

# Institutional Review Report 2019

Dublin City University



QAI REVIEW

CINNTE 



# Foreword

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is responsible for the external quality assurance of further and higher education and training in Ireland. One of QQI's most important functions is to ensure that the quality assurance (QA) procedures that institutions have in place are effective. To this end, QQI carries out external reviews of higher education institutions on a cyclical basis. This current QQI cycle of reviews is called the CINNTE cycle. CINNTE reviews are an element of the broader quality framework for institutions composed of Quality Assurance Guidelines; each institution's Quality Assurance Procedures; Annual Institutional Quality Reports (AIQR); and Dialogue Meetings. The CINNTE review cycle runs from 2017-2023. During this period, QQI will organise and oversee independent reviews of each of the Universities, the Institutes of Technology and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI).

Each CINNTE review evaluates the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of each institution. The review measures each institution's compliance with European standards for quality assurance, its regard to the expectations set out in the QQI quality assurance guidelines or their equivalent and its adherence to other relevant QQI policies

and procedures. CINNTE reviews also explore how institutions have enhanced their teaching, learning and research and their quality assurance systems and how well institutions have aligned their approach to their own mission, quality indicators and benchmarks.

The CINNTE 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, including:

- the publication of Terms of Reference;
- a process of self-evaluation and the 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.

This institutional review of Dublin City University (DCU) was conducted by an independent review team in line with the Terms of Reference in Appendix A. This is the report of the findings of the review team.

# The Review Team

Each CINTE review is carried out by an international team of independent experts and peers. The 2018 institutional review of Dublin City University was conducted by a team of 6 reviewers selected by QQI. The Review Team was trained by QQI on 11 September 2018. The Chair and Coordinating Reviewer undertook a planning visit to Dublin City University on 12 September 2018. The Main Review Visit was conducted by the full team between 22 September and 26 September 2018.

## CHAIR

**Professor Marijk van der Wende** is Distinguished Professor of Higher Education at Utrecht University's Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance. Her research focuses on the impact of globalisation and internationalisation on higher education. She has published widely on the impact of these processes on higher education systems, institutions, curricula, and teaching and learning arrangements. She is also an affiliate faculty and research associate at the Center for Studies in Higher Education (CSHE) at the University of California Berkeley and a member of the Academia Europaea (the Academy of Europe, section behavioural sciences). Previously, she was Dean of Graduate Studies at Utrecht University (2015-2017) and Founding Dean of Amsterdam University College (2007-2015). She served as the President of the Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE) of the OECD (2005-2011), as a member of the Higher Education Authority Ireland (2011-2015), the Scientific Board of the Dutch Military Academy (2007-2013), and worked at NUFFIC (the Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education) (1992-1998), and with the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) in Brussels (1994-1998). She has been a chair and member of numerous national and international advisory committees and editorial boards. Marijk holds BA degrees in teaching and pedagogy, and MA and PhD degrees in educational sciences, from the University of Amsterdam and the University of Utrecht, respectively.

## COORDINATING REVIEWER

**Sarah Butler** works as a freelance consultant after a career in higher education management spanning forty years. Much of that time was spent at the University of Sussex where, after many central university management roles including strategic planning and governance, she specialised in academic affairs. She was Director of Academic Support/Director of Academic Quality for a period of 9 years and a member of the university's heads of professional services team. Between 2006 -2014, she was seconded part-time as an Assistant Director to the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). Here she worked principally with national and European agencies on qualifications frameworks. This included the publication in 2008 of *The Higher Education Credit Framework for England* and the revision in 2012 of *The frameworks of higher education qualifications of UK degree-awarding bodies*. She also developed sections of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and managed institutional reviews. During her career she participated in a wide range of national activities. She was elected as an executive member of the Council of Validating Universities for a period of nine years. During her time at the University of Sussex she acted on numerous occasions as an external reviewer for other universities conducting internal or transnational reviews.

### INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE

**Dr Kelli J. Armstrong** is Vice President, Planning & Assessment, Boston College. Kelli oversees a broad range of activities and initiatives that promote the use of information and planning in strategic decision making at Boston College. Kelli leads institutional research and planning, space management and strategic services efforts that examine and advance the university's effectiveness in fulfilling its mission and strategic priorities. She has served as a member of external review teams for the New England Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (NEASC) for more than a decade. Having earned her PhD from Boston College in 1996, Kelli returned to the campus in 2004 to lead BC's first formal institutional research office. Prior to her arrival at BC, Kelli served as the Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrolment Management at UMass Boston and worked as both a researcher and an enrolment manager in various higher education settings, including Tufts University, the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education and the UMass system office. Earlier in her career she was Assistant Dean of Admissions at Bates College and an account executive in an investor relations firm. Kelli received her B. A. from Bates College, an M. A. from the University of Virginia and a Ph. D. from Boston College.

### LEARNER REPRESENTATIVE

**Shane Comer** graduated with a BSc (Hons) in Physiology from UCD in 2014 and following this he read immunology at TCD and was awarded an MSc in 2015. He is currently a PhD student in the Molecular Haemostasis laboratory in the UCD Conway Institute, having just entered his final year. His PhD research is investigating the regulation of human platelets by cyclic nucleotides. He was also the Deputy President and Vice-President for Education in UCD Students' Union for the academic year 2012/2013 and Chairperson of the TCD Graduate Students' Union 2014/2015. He has been involved in several academic, administrative and management committees within both UCD and TCD in recent years and has participated in numerous internal quality reviews for both institutions. He is involved in a number of science outreach and public engagement initiatives, having worked with groups such as Student Slingshot Academy, Pint of Science Ireland, UCD Inherited Blindness Summer School, PVCR Ireland, Diabetes Research Summer Academy & others.

### IRISH HE REPRESENTATIVE

**Professor Jim Browne** is an experienced leader with over 30 years of academic leadership and service in NUI Galway as President, Registrar, Dean of Engineering and a research leader. He has also served on and led numerous Boards focusing on strategic direction, excellence in governance and the effective management of risk. He is currently Chairman of the National Children's Hospital Group Board. He has published eleven books and over 200 academic papers in international journals and conferences and has supervised over 40 PhD students. He has experience at executive and board level, nationally and internationally, in academic and business settings. He is particularly experienced in working in the hi-tech sector, including the technology and med tech sector, and in setting up and working with multi partner industry – university research and development projects in Europe, the United States and Asia, particularly China.

### EXTERNAL REPRESENTATIVE

**Peter Cosgrove** is an expert on the future of work and workplace trends. He was most recently a Director with Cpl, the largest recruitment and outsourcing consultancy in Ireland, and founder of the Future of Work Institute. Outside of the staffing industry, he has also worked in management consultancy and investment banking. He is a regular contributor to the national media on areas of talent, diversity and the future of work. Peter is on the steering committee of the 30% Club which promotes gender diversity, and on the Board of the mental health charity Aware. He is an honorary fellow of the National Recruitment Federation.



