Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Prior to 2012, legal responsibility for assuring the quality of Irish higher education and training awards and the education and training provision leading to them, was shared by a variety of education and training providers, awarding bodies and regulatory authorities. These providers, bodies and regulatory authorities functioned within distinct sectors or parts of sectors in the broader education and training system, and within distinct quality assurance traditions and cultures.

There were three distinct systems in place for quality assurance in each of the following sub-sectors in Irish higher education and training:

- Universities and their associated colleges;

- Institutes of Technology and independent providers;

- Dublin Institute of Technology and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

In November 2012, a significant piece of legislation relating to the quality assurance of higher education was enacted, namely the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012)* [1]. Under this legislation, a new agency called *Quality and Qualifications Ireland* [2] (QQI), was established. QQI was created by an amalgamation of three bodies that had both awarding and quality assurance responsibilities in the higher education area: the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB). The agency also comprises the body which had awarding and quality assurance responsibilities for the further education and training area; the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC).

In addition to absorbing all of the functions of the bodies subsumed into the QQI, QQI acquired new functions relating to quality assurance within the higher education sector including:

- Development of a Statutory Code of Practice for International Students;

- Awarding of the International Education Mark to providers based on compliance with the Code of Practice;
- Maintenance and publication of a register of Programmes and Awards in the NFQ;

- Statutory body for external QA of the university sector;

- Stronger oversight of linked colleges (colleges, many of which are state funded, where the awards are made by the universities and other self-awarding bodies) including collaborative and transnational provision;

- Stronger relationship with professional awarding bodies such as in the regulated professions: law, medicine, dentistry, engineering, pharmacy etc.

National and international developments have had a strong impact on the quality assurance policies and procedures in place in Ireland over the past number of years and there has been significant consistency of approach to quality issues and similarity of policy objectives within the quality community across all sectors - i.e. the universities and their associated colleges; Institutes of Technology; independent providers; Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT); and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI).

Under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012) [1], the following elements are statutory requirements across all higher education and training sub-sectors:

- Internal assessment;

- External review;

- Publication of outcomes;

- Implementation/Follow-Up.

A particular collaborative initiative of note is the establishment in 2003 of the Irish Higher Education Quality Network [3] (IHEQN). The IHEQN brings together key players in quality assurance in the higher education and training sector - provider representatives, student representatives, quality assurance agencies and the Department of Education and Skills. Under the aegis of the IHEQN, the principal national stakeholders have worked collaboratively to promote a shared quality culture across the higher education and training system. The network provides a forum for discussion of quality assurance issues and for the dissemination of good practice in quality assurance amongst practitioners and policy makers. It also endeavours, where appropriate, to develop common national principles and approaches to quality assurance in Irish higher education and training. The site acts as a useful information resource regarding quality assurance organisations operating in Ireland, Europe and internationally as well as providing updates on quality assurance/quality improvement developments and events.

Since 2005, the IHEQN has agreed a number of principles relating to quality assurance including:
• Principles of good practice for quality assurance/ quality improvement in Irish higher education and training;

• Principles for reviewing the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures in Irish higher education and training;

• Principles for Student Involvement in Quality Assurance/Quality Enhancement;

• Principles for follow-through on Quality Improvements identified through Quality Reviews.

The IHEQN has also developed the document Provision of Education to International Students: Code of Practice for Irish Higher Education Institutions. The principles reflect the arrangements across Irish higher education for internal assessment, external review and publication of results. All agreed principles are compatible with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, and the quality assurance principles set out in annex 3 of the Recommendation for the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

The outcomes of the activities of the IHEQN will provide an additional reference point for policy developments within the QQI.

In 2016, a Code of Practice and International Education Mark came into law in Ireland. A voluntary code of practice existed across Ireland’s higher education institutions under the IHEQN which assures a high standard in the recruitment, reception, education, pastoral care and welfare of international students. All of the [higher education institutions][4] that are under the umbrella of Education in Ireland [5] have signed up to this Code of Practice.

