising in programmes in business, management, and informatics. NCI is characterised by the diversity of its learner body and its strong links to business and the community.

NCI occupies a unique niche in third-level education in Ireland, with access being the central element of its mission and with a learner-centred focus that is reflected in the provision of high quality educational opportunities at a time, pace and place that suit the learner. The focus on access springs from an educational philosophy that recognises the potential of all learners, whatever their age, background, circumstances or educational history.

With a mission grounded in the belief in learner potential, the College is committed to delivering academic excellence in a learner-centred environment, with a curriculum that is responsive to the needs of business, trade unions and community. Indeed, from inception the College has worked closely with a range of partners in pioneering new ways of widening access to third-level education.

#### 1.2.1 NCI's Mission, Vision & Values

#### Mission:

The mission of the College is to:

- · provide access to education at a time, place and pace that suits the learner
- create opportunities for learners to succeed
- provide a centre of academic excellence in its chosen programmes

One of the most important characteristics of NCI is the extent to which all of its activities and programmes are driven by this mission. It is the mission that determines the College's focus, scope, priorities and the partners with whom it works. This mission was developed in 1991 through a lengthy and intensive consultative process with input from all faculty and staff and all key stakeholders in business, trade unions and the community. This ensured a sense of ownership and a high level of commitment from all involved in putting the agreed mission into effect.

NCI's mission – focused on access, opportunity and excellence – springs from an educational philosophy that recognises the ability of all learners to succeed, to achieve their ambitions and to realise their potential to its fullest extent, regardless of their age, background or educational history.

The emphasis on responsiveness to learner potential (and enablement there of) demands that NCI provides highest quality education that is accessible to learners in a manner that meets their current and future needs. NCI seeks to achieve this goal through creating a dynamic, learner-centred learning environment.

#### Vision

The concept of learner potential is at the heart of what NCI does. Consistent with contemporary research on the nature of learning and the different expressions of intelligence, NCI starts from a belief in the potential of all learners and the imperative of creating the right environment for the release of that potential. This vision is adopted for a two fold purpose:

- To achieve personal development and, thereby, make a responsible contribution to their community and wider society and
- · To enable persons to be enterprising.

#### Values

The mission is underpinned by four core values: empowerment, excellence, partnership and service.

- Empowerment: the value of empowerment underpins the work of the College both internally and with its external partners. NCI, in all its activities, seeks to create a dynamic, learner-centred environment that nurtures and builds the potential and abilities of its learners and of its faculty and staff
- Excellence: NCI believes that all learners deserve excellence and strives for this in all the programmes and services it provides. It works continuously to maintain a proven reputation for the highest standards both within and outside the institution
- Partnership: NCI values partnership with all its stakeholders as essential to achieving its goals. All activities are undertaken in partnership.
- Service: NCI upholds the value of service. It seeks to respond to the needs of its surrounding community. NCI seeks to be a significant contributor to the implementation of sustainable solutions to learners to access education at a place, pace and time that suits their needs.

NCI has been successful in realising its vision through the practical application of specific sustainable interventions in distinct ways as follows:

## 1.2.2 Delivering on the Mission, Vision & Values: Creating Access

NCI recognises that empowered and enterprising individuals are the greatest asset in social development. Accordingly, NCI channels its efforts to contribute to community, business and social interests in the following ways:

- The provision of high quality educational opportunities for all learners
- The provision of active outreach to cohorts of learners traditionally under-represented in third-level education such as second-chance learners, learners from areas of low income, learners in the workplace and learners in the community.

In the College's terms, access is an issue that applies to all learners, not just to certain disadvantaged groups referred to in the current access debate, namely under-represented groups, mature learners, learners with disabilities, women and second-chance learners. The concept of access is integral to the mission of NCI and permeates everything undertaken by the College. Unlike other educational institutions there is no designated Access Officer; instead all faculty and staff take ownership of the responsibility of operationalising access. The College's multi-dimensional approach to access incorporates its ethos, values and attitudes, its structures, systems and its practices.

## 1.2.3 Delivering on the Mission, Vision & Values: Access, Partnership and Learning Communities

NCI, while contributing to community needs, seeks to make the community a supportive learning environment for learners; it aspires to create 'learning communities'. NCI acknowledges the powerful influence on individual learners of their community's attitudes, values, expectations and experiences with regard to education. Accordingly, NCI perceives that a key dimension of its work is the development of strong and effective partnerships between itself and other powerful actors in the educational arena: parents, early learning providers, primary and second level schools, community groups, voluntary organisations, business and statutory agencies. Through these partnerships NCI seeks to create an effective learning community that presents education as an exciting opportunity and creates a supportive culture in which learners are encouraged and motivated to develop to their highest potential.