# Section A

## Introduction

Introduction and Context

# Introduction

## 1. Introduction and Context

Dublin City University (DCU) originated as the National Institute of Higher Education, Dublin (NIHE, Dublin), which took in its first cohort in 1980. It had been set up to fulfil the national demand for a highly-trained work force with skills in business, science, electronics, computer technology, communications and languages, and as an agent for change in the local community. In 1989, DCU was established as an independent university under the Dublin City University Act. In 2013, a process of incorporation was initiated to bring three teacher education colleges (St Patrick's College of Education, Drumcondra, Mater Dei Institute of Education and the Church of Ireland College of Education) under its ambit, forming a single institution with a new shared mission under the concept of 'one DCU'. The process was formally completed in 2016, resulting in 4,000 additional students, 400 additional members of staff, and the creation of a multi-campus university operating across three sites. It enabled the establishment of the DCU Institute of Education (the first faculty of education in an Irish university) and facilitated the expansion of its portfolio in the humanities and social sciences. This development has entailed a very significant investment of resources, energy and commitment over the past five years.

In 2017/18, the University had almost 17,000 students (16,991). 19% of these were postgraduate students of whom 4% were registered for research degrees. 18% of the total student population were international students and 5% were studying by distance education through DCU Connected. 427 students were taking dual degrees under Erasmus programmes or through collaborative links in Canada and the USA. In addition, there were 567 students studying on transnational education (TNE) programmes at the Princess Nora Bint AbdulRahman University (PNU) in Saudi Arabia.

Since its inception, the University has striven to establish a reputation for innovation in its teaching and research and to be distinctive in its commitments to enterprise and to engagement with society. Its mission is to 'transform lives and societies through

education, research, innovation and engagement'. The University's current strategic plan for 2017-22, 'Talent, Discovery and Transformation', sets out a vision for the University structured around six key themes of talent, discovery, creativity, society, technology and sustainability. There are five constituent strategies addressing: teaching and learning; research and innovation; internationalisation; engagement; and student experience. Strategic plans derived from these have also been developed at the level of academic and professional units.

There are five faculties (Institute of Education, Engineering and Computing, Science and Health, Humanities and Social Sciences, and the DCU Business School) with their constituent schools and the Open Education Unit responsible for the DCU Connected portfolio. Over 180 taught programmes are delivered, and the University's portfolio reflects its focus on inter-disciplinary degrees and the application of knowledge to the needs of enterprise and the wider society. 75% of DCU undergraduates are registered on programmes that include periods of structured, credit-bearing work-based learning or study abroad. DCU pioneered the optional INTRA (Integrated Training) programme, which provides for-credit, paid work placements in undergraduate programmes to enhance employability and further develop graduate attributes through real-world experience.

DCU has a long-standing commitment to addressing educational disadvantage. According to the AIQR, the University's Access programme, which targets socio-economic disadvantage among groups currently under-represented in higher education, is the largest and most comprehensive in the state. In 2012, DCU was the first university globally to adopt the concept and principles of an Age Friendly University. In 2017, it was the first university in Ireland to be designated a 'University of Sanctuary'. It was also, in 2018, the first university globally to be designated an 'Autism Friendly University'.

DCU has a strong reputation for its commitment to entrepreneurship and its engagement with the enterprise sector in Ireland. DCU Invent is the University's Innovation and Enterprise Centre working on the one hand with technology-based companies outside the University and on the other with University researchers on campus to support the transformation of knowledge into commercial initiatives. DCU Alpha constitutes the DCU Innovation campus hosting more than 40 companies and providing flexible work space for freelancers and technical start-ups. DCU Ryan Academy offers a range of training, leadership and funding initiatives for entrepreneurs.

In common with the rest of the sector in Ireland, the University has operated in a period of considerably reduced public funding over the last eight years. The national public sector Employment Control Framework has presented considerable challenges not only in terms of increasing student-staff ratios but also to recruitment of staff to ensure appropriate expertise. Since the University's last review in 2010, DCU has undergone a period of fundamental change in terms of its size, structures and breadth of activities. As a result of planned growth in student numbers and the incorporation of three teacher education colleges, the student population has increased by 64% since 2010. The University now comprises three campuses on which both teaching and research are delivered, and at which students and staff expect to be able to access equivalent support services. DCU has developed transnational provision and is working with three international partners. The new strategic plan sets out a vision and defines the way forward for DCU. However, between 2013-16, there was an intense period of incorporation in which policies and procedures governing staff and students had to be aligned, and financial arrangements and operational systems underpinning their management had to be integrated. The University's expansion has therefore entailed a profound period of organisational and cultural change (which will be ongoing).

#### **COMMENDATION 1**

**The Review Team commends the progress achieved by DCU in the incorporation process. It applauds the University's commitment to securing buy-in to the concept of "one DCU", the creation of a new, shared, mission and values, and the singularity of purpose of the Faculty Deans.**

The Team considered other progress made since the 2010 IRIU review. Whilst noting the considerable burden resulting from the incorporation process, it was observed that four of the ten recommendations from the 2010 review (recommendations 3,5,9 and 10) were the subject of the same or similar recommendations in the current review (see recommendations 2,5,9 and 12 below). The Team was of the view that greater focus was required to prioritise these areas and bring the necessary improvements to a swift conclusion.

The University has a Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy statement (revised in 2018) to guide quality assurance processes throughout the University and to support alignment with the newly launched Strategic Plan. DCU has adopted a Quality Framework, which links Annual Programme Review (APR) with Periodic Programme Review (PPR) to Internal Quality Reviews (IQR) of academic areas and embraces a parallel internal Quality Review of University support and professional units. The Quality Promotions Office was established in 2001 to promote, support and facilitate continuous quality improvement activities across academic and administrative units. The Quality Improvement and Development Fund initiative (QuID) provides small grants to fund quality enhancement projects across the University. Since 2012, almost €180,000 have been allocated to a series of projects across the University. It was evident from dialogue with senior managers and Faculty Deans that DCU has made impressive progress towards embedding quality assurance in all aspects of delivery since the 2010 review. Most groups that the Team met reported that it was woven through the majority of University processes and was generally well received. Outcomes of the focus groups established to support the development of the ISER indicated that staff were committed to a culture of quality assurance and continuous improvement.



