



University of
Medicine and
Health
Sciences

RCSI

Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

Quality Assurance Framework 2022-23



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[1] Background & context

[1.1] The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI)

The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) was established by Royal Charter in 1784 to set and support professional standards for surgical training and practice in Ireland. RCSI has evolved considerably in the intervening years and is now both a university and a postgraduate training body in surgery and related specialties. This dual role brings many advantages to the institution, not least of which is the ability to offer education and training at all career levels (i.e. undergraduate, postgraduate & professional) in medicine, surgery and related disciplines. In fact, it is the only surgical or medical Royal College in these islands to have university status. RCSI is the largest medical school in Ireland and awards medical degrees in Ireland, Bahrain and Malaysia. RCSI also provides undergraduate degree programmes in Pharmacy and Physiotherapy in Ireland, undergraduate Nursing degree programmes in Bahrain and masters (taught & by research) and doctoral programmes variously in Ireland, Bahrain, China, and Malaysia. RCSI became a Recognised College of the National University of Ireland (NUI) in 1978. Following an institutional review commissioned jointly by the Higher Education Authority and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, RCSI independent degree awarding powers were activated by ministerial order in 2010 pursuant to the terms of The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (Charters Amendment) Act 2003. The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 established RCSI as a Designated Awarding Body. In 2019 RCSI received authorisation to use the description 'University' and to style itself accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Amendment Act 2019.

[1.2] RCSI Awarding Arrangements

[1.2.1] Degree Awards

The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) became a Recognised College of the National University of Ireland (NUI) in 1978. As noted above, RCSI independent-degree awarding powers were commenced in 2010 by Ministerial Order, and the Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education & Training) Act 2012 recognised RCSI as a Designated Awarding Body (i.e. a body having independent degree awarding powers) under the Act. The granting to RCSI of independent degree-awarding powers enhanced its status as a higher education institution both nationally and internationally. However, the visibility and recognition associated with NUI degrees confers considerable reputational and historical advantage on RCSI graduates. RCSI places considerable value on its graduates being graduates of the NUI and, as a result, does not invoke its independent degree powers in most circumstances. In light of this, Schedule 3 (9) of the Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education & Training) Act 2012 introduced Section 47A to the Universities Act 1997 which provides that the degrees & qualifications of RCSI shall be degrees & qualifications of the NUI where they are approved by the NUI and while RCSI remains a Recognised College of the NUI¹. This legislative change was subsequently reflected in an amendment to the NUI Statutes. Accordingly, degrees of RCSI are awards of the NUI, with the sole exception of the degree of Doctor of Science (DSc) *honoris causa* which is solely and exclusively a degree of the RCSI University of Medicine & Health Sciences.

[1.2.2] Postgraduate/Professional Awards

The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (Charters Amendment) Act 2003, which amends previous legislation and the original Royal Charter of Incorporation of the College and supplementary Royal

¹ This reflects the status of the degrees of the Constituent Universities of the NUI as codified in Section 47(5) of the Universities Act 1997, which states that 'The degrees and other qualifications awarded by a constituent university shall be degrees and qualifications of the National University of Ireland and shall be so designated'.

Charters, empowers RCSI [a] to award Licentiates, Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees in Surgery and related disciplines, and [b] to admit candidates to Membership and Fellowship of the College in Surgery and related disciplines.

[1.3] Quality Assurance as a key Bologna Action

The Bologna Process, which marked its 20th anniversary in 2019, is a process of intergovernmental cooperation in higher education (HE) between 48 European countries making up the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Its key actions include the delineation of a three-cycle structure for HE (Bachelors – Masters – Doctorate), the facilitation of recognition of qualifications across countries and the strengthening of quality assurance (QA) processes in HE. The original Bologna Declaration (1999) encouraged the development of comparable criteria and methods for QA leading to the adoption of the ‘Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area’ (known as the ESG) in 2005.

[1.4] European Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance

The ESG were developed by the ‘E4 Group’, comprised of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Universities Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and the European Students’ Union (ESU). The ESG, which were revised in 2015, have been adopted widely as a shared reference point for QA in higher education and, currently, over 20 national QA agencies in Europe are compliant with them including Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

The ESG 2015 are based on four principles for quality assurance in the EHEA²:

- Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;
- Quality assurance responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students;
- Quality assurance supports the development of a quality culture;
- Quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society.

The revision process leading to the adoption of ESG 2015 took into account the significant changes in higher education within the EHEA since 2005, including the shift to student-centred learning, flexible learning paths and the recognition of competencies acquired outside of formal education. It also broadened the scope of ESG to encompass all higher education provision ‘regardless of the mode of study or place of delivery’ reflecting the growth of transnational provision and the diversification of delivery modes (especially the advent of e-learning)³. ESG 2015 focuses on learning and teaching but also includes references to ‘the learning environment and relevant links to research and innovation’, while also requiring institutions to have policies and procedures in place for the quality assurance of other activities including research and institutional governance.

The E4 Group recently undertook an evaluation of the continued relevance and applicability of the ESG in the light of recent changes in the European higher education landscape. Arising from this process, they issued a statement in August 2020 affirming the continued validity and relevance of the ESG⁴.

² http://www.equip-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/ESG_2015.pdf

³ A comparative analysis of ESG 2015 versus ESG 2005 can be found at http://www.equip-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/EQUIP_comparative-analysis-ESG-2015-ESG-2005.pdf

⁴ https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/E4-statement_The-ESG-in-the-changing-landscape-of-higher-education_Final.pdf

[1.5] Quality Assurance in Irish Higher Education

The Universities Act 1997⁵ set out statutory requirements for the operation of Irish universities, including the requirement for each university to establish internal quality assurance processes. The Act places the ownership of quality processes explicitly with each institution, and it mandates an approach based upon a holistic view of quality in an institution and which involves external reviewers, students and stakeholders while preserving institutional autonomy, ensuring public accountability and facilitating international benchmarking.

In addition to establishing the internal policies and procedures required by the legislation, the universities authorised the establishment of the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB), one of the predecessor bodies to Quality & Qualifications Ireland, in 2002. The core activities of IUQB included conducting external institutional reviews of the Irish universities; developing and disseminating good practice guidelines in aspects of teaching & learning, research and strategic planning/management; and liaising with national and international organisations (including EUA & ENQA)⁶. The IUQB, in conjunction with the Higher Education Authority (HEA), commissioned the European University Association in 2004-2005 to undertake the first cycle of external review of the seven Irish universities. In 2009 IUQB launched the Institutional Review of Irish Universities (IRIU) process, the second cycle of external reviews.

The Quality & Qualifications (Education & Training) Act 2012⁷ established Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI) as the statutory body responsible for qualifications and quality assurance in higher education and in further education & training in Ireland, combining the roles of four predecessor organisations⁸. QQI has a broad remit encompassing the domains of quality assurance in higher and further education & training, the awarding & recognition of qualifications, the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), qualifications recognition and international education. With regard to quality assurance in higher education, QQI bears statutory responsibility for the approval of the QA policies and procedures of higher education providers, and for periodic review of the effectiveness of these procedures. To that end, QQI assumed responsibility for the completion of the second (IRIU) cycle of institutional reviews of the Irish universities, which had commenced in 2009. QQI launched the third 'CINNTE' cycle of Institutional Reviews in 2017.

Amongst a range of other provisions, the 2012 Act also simplified the degree-awarding landscape in Ireland by recognising two categories of institution:

- **Designated Awarding Bodies** (DABs) with independent degree awarding powers
- **Linked Providers** (LPs) which enter into a formal arrangement with a DAB under which the LP delivers a programme of education & training that satisfies the prerequisites for an award of the DAB

QQI bears responsibility for approval and for periodic review of the QA policies and procedures of the DABs⁹. In relation to LPs, the statutory responsibility for approval of their QA policies and procedures (and for periodic review of the effectiveness of these procedures) lies with the relevant DABs.