## 1.2.4 Delivering on the Mission, Vision & Values: The Underpinning Strategies

NCI embodies its mission in a set of three interlinked and mutually supportive strategies on learning and teaching that grow from the strengths of the College's tradition and underpin its development objectives for the future:

- · Learning and teaching: programme development
- Learning and teaching: research
- · Learning and teaching: enterprise

The three strategies are at the heart of the College's efforts to implement its mission to broaden access to education and all three reflect its learner-centred approach. The focus is on research-supported development of innovative teaching strategies that demonstrably promote learner learning and the development of lifelong learning skills.

#### 1.2.4 Learning and Teaching: Programmes

Learning and teaching are the core activities of the College and they provide the College with a potential pool of research subjects. The focus is on issues such as class size, individualised and group focused instruction, the use of skill building and didactic teaching methods, the use of technology to facilitate the learning process and the enhancement of the learners' learning experience. Faculty are expected to be both subject knowledge experts and learning specialists. The teaching context provides many opportunities to disseminate the results of research as well as providing a potential research laboratory.

#### 1.2.5 Learning and Teaching: Research

The research strategy in NCI focuses on three broad issues:

- Developing research capability within the academic community
- Conducting research in areas that are central to the core mission of the College lifelong learning and the enhancement of the learning process
- Disseminating research through the preparation of research reports, monographs, refereed journal publications and books

These are ambitious objectives but the College is committed to ensuring that they are realised.

#### 1.2.6 Learning and Teaching: Enterprise

The enterprise strategy of the College aims to bring the education and enterprise domains closer together, to engage faculty and learners at a practical level with enterprise and to strengthen the practical dimensions of enterprise education in the NCI classroom. The enterprise strategy is interlinked with the learning and teaching programmes and research strategies; seeking to support the growth and commercialisation of new developments on

learning and teaching emerging as a result of the College's engagement in research on learning and teaching.

NCI has always recognised that a culture of enterprise at all levels in the College is critical for survival and growth. Faculty must be enterprising in meeting the needs of new cohorts of learners every year, dealing with diverse learning needs and styles and finding practical applications for new teaching methods and technologies. Faculty must also be enterprising in meeting new challenges – for example, from changing economic and social conditions, from increased competition among education providers and from new technology.

The combination of the three strategies ensures that NCI will continue in its pursuit of the highest quality learning for its learners and provides a unique model of synergy in pursuit of its mission.

## 1.2.7 Creating a Unique Learning Environment

In response to its vision of enabling learner potential, a priority for the College is the provision of appropriate and effective support structures for the learners. The implementation of this priority is guided by the principle of being learner centred. The College recognises that learner well-being demands a multi-dimensional approach and, accordingly, the supports provided cover not only the learners' academic needs but also needs related to social, recreational and health dimensions of life.

The key elements of the College's unique learning environment include:

- Faculty learning and teaching development
- Student learning and teaching development
- o Future of Learning Programme
- Academic supports including the Library and Information Service, ICT Services, Career and Opportunities Service
- Clubs and societies
- Sports facilities
- Responses to needs arising from disability, learning or health difficulties
- Learners Charter outlining expectations and responsibilities on the part both of the College and the learner

#### 1.2.8 Delivering on the Mission, Vision & Values: Strategic Themes

The strategic themes of the College in pursuit of its mission may be summarised as:

- To continue College efforts to transition from a teaching organisation to a truly learner-centred college that recognises and seeks to maximise the potential of all its learners
- 2. To continue to build effective partnerships and develop initiatives that allow learners access to higher education at a time, place and pace that suit the learner.
- 3. To pursue the highest quality learning for NCI learners through integrated learning and teaching strategies of programmes, research and enterprise.
- 4. To build upon its niche learner focus and promote the academic excellence of NCI while enhancing its status and recognition in the education community.
- 5. To develop the organisational structure and resources to support the College in pursuit of its mission.
- 6. To develop the College as the educational, cultural and social hub of the local community.

Collectively, the strategies provide the framework for programme review and evaluation, for setting objectives and goals and for establishing measurable performance targets. They provide a framework that helps to keep the College focused on its mission and on track. The specific initiatives to be undertaken in pursuit of these strategic goals are contained in the Milestones and Outcomes documents for all areas of the College.

## 1.3 The History of NCI

### 1.3.1 NCI's Origins

NCI was established in 1951 by the Jesuit Order as the Catholic Workers College. The then focus of the College was on workplace policies and practices. Over the years the College became the Workers College, and subsequently the National College of Industrial Relations, finally becoming the National College of Ireland in May 1998. The College has a proud history of change and development driven by the needs of the learner.