Section

B

Institutional Self-Evaluation  
Report (ISER)

Institutional Self-Evaluation Report

# Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER)

## 2. Institutional Self-Evaluation Report

DCU's preparation for the Institutional Review and the production of the ISER built on the development of the new Strategic Plan exploiting the wide range of data analysis, feedback and discussions which had contributed to its inception (see STRATEGIC PLANNING under Objective 1 below). A CINNTE Institutional Steering Group comprising 26 members (a range of academic and administrative staff and a mix of genders) was established, chaired by the Deputy President. It included student members who had been involved both with the development of the 2017/22 strategic plan and the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP). It met monthly between December 2017 and June 2018 to oversee the preparation of the ISER and to plan for the review. It established three sub-groups to analyse, reflect on, and evaluate the experience of the three principal stakeholders affected by quality assurance and enhancement activities: DCU students, DCU staff, and external stakeholders.

The student sub-group drew on evidence from the national Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE), the pilot of the ISSE for postgraduate research students, the Jisc Digital Tracker Survey conducted in over 90 UK and international higher education providers in 2017/18, and an in-house survey of continuing second- and third-year undergraduates not falling within the scope of the ISSE. In addition, a suite of eight externally-facilitated focus groups were held relating to a range of student types (first-year entrants, postgraduate taught etc.). Routine DCU surveys (e. g. those conducted by the library) were also used as sources of evidence. The staff sub-group initiated staff focus groups on six themes related to the experience of implementing quality assurance and enhancement procedures, which were

also led by an external facilitator. The sub-group also drew on outputs from the institutional workshop facilitated by NStEP. The third sub-group derived evidence of the experience of external stakeholders from external examiner reports, a survey of the experience of external peer reviewers on Internal Quality Reviews (IQRs), a survey of external members of programme accreditation boards and a survey of an external advisory group linked to student placements on a range of programmes in the DCU Institute of Education.

An area of the DCU website was devoted to the CINNTE Institutional Review and the Quality Promotions Office coordinated a series of presentations and updates on the process to the University's management and community. It was clear that there were a variety of highly effective means of engaging all stakeholders in contributing to the data on which the ISER was based. It was not clear to what extent the community had opportunities to comment on drafts of the ISER and its conclusions, but the Team observed that staff and students were clear that the commentary and analysis described an institution that they recognised. The Institutional Steering Group secured excellent engagement of staff and students with the process.

The Review Team found that the ISER was informative in most areas, with an appropriate balance of description and evaluation. The section on Support for Learners was exemplary in providing an evidence-based analysis of its strengths and weaknesses. While data relating to student numbers was received from the HEA, the Team would have found it helpful if the ISER had supplemented this with more detailed breakdowns of the student population (student



numbers per faculty and school disaggregated among undergraduate/taught postgraduate/research postgraduate, numbers of international/mature/disadvantaged students etc) and staff-student ratios. On the whole, the Team found that the ISER was a good document, which provided a sound basis for the review. The exception to this was the section on collaborative provision, which provided little information on the various collaborative

activities and no analysis of the effectiveness of DCU procedures. Reference to DCU's transnational activities in Saudi Arabia and emerging strategic partnerships in America was entirely absent from the ISER, the Institutional Profile and the AIQRs. This was an unfortunate lacuna in view of the challenge, very widely recognised, of ensuring the quality of collaborative provision (see recommendation 10 below).



# Section C

## Quality Assurance/Accountability

Objective 1 – Current Quality Assurance Procedures

Objective 2 - Quality Enhancement

Objective 3 – Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression

Objective 4 – Provision of Programmes to International Learners

# Quality Assurance/ Accountability

## 3. Objective 1 – Current Quality Assurance Procedures

### OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

The review team concluded that there was sufficient evidence to confirm that institutional quality assurance procedures are effective and appropriate and cover teaching, learning and assessment in a comprehensive way. The Review Team found that, overall, the quality assurance mechanisms adopted by DCU were compliant with the requirements of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and had regard to the QQI Core Quality Assurance Guidelines (QAG). The AIQRs, appendices to the ISER, and additional documentation supplied on programme approvals evidenced that comprehensive procedures were in place for the approval, monitoring and review of academic programmes and that these were effectively implemented. A deep commitment to a quality assurance culture was evident at all levels and evidenced in the University's approach to the incorporation of the three teacher education colleges. The Quality Promotions Committee, in conjunction with Education Committee and Academic Council, take the lead on quality assurance and are accountable to the Governing Authority. At University level, the implementation of procedures and policy was sound. However, the Review Team found, through meetings with both students and staff, and examination of documentation, that the quality of the student experience in relation to teaching, learning and assessment (which was delegated to faculties and academic schools) varied according to individual programmes, modules or lecturers. The Review Team was of the view that the University needs to be more proactive in assuring and monitoring a consistent student experience, irrespective of programme, to a defined threshold level.

Reporting on quality and the outcomes of quality assurance is comprehensive and transparent, but efforts could be continued to close the feedback loops to both staff and students. There are effective innovations in both quality assurance and quality enhancement.

On the whole, the student experience is in keeping with the University's mission and strategy and its quality assurance regime aligns with this. The University has made substantial achievements in quality assurance and enhancement, but four of the Review Team's recommendations relate to recommendations made in the 2010 IRIU review, suggesting that more focus needs to be given to specific targets.

TNE was not addressed in the ISER and the absence of discussion of this significant development seemed to confirm that TNE and arrangements for the development, approval, oversight, monitoring, and review of partnerships (as opposed to the academic programmes delivered) were not well integrated into the mainstream of the University's quality assurance activities.

The Team recognised that DCU had perhaps been in a reactive mode to approaches for various partnerships in the last five years. In some cases, this meant that procedures were being drafted and approved in tandem with specific initiatives being developed and this was unavoidable. It was clear that the University was now intent on moving away from ad-hoc responses to initiatives toward the development of a pro-active DCU-wide reference framework for global operations. However, the emerging protocols and procedures approved so far could benefit from further work in light of national and international best practice and the learning experiences of other institutions. In light of its ambitions to expand TNE

and strengthen various strategic inter-institutional partnerships, the Team is of the view that DCU needs to work faster, in particular, to embed appropriate protocols and procedures for the recognition, oversight and renewal of partnership arrangements (as distinct from specific arrangements for the transnational and/or joint delivery of programmes). Similarly, the Review Team found that the agreement with a linked provider could usefully have addressed the monitoring and review of the partnership arrangement (as opposed to research programme delivery).

AIQRs were consistent and coherent in describing developments in quality assurance and enhancement. However, no reference was made to transnational education and collaboration in Saudi Arabia and Arizona, which were significant omissions.