The Code of Practice sets out standards, guidelines and minimum requirements across: marketing and recruitment of international students; the enrolment process; fees; refunds; orientation; accommodation; student support services; student protection; and grievance and appeal procedures.

Concern with ‘whole-system’ quality assurance in Irish higher education and training is also informed and driven by international policy developments, particularly in relation to the Bologna Process.

**Responsible Bodies**

As stated in the introduction above, QQI is responsible for the external quality assurance of the Universities and their associated colleges, the Institutes of Technology and the providers within the independent sector making national awards, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

The impact of international developments relating to quality assurance on Irish higher education and training has been notable, particularly in relation to the Bologna Process. The emergence of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (‘Bologna’ Framework) in 2005, for example, and the related requirement that Bologna member states should not only develop their own national frameworks of qualifications, but should also themselves verify the compatibility of their national frameworks to the Bologna Framework, has been particularly significant in this regard. One of the criteria for verifying the compatibility of national frameworks to the Bologna Framework is that the national quality assurance systems for higher education refer to the national framework of qualifications and are consistent with the quality assurance developments within the Bologna Process.
Ireland was one of the first countries to self-certify the compatibility of its national framework with the Bologna Framework, a task which was completed in November 2006. All of the higher education quality systems were found to have referenced the NFQ and the four quality assurance agencies in place at that time formally agreed with the self-certification report.

Three of the four former external quality assurance agencies for higher education and training in Ireland – HETAC, the NQAI and the IUQB – underwent external reviews and successfully demonstrated their compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and as a result are members of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The full set of documentation pertaining to these reviews – self-evaluation reports, external panel reports, agency responses, considerations of reviewing bodies – are published on their respective websites. QQI underwent an expert review by ENQA in 2014. In addition, HETAC and the IUQB are also listed in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

**Approaches and Methods for Quality Assurance**

**Internal Quality Assurance within the University Sector**

All of the universities ensure the on-going quality and improvement of their teaching and learning activities through regular internal QA reviews. These include evaluations of study programmes, as well as academic, administrative and service units within each university, and unit-based reviews of schools, faculties and colleges, depending on a university’s structure. These reviews are organised by each individual university, with the assistance of external experts from a broad range of countries and stakeholder groups. Internal QA procedures at Irish universities are longstanding. Quality assurance in the Irish university system is distinctive, since very few countries have requirements for internal quality processes specified in primary legislation. Within Ireland, ownership of quality processes explicitly rests with each university.

The legislative provision for internal quality assurance of Irish universities is contained in Section 35 of The Universities Act [6], 1997, which specifically requires each university to organise periodic internal evaluations of the quality of education (including research) and related services provided by the university, at the level of the primary academic (and administrative) unit.

The unit level evaluation was to take place at least every ten years. Internal reviews had to include initially, the involvement of employees of the university and then persons, other than employees, who were capable of making national and international comparisons on the quality of teaching and research and the provision of other services at university level. The outcomes of reviews had to be made publicly available and the university had to implement any findings arising out of the evaluations, having regard to the resources available.

Institutionally specific guidelines for all stages of the internal review process were in place by the end of 2012 and available from the website of the Quality Office in each university. Following each internal review, a Quality Improvement Plan was prepared by the unit. This generally included a one-year plan and a five-year plan monitored over time by the Quality Officer. Overall, the length of the review cycle is about seven years in most universities. Many of the internal action plans were published alongside the review reports on Quality Office websites. Many of the universities have published an Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Report (2018). These link with their current Strategic Plans. With this process, the direction, scope and the priority actions of the universities for the 5-year period 2017-2022 are identified.