In 1990/91 the College commenced a period of major change, essentially developing from its tradition in industrial relations to a college aspiring to meet and serve the needs of learners. As such, a major period of transition and expansion was inaugurated, during which the College mission was revisited. A new agreed College mission was defined at that time, and which still remains, to provide education at a time, place and pace that suit the learner.

### 1.3.2 Meeting Society's Changing Needs

The revised mission, which still remains, is to provide education at a time, place and pace that suit the learner and is encapsulated in the principles of Access, Opportunity and Excellence. In order to deliver on this mission a strategic development plan was developed and implemented. This resulted in a seven fold increase in learner numbers between 1991 and 1997. During this period, the College also established a range of new education and policy research programmes (including a Policy Research Centre), as well as inaugurating the Centre for Educational Opportunity.

In the second half of the 1990s NCI launched the next phase of its expansion – which included adoption of the name "National College of Ireland" - and the beginning of the planning process which led to the 2002 relocation to a state- of- the- art, purpose- built education and research facilities in the heart of Dublin's IFSC. From this location the College now services the educational needs of over seven thousand learners on full and part-time programmes conducted on campus and in 40 off-campus locations nationwide through distance learning programmes, in-company programmes and community based programmes. NCI now provides a range of certificate, diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes in business studies, financial services, accounting, management and supervision, human resource management, informatics and software systems.

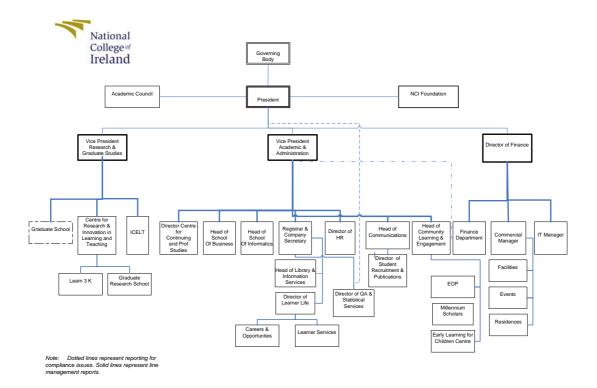
## 1.4 Governance and Organisational Strategy

#### 1.4.1 NCI's Legal Form

NCI is a company limited by guarantee without share capital. Unlike state funded third level institutions it was not established under statute and accordingly the funding structure places a much greater reliance on private fees and fundraising.

#### 1.4.2 Organisation Structure

## See Appendix 2 for expansion of this diagram



#### 1.4.3 The Governing Body

Overall responsibility for the College under its Articles and Memorandum of Association rests with the Governing Body. The Governing Body comprising 14 governors of whom three each are appointed by IBEC, ICTU and the Jesuit Provincial, two are appointed by the staff of NCI, one is appointed by the learners and a Chairperson nominated by the Governing Body. The President of NCI is an ex officio member of the Governing Body. The rules and procedures relating to the Governing Body are set out in the Articles of Association of NCI. Executive responsibility rests with the President of the College.

#### 1.4.4 Academic Council

The Academic Council assists the Governors in the planning, coordination, development and overseeing of the educational work of the College. The Council is chaired by the President and the remaining members are:

- The Vice President Research
- The Vice President Academic and Administration
- The Registrar
- The Heads of Schools
- The Director of Continuing and Professional Development

- The Director of Community Learning and Engagement
- Director of the Centre for Research and Innovation in Learning and Teaching
- The Head of Library and Information Services
- Director of Quality Assurance and Statistical Services
- Three full-time members of the academic staff of the college as appointed by the President:
- Six full-time members of the academic staff of the college elected by the members of the academic staff of the College
- Two student/learner members to be elected by the Learners Union;
- Such additional members of staff as the President may from time to time appoint as nonvoting members.

The principal functions of the Academic Council include:

- To design, develop and implement appropriate programmes of study
- To make representations to the Governors for the establishment of appropriate structures to implement the programmes referred to above
- To make recommendations to the Governors on programmes for the development of research
- To make recommendations to the Governors for the selection, admission, retention of learners generally
- To make and to implement the academic regulations of the College

#### 1.4.5 The Office for Institutional Development

The College has a distinctive funding mix – modest state support, learner/company funded programmes and philanthropic fundraising support. To provide financial stability, free of long-term indebtedness, and to implement its planned programmes, the College strengthened its fundraising capacity leading to the establishment of an Office for Institutional Development with responsibility for fundraising and alumni relations.