## GOVERNANCE AND ACADEMIC MANAGEMENT

The DCU Governing Authority is responsible for the governance of University activities in accordance with The Universities Act 1997. Ultimate oversight of quality assurance resides with the Governing Authority. It discharges its responsibilities through a hierarchy of committees, and two strands within this structure have a bearing on the quality assurance of teaching and learning, research and scholarship, administration and professional support at DCU. Executive Committee and its sub-committees advise the President on issues of major strategic and operational importance, communicate the strategic direction to the wider University, ensure that the University's policies and structures adequately support the implementation of the DCU Strategic Plan, and determine budgetary allocations to units (monitoring their subsequent implementation). Academic Council leads the control and oversight of the academic affairs of DCU operating through three main sub-committees (Education Committee, University Standards Committee and Graduate Research Studies Board). At the heart of both these strands is the Quality Promotions Committee (QPC), the membership of which is drawn from across academic and professional support units. The QPC is responsible for making recommendations on principles, policies, and procedures for quality assurance and improvement of teaching, research

and administration. Whilst formally a sub-committee of Executive Committee, it also provides advice and makes recommendations to Academic Council on matters of quality assurance and improvement. There is an overlap in membership between Executive Committee and Academic Council. The QPC provides a funnel through which quality assurance can be effectively aligned to the University's strategic objectives.

The Team noted that one of the recommendations of the 2010 Review had been to seek opportunities for external members of the Governing Authority (GA) to become more intimately acquainted with the University's work, and for a standing committee of external members to be established, which would sit between meetings of the full GA. The ISER explained that the University had decided against the establishment of another standing committee, preferring to put in place a range of mechanisms to enable external members to become more engaged with the University (such as visits to academic and professional support units and presentations at GA by a variety of units). In the specific case of quality assurance, a Quality Assurance Liaison role for an external member of the GA was established to deliver a key point of contact between the University and the GA. The holder reads all Internal Quality Reviews and follow-up reports and provides regular updates to the full GA on progress with reviews and improvements. This allows for the GA's ultimate responsibility for the quality assurance framework to be effectively discharged. The Team's extensive discussion with members of the Governing Authority provided evidence that the GA has a thorough understanding of quality assurance and enhancement matters and a well-informed engagement with the operation of the University.

### **COMMENDATION 2**

The Review Team commends the engagement of the Governing Authority's external members with the quality assurance and enhancement agenda.

The Quality Promotions Office was established in 2001 to promote, support and facilitate continuous quality improvement activities across academic and administrative units. In 2016 it was restructured to co-locate the University's institutional research and analysis function and to play a role in supporting the

development and implementation of institutional strategy. The Team found that this is an effective model for the support of quality processes throughout the University: data and analytics are more readily available, and schools or units are well supported for the various reviews. It contributes to the scope for better alignment of quality assurance processes and their outcomes with strategic planning. The QPO Office is highly regarded and effective and is an asset to the University.

**COMMENDATION 3**

**The Review Team commends the creation of the Quality Promotions Office and the co-location within it of the institutional research function. It has the capacity to inform both quality assurance and strategic planning activities and to facilitate greater congruity between the two. It has greatly improved quality assurance and enhancement activities at the University, providing focussed process support for improvements.**

**STRATEGIC PLANNING**

During the 2016/17 academic year, DCU developed its new strategic plan ‘Talent, Discovery and Transformation 2017 - 2022’. This process was led by the Senior Management Group (SMG). The AIQR describes how ten cross-institutional working groups were established to examine a number of potential strategic themes. A centerpiece of the consultative process was the hosting of ‘DCU Fuse’, a 24-hour, online, crowd-sourcing event allowing the University to engage with staff, students, alumni, and friends in discussions of ten themes. The outcomes of the debate on this online platform were distilled for report to the SMG. In the Team’s view, the process to put in place the University’s new strategic plan for 2017-22 was appropriate. It involved an excellent mix of ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ processes and engaged with all of the stakeholders: students at all levels, staff including academic, research and support staff, and external stakeholders from business, industry, NGOs, agencies, and the wider community. The resulting plan is well written and clear in terms of the direction that DCU has set out for itself.

DCU faces the challenges of funding and fierce international competition for staff and students that confront all Irish universities. However, over

and above these, the Team was of the view that there are two specific environmental factors likely to impact upon the period of the new strategic plan. First, the emergence of the new model of technological university, with the creation of the Technological University Dublin in 2019, poses a particular challenge given DCU’s historical profile and programme portfolio. Furthermore, DCU’s profile is in transition as it consolidates the incorporation of the three formerly stand-alone colleges of education. In this context, the University’s explicit commitment to ‘review and renew’ the plan on a rolling annual basis is welcome and necessary. This process also affords an opportunity for the University to take regular account of the outcomes of Quality Reviews and thus achieve greater synergy between quality assurance/enhancement and strategic planning. DCU will need to be ‘agile’ in the coming years as it deals with these challenges. The Review Team is convinced that the management team at DCU has the capacity to meet this challenge and ensure the University’s future and that of its students and staff.

The Review Team noted the lack of measurable targets in the published Strategic Plan. In discussion, the University indicated that such measurable targets are available and are communicated appropriately inside the University. The Team suggested that the University might consider whether future strategic plans should include more explicit performance indicators and associated measurable targets, where appropriate. Publication of such targets might make more visible the evident ambition of the University and act as an incentive for staff at all levels.

**COMMENDATION 4**

**The Review Team commends the University’s comprehensive and inclusive approach to the development of the 2017-22 strategic plan and its ‘rolling planning’ process.**

**RISK MANAGEMENT**

A risk register is completed by each unit of the University. The local risk registers are reviewed, and institutional risks identified by the Senior Management Group (SMG). The overall risk register is monitored on a quarterly basis by the Governing Authority and on a more regular basis by the SMG. The overall risk register has an appropriate and

manageable list of high-level risks (10-12). It was clear from meetings with the Senior Management Group and the Governing Authority that there were sound processes for the identification of key risks and mitigation factors; processes were secure. The risk register was mentioned at multiple meetings and is clearly a living document throughout the institution.

## THE STUDENT VOICE

### STUDENT REPRESENTATION

As stated in the DCU Strategic Plan 2017-2022, ensuring that DCU students receive a life-enhancing education is of paramount importance. Central to this is ensuring that students are adequately and appropriately represented throughout all stages of the quality assurance and enhancement process. The 2010 IRIU review recommended that DCU further explore the opportunity for student representation in quality assurance governance. In 2017/18, DCU participated in the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP), and formal student representation was reviewed and found to be at appropriate levels including the Governing Authority (see QUALITY ENHANCEMENT section below). It was welcome to hear in meetings with both staff and students that the student voice is one of the key considerations in actions taken by the University.