The Quality & Qualifications (Education & Training) Amendment Act 2019¹⁰ amends and extends the provisions of the 2012 Act in a range of areas including the designation of 'Listed Awarding Bodies',

⁵ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1997/act/24/enacted/en/pdf>

⁶ 'A Framework for Quality in Irish Universities: Concerted Action for Institutional Improvement', Irish Universities Association & Irish Universities Quality Board, 2nd edition, 2007; <https://www.iua.ie/publication/iuqb-a-framework-for-quality-in-irish-universities-meeting-the-challenge-of-change/>

⁷ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2012/act/28/enacted/en/pdf>

⁸ The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, the Higher Education Training & Awards Council, the Further Education Training & Awards Council and the Irish Universities Quality Board

⁹ Therefore, the statutory responsibility for approving the quality assurance policies & procedures of RCSI lies with QQI

¹⁰ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2019/act/32/enacted/en/pdf>

the establishment of a fund for the 'Protection of Enrolled Learners', authorisation to use the International Education Mark (IEM), Academic Integrity & Misconduct and 'University' designation.

[1.6] Statutory & Other Guidelines for Quality Assurance

[1.6.1] Statutory Guidelines

In 2016 QQI published its over-arching Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines¹¹ which provides the structure and rationale for all QQI statutory guidelines addressing the higher and further education sectors. In the intervening period, QQI has published a suite of core, sector-specific and topic-specific statutory guidelines for QA including:

- I. Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for use by all Providers (Apr. 2016)
- II. Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies (Sector-specific; Jul. 2016)
- III. Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Research Degree Programmes (Topic-specific; Mar. 2017)
- IV. Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes (Topic-specific; Mar. 2018)

The 'Core' Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines document identifies the eleven core areas in which providers are expected to establish QA procedures, and elaborates what is expected of provider procedures in these areas. The Core Guidelines take cognisance of, and are closely aligned with, the ESG-2015 as demonstrated in the content map below. The sector-specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies focus primarily on the statutory responsibilities of DABs for the approval of the QA policies and procedures of their Linked Providers, and for periodic review of the effectiveness of those procedures.

[1.6.2] Guidelines of the National University of Ireland

As a Recognised College of the National University of Ireland, RCSI takes cognisance also of the guidelines, policies and procedures of the NUI in relation to the validation of educational programmes leading to degree awards, and to Quality Assurance and Enhancement¹², including

- I. NUI Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement (2017)
- II. Quality Assurance for Collaborative and Transnational Provision of Academic Programmes Leading to NUI Qualifications (2013)
- III. Regulations, Procedures and Guidelines for the Approval of New Programmes and Changes to Existing Programmes in the Recognised Colleges (2020)

¹¹ www.qqi.ie

¹² It should be noted that RCSI, being a Designated Awarding Body, does not fall within scope of the NUI Policy/Procedures for the Approval of Quality Assurance Procedures in the Recognised Colleges (2017)

Mapping of QQI Core (Statutory) Guidelines for Quality Assurance (2016) to ESG-2015 and to the QQI Annual Quality Report template

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			

Graphic courtesy of Quality & Qualifications Ireland [Annual Quality Report template, 2020]

[2] Quality as a Strategic Imperative for RCSI

[2.1] Quality as a Foundation for Strategy

The RCSI Strategic Plan 'Transforming Healthcare Education, Research and Service' guides the development and activities of the University in the period 2018-2022. RCSI's vision is 'to be an international leader in supporting healthcare professionals through high quality education, research and service, to enable people to live long and healthy lives'.



RCSI has committed itself to actions across three Strategic Pillars:

- [1] Delivering a transformative learning experience
- [2] Leading impactful research
- [3] Supporting healthcare and societal well-being in Ireland and internationally

The plan identifies four key strategic enablers to ensure that RCSI meets these commitments, specifically:

- Deepening its organisational capabilities
- Increasing the quality and breadth of its partnerships
- Supporting its people and culture
- Maintaining its financial performance and governance standards

RCSI has identified Quality as one of the three foundational elements of the entire strategic plan, together with Reputation and Equality, Diversity & Inclusion. Given that the work of RCSI is driven by an unrelenting focus on quality and reputation, and that our relationships are based firmly upon equality, diversity & inclusion, these elements are also the measure of success in implementing the Strategic Plan.

[2.2] RCSI Quality Policy

[2.2.1] A culture of quality underpinning the RCSI vision

Arising from our mission – *to educate, nurture and discover for the benefit of human health* – our corporate vision is *to be an international leader in supporting healthcare professionals through high quality education, research and service, to enable people to live long and healthy lives*. Our progress to-date in this regard, and our plans for the future, depend crucially on an all-pervasive culture of quality in which responsibility for the quality of the student / professional trainee experience, and for continuous quality enhancement, is shared by all staff.

[2.2.2] Principles

The core principles underpinning this culture of quality are as follows:

- RCSI is committed to ensuring that we deliver a quality educational experience to our students and professional trainees, that we support our staff to realise their full potential and develop

collective excellence within the university and that we provide an excellent standard of service to our stakeholders

- As one of Ireland’s leaders in the area of transnational education provision, RCSI is committed to ensuring that students based on our overseas campuses receive a learning experience which is equivalent to that of students based at RCSI-Dublin
- The maintenance and enhancement of quality is the responsibility of every member of RCSI staff
- RCSI is committed to robust, transparent processes and procedures for ongoing quality assurance and quality enhancement of academic programmes, Schools, Faculties and Professional Support Units both in Ireland and overseas
- Institutional research, the gathering of quantitative and qualitative data to support evidence-based quality assurance and quality improvement processes, is central to RCSI operations. In this regard, particular value is placed upon the views of students, staff and external peers. The views of students and staff are sought through regular surveys. External views derive from the involvement of external examiners in all programmes and the inclusion of external members in all review panels
- RCSI is committed to working constructively with other Irish higher education institutions, and with statutory regulatory bodies in Ireland and overseas, to maintain and enhance the reputation of Ireland as an education provider
- The RCSI quality policy supports, informs and responds to the university’s institutional strategy, identifying as core values of RCSI the quality of the student experience, continuous quality enhancement in all of our activities and the quality of our contribution to our stakeholders and to the communities in which we work across the world
- The RCSI quality policy is guided by the overarching Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and by the relevant national legislation & statutory guidelines in Ireland and in the other jurisdictions within which we operate

[2.3] The RCSI Definition of Quality

The RCSI Quality Policy states that RCSI is committed to ensuring that we deliver a quality educational experience to our students and professional trainees, that we support our staff to realise their full potential within the university and that we provide an excellent standard of service to our stakeholders. While the term ‘quality’ is used widely in higher education and significant resources are devoted to measuring it, definitions of quality in higher education are somewhat difficult to find. RCSI has adopted the work of Schindler *et al.* (2015)¹³, which attempts to synthesise the literature on definitions of quality in higher education, as the basis for its definition of quality and for the parameters used in its measurement. For RCSI ‘quality’ means delivering programmes of education, training, research and service that are:

- **Purposeful**
 - Conforming to the university’s stated mission & vision and championing current best practice and professional standards in the health professions and life sciences
- **Transformative**
 - Bringing about positive change in student learning and the realisation of students’ personal and professional potential
- **Exceptional**
 - Achieving distinction for its programmes, students and staff through the attainment of the highest standards

¹³ Schindler L, Puls-Elvidge S, Welzant H, Crawford L. Definitions of Quality in Higher Education: A Synthesis of the Literature. Higher Learning Research Communications 2015; 5 (3): 3-13.

- **Accountable**

- Being accountable to internal and external stakeholders for the optimal use of resources, and the delivery of excellent educational products and services

Specific parameters, again taken from the work of Schindler *et al.* (2015), to assess each of these domains are as follows:

Purposeful <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fulfillment of Mission & Vision • Transparent aims & processes • Achievement of standards • Attainment of institutional goals 	Transformative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner-centred approach • Competence of lecturers / trainers • Clarity of outcomes • Development of critical thinking • Development of (clinical) skills • Student engagement with content
Exceptional <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credibility • Legitimacy • Reputation • Ranking • Prestige 	Accountable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on continuous improvement • Sufficiency of facilities • Procurement of quality resources • Student preparedness for professional practice & employment

[2.4] Quality Assurance of Transnational and Collaborative Educational Provision

RCSI is involved in a range of instances of transnational and collaborative educational provision (TN/C) across its international branch campuses and international programmes (see table below). The Quality Committee has overall responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement across these programmes and campuses (see Appendix 1). In addition to participating in local quality assurance and professional accreditation processes, they are subject to review by RCSI in the context of the ongoing programme of periodic internal quality assurance reviews administered by the Quality Enhancement Office (see Section 4.3.4.1).