Although the responsibility for internal quality assurance procedures in The Universities Act remain with the individual university, the seven Irish universities in 2003 voluntarily agreed a common
framework for the periodic internally organised evaluations at unit level. The Framework for Quality was published by the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU). This publication was revised in 2007 in the light of the adoption of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

In 2002, the governing authorities of all seven universities delegated to IUQB the function of arranging regular reviews of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures, which are institutional in their scope. In addition, the governing authorities also delegated authority to the IUQB under Section 41 (2) of the Universities Act to “publish the report in such form as it thinks fit and shall provide the Minister with a copy and the Minister shall cause a copy of the report to be laid before each House of the Oireachtas as soon as practicable after it is received by him or her”.

Under Section 49 of The Act, the statutory funding body for Irish universities, the HEA, may review the procedures established in accordance with section 35, and may, following consultation with the universities, publish a report, in such form and manner as it thinks fit, on the outcome of any such review.

In 2004, the IUQB and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) jointly commissioned the European University Association (EUA) to undertake the first institutional reviews of Irish Universities, through a customised version of its Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP).

The first institutional review with the assistance of experts from Europe, America and Canada, was designed for:

- The IUQB, in the case of each university, review and report on, the effectiveness of its quality assurance procedures and the implementation of findings arising out of the application of those procedures, in the context if its overall institutional decision making and strategic planning;

- The HEA, conduct and report on an overall review of quality assurance procedures established by the universities.

The first external reviews (conducted in 2004/2005) were designed to ensure that the Irish university system and its stakeholders gained maximum benefit from comprehensive evaluations by teams of experienced international quality assurance experts and that the procedures and processes in place in Irish universities could be reviewed against best practice internationally. The outcome reports of the first review cycle were made publicly available in April 2005.

In October 2006, after consultation with the universities, it was agreed that a second cycle of institutional reviews would be initiated in order to confirm the compliance of Irish universities with the requirements of (i) Section 35 of The Act, and their consistency with (ii) Part 1 requirements of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area 2005. This process is termed Institutional Review of Irish Universities (IRIU). A handbook was published by the IUQB in March 2009 which sets out in detail the IRIU process.

The seven universities have now been reviewed as part of the second cycle of institutional reviews. Each IRIU was undertaken by a team of six independent national and international reviewers selected by the IUQB Board. Institutions underwent IRIU typically every six years. A schedule of reviews was agreed between each university and the IUQB. Once dates for review were agreed and published, each university participated in each of the four integrated elements of the external review process namely: (i) the production of an institutional self-assessment report (ii) an external assessment and
site visit by a group of reviewers (iii) the publication of a review report including findings and recommendations and (iv) a follow-up procedure to review actions taken, the outcomes of which were also published.

On November 06 2012, Section 35 of The Universities Act (1997) was repealed and QQI took over responsibility for the external quality assurance review of the universities. In the transition period following establishment, in accordance with Section 84 of The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012, QQI continued to operate in line with the requirements of the IUQB Memorandum of Association, 2006.

QQI is now responsible for the external quality assurance of the university sector. It has developed a review model which is drafted and agreed in consultation with the Irish universities. QA in the Irish universities is overseen by QQI. All of the Irish universities have developed comprehensive internal QA procedures with regard to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines and Sector-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, which are underpinned by the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

All of the universities have Dialogue Meetings with QQI and also provide the agency with an annual Institutional Quality Assurance Report for each academic year. QQI also coordinates independent external Cyclical Reviews of universities on a periodic scheduled basis. These provide the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness and implementation of institution-wide QA procedures for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and enhancing the quality of education, training, research and related services the university provides. The current Review Cycle is 2017-2023.

QQI published the report of an independent review team Review of Reviews Report. The task entrusted to the team was to analyse the strengths, weaknesses, impacts and other features of the higher education institutional review processes used by the three higher education organisations (the ‘legacy organisations’) that were incorporated into QQI following its foundation in November 2012. The team was also asked for its views on possible future approaches to institutional review, taking into account the current legislative obligations and strategic intentions of QQI.