Student members (DCU Students' Union officers) of the Governing Authority confirmed that they are valued members of the group and that their concerns are addressed in a deliberate manner. One external GA member stated that the role of the student representatives was to "keep Governing Authority on its toes". This was reassuring, given the proactive role that the DCU Governing Authority takes in quality assurance and enhancement. However, given that student sabbatical officers turn over on an annual basis, it was felt that specific induction should be given to all new student GA representatives each year (as is given to new GA members upon the formation of a new GA every five years).

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

**The Review Team recommends that the University provide training and support for student representatives on Governing Authority to enable them to make an effective contribution in that role.**

At a more local level, the recent introduction of student-staff fora in the School of Applied Languages and the Faculty of Engineering and Computing, again as part of NStEP, has proven to be very popular amongst both staff and students. The Team notes that work is underway to implement fora on a University-wide basis.

The Review Team observed that DCU had made a concerted effort to ensure that student representation is woven throughout quality assurance and enhancement processes, that student representatives are full members of all key quality assurance committees and can contribute equally to the process. One undergraduate student highlighted the University's approach as an "open-door policy," with staff very receptive to *ad hoc* feedback from students.

### STUDENT EVALUATIONS

The 2010 review recommended that DCU explore new ways to extract student evaluations of their experience of learning. The Review Team found a commitment amongst DCU's academic management to collect and analyse data. However, there was a lack of follow-up on specific action points and a lack of reporting to students on what had been done in response to their feedback. The collaboration between DCU and DCU Students' Union (DCUSU), as part of NStEP, proved very beneficial with increased student participation in the ISSE from 26% to 34%. The ISSE revealed that student/staff interaction was the weakest engagement indicator for DCU. If students give constructive feedback yet see no evidence that it has led to action by the University, engagement with members of staff will naturally decline, as will engagement with evaluation processes (see recommendation at the end of this section).

A key element of the quality assurance and enhancement process is reporting back to stakeholders on the quality enhancements that have been made in response to feedback. DCU has worked closely with DCU Students' Union in order to close this feedback loop. One example given to the Review Team was the relocation of the DCU Maths Learning Centre to a more suitable location following feedback from students. This was then communicated to the DCU community through an information campaign by DCUSU. While the collaborative effort of DCU and DCUSU is to be applauded, in the Team's view DCUSU

should not be relied on to be the conduit for feedback on action taken. The Team considered that DCU should consider more ways of engaging with students in a meaningful way and of identifying effective means of closing the loop on action taken in response to feedback (see the recommendation below).

In response to recommendation 6 (referred to above) of the 2010 IRIU institutional review, DCU introduced a module-focused Quality Enhancement and Survey of Teaching (QuEST) in 2012. It is currently available to students for all modules undertaken and is completed through the DCU virtual learning environment (VLE). Participation rates are of significant concern, with less than 5% engaging with the survey. Reasons for the poor participation rates cited in the ISER were that DCU students are “over-surveyed” and suffering from “survey fatigue”, resulting in the poor engagement levels observed. In addition, the Team heard that many individual module coordinators perform evaluation surveys using their own tools. However, when the Team met undergraduate students during the Main Review Visit, it found that students did not feel that they were over-surveyed, and most students present had not heard of the QuEST system, despite it having been in existence for six years. If they had encountered it, they did not know what actions were taken by DCU on foot of the outcomes of the survey. It was also unclear to the Team whether locally collected module evaluations were collated, analysed and communicated through quality assurance processes such as the APR to the QPC.

The Review Team found that, while DCU has student feedback and evaluation systems in situ, many take place on a non-systematic basis, with processes varying significantly between schools, programmes and modules. It was evident from meetings with students and staff that the methods of gathering student evaluation, and the emphasis placed on it by members of staff, also varied. While DCU’s levels of engagement with the ISSE are better than national averages, in the Team’s view too great a weight is placed on its benefits at a programmatic level (given the more general scope of the survey). Although the University has committed to analysing ISSE data at faculty level, school level, and, where possible, programmatic level, the Team is of the view that over-reliance on this approach would be unwise, since the ISSE does not allow for enough specificity at modular or programmatic level.

The Review Team concluded that DCU should implement a fit-for-purpose, University-wide system of evaluating teaching at the module level, which should be independent of module and programme coordinators. This should help provide a consistent measure of the student learning experience across schools and faculties (see also the paragraph on the **Use of Data and Analytics in the Quality Assurance of Teaching and Learning** below). The Review Team acknowledged, first, that there are concerns about a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. However, there would be scope for survey systems to be designed with a common core with additional bespoke, module-specific questions at a local level. The Team also acknowledged that informal mid-module evaluations are effective in rapidly addressing potential problems or concerns; the adoption of a standard teaching evaluation tool would not preclude their use. However, DCU should work with academic staff in order to rationalise the number of individual *ad hoc* surveys employed alongside a revitalised University-wide tool.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 2**

**The Review Team recommends that, as a matter of urgency, DCU should implement a fit-for-purpose, University-wide system of independent evaluation of the student learning experience at the module level. Resulting reports should be used as a regular part of Annual Programme Review, Periodic Programme Review and internal Quality Reviews and effective feedback provided to students.**

## **QUALITY ASSURANCE OF PROGRAMMES OF STUDY**

### **PROGRAMME APPROVAL**

The AIQRs make clear that the process of approval for new academic programmes begins with the schools, which are given a clear process and template for programme development. Each proposed programme must undergo validation (consideration of the business case by the University’s Education Committee) and accreditation (where the academic integrity of the programme is evaluated by a bespoke Accreditation Board including external experts). Initial proposals supported by the relevant faculty are developed as a validation proposal, which includes the outline structure of the curriculum, programme learning outcomes, proposed entry and progression

requirements, exit routes, a discussion of the strategic fit with DCU's strategic plan and mission, likely demand and intake, and an assessment of resource requirements. If the proposal is approved by Education Committee, and any conditions satisfied, then the proposed programme is considered by an Accreditation Board which makes recommendations to Academic Council. The Accreditation Board considers the proposed curriculum in detail, including module descriptors, an articulated assessment plan, and a staffing plan including relevant faculty CVs. Final approval is granted by Academic Council and reported to the Governing Authority.

In examples of programme approvals made available to the Team, there was evidence of appropriate consideration of programme learning outcomes in relation to the National Framework of Qualifications. Internal and external stakeholders were satisfied with the validation and accreditation procedures and believed they added value. The Team found that the programme approval process appeared to be appropriate, rigorous and standardised across the University.

Although the process has many steps, the Team was encouraged to learn from Faculty Deans and academic heads that a programme can launch within a year of development of the business case by the faculties, thus allowing some nimbleness in moving it to the market. DCU has identified further scope for enhancement of timing and synchronicity with marketing and publicity timetables. See the paragraph on **Alignment of the University's mission with targets for quality** below.