RCSI TN/C provision of undergraduate degree programmes		
Campus / Programme	Type of provision ¹	Partners
RCSI-Bahrain	TN	N/A
RCSI-UCD Malaysia Campus	TN/C	University College Dublin
Perdana University-RCSI School of Medicine	TN/C	Perdana University (Malaysia)
BSc Pharmacy (International)	TN/C	Soochow University (China)

¹ TN = Transnational provision; TN/C = Transnational Collaborative provision

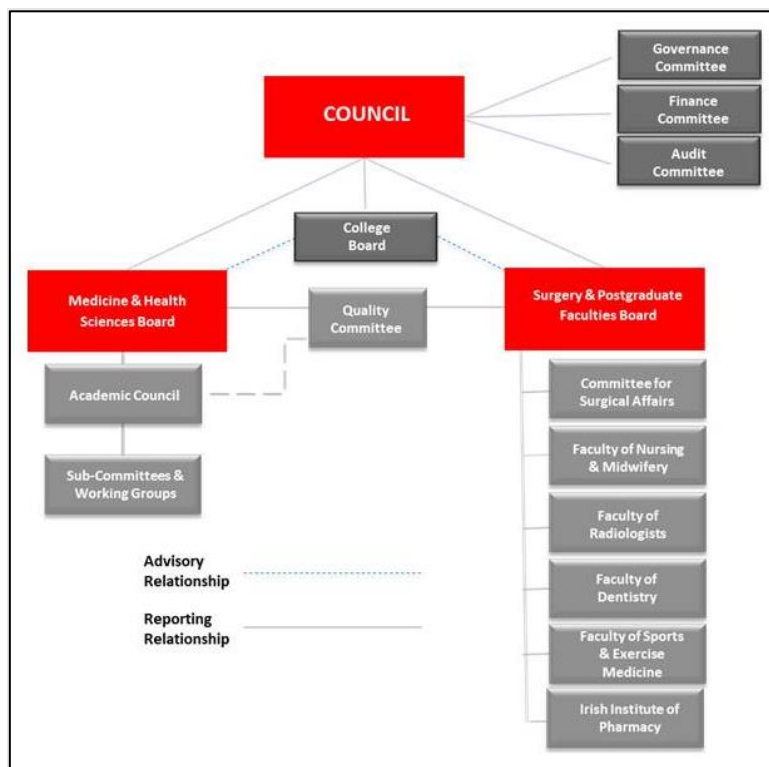
RCSI has adopted the IHEQN ‘Guidelines for the Approval, Monitoring and Review of Collaborative and Transnational Provision’¹⁴ as a ‘ready reckoner’ when evaluating proposals for the development of new TN/C provision arrangements.

¹⁴ Guidelines for the Approval, Monitoring and Review of Collaborative and Transnational Provision, Irish Higher Education Quality Network, 2013

[3] Quality Assurance within the governance of RCSI

[3.1] Overview of governance

Established initially as a surgical Royal College, RCSI is governed by the Council. The governance structure has evolved considerably over time, reflecting the subsequent development of RCSI as a higher education institution, the advent of independent degree awarding powers, changes in best practice in higher education governance and university designation. The current structure is summarised below.



When its independent degree-awarding powers were activated in 2010, RCSI established the Medicine & Health Sciences Board (MHSB) and Surgery & Postgraduate Faculties Board (SPFB). MHSB¹⁵ is the governing body for all RCSI educational programmes leading to degree awards in the health sciences, while SPFB is the cognate body governing RCSI postgraduate/professional training and certification in Surgery and related specialties. Both of these Boards operate under authority for specified non-surgical matters delegated to them by Council. Council retained a number of ‘Reserved Powers’, mostly concerned with financial governance and oversight of the university, and these are exercised through the functions of the Finance Committee and the Audit Committee. In recognition of the growing complexity and breadth of the university’s activities beyond Surgery, Council in 2013 established the College Board as an overall advisory body for RCSI.

[3.2] Key entities relevant to Quality Assurance

[3.2.1] Quality Committee

The RCSI Quality Committee (QC) is responsible for the creation of policy and for the implementation of quality processes and quality assurance/quality improvement (QA/QI) activities across academic and administrative areas of all RCSI campuses. The Quality Committee (QC) reports both to MHSB and

¹⁵ The structure of the MHSB broadly parallels the structures of the Governing Bodies of the NUI Constituent Universities that come within the ambit of Section 4 of the Universities Act 1997.

to SPFB. The QC plays a significant role in integrating QA activities on overseas campuses into the overall QA system, and in supporting these campuses in their interactions with local QA/QI structures and processes. RCSI Bahrain has a local Quality Assurance Committee (QAC). A report on its activities is presented at each QC, and the Chair of the QAC is a member of the QC. The QC Membership & Terms of Reference are given as Appendix 1 (below).

The QC has two standing sub-committees reporting to it, the Academic Integrity Working Group (AIWG) and the Institutional Review Working Group (IRWG). The AIWG is a formal structure to allow RCSI to monitor and respond to initiatives launched by the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) and by QQI in the area of Academic Integrity. The IRWG is responsible for the management of Institutional Reviews conducted by QQI. It was reconvened in 2022 in preparation for the 2023 Institutional Review.

[3.2.2] Quality Enhancement Office

The QEO is the executive function of the RCSI Quality Committee (QC) and of its sub-committees, and reports to the Vice Chancellor & CEO/Registrar of RCSI. The role of the QEO is to support the implementation of the RCSI QA/QI strategy by coordinating all relevant activities and by collecting the data needed to allow the QC to quality assure all aspects of programme delivery. The QEO is comprised of four members of staff: Head of Quality Enhancement Office, Director of Psychometrics, Quality Reviews Manager and QA/QI Analyst. The Head of Quality Enhancement Office reports to the Chair of the Quality Committee, the Vice Chancellor & CEO/Registrar of RCSI.

[3.2.3] Awards & Qualifications Committee

The RCSI Awards & Qualifications Committee (A&QC) has authority and operational responsibility delegated by MHSB to evaluate and consider educational programmes which fall under the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) for approval and accreditation, and to carry out periodic Programmatic Reviews. The A&QC policies and procedures for the accreditation of new degree programmes are designed to satisfy the requirements of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and those of the National University of Ireland.

[3.3] Input to Institutional Strategic Planning

The QC and QEO contribute to institutional strategic planning by routinely providing key data to RCSI governance structures and Senior Management Team, including primarily (i) a dashboard of key performance indicators of student and staff satisfaction and engagement derived from ongoing survey activity, and (ii) the insights and recommendations arising from internal QA reviews. In addition, the QEO facilitates thematic reviews to inform the strategic planning process. For example, in 2017, the QEO facilitated a thematic review of implementation of the previous Strategic Plan (2013-2017) carried out by a six-member international Review Panel. This review provided a series of recommendations which informed the development of the new RCSI Strategic Plan 2018-2022.

[4] The RCSI Quality Framework

[4.1] Aim

The RCSI Quality Policy emphasises the paramount importance of delivering a high quality educational and professional development experience to our students and professional trainees. The aim of the RCSI Quality Framework is to encompass the array of tools necessary to assure and enhance the quality of our educational and training provision, and to demonstrate this quality to our internal and external stakeholders.