The CINNTE [7] cycle of independent quality reviews of higher education institutions was launched by the Minister of State for Higher Education on September 26 2017. A Handbook [8]and Terms of Reference [9] for the Cyclical Review of Designated Awarding Bodies (Universities, RCSI and the Dublin Institute of Technology) have been developed. The review process is in keeping with Parts 2 and 3 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) and based on the internationally accepted and recognised approach to reviews, i.e.: The publication of Terms of Reference (available in Appendix A); an Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER); an external assessment and site visit by a team of reviewers; the publication of a review report including findings and recommendations; and a follow-up procedure to review actions taken. The QQI policy for cyclical reviews of higher education institutions [10] is available to download together with the schedule [11] of Institutional Reviews for 2017-2023.

23 institutions (universities, institutes of technology and the RCSI) will be reviewed over the coming seven years. The CINNTE review cycle began in 2017 and will run for seven years until 2023. During this time, QQI will organise and oversee independent reviews of each of the Universities, the Institutes of Technology and RCSI. Each review will be carried out by an international team of independent experts and peers, who will review the education and training provision, to ensure agreed quality standards are being met. This is the third review round of Designated Awarding Bodies. Previous rounds took place in 2004-2005 and 2009-2012.

Each Designated Awarding Body provides QQI with an Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Report
(AIQR). The reporting period is an academic year and runs from September 1 to August 31. The AIQR is composed of six parts and is intended to articulate with external periodic review. On a basic level, it is intended that the AIQR, particularly part one, will assist with documentation management for institutions in review and lessen the burden on institutions to provide the Review Team with a significant amount of documentation in advance of their visit. If appropriate, it may be possible for a Review Team to satisfy itself that an institution is compliant with ESG 2015 on the basis of the evidence provided by the AIQR.

The following institutions are designated awarding bodies: Dublin City University Dublin (DCU), Institute of Technology (IT), University College Cork (UCC), University College Dublin (UCD), University of Limerick (UL), National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG), Maynooth University, The National University of Ireland (NUIM), The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), Trinity College Dublin (TCD).

The current (2017-2023) review cycle is being conducted in a very changed context for higher education. The landscape for higher education has been significantly reshaped since the last cycle of reviews commenced. Smaller colleges have been merged with universities and many institutes of technology are reorganising and preparing mergers as part of the Technological University process. New alliances and clusters, envisaged by ‘Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape’ (HEA 2012) have commenced. A new approach to public funding has been introduced and operated by the Higher Education Authority (HEA). Initiatives for enhancement such as the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) and the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (NFETL) have been formalised at a national level. These developments mean that there are new sources of information and external benchmarks available to institutions that can be used to inform self-evaluation in this review cycle. Key measurements such as entry profiles, student retention, graduate profiles and staff and student satisfaction rates can provide some quantitative evidence of the quality of an institution’s offer.

The 2012 Act states that QQI shall consult with the HEA in carrying out the review. QQI has agreed with HEA that this will take the form of engagement with QQI on the Terms of Reference and confirmation of the status of the institution within the higher education system, sharing individual institutional profiles and data with the Team.

**Internal Quality Assurance within the HETAC Sector**

HETAC was the qualifications awarding body for higher education and training institutions outside the university sector and had responsibility for the external quality assurance of its sector. The Council’s role and functions include the setting of standards for named awards, the validation of programmes, the registration of providers, the agreement of providers’ quality assurance procedures with providers and the review of the implementation and effectiveness of those procedures.

The Council, as part of its statutory functions, could delegate authority to make awards to the Institutes of Technology. The power to make awards at levels 6 - 9 in respect of taught programmes was delegated to most of the Institutes of Technology. Delegated authority to award research degrees (level 9 and 10) was restricted and discipline specific. Some Institutes of Technology had delegated authority to make awards at levels 9 and/or 10 in specific disciplines. It was recognised that self-regulation and self-validation for established higher education and training institutions, such as the Institutes of Technology, which allowed for those institutions to take appropriate responsibility for their own processes relating to programme development, subject to regular review, was in line with best international practice.