### **MONITORING AND REVIEW OF PROGRAMMES**

Academic programmes at DCU are subject to annual programme review (APR) and five-yearly periodic programme review (PPR). Over half the programmes are also subject to PSRB (professional, statutory and regulatory body) accreditation. APR is conducted each October and monitors programme delivery and student attainment on programmes in the previous academic year. Reports are discussed at Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees, with key issues being transmitted to Faculty Management Boards. In addition, faculties transmit to Education Committee reports on issues which are *supra* faculty level and the domain of University-level management.

Outcomes of the staff focus groups used as part of the development of the ISER, as well as the Team's meetings with staff, indicated that staff members had mixed views about the value of APR. Although the process keeps quality assurance centre-front for programmes, it has become a bureaucratic exercise in some departments, or is viewed simply as a request for more resources. The forms were overhauled by the Associate Deans of Teaching and Learning in 2014/15, which led to greater efficiencies. The benefits of the improvements may not yet have had time to register widely.

The internal PPR process is conducted on a cyclical basis using a standardised template and reporting structure. Where programmes are also subject to accreditation by PSRBs, the self-evaluation and outputs of these external reviews can be used as a substitute for the internal PPR, where appropriate. Faculty Deans confirmed that PPRs are well received by schools and faculties, particularly as the external perspectives are found to be useful in refining curricula and evaluating their effectiveness. Members of the QPC and Faculty Deans confirmed that the Quality Framework provided a clear process for PPR recommendations to progress through the decision-making and approval structures. However, in more than one meeting, dissatisfaction was expressed that the feedback loop to schools about recommendations transmitted to senior management levels was inconsistent or non-existent.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3**

**The Review Team recommends that the University take steps to ensure effective communication to staff and students about responses to feedback provided and changes implemented (or not) as a result of quality assurance activities.**

Appendices to the ISER provided evidence of impact and change as a result of routine APR and PPR monitoring processes. The Team found that, on the whole, the processes were appropriate and effective. One important omission, however, seems to be the provision of reliable management information from consistent data sets of student evaluations of teaching and learning at the module level (see the paragraph on **student evaluations** above).

## USE OF DATA AND ANALYTICS IN THE QUALITY ASSURANCE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The ISER and AIQR describe how quantitative and qualitative data are collected on a range of facets of the student experience. Data which are regularly analysed and used on an annual basis are the outcomes of the ISSE (which is disaggregated to school and programme level and is provided for PPR and Quality Reviews), student progression, retention and award data (which are used in reviews and also received by Education Committee), the First-Year Student Experience Survey, the International Student Barometer and statistical data related to examination performance, which is scrutinised by programme boards and by Academic Standards Committee. Other survey data which has been used (but which is not routinely available) are the Jisc Digital Tracker Survey from 2017 and the pilot of ISSE for postgraduate research students.

Through the location of the institutional research function in the QPO, DCU has made great strides in systematizing data collection and disseminating it for subsequent review. However, further progress will be limited since there is only one research analyst in the service of the entire University. Also limiting is the lack of a data warehouse (as a repository for comparative data across schools) and business intelligence tools. With the continued focus on quality assurance, DCU's need for analytics and data to support decision-making will become greater. The development of a new Student Information System (SIS) also highlights the need for an analytic structure to mine information effectively. An important component of DCU's mission is to support the experience of all students on campus from diverse backgrounds. Use of data at an appropriate level of granularity to better understand differences in the experiences of population subgroups (e. g. international, access, part-time, taught postgraduate, research postgraduate, gender and ethnicity) will be critical to provide appropriate interventions when needed.

There is a heavy reliance on ISSE as the source of student feedback in PPR and Quality Reviews and, in the view of the Team, it should be balanced by other measures, including evidence from source systems. The implementation of a new Student Information System should allow access to better information

from the source system on students' experience with, and performance on, various modules and programmes, but close attention to the reporting capabilities of the new system will be required.

Although some mention was made of the use of SciVal data for research comparisons, there is limited use of external benchmarking at DCU. Comparison with external peers is important to create context and to measure the performance of academic programmes and research outputs. The lack of such external benchmarking limits the effectiveness of internal reviews and quality management.

### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

**The Review Team recommends that the University develop a Data Analytics Support Plan to ensure that the Quality Framework is supported by appropriate analytic capacity, enabling the University to better identify and understand differences in student progression and performance. In addition, the Team recommends that the regular use of internal and external benchmarking data be increased.**

The Quality Enhancement and Survey of Teaching (QuEST) initiative was developed in response to a recommendation in the 2010 institutional review that the University develop further ways for students to provide feedback on their experience of teaching. However, the response rate is quite low and does not provide reliable information on the quality of teaching; it appears to be inconsistently used across modules. Neither students nor academic heads seemed clear as to how any outputs were used or to what bodies, if any, these were reported. Without a standard teaching evaluation tool that uses common measures, there is limited scope for achieving a University or school-wide perspective on how well DCU is delivering effective teaching (a fundamental component of its mission). Standardised items and standardised reports on teaching and learning performance across modules and programmes are a necessary component of quality assurance, the management of teaching and learning, and of support for successful teaching (for example potentially providing evidence of teaching and learning performance in promotion applications). See the recommendation in the above paragraph on **Student Evaluations**.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

### QUALITY ASSURANCE AT FACULTY, PROGRAMME AND MODULE LEVEL

Ultimate responsibility for quality assurance of the delivery of programmes in faculties rests with the Faculty Executive Deans. Day-to-day oversight is delegated to Associate Deans of Teaching and Learning (ADTLs) who chair the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees, represent their faculty on relevant University committees, and contribute to the development of faculty strategy in relation to teaching and learning. They manage, within the faculties, the processes of programme validation and accreditation, and the annual and periodic programme review cycles.

In schools, School Teaching Convenors maintain oversight of the delivery of programmes and modules, liaising with programme chairpersons. The programme chairpersons are responsible for programme level induction, ensuring the availability and accuracy of programme information, acting as key contact for student queries, chairing Programme Board Examination Review Committees (PBERC) and Progression and Award Boards (PAB). They work with module co-ordinators and lecturing staff to monitor student academic performance, and to assure the quality of modules. It was clear to the Review Team that programme chairpersons and module co-ordinators enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. However, in the Team's opinion, this resulted in too wide a variation in core aspects of the student learning experience. The Team repeatedly heard that information at the module level, particularly with respect to the provision of assessment information (see the paragraph on **Assessment of Learners**, below) and feedback on performance varied depending on the module co-ordinator (and in similar ways on the Programme Chairperson). The extent to which postgraduate research students appointed to teach on programmes were provided with guidance or training was also dependent on individual programme chairpersons and module coordinators. The Team asked students and staff about arrangements for academic support for students and where students should expect to go to discuss their overall academic progress (as distinct from queries in relation to individual modules or programmes or more general learning support or pastoral advice). In response to specific queries, the University appeared to have

no overarching policy on this and arrangements depended on faculties and schools, but more commonly on individual programmes. Students reported a wide range of experiences. Academic staff expressed some frustration with the process of module co-ordination in the context of programme management. Many staff offered the view that it would be helpful if schools 'owned' and managed modules.

The Team formed the opinion that, whilst the University had well-developed overarching quality assurance policies that were rigorously implemented and managed at University level, it was less vigilant in ensuring that its faculties and schools were providing a high-quality learning experience on matters delegated to them in the routine delivery of programmes. There seemed to be too many features which were left to the discretion of individual staff, resulting in an uneven pattern of delivery. In the Team's view, the University should be pro-active in ensuring that all its students had an acceptable learning experience and, further, it should set the standards for this. The Team was mindful that variations in delivery are both necessary and acceptable depending on the demands of different disciplines. However, all students should expect a consistent minimum provision and it should be for the University to determine this threshold standard, irrespective of faculty, school, programme or module and ensure effective implementation.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

The Review Team recommends that the University

**a) develop systematic sets of University-wide policies clarifying the minimum expectations of what faculties and schools should provide to secure a consistent student learning experience and b) monitor their implementation. The Team recommends that these initially include guidance on standard sets of assessment information and marking/grading criteria to be provided at module level, expectations for a point of contact for students for discussion of their academic progress on a programme (e. g. year tutor/personal tutor/subject lead), timelines for return of assessed work, and appropriate training for all postgraduate research students who teach on undergraduate courses.**

## WORK-BASED LEARNING

A key feature of undergraduate programmes offered by DCU is the opportunity for work-based learning (or study abroad) to form an accredited part of their studies, with 75% of programmes incorporating a work-based learning element. Key to this is the optional INTRA scheme of integrated, for-credit placements for those disciplines not having placements at the core of the programme of learning (such as nursing or education). The operation of the INTRA scheme is discussed in the **Quality Enhancement** section below.

## ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS

Assessment modes for modules and schedules of assessment for programmes are considered and approved as part of the validation and accreditation processes (see the paragraph on **Programme Approval** above). Subsequent changes are approved by schools and Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees. Schools conduct regular reviews of assessment. The Teaching and Enhancement Unit (TEU) provides professional support for the enhancement of assessment practices including feedback to students. At the end of each semester, outcomes of assessment are monitored by programme chairs or Programme Board Examination Review Committees, and Progression and Award Boards are convened to consider assessment outcomes at the end of the second semester and subsequent to resits of examinations. Summary statistics of student performance are available for review by academic staff using the Guru platform. At institutional level, standards and academic performance are monitored annually by Education Committee, which considers analyses of student performance prepared by the QPO.

In 2013, DCU developed the *Policy on Assessment and Feedback in Teaching and Learning*, which created sound principles of assessment and expectations about feedback to be applied across all faculties. The ISSE data for DCU indicated that just over 50% of respondents felt that they 'very often' or 'often' had clear information on how work was to be assessed, on the timing of assessments, and on what was required for a good mark. In discussions with students it became apparent that the levels of information on assessment very much depended on the module

coordinator. For some modules grade descriptors and grading criteria were provided, but practice was inconsistent across modules. The students highlighted that this was a particular challenge in the first year of a programme, but students subsequently became familiar with the practice of individual module coordinators as they progressed through the programme. Some students also indicated that the most basic information such as submission deadlines could be difficult to ascertain and again was highly variable between modules. There appeared to be no University-wide guidelines or requirements in respect of the categories of assessment information that all students should expect to receive, irrespective of module, programme, school or faculty.

The ISSE responses also indicated that 40% of students either never, or only sometimes, received feedback on their work that helped them to improve their performance on subsequent assessment. Discussions with undergraduate students confirmed that the quality and availability of feedback appeared to be quite variable across the University and was dependent on the module coordinator. Fewer than 50% of students across first year and final year undergraduate students felt that they were "provided feedback on a draft or work in progress" or "provided prompt and detailed feedback on tests or completed assignments", less than the national average in the ISSE for both questions.

Discussions with academic staff, students and case studies indicated that there were pockets of excellent practice on feedback to students (for example, the use of reflective logs on feedback received). However, the University appeared to have no systems in place to ensure that students received adequate levels of information about module assignments which were consistent across the University (or even within faculties and schools). Similarly, although the University had approved the *Policy on Assessment and Feedback in Teaching and Learning*, which sets out mandatory requirements for feedback, these did not include University-wide timeframes for the provision of feedback to students. Furthermore, it was clear that the policy was not being implemented within faculties and schools – nor did the University appear to have any means of monitoring the consistent implementation of its policy across the University. The Review Team considered that University-wide policies should be established setting out a)

the minimum expectations of the information on assessment that should be provided at module level, and b) expectations about the quantity, quality and timeliness of feedback that every student could expect to receive. See the recommendation in the paragraph on **Quality Assurance at faculty, school, programme and module level** above.

## RESEARCH

### RESEARCH ACTIVITY

The Review Team was impressed with the University's commitment to research, which appeared to be shared widely across the University. The Review Team noted DCU's specific emphasis on an appropriate mix of fundamental and translational research. The University was very clear on its aspiration to achieve high quality research across all academic areas and the translation of all research to secure impact wherever appropriate. The future context for assuring and enhancing its research activities was set out in the Research and Innovation Strategy 2017-22. The Team supported the leadership of the Office of the Vice-President Research and the Research Committee in identifying research priorities and the ongoing work of the Office of the Vice President Research to monitor their implementation and refine them. The Team also observed the commitment of academic units to consider research priorities in a) filling appointments (in order to build critical mass and maximise impact), and b) when making investment in infrastructure and equipment. The Review Team urged the University to continue its strategic prioritisation of research themes.

The Review Team noted that there are currently 19 University Research Centres in place. Annual reviews of their performance were inaugurated two years ago and are submitted to the Vice President Research and Innovation (outside of the external reporting required by some funding agencies). In the Team's view, such annual reviews serve both the Research Centres and the University well. The Team also supported the sustainability review of 16 of these research centres currently planned by the University.

The Review Team discussed with the Vice-President Research and Innovation and research directors how the University supported the research of newly appointed junior academics. It welcomed the

protection offered to those colleagues to ensure that, in their initial years, their teaching responsibilities did not compromise their long-term research productivity. The Review Team noted the very positive attitude of the research leaders towards their post-doctoral colleagues and their research students. Discussions with both of these groups demonstrated that DCU provided a very supportive research environment.

### COMMENDATION 5

**The Review Team commends DCU on its University-wide commitment to research and its continuing efforts to identify and refine its research priorities.**

### RESEARCH DEGREE PROGRAMMES

Policies and procedures relating to the quality assurance and enhancement of postgraduate research and doctoral education are led by the Dean of the Graduate School and the Graduate Research Studies Board. The Graduate Studies Office supports the development and delivery of postgraduate taught and research programmes across the University and provides a range of services for its graduate students. The Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis govern all aspects of research degree delivery. These have been augmented by a range of handbooks and guidance published by the Graduate Studies Office, including, in recent years, a comprehensive Graduate Research Guide. The first Annual Report on DCU Graduate Studies was produced in respect of the 2016/17 academic year and the Team welcomed this development as an important tool in monitoring trends and increasing transparency.

It was clear from discussions with the heads of academic units, research directors, academic staff and some PhD students that the 'structured PhD' model was well embedded across the University. This was considered to be important, given that the majority of PhD graduates emerging from the University will be employed outside of academia; the experience of a 'structured PhD' programme offered appropriate preparation for work in the wider society and economy. There was evidence that supervisory panels and the annual progression and review processes were implemented routinely.

The Team had some concerns about the preparedness of some doctoral students to discharge their

responsibilities in supporting teaching programmes at the University. The opportunity to be involved in the teaching life of the University was welcomed by research students as a positive development. However, a minority of the students who met the Team reported that they had not undergone any formal training for their teaching roles at DCU. The Team considered that the University might wish to consider the introduction of this as a formal requirement for all postgraduate research students involved in teaching (see the recommendation on quality assurance at faculty, school, programme and module level above).

It was not clear that DCU had in place any formal targets for the completion of doctoral theses or a system for routinely monitoring the respective performance of faculties and schools in this respect. While it does not have specific concerns about the completion rates, the Team has the following recommendation:

**RECOMMENDATION 6**

**The Review Team recommends that the University consider both setting and monitoring expected targets in order to clarify expectations for both research students and supervisors.**

**SUPPORTS FOR LEARNERS**

The Review Team found that there was a comprehensive range of student support co-ordinated through a central unit, Student Support & Development (SS&D). It offered general support to all students, targeted support to specific groups and individual support to students registering with the Disability and Learning Support Service. Since 2015/16, support services have been delivered on all three campuses with the aim of providing a similar level of support to all students on the new campuses.

Orientation includes additional targeted provision for specific student groups such as DCU Connected students, mature students, students with disabilities and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. As a result of feedback from students on the difficulty of digesting so much information on arrival, a supplementary online orientation programme has been developed which provides a weekly breakdown of tips and reminders. First-year students registered through the Access service are

provided with second-year peer mentors throughout their first year. Support for all first-year students is a priority and a range of services have been designed explicitly to support them. SS&D arrange interventions to support students at risk of non-academic progression (see the paragraph on **Progression** under 'Objective 3 below'). Provision of counselling services is a challenge, particularly at peak demand times, given the increase in student numbers. DCU is exploring a model of external counselling to provide weekend and after-hours cover and services to off-campus students (including those studying abroad, on placement, or studying through DCU Connected) and who are unable to access campus services. The Careers Service provides professional development support to complement DCU's approach to embedding **work-based learning** in the curriculum (see the paragraph on work-based learning above). It also delivers credit-bearing modules in the curriculum. As of 2018, there are proposals for a new Leadership and Lifeskills Centre to be located in the new Student Centre (subject to resources becoming available). The aim is to give students the opportunity to build a personalised suite of development activities embracing a range of skills, from career planning to leadership development. The intended focus is on building resilience and developing life-skills to cope with change (and, thus, in the longer term reducing the need for counselling). Existing staff and alumnae will be used as a resource. The support provided by DCU's Maths Learning Centre (MLC) was positively endorsed by students and elected student representatives. Based on ISSE feedback from students, the existing MLC had been moved to the library complex and there was an immediate increase in uptake of the service. The change in location was endorsed by students and constituted a good example of enhancement.

The Review Team was impressed with the proactive approach of the SS&D. There was sound and demonstrable evidence in the ISER, case histories provided in the appendices and discussion with the Team of an enhancement focus to its work. Their approach to developing their services was based on research and reflection, regular evaluation of provision, benchmarking nationally and internationally, and regular dialogue with DCU Students' Union and faculties. Developments are clearly informed by the Strategic Plan, interrogation

of management data to identify trends and the use of a variety of student surveys and feedback fora. The implementation of annual reviews and annual strategic planning days was considered exemplary.

#### **COMMENDATION 6**

The Review Team commends the extensive range of services provided by the Student Support and Development Centre (welcoming in particular the proposed Leadership and Lifeskills Centre), and its informed approach to developing, evaluating and adapting its services.

## **LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

### **LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

The Review Team visited two of DCU's three campuses: Glasnevin and St. Patrick's. DCU is currently embarking on an ambitious capital development plan, which includes a new student centre, provision of new sports facilities, additional on-campus accommodation and '21<sup>st</sup> century digital teaching spaces', intended to support the University's ambitions across all three campuses. In the summer of 2018, the construction of the new student centre 'The U' was completed on the Glasnevin campus. It has been well-received by DCU students as an enhancement to its social and collaborative space. In addition to a student gathering space, an auditorium and lecture spaces were also provided, and DCU took the opportunity to standardise the classroom environments with upgraded technology and seating. In the ISSE, 83% of students reported satisfaction with their physical environment on campus.

Students are looking forward to the upcoming investment in halls of residence, as the high cost of living in the local community was frequently cited as a concern in conversations with students. Also reported in the ISSE was the occasional difficulty in travelling between campuses, creating challenges for those students pursuing modules at different sites.

In 2015 DCU invested heavily in a Digital Transformation Programme to enhance security and improve connectivity across the campuses. The technical infrastructure and improvements from the development plan are impressive, given the limited resources of this Team, and the variability in the networks across the three campuses.

## **INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT**

In 2014 the University established an Information Systems Governance Committee as a sub-group of Executive to advise on the strategic direction of all information resources and the future development of IT solutions. Further, in 2017, DCU approved the development of an Information Strategy, which recognised data as a critical asset and proposed a set of principles for their governance, management and use.

There has been substantial investment in the IT network, audit, fail-safes and disaster recovery exercises. Discussions with support services made it clear that there is a very considerable project portfolio (such as Voice over IP (VOIP), Private Branch Exchange (PBX), connectivity and Wi-Fi, bandwidth, integration with the cloud, Bring Your own Device (BYOD), disaster recovery planning/ business continuity planning). DCU has a track record in online and distance learning, but there will be further resource requirements