[4.2] Objectives

The objectives of the Quality Framework are:

- To provide a comprehensive body of data which facilitates the timely monitoring of the performance of all RCSI educational and professional programmes in Ireland and overseas
- To enable Schools, Faculties, Professional Support Units and overseas Branch Campuses/programmes to assess the effectiveness of their internal quality assurance policies and procedures through the process of periodic internal quality assurance review
- To ensure external validation of quality processes through the involvement of independent, external peers as external examiners and as members of review panels
- To engage students and professional trainees meaningfully as partners in quality assurance and enhancement
- To demonstrate compliance with national and international standards
- To develop the culture of quality within RCSI in which all staff share the vision and responsibility for ensuring high quality educational and professional training provision
- To support the attainment of the RCSI strategic goals in furtherance of the university's mission and vision

[4.3] Elements of the Framework

[4.3.1] External

[4.3.1.1] Periodic Institutional Review

RCSI, as a Designated Awarding Body, is subject to periodic Institutional Review by Quality & Qualifications Ireland, which bears statutory responsibility for the approval of RCSI's QA policies and procedures and for periodic review of their effectiveness. The next such review will take place in 2023 as part of the QQI 'CINNTE' Cycle of Institutional Reviews which commenced in 2017.

Previously, RCSI has undergone two Institutional Reviews:

- An Institutional Review was conducted in 2009 by an international Review Panel convened jointly by the Higher Education Authority and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland as part of the process which led to the activation of degree-awarding powers in 2010
- RCSI was subject to Institutional Review in 2013-2014 by an international Review Panel as part of the Institutional Review of Irish Universities (IRIU) Cycle administered by the Irish Universities Quality Board & QQI (2009-2015). The Panel reached the following conclusions:
 - The Review Team found that the institutional strategic planning, governance and ownership of quality assurance and enhancement is consistent with RCSI's role as an independent degree-awarding institution and consistent with the provisions of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012
 - The Review Team found the institution's quality assurance arrangements for national, transnational and collaborative provision to be consistent with Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

and national, European and international guidelines and standards, particularly in accordance with the Bologna process

- The Review Team found that RCSI planning, structure and systems support its responsibilities as an awarding body with qualifications recognised by the National Framework of Qualifications

RCSI overseas campuses and partner institutions are subject to Institutional Review by local cognate bodies including the Bahrain Education & Training Quality Authority and Higher Education Commission (RCSI-Bahrain), the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (RCSI-UCD Malaysia Campus & Perdana University) and the China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Centre (Soochow University).

[4.3.1.2] Annual Reporting to Quality & Qualifications Ireland

QQI has continued the practice of annual reporting instituted by the Irish Universities Quality Board. In consultation with the Designated Awarding Bodies, QQI revised the scheme and developed the current submission format, which is the Annual Quality Report (AQR)¹⁶. The AQR covers a reporting period which runs from September to August of the preceding year and is divided into two parts:

- Part 1 provides an overview of QA governance, policies and procedures within the institution
- Part 2 provides information relating to institution-led QA during the reporting period

The AQR informs discussions between each Designated Awarding Body and QQI in the context of the Annual Dialogue Meeting, and the annual submissions form a useful record of the evolution of institutional QA policies and procedures between periodic Institutional Reviews. QQI publishes the AQR submissions and produces an annual summary report covering the submissions made for each successive reporting period.

[4.3.1.3] Professional Regulatory Accreditation Processes

As a health sciences university and postgraduate / professional training body, the majority of RCSI educational and training programmes are subject to accreditation by the relevant Postgraduate Regulatory Statutory Bodies (PRSBs). The five relevant PRSBs in the Republic of Ireland and the programmes which they accredit are listed below.

Postgraduate Regulatory Statutory Body	Programme(s)
Irish Medical Council	[A] MB, BCh, BAO (Medicine) degrees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduate & Direct Entry • Ireland, Bahrain & Malaysia [B] Postgraduate / Professional Training Programmes in Surgery, Emergency Medicine, Dentistry, Radiology, Sports & Exercise Medicine <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ireland only
Nursing & Midwifery Board of Ireland	All Nursing degrees, educational & professional awards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ireland only
Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland	[A] Integrated Masters degree in Pharmacy (MPharm) & BSc degree in Pharmacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ireland only [B] Pharmacy Practitioner Revalidation & Continuing Professional Development programmes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ireland only

¹⁶ Formerly the 'Annual Institutional Quality Report (AIQR)'

CORU [The Health & Social Care Professions Regulator]	BSc degree in Physiotherapy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ireland only
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RCSI TN/C medical degree programmes in Malaysia are subject to accreditation by the Malaysian Medical Council also.

[4.3.1.4] StudentSurvey.ie

RCSI participates annually in StudentSurvey.ie (formerly the Irish Survey of Student Engagement; ISSE). This is a national initiative co-sponsored by the HEA, the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA) and the Union of Students in Ireland (USI). StudentSurvey.ie commenced in 2013, surveying first year undergraduate, final year undergraduate and taught postgraduate students. A revised and shortened survey instrument was deployed in 2016, and a new survey of postgraduate research students was piloted in 2019. The QEO facilitates RCSI participation by liaising with the StudentSurvey.ie Project Manager and the commercial provider that administers the surveys on-line. QEO determines an appropriate three-week ‘fieldwork’ period during February-March of each year during which the survey is open to RCSI students. In addition to reporting the data annually at national level, StudentSurvey.ie provides the raw survey data to the participating institutions, including RCSI. The QEO prepares and circulates an annual internal report, which analyses the StudentSurvey.ie data in the context of national and sectoral benchmarks.

[4.3.2] Annual

[4.3.2.1] External examining

External examiners play an important role in the ongoing quality assurance of degree programmes at RCSI. The Medicine & Health Sciences Board nominates external examiners to the NUI Senate, which approves and appoints them. These examiners report directly to NUI and thence to RCSI. For undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, they have access to examination results and to examples of students’ assessed work, and they are involved in aspects of the examinations process and in Examination Board meetings. For research degree programmes, they are involved in the examination of the thesis and, for Level 10 awards (MD & PhD), in the *viva voce* examination of the candidate.

[4.3.2.2] Annual Programme Monitoring

Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) is a concise mechanism which gathers data on the operation of educational programmes building on the previous year’s achievements, addressing issues raised in external examiner reports & student feedback and presenting plans for the coming academic year. When implemented consistently, APM builds an evidence base documenting programme performance in the interval between initial programme validation and periodic programmatic review. The Quality Committee mandated the Quality Enhancement Office (QEO) to develop a system of APM which was launched initially in 2016 for the PU-RCSI & PMC/RUMC medical degree programmes. In parallel, the RCSI-Bahrain Quality Office implemented Annual Programme Analysis (and Annual Module Analysis) across all programmes. The APM system was revised and relaunched in 2019 with the advent of the BSc (International Pharmacy) dual-degree programme between RCSI and Soochow University. All RCSI taught undergraduate and postgraduate TN/C programmes¹⁷ will fall within scope of APM ultimately, but implementation will be on a phased basis. APM commenced for taught undergraduate TN/C programmes in Q3 of 2019 (covering the 2018-2019 academic year), and will commence for taught postgraduate TN/C programmes in Q3 of 2022 (covering the 2021-2022 academic year). The APM process is governed by the Medicine & Health Sciences Board (MHSB)

¹⁷ i.e. Programmes delivered at RCSI-Bahrain, Perdana University-RCSI School of Medicine, RUMC and Soochow University.

through the RCSI Quality Committee, with operational responsibility for the process assigned to the QEO.

[4.3.3] Recurrent

[4.3.3.1] Programme validation & approval

The RCSI Awards & Qualifications Committee (A&QC) is responsible for the approval and validation of new educational programmes leading to RCSI degree awards aligned with the National Framework of Qualifications. It is responsible also for the revalidation of existing programmes to which Minor or Major Changes are proposed by Schools within the Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences. For new programmes, the process involves two stages: [1] establishment of a Business Case and [2] development of an Academic Proposal. Once a Business Case for a new programme has been submitted, it is reviewed internally by the A&QC Business Case Review Panel and feedback is given to the proposer. If/when the final Business Case has been approved by A&QC, a recommendation is made to the RCSI Senior Management Team which, if approved, will permit the proposer to progress to the second stage. The Academic Proposal is subject initially to internal review by the A&QC Academic Case Review Panel in an iterative process that leads ultimately to external, independent review of the programme proposal jointly by RCSI- and NUI-appointed assessors. On successful completion of this external review process, the programme is recommended for approval to MHSB and, ultimately, to NUI Senate. Major changes to existing programmes are subject to a process similar to the Academic Proposal review for new programmes, while minor changes are subject to a less extensive review, with final approval in both cases by MHSB and NUI Senate.