Whether or not a provider had delegated authority to make awards influenced whether the internal...
quality assurance arrangements in place for the provider were managed by the provider itself or by HETAC. Providers of higher education and training leading to HETAC awards were obliged to have quality assurance procedures in place and review their effectiveness across different levels including organisational level, programme level, and modular and intra-modular levels.

HETAC set out Guidelines and Criteria for Quality Assurance Procedures 2011 for all providers that offered programmes leading to HETAC awards. The guidelines aimed to assist higher education and training providers in designing, establishing, evaluating and maintaining procedures for the quality assurance of the higher education and training programmes which they provided.

In 2008, HETAC adopted a revised policy on the Registration of Providers. This was introduced to ensure that only bona fide providers offering quality assured programmes were registered as HETAC providers. All applicants under the policy had to be engaged in, or plan to engage in, the provision or procurement of programmes of higher education and training as defined in the NFQ, had to have a substantial base within the State, had to demonstrate a sound financial basis and had to comply with relevant legislation. Their internal quality assurance procedures were agreed during the registration process.

Quality assurance activities included, amongst others, approval, periodic review and monitoring of programmes and awards; quality assurance of assessment of learners and staff involved in teaching.

An approval process for programme development is a key element of higher education and training quality assurance. In the HETAC sector depending on the context (delegated authority or not) the process could either be provider-owned (internal) or operated by the HETAC itself (external).

Programme validation was carried out using a model of peer review evaluation. On the basis of recommendations by panels of peer reviewers, programmes were validated. This was an internal process for an Institute of Technology with delegated authority and for a provider with delegated authority, HETAC conducted this process. As part of the validation process, these panels reviewed documentation prepared by providers, visited the institution and make a written report detailing their recommendations. Panels varied in size, usually between three and five members, and sometimes a single panel considered more than one programme. The panels were independent of the institution and retained persons with expertise in the programme’s discipline-area and in generic areas including pedagogy, assessment and quality assurance and were convened to be competent to make national and international comparisons. They consisted of a chairperson, experts in the academic discipline(s) concerned drawn from other HETAC providers, Irish universities and higher education institutions in other countries, and industry, the voluntary sector and the public service. They normally included an assessor with expertise in understanding and representing the interests of learners. Usually this was a learner. Where it was not feasible to include a learner then a recent graduate, or a student union officer, or another suitable person generally represented the interests of learners.

Typically, Certificates of Approval were issued, either by HETAC or by an Institute of Technology, under delegation of authority from HETAC, with five year validity. Programmes had to be reviewed and if appropriate re-validated within five years. The awarding body sought recommendation on revalidation from an independent panel appointed by the institution for each programme.

External Quality Assurance within the HETAC Sector

External quality assurance shared the same broad objectives as internal quality assurance; maintenance of a desired level of quality in higher education and training services and products. These dual objectives were achieved by HETAC through:
Establishing quality standards;
Establishing criteria and guidelines for internal quality assurance;
Establishing and implementing policy and procedures for external quality assurance;
Researching for the purpose of innovating and invigorating quality assurance methods;
Publishing quality reviews of programmes, institutions (providers), themes and the system as a whole.

In 2008, HETAC began a programme of Institutional Reviews. This major project resulted in the formal review of all HETAC providers, and institutional reviews occurred typically on a 5 year cycle.

The Institutional Review was intended to:

- Enhance public confidence in the quality of education and training provided by the institution and the standards of the awards made;
- Assess the effectiveness of the quality assurance arrangements operated by the institution;
- Confirm the extent that the institution has implemented the national framework of qualifications and procedures for access, transfer and progression;
- Evaluate the operation and management of delegated authority where it has been granted;
- Provide recommendations for the enhancement of the education and training provided by the institution;
- Contribute to coherent strategic planning and governance in the institution.