The need for such an office arose as a professionally resourced fundraising capability is needed to succeed with the overall fundraising programme and to establish a culture of significant and ongoing philanthropic support

The relocation of the College to state-of-the-art facilities which were financed principally by fundraising is testament to the capability of the College in this area.

#### 1.4.6 Organisational Strategy

Management of the National College of Ireland is coordinated and facilitated by the Executive Board

The Executive Board, which is accountable to the President, is the senior management committee with responsibility for developing strategy, implementing strategy and approving appropriate policies and procedures, agreeing plans, monitoring corporate performance and ensuring that all aspects of the corporate function operate with optimal efficiency and effectiveness. Although each member of the Executive Board has an overall defined area of responsibility in this context, the Committee assumes a shared responsibility for every aspect of the College's operations. The Executive Board also helps to determine the corporate response to specific initiatives or situations.

It is recognised that the Executive Board cannot discharge this broad mandate without widespread consultation; therefore, an important responsibility for the committee is establishment of appropriate channels of communications with the Management Committee, and the wider College community.

### 1.4.7 Academic Structures

#### The School of Informatics

NCI sees information and communications technology as being critical to realising the College mission of delivering focused, quality programmes in response to learner needs. Accordingly, after extensive consultation with industry, the School of Informatics has devised a number of programmes. Each programme is delivered using an innovative "studio classroom" model of education delivery. The "studio classroom" model uses a specifically designed classroom with electronically integrated workstations, projection systems and supporting software. It combines features of the classic lecture, tutorial and computer laboratory. Use of the studio classroom replaces traditional lecture delivery with a more intensive "learn by doing" approach that emphasises learner participation, problem solving and teamwork. The School specialises in Software Development, Learning Technologies, Information Systems.

#### The School of Business

The School of Business provides a range of programmes in the business area for both full-time and part-time learners based on campus specialising in Human Resource Management, Industrial Relations, Business, Accounting, and Management and Financial Services. Faculty within the school are also actively engaged in research and consultancy within industry to ensure that each programme offered is academically and practically focused.

Educational Opportunity Programmes is a unit within the School of Business, but providing programmes in an off-campus capacity at locations around the country. The aim is to maximize the learning potential of the non-traditional learner in a safe, supportive environment while at the same time providing her/him with the opportunity to excel and to progress along the educational continuum.

#### The Centre for Continuing and Professional Studies

The Centre for Continuing and Professional Studies provides a range of part-time blended learning programmes in a variety of business disciplines. Programmes are offered through a range of delivery mechanisms: in-company, off-campus, in the workplace, and in the community.

#### The International Centre for Learning and Teaching (ICELT)

Operationally, the central element of the enterprise strategy is the International Centre for Education and Learning Technologies (ICELT). This was established under the College's enterprise strategy to help embed the concept of enterprise within the programmes of the College. It also provides a start-up facility and learning space for clusters of companies involved in e-learning, learning technologies and learning transfer businesses – all of which have direct links to the research priorities of the College. It is the only incubation facility in Ireland focusing exclusively on enterprise in the e-learning and teaching sectors

ICELT/NCI provides 12,000 square feet of purpose built, state-of-the-art, affordable incubation space, coupled with a leading-edge communications infrastructure. ICELT's primary aim is to assist in the creation of knowledge intensive companies in the learning and teaching and related technology sectors, through the creation of the right environment for enterprise development.

#### In addition ICELT will:

- Facilitate the commercialisation of internally generated research and maximise the commercial value of research emanating from the College's learning research centre.
- Provide new business growth through the development and exploitation of value-added learning and related technologies
- Promote a culture of entrepreneurship throughout the College.

Over the past two years ICELT has supported the development of 11 new businesses in the eLearning and related technologies domain, currently employing 100 people in the Centre and is supported by an Advisory Board consisting of senior business, state agency, and academic personnel.

## 1.4.8 Community Based Learning

As a catalyst for social and economic regeneration, NCI is well positioned to take a leadership role in regenerating the inner city generally – a role for which the NCI's mission has enormous resonance and relevance.

NCI is active in the community and works to provide opportunities for advancement. For example, Learning in the Community is a key element of the NCI offering, which has three primary objectives:

- Application of knowledge as regards the learning process of individuals
- · Identification of factors that facilitate and hinder learning
- Development of learning environments which are capable of supporting individuals to become motivated, self-confident, effective and self-aware life-long learners.

The learner's surrounding environment is an important factor in the overall successful and effective delivery of education. Specifically there are a number of objectives which the NCI have defined in this regard, these are:

- Family: to provide training and support services for families so that they understand the learning process and, from the early months of the child's life, can provide the kind of learning opportunities and guidance and encouragement that will provide the necessary foundation for life-long learning in their children. To this end, the Early Learning Programme, along with the Stretch to Learn Programme, provides a start for young children as learners, in families that support and encourage learning from birth across the different stages of education, in order to increase their opportunities in life and develop their full potential.
- School: the focus on Schools relates to the learner retention at primary and secondary level and also reading initiatives and activities. The college is focused on enabling learners to progress on a life-long educational journey, by making smooth transitions from one stage of the journey to the next.
- Community: the college is actively working to provide access to knowledge and research, needs assessment, training opportunities and support systems to a wide range of community groups. In addition the NCI provides linking, networking and knowledge-sharing and partnership opportunities to community groups and businesses in order to support their active participation in the creation of a supportive and effective learning environment in the community.
- Wider social system: to provide knowledge and research to local and state government bodies and policy-makers in order to influence policy and education service delivery and to gain co-operation and support for new initiatives being developed.

Learning in the Community, when coupled with the specific activities for the IFSC community and the Educational Opportunity Programmes (see above), delivers a huge benefit to the local community and specifically to areas of socially disadvantaged.

#### 1.4.9 The Commercial Office

In terms of daily life within the College, the Office is responsible for the facilities management services and operations appropriate to the NCI mission. The Commercial Office is also responsible for the letting and management of all student residences based at the College's IFSC campus, together with the management and letting of the physical infrastructure of the College.

This office plays an essential role in utilising NCI's physical assets to ensure that learners have the physical facilities necessary and appropriate to enhance their learning experience. In addition, the office has a proven ability to generate income from its own resources. The Office does this by maximising the revenue potential available from NCI's excellent physical facilities and location.

## Appendix 1.1

#### **Academic Quality Sub Committee – Working Parties**

## **Academic Quality Assurance Standards**

Michael Barry Senior Lecturer, School of Business

Gary Brady Vice President, NCISU
Mary Buckley Librarian – Co-Chair
Ellen Byrne Associate Faculty Member

Ciaran Byrne President NCISU

Des Gargan Associate Faculty Member Michele Kehoe Lecturer, School of Business

Bertie Kelly Commercial Manager

Elaine Maher Assistant Lecturer ,School of Informatics

Deirdre O'Sullivan Admissions Officer

Michele Ryan Director, Education Opportunity Programmes Paul Stynes (c) Lecturer ,School of Informatics – Co-Chair

#### Programme Development, Review and Evaluation

Gary Brady Vice President, NCISU Ciaran Byrne President, NCISU

Nicola Carroll

Eoin Geraghty

Desmond Gibney

Head International Office – Co-Chair

Director, Student Publications

Lecturer, School of Business

Paul Hederman Director, Centre for Continuing & Professional Studies

Orla Heslin – Programme Co-Ordinator, School of Business

Eamon Jordan Finance

Vivienne Maher Lecturer, School of Business

Cristina Muntean Assistant Lecturer, School of Informatics – Co-Chair

Pramod Pathak Head, School of Informatics
Anita Redahan Careers and Appointments Office
Corina Sheerin Lecturer, School of Business

#### **Examinations and Awards**

Gary Brady Vice President NCISU
Ciaran Byrne President NCISU
Fiona Carson Registrar's Office

Shauna Cassidy Programme Co-Ordinator, School of Informatics

Emma Fry Business Analyst

Brian Hayden

Paul Hayes

Christian Keeling

Grace O'Malley

Senior Lecturer, School of Business

Lecturer, School of Informatics

Assistant Lecturer, School of Business

Lecturer, School of Business – Co-Chair

Niamh McAuley Director, Learner Life

Eugene O'Loughlin Lecturer, School of Informatics – Co-Chair

#### Emma Fry

#### Research

Fabian Armendariz Lecturer, School of Business

Colette Darcy Lecturer, School of Business - Co-Chair

Vance Gledhill Dean of Postgraduate Research

Teresa Hurley Postgraduate Student

Dietmar Janetzko Lecturer, School of Informatics

Lisa Kilmartin Research Office

T J McCabe Lecturer, School of Business

Gerry Macken Manager, ICELT
Sabine Moebs Postgraduate Student
Peter Nash Head, School of Business

Stephan Weibelzahl Lecturer, School of Informatics – Co-Chair

#### **HR Policies**

Brian Byrne Associate Faculty Member

Denise Collins Director, Finance Lorraine Inglis Human Resources

Geraldine Minogue Manager, IT Department - Chair

Tony Morgan Premises

Ann Noonan Director, Human Resources

Denis O'Connell Finance Office

## **Appendix 1.2: Organisation Chart**