[4.3.3.2] Student satisfaction & engagement surveys

Survey data collection in RCSI (both in Ireland and overseas) is centralised and managed by the Quality Enhancement Office. Feedback from undergraduate students is collected at the end of each Semester. Postgraduate students are surveyed either once a year or, in a selection of taught postgraduate programmes, on a modular basis. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of results are reported to Cycle or Programme Directors who disseminate the findings to their staff and are also responsible for closing the feedback loop with students. Quantitative analyses of survey data are made available routinely to students via the Moodle virtual learning environment. Annually, the QEO conducts over 250 surveys. In addition to surveys of students in degree-awarding programmes, the QEO manages feedback processes for professional trainees & practitioners under the auspices of the National Surgical Training Programme, the Irish Institute of Pharmacy and the Affiliation for Pharmacy Practice Experiential Learning (APPEL).

From October 2020 the QEO implemented a new RCSI Student Pulse Poll, in response to the changes to the learning environment and the need for a more rapid and ongoing feedback mechanism. Student Pulse was a monthly poll that tracked students' experience by asking students to rate their overall student satisfaction followed by two open ended questions, about the aspects of student experience that are working well and what could be improved. These questions were repeated each month in 2020-21 to a random sample of one third of RCSI students across Schools. The frequency has decreased to two polls and one longer survey in each Semester. Results are regularly reported to the Senior Management Team. Year Leads and professional departments. , The Quality Committee and QEO continually emphasise the importance of 'closing the feedback loop' with students following surveys, so that students can be assured that their opinions are valued and responded to. For example, QEO published a best practice guidelines document on 'closing the feedback loop' during 2019. During 2021, the QEO set up a Moodle page dedicated to Student Pulse data that also contains examples from professional departments of how the results impact decisions made by the University in order to close the feedback loop with students. A process is being developed to formalise a response to student feedback across the University.

In addition to routine end of semester feedback surveys, the QEO collects survey data for research purposes (in consultation with the RCSI Research Ethics Committee) and to support internal development initiatives, for example:

- Annual Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) surveys of staff and students as part of RCSI's ongoing engagement with the Athena-SWAN Charter & awards process
- The PILLAR Study: Professionalism, Leadership and Resilience -administered to medical students
- Studies on the impact of COVID-19

[4.3.3.3] Staff surveys

In parallel with its administration of student surveys, the QEO is responsible also for running quarterly staff surveys (Staff Pulse) in conjunction with the Human Resources Department and/or the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Unit. A separate survey of new joiners is administered after each induction session.

[4.3.4] Periodic

[4.3.4.1] Internal Quality Assurance Reviews

As a Designated Awarding Body, RCSI is subject to statutory requirements to review the effectiveness of its internal QA policies and procedures through cyclical review of schools, faculties and professional support units, including international programmes and branch campuses. In conformity with the requirements of the relevant legislation and standards, these QA reviews are characterised by [a] the degree to which self-assessment drives the review process and [b] the overall focus on quality enhancement.

Following the establishment of the Quality Enhancement Office in late 2010, the first Internal Quality Assurance Reviews took place during 2011 and the process continues, following a calendar of 'rolling' reviews approved by the RCSI Quality Committee in the context of its operational and strategic plans. These reviews occur in four parallel cycles:

- Reviews of Schools within the Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences
- Reviews of Postgraduate / Professional Faculties
- Reviews of Professional Support Units
- Reviews of Overseas Branch Campuses & Programmes

The Internal Quality Assurance Review process involves three distinct phases encompassing an approximately six month time period.

Phase I – Self-assessment [2-3 months]

The unit under review undertakes a period of self-assessment focusing on four key questions:

- What do we do?
- How do we do it?
- How do we know it works?
- How might we do it better?

Typically a unit will take 2-3 months to complete its self-assessment, the main output of which is a 'Self-Assessment Report (SAR)'. SAR documents are usually brief (40 pages max.) and accompanied by supporting documents as required. The SAR is a confidential document seen only by the unit which produces it, the QEO & Quality Committee and the Peer Review Group involved in Phase II of the review (see below). The confidentiality of the SAR in this type of review is a guarantor of a 'safe space' in which the unit undergoing review can engage openly with the process.

Phase II – External Validation [4-6 weeks]

In parallel with developing the SAR, the unit works with the QEO to appoint a ‘Peer Review Group (PRG)’ who act as ‘critical friends’ to the Unit, carrying out a site-visit (of 2.5-3.0 days duration) and meeting with the unit’s stakeholders. The PRG consists usually of five members [1 x QA specialist (Chair); 1 x student reviewer; 1 x internal RCSI nominee; 2 x external experts], but may be larger depending on the needs of the unit under review. The primary role of the PRG is to validate the content of the SAR and to make recommendations for the future trajectory of the unit. The PRG will deliver an exit presentation at the end of the site-visit and then, some six weeks later, will issue a Peer Review Group Report detailing their findings, commendations and recommendations.

Phase III – Quality Improvement Planning [4-6 weeks]

On receipt of the Peer Review Group Report, the unit develops a ‘Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)’ in response to the PRG recommendations. This takes a simple tabular format listing actions planned in response to the recommendations of the PRG, with assignment of responsibility, time-lines & budgetary implications. The final QIP, is approved by relevant members of RCSI SMT. The QIP and the Peer Review Group Report, are presented to the Quality Committee.

On completion of the review process, the Peer Review Group Report and QIP are published on the RCSI web-site as required by the legislation. However, due to its confidential nature, the SAR is never made public. As a means to ensure continuity between reviews, implementation of the QIP arising from the previous review is assessed mid-Cycle (i.e. after approx. 3-4 years) by MHSB or SPFB as appropriate.

4.3.4.2] Programmatic Reviews

Programmatic Reviews at RCSI commenced in 2014 and are managed by the Awards and Qualification Committee (A&QC). A similar process is utilised for external programmatic reviews in Bahrain. The A&QC oversees a rolling cycle of Programmatic Reviews of all RCSI programmes which lead to qualifications or awards on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and which fall under the governance of the Medicine and Health Science Board and, ultimately, the National University of Ireland. Programmatic Reviews involve the preparation of a Self-evaluation Report by the relevant programme director, a two-day site-visit facilitated by a three-person panel¹⁸, submission of a review report, and presentation of the report to MHSB and to the NUI Senate. The possible outcomes of the Programmatic Review process are:

- [a] Full Confidence with revalidation for a period of five years;
- [b] Limited Confidence with quality improvement planning and follow-up; or
- [c] No Confidence with consequent discontinuation of the degree programme.

4.3.4.3] Thematic & Bespoke Reviews

The QEO administers thematic and bespoke reviews on an occasional basis as directed by RCSI Senior Management, by MHSB or by SPFB. For example, to assist in the process of developing the Strategic Plan 2018-2022, a thematic review of implementation of the previous Strategic Plan was undertaken during 2017 by an international review panel which assessed the impact of the plan, identified factors that influenced the implementation of its elements and made key recommendations which informed the development of the new plan. During 2019 the QEO facilitated a bespoke review of the RCSI Clinical Research Centre at the behest of Senior Management.

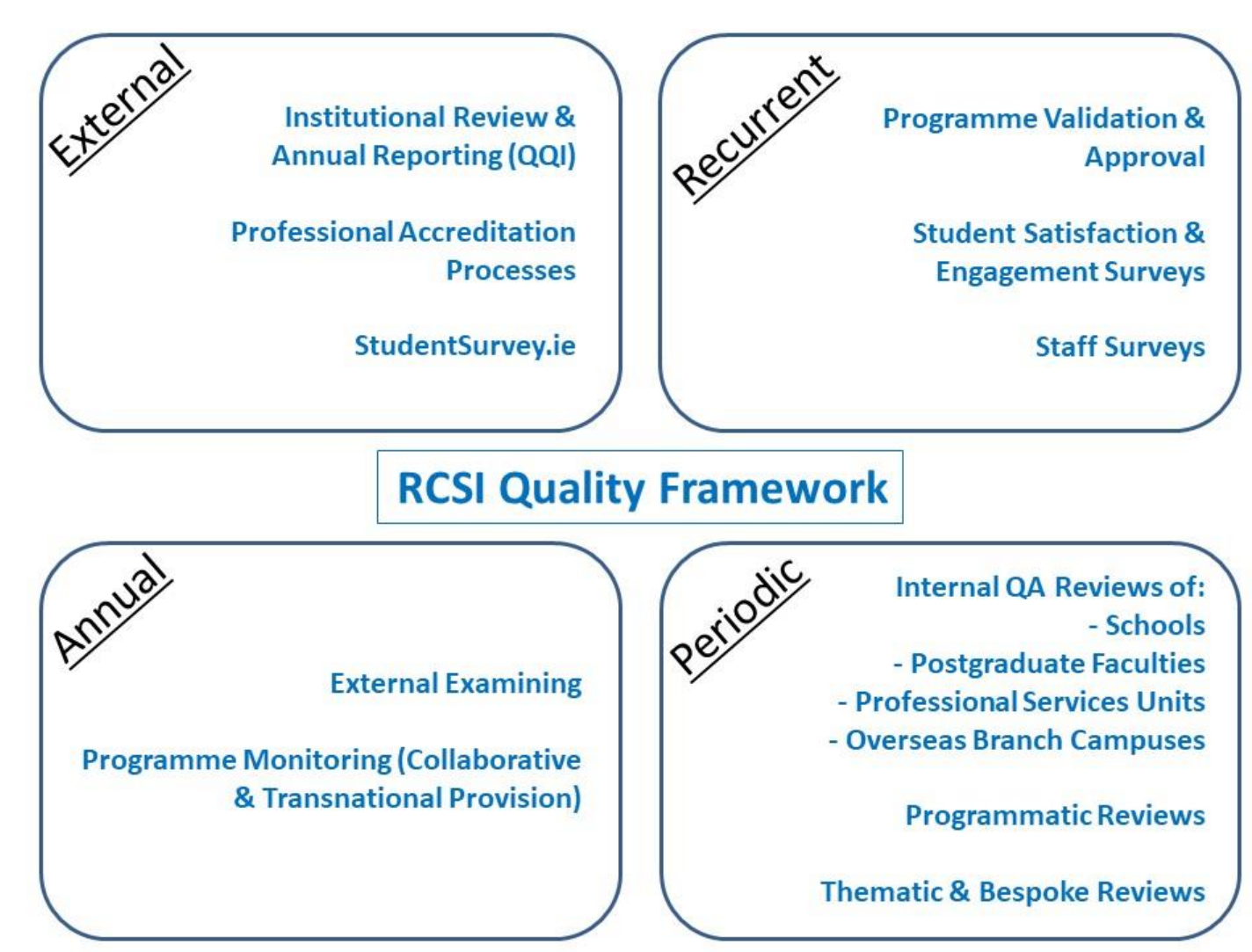
4.4] The NUI-RCSI Quality Assurance Relationship

As described above (Section 1.1), RCSI is both a Designated Awarding Body and a Recognised College of the National University of Ireland. Since the provisions of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance

¹⁸ One external member nominated by RCSI, one external member nominated by NUI & one internal RCSI panel member

(Education and Training) Act 2012 preclude one Designated Awarding Body from being deemed a Linked Provider of another Designated Awarding Body, RCSI is not a Linked Provider of NUI and therefore does not fall within scope of the Statutory Guidelines for NUI review of Linked Providers. Instead, as a Designated Awarding Body, QQI bears statutory responsibility for approval of RCSI QA policies and procedures and for periodic review of the effectiveness of these procedures. Nonetheless, an important QA relationship remains active between NUI and RCSI. The NUI Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement sets out a series of objectives that arise from its broad definition of quality assurance, one that emphasises the importance of awards standards and of procedures relating to the approval, monitoring and review of all programmes leading to NUI qualifications in the Recognised Colleges. This policy remains relevant to RCSI as a long-standing NUI Recognised College. A document has been developed by the two institutions to describe the scope and nature of the NUI-RCSI Quality Assurance Relationship [see Appendix 2 below].

Overview of the RCSI Quality Framework



Appendix 1: Membership & Terms of Reference of the RCSI Quality Committee (Rev 8 Final)

[1] Remit

The RCSI Quality Committee (QC) is responsible for the creation of policy and for the implementation of quality processes and quality assurance/quality improvement (QA/QI) activities across academic and administrative areas of all RCSI campuses.

[2] Membership

Composition	Name	Mode of selection
Vice Chancellor & CEO/Registrar, RCSI (Chair)	Prof Cathal Kelly	Ex Officio
President RCSI Bahrain	Prof Sameer Otoom	Ex Officio
Head of Quality Enhancement Office	Ms Aisling Reast	Ex Officio
Director of Quality and Academic Development, RCSI Bahrain	Dr Kathryn Strachan	Ex Officio
Representative, Medicine & Health Sciences Board (MHSB) nominated by MHSB ^a	Prof Fidelma Fitzpatrick <i>Appointed July 2022</i>	Nominated
Representative, Surgery & Postgraduate Faculties Board (SPFB) nominated by SPFB ^a	Dr Mary Boyd <i>Appointed November 2022</i>	Nominated
External 'person of esteem' nominated by the Chief Executive Officer ^{a b}	Prof Brian Bowe <i>Appointed October 2021</i>	Nominated
External 'person of esteem' nominated by the Chief Executive Officer ^{a b}	Mr Michael Kelly <i>Appointed January 2017</i>	Nominated
President of RCSI Students' Union		Ex Officio
President of RCSI Postgraduate Students' Union		Ex Officio
Dean, Perdana University – RCSI ^c	Prof Karen Morgan <i>October 2021</i>	Ex Officio
Convenor, Academic Integrity Working Group	Dr Matthew Lynch <i>January 2021</i>	Ex Officio
Programme Manager PU-RCSI Programme Office ^c	Ms Julie Creedon <i>May 2022</i>	In attendance
Director of Psychometrics and Associate Professor, Quality Enhancement Office, RCSI	Prof Richard Arnett	In attendance
Quality Reviews Manager, Quality Enhancement Office, RCSI	Ms Anne Weadick	In attendance
QA/QI Analyst, Quality Enhancement Office, RCSI	Ms Joanna Zawadzka	In attendance
Quality Enhancement Manager, RCSI Bahrain	Ms Heba Abdulhalim	In attendance

^a All appointments are for three years or term of the office holder if different.

^b The period of office can be renewed for a further period of three years, up to a maximum of six years.

^c PU-RCSI representatives participate in meetings for PU-RCSI business only.

The Committee should aim to have gender representation of at least 40% either gender and diverse representation, in so far as possible.

NB: Representatives of additional international RCSI programmes / campuses can be added to the QC as required.

[3] Reporting structure

The QC reporting structure is depicted schematically below:



The QC will report both to the Medicine & Health Sciences Board (MHSB) and the Surgery & Postgraduate Faculties Board (SFPB). The Quality Enhancement Office (QEO) will act as the ‘executive arm’ of the QC and will report to the Vice Chancellor & CEO/Registrar of RCSI. The QC will have two sub-committees reporting to it, the Academic Integrity Working Group (AIWG) and the Institutional Review Working Group (IRWG). The AIWG is a formal structure to allow RCSI to monitor and respond to initiatives launched by the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) and by Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI) in the area of Academic Integrity. The IRWG is responsible for the management of Institutional Reviews conducted by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) under the terms of the Universities Act 1997, the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Amendment Act 2019. The QEO will coordinate and support the work of the AIWG and the IRWG.

The Awards & Qualifications Committee (A&QC) reports to the Academic Council (AC). Because of the key role played by the AC as a forum for heads of academic departments and of administrative functions, the QC also will have a reporting relationship to AC to ensure that its members are appraised of QA/QI issues and activities; specifically this will mean that reports & documents issued by the QC through the QEO will be communicated to the AC for information on a discretionary basis.

[4] QC terms of reference

- to develop and maintain a quality focus in all RCSI activities
- to monitor quality issues and to advise MHSB, SFPB, AC, College Board & RCSI Council as required
- to oversee all QA/QI activities and to support College units (Schools and non-academic units) undertaking external and internal reviews across RCSI campuses (see Appendix 1)
- to monitor and review internal QA/QI policies and procedures
- to promote and support quality practices in assessment
- to monitor the implementation of Quality Improvement Plans developed by RCSI units following reviews
- to commission appropriate QA/QI activities in response to internal and external requirements
- to monitor and develop the RCSI QA/QI strategy in line with institutional requirements, local legislative requirements and international best practice
- to oversee an internal programme of ‘rolling reviews’ of academic units (at the level of Schools), of non-academic service units, of Postgraduate Faculties within RCSI and of RCSI international campuses

[5] Frequency of meetings

The QC will meet quarterly.

Annex A: The management of QA/QI processes on RCSI international campuses

In addition to the development and implementation of RCSI QA/QI policies and procedures across all campuses, the Quality Committee (QC) will play a significant role in supporting the international campuses in their interactions with local QA/QI structures and processes. The relevant reporting relationships are shown schematically below.

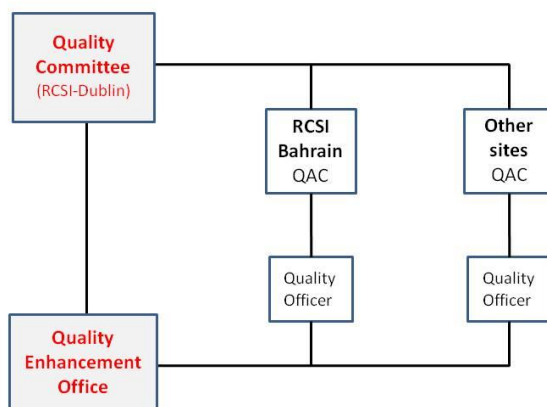
[a] Each international campus will constitute a local Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) which will report to the QC, and the Chair of each QAC will be a member of the RCSI QC; for example, the Chair of the RCSI-Bahrain QAC will be the Bahrain representative on the RCSI QC.

[b] Each international campus will appoint a part- or full-time member of administrative staff to act as Quality Officer to facilitate the work of the QAC and to manage local QA/QI activities & liaison with the QEO (Dublin) on a day-to-day basis.

[c] Schools and Non-academic Units located on international campuses will participate in Institutional Reviews of RCSI (under the aegis of QQI) and in internal reviews run by the QEO.

[d] The QEO will support and assist QACs on international campuses in QA/QI processes mandated by local institutions and/or legislation.

Figure 1: Reporting relationships between the Quality Committee and quality functions on RCSI international campuses & sites



Appendix 2: The Quality Assurance Relationship between the National University of Ireland and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland



**The Quality Assurance Relationship between the
National University of Ireland and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland – University of
Medicine and Health Sciences**

January 2020

The Quality Assurance Relationship between the National University of Ireland (NUI) and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI – University of Medicine and Health Sciences)

1. Purpose of this document

This document sets out the nature and scope of the Quality Assurance (QA) relationship between NUI and RCSI – University of Medicine and Health Sciences, (hereinafter referred to in this document as RCSI) which has been a Recognised College of NUI since 1977.¹⁹

The NUI-RCSI QA relationship has its basis in the Statutes of the National University of Ireland (1908, as amended)²⁰ which govern NUI's relationships with its Recognised Colleges. Interpreting QA in its broadest sense, the relationship aims to ensure that the education and research programmes offered and awarded by RCSI, which lead to degrees and other qualifications of the National University of Ireland, are of a high academic standard that is comparable to that provided by the constituent universities of NUI. This is an important QA relationship which assures not only NUI but also students and the wider public of the quality of RCSI programmes of study leading to NUI degrees and qualifications.

While the overarching QA relationship as provided for in NUI Statutes endures, the scope of the NUI-RCSI QA relationship altered when RCSI gained independent awarding powers in 2010, followed by Designated Awarding Body (DAB) status as provided for in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012. In summary, since 2012, RCSI's Quality Assurance policies and procedures are subject to approval by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the state agency, which carries out the statutory requirement to externally review RCSI's institutional QA system once every seven years.

2. Background & context

The **National University of Ireland (NUI)** is a university established by law under the Irish Universities Act 1908 and restructured under the 1997 Universities Act. NUI comprises, in law, four autonomous constituent universities. Separately from these, NUI is empowered under its charter and by statute, to recognise other higher education institutions and to award degrees and other qualifications of the National University in those institutions. The nomenclature used by NUI as in the 1997 Act is that of 'NUI Recognised College'.

The **Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI)** is the second oldest third-level academic institution in Ireland. Established in 1784, RCSI is both a health sciences Higher Education Institution with Schools of Leadership, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy and Graduate Studies, and a Postgraduate Training Body in Surgery and related specialties. RCSI is one of four Royal Colleges of Surgeons in Great Britain and Ireland (Edinburgh, England, Glasgow & Ireland), which espouse standards of excellence in surgery as their guiding principle. The RCSI School of Medicine was established in 1886 and RCSI became a Recognised College of NUI in 1977. RCSI gained independent degree-awarding powers in 2010 and became a Designated Awarding Body in 2012. In 2019, RCSI was authorised to use the title "university" in Ireland, having been authorised to do so overseas since 2015.

¹⁹ On 12th December 2019, the Minister for Education and Skills, Mr Joe McHugh TD, granted authorisation to RCSI to use the title "university" in Ireland, under the terms of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Amendment Act 2019.

²⁰ Statutory Provisions Governing the Recognised Colleges of the National University of Ireland (NUI Statute 86, Chapter LIX: "Recognised Colleges" and as amended by Statute 268).

3. Impact of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012

3.1. NUI

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 defined the University as a 'Designated Awarding Body' (DAB). In large part, this designation carries on NUI's long-standing statutory degree-awarding role, however the 2012 Act placed additional requirements on the University in the area of Quality Assurance. NUI became obliged to establish quality assurance arrangements in respect of 'Linked Provider' institutions that deliver educational programmes leading to awards of the University. Linked Provider institutions were defined in the 2012 Act as those without degree-awarding powers themselves but which enter into an arrangement with a DAB in order to provide accredited programmes of education and training. In 2019, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) published 'Statutory Guidelines for NUI for the Review of its Linked Providers'²¹.

3.2. RCSI

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 also defined RCSI as a 'Designated Awarding Body'. Further to this, Schedule 3 (9) of the 2012 Act amended the Universities Act 1997 to introduce Section 47A, which provides that the degrees & qualifications of RCSI shall be degrees and qualifications of the National University of Ireland where they are approved by NUI, and while RCSI remains a Recognised College of NUI. This legislative change was subsequently reflected in an amendment to NUI Statutes, namely, the insertion of statute 268 which states:

"Where a Recognised College is granted the power to award its own degrees, but wishes to remain a Recognised College of the University, and where it is the opinion of the Senate that the College should continue to be recognised, then the degrees and other qualifications awarded by the Recognised College, where these are also approved by the Senate, shall continue to be degrees and other qualifications of the National University of Ireland".

3.3. The NUI-RCSI Quality Assurance relationship

The above-noted legislative changes and statutory amendments re-affirmed the centrality of the NUI-RCSI Recognised College relationship in terms of the degrees and other qualifications offered to students.

In relation to responsibilities for Quality Assurance however, the provisions of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 preclude one Designated Awarding Body from being deemed a Linked Provider of another Designated Awarding Body. It is therefore the case that, although an 'NUI Recognised College', RCSI is not a Linked Provider of NUI and therefore does not fall within scope of the Statutory Guidelines for NUI review of Linked Providers. Instead, because RCSI is a Designated Awarding Body, QQI bears statutory responsibility for approval of RCSI's QA policies and procedures and for periodic review of the effectiveness of these procedures (institution-wide).

It is therefore clear that, further to the 2012 Act, NUI does not have statutory responsibility for the approval of RCSI's QA policies and procedures. Leading on from this, NUI is not responsible for carrying out external institutional review of the effectiveness of RCSI's QA policies and procedures. These statutory responsibilities rest with QQI.

It is nonetheless also evident that the relationship between both institutions is one that is concerned with academic provision for students and has quality assurance at its core., given

²¹ QQI Statutory Guidelines for the Review of Linked Providers by the National University of Ireland, March 2019/QP21 (accessible at: www.qqi.ie and at http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/Statutory_Guidelines_for_the_Review_of_Linked_Providers_by_the_NUI.pdf)

the statutory provision that RCSI degrees and qualifications are degrees and qualifications of NUI, for as long as RCSI remains a Recognised College.

NUI’s own Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement²² sets out a series of objectives that arise from NUI’s broad definition of quality assurance, one that emphasises the importance of a high standard of qualifications offered and of procedures relating to the approval, monitoring and review of all programmes leading to such NUI qualifications in the Recognised Colleges. This policy remains relevant to RCSI and is implemented on a regular and ongoing basis during each and every academic cycle.

4. Governance and Management of the NUI-RCSI relationship

The overall governance of the NUI-RCSI relationship is the responsibility of the Senate (Governing Body) of the National University of Ireland and the RCSI Medicine & Health Sciences Board. The Chief Executive Officer of RCSI is by tradition co-opted as a member of NUI Senate.

In terms of ongoing management of the business relationship between NUI and RCSI, the principal mechanism is the ‘NUI-RCSI Working Group Executive (WGE)’, which meets quarterly. WGE meetings are usually scheduled to coincide with RCSI examination board meetings and the meetings of NUI Senate, and the location of the WGE meeting alternates between NUI and RCSI. The membership of the WGE normally consists of the following post-holders, noting that NUI reserves the right to co-opt additional members where necessary for the benefit of gaining relevant expertise in defined areas:

NUI	RCSI
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registrar • Head of Registry & Academic Services • Manager of Academic Affairs (or nominee). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dean/Chief Academic Officer • Associate Director for Academic Affairs • Manager of Registry Services • Chair, Awards & Qualifications Committee • Director of Quality Enhancement

Standing agenda items at WGE meetings include:

- Approval by Senate of new RCSI academic programmes and of major & minor changes to existing programmes that lead to NUI qualifications;
- Any other points relating to the RCSI Programme Portfolio leading to NUI Qualifications;
- Quality Assurance Provision and arrangements
- RCSI Collaborative and/or Transnational Provision;
- External Examiners (appointment by NUI in line with approved NUI Policy)
- Conferings and related operational matters;
- Any other business, including legislative or sectoral policy developments relevant to RCSI and/or NUI and strategic developments within RCSI or NUI.

5. RCSI internal governance structures relevant to degree awards

Following the granting of independent degree-awarding powers in 2010, RCSI established the Medicine & Health Sciences Board (MHSB) and the Surgery & Postgraduate Faculties Board (SPFB). The MHSB is the governing body for all RCSI educational programmes leading to degree awards aligned to the Irish National Framework of Qualifications, while SPFB is the cognate body governing RCSI postgraduate/professional training and certification in Surgery and related specialties.

²² NUI Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement. November 2017, accessible at http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/NUI_Quality_Assurance_Policy_2018.pdf

In relation to the exercise of RCSI's degree-awarding powers, MHSB is the ultimate decision-making body in RCSI. The RCSI Awards & Qualifications Committee manages processes relating to the validation and approval of new programmes, and to the periodic review and re-validation of existing programmes, reporting to Academic Council and thence to MHSB. In the context of RCSI awards with NUI accreditation, the MHSB and NUI Senate relationship is described below.

6. The role of NUI in quality assurance of RCSI degree awards

6.1. Validation & approval of new programmes

The RCSI Awards & Qualifications Committee (AQC) is responsible for the approval and validation of new educational programmes leading to RCSI degree awards aligned with Ireland's National Framework of Qualifications. It is responsible also for the revalidation of existing programmes to which Minor or Major Changes are proposed by Schools within the Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences. For new programmes, the process involves two stages: [1] establishment of a Business Case and [2] development of an Academic Proposal. Once a Business Case for a new programme has been submitted, it is reviewed internally by the AQC Business Case Review Panel and feedback is given to the proposer. If/when the final Business Case has been approved by AQC, a recommendation is made to the RCSI Senior Management Team which, if approved, will permit the proposer to progress to the second stage. The Academic Proposal is subject initially to internal review by the AQC Academic Case Review Panel in an iterative process that leads ultimately to external, independent review of the programme proposal by separate RCSI and NUI-appointed assessors. On successful completion of this external review process, the programme is recommended for approval to MHSB and ultimately, to NUI Senate.

Major changes to existing programmes are subject to a process similar to the Academic Proposal review for new programmes, while minor changes are subject to a less extensive review, with final approval in both cases by MHSB and NUI Senate.

6.2. Ongoing quality assurance of existing programmes

The quality assurance of existing programmes is managed on an ongoing basis by the RCSI's academic Schools, internal governance committees, Examination Boards and Registry functions, through the monitoring and analysis of multiple data-streams:

- i. Student feedback surveys (semester-based or, exceptionally, more frequent)
- ii. In-course examination results (semester- or academic year-based)
- iii. Exit (*i.e.* final end of programme) examination results
- iv. External examiners' reports
- v. Accreditation reports issued by the relevant Postgraduate Regulatory Statutory Bodies
- vi. Programmatic Review reports

NUI has a direct involvement in this primarily through its statutory role to approve and appoint external Examiners for all RCSI degree programmes. These Examiners report directly to NUI (and thence to RCSI), and have access to examination results and to examples of students' assessed work, and they are involved in aspects of the examinations process and in Examination Board meetings. In addition, the NUI Registrar and RCSI Dean/Chief Academic officer co-chair Examination Board meetings in RCSI.

6.3. Periodic, external review of existing programmes

The RCSI Awards & Qualifications Committee administers a rolling cycle of periodic Programmatic Reviews. The aim is to ensure that existing programmes can be re-validated and re-accredited as RCSI degrees, which are degrees of the National University of Ireland as per schedule 47A of the (amended) Universities Act. Reviews focus on the quality assurance

arrangements for existing programmes in a particular discipline or subject area. The reviews are carried out in line with NUI and RCSI guidelines and use specific indicators benchmarked to international best practice. The reports arising from the periodic reviews will make judgments about whether programmes continue to meet minimum standards as well as recommending improvements. For programmes undergoing review, the relevant head of academic unit completes a self-evaluation report on the programme which forms the basis for a site-visit by a peer-review panel consisting of a chairperson and two external peer reviewers, one appointed by NUI and one by RCSI. The final report summary is submitted to MHSB for noting, following which it is circulated to NUI to support NUI Senate re-validation of the relevant academic programme for the subsequent cycle.

7. Involvement in Institutional Review by Quality & Qualifications Ireland

RCSI was subject to Institutional Review by Quality & Qualifications Ireland in 2013-2014 as part of the last Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB)/QQI Review Cycle. While NUI was not itself reviewed by IUQB/QQI in that Cycle, NUI was a key stakeholder for the RCSI Institutional Review and, as such, had an opportunity to meet with the Review Panel which conducted the RCSI Institutional Review. QQI commenced the current 'CINNTE' Cycle of Institutional Reviews in 2017, with NUI scheduled for review in 2021-2022 and RCSI in 2022-2023. It is anticipated that RCSI will be involved as a key stakeholder in the Institutional Review of NUI, and that NUI will be involved similarly in the Institutional Review of RCSI.