Institutional reviews consisted of six phases, namely;

- HETAC set terms of reference following consultation with institution;
- Self-study was undertaken by the institution;
- Visit by expert panel appointed by HETAC and written panel report;
- Institutional response including implementation plan;
- Panel report and response published;
- Follow-up report submitted by the institution.

The membership of the review panel was set out in the Institutional Review Policy. The panel generally consisted of 5-7 members and had to include persons reflecting the perspective of learners and of the world of work and persons with senior management experience of higher education and training provision. At least one of the members had to be from outside Ireland, bringing an international perspective to the review.

From 2008 to the end of 2012, 31 institutions/providers underwent the institutional review process. All documentation relating to Institutional Reviews is publicly available on the HETAC website, including terms of reference, self-evaluation reports, panel reports, responses from providers and progress reports.

In addition to its role in relation to the validation of programmes and the establishment and monitoring of standards, HETAC’s statutory remit was also to ensure that student assessment procedures within institutions were fair and consistent and fit for purpose and that for-profit programmes validated, with a duration of greater than three months, had academic or financial protection for the learners who enrolled on those programmes.

In 2010, HETAC adopted Provider Monitoring Policy and Procedures. This policy was designed to ensure that providers offered programmes as planned and validated, adhered to approved internal quality assurance procedures and aimed to result in higher quality provision to the benefit of learners.
Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, the NQAI was responsible for the external quality assurance of the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). It was also given interim responsibility for the external quality assurance of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) which was granted degree-awarding powers by the State in 2010. The external quality assurance of the DIT and the RCSI became the responsibility of the new qualifications and quality assurance body, QQI, once it was established in 2012.

The Dublin Institute of Technology

The NQAI exercised certain legislative functions in relation to the quality assurance procedures of the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). Under the Qualifications Act, there was a requirement for the DIT to put quality assurance procedures in place and to agree those procedures with the NQAI. The NQAI and the Institute agreed an initial set of procedures in June 2002. The Institute adopted a revised Quality Enhancement Handbook in June 2006 which, inter alia, extended its quality assurance policies and procedures to non-academic departments. These revised procedures were agreed with the NQAI in January 2007, and contained a formal statement of their compatibility to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. They also noted the Institute’s agreement with the verification of the compatibility of the Irish NFQ with the Bologna Framework.

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 also provided that the NQAI should consider the findings arising out of the application of the agreed quality assurance procedures and could make recommendations to the Institute in respect of them. Following consultation between the Institute and the NQAI, an agreed approach to this function was developed in February 2004. The findings from the Institute’s programme validation and review processes, as well as school and faculty reviews, were considered by the NQAI on an annual basis, and recommendations were made as appropriate. To date, findings arising from the application of the quality assurance procedures were considered for the academic years 2002-3 to 2011-12. The agreed approach was kept under review by the NQAI and the Institute.

The DIT was also subject to external quality assurance, as set out in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999. Section 39(4) of the Qualifications Act required the NQAI, in consultation with the DIT, to review the effectiveness of the Institute’s quality assurance procedures ‘not more than once in every three years and not less than once in every seven years’. In fulfillment of this requirement, in 2005-06 a review was undertaken by the European University Association, on behalf of the NQAI, of the effectiveness of its quality assurance procedures. Following the five year cycle that is common to institutional reviews nationally, the NQAI decided in May 2010 that a second review should take place in the academic year 2010-11. It agreed the terms of reference for the review and appointed a review panel of national and international experts to undertake the review on its behalf. The review process, including the preparation of a self-evaluation report by the DIT, a site visit to the DIT by the review panel, the completion of a report by the review panel and the preparation of an institutional response to that report by the DIT, was completed in June 2011. All documentation relating to the review is publicly available on the NQAI website.

The QQI is now responsible for the external quality assurance of the DIT.

The Royal College of Surgeons (RCSI)

RCSI was granted degree-awarding powers by the State following a review requested by the Minister for Education and carried out by the NQAI and the HEA in 2010.
The RCSI Quality Office is responsible for managing the internal reviews of Schools and non-academic units within the RCSI. The RCSI system of ‘rolling' internal reviews commenced in January 2011. Academic units (at the level of School or Faculty) and non-academic units (administrative support functions) are subject to review on seven- and six-year cycles respectively. In all cases, these reviews follow the format of:

- Preparation of a Self Assessment report (SAR) by the unit under review;
- A site-visit of 2-3 days duration by a Peer Review Group (PRG) comprising two external and two internal members;
- Submission of a formal report by the PRG;
- Development of a Quality Improvement Plan in response to the report.

During 2011, internal reviews of the School of Postgraduate Studies and of the Examinations Office were in progress. An institutional review of the RCSI was undertaken by the NQAI and the HEA in 2010, as part of the process for the RCSI to obtain independent degree-awarding powers.

The QQI is now responsible for the external quality assurance of the RCSI. Among its functions, the body will review the effectiveness of internal quality assurance policies, procedures and structures at the RCSI. The first institutional review of the RCSI in this regard will take place in 2014.

**Technological University Development**

On 1 January 2019, Technological University (TU) Dublin was formally established. However, it did not emerge fully formed but is building on some 175 years of proud higher educational history between Dublin Institute of Technology and the Institutes of Technology Blanchardstown and Tallaght. This milestone new unitary institution, the largest now in the State, spread across three main campuses and with a “virtual” campus, comprising some 28,000 students and over 3,000 staff, will build up and record an equal history of service excellence to its students and hopefully over a similar time period and beyond.

The emergence of the first technological university is a landmark day for Irish education as new Higher Education Institutions such as TU Dublin will be distinguished from traditional universities by an ethos that is more closely aligned with, and which builds upon, the mission and focus of Institutes of Technology from which they stem.

They will have an emphasis largely – though not exclusively – on programmes at Levels 6 (higher and advance certificates) up to Level 8 (honours bachelor degree) on the National Framework of Qualifications, and on industry focused research. TUs will also play a pivotal role in facilitating student access and progression particularly through their relationships with the further education and training sector.

TUs will also have a regional development mission and focus on research, innovation and knowledge-transfer particularly in partnership with Small and Medium Enterprises. They will forge close links with business, enterprise and local and regional communities.

The 2011 *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* [12] provided for substantial changes to the landscape of Irish higher education including reform of teacher education, improved institutional alignment and consolidation within the Institute of Technology sector and a pathway of evolution for consolidated institutes to become technological universities (TUs).

It is intended that technological universities will:

- Support innovation, management upskilling and internationalisation of companies;
• Create the capacity for greater engagement with local enterprises, particularly Small and Medium Enterprises;
• Increase internationalisation activities – attract more international students and increase mobility opportunities for Irish students and staff;
• Provide a key selling point in the attraction, retention and development of Foreign Direct Investment in the regions;
• Facilitate lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling;
• Provide greater capacity for social and community engagements – placements, work with schools, cultural and sporting activities.

The Technological Universities Act 2018, underpins the establishment of technological universities and was signed into law on 19 March 2018. Three other consortia of Institutes of Technology are currently engaged with the process seeking to become designated as technological universities:

**Munster Technological University (MTU)**, consisting of Cork Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Tralee. This TU would encompass some 14,000 students.

**Technological University for South-East Ireland (TUSEI)**, consisting of Waterford Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Carlow. This TU would encompass some 14,500 students.

**Connacht Ulster Alliance (CUA)**, consisting of Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Sligo, and Letterkenny Institute of Technology. This consortium would encompass some 16,000 students.

Since 2013, the Government has co-funded technological university development and related landscape restructuring proposals by some €20 million, some €9.28 million of which has co-funded the Technological University Dublin consortium.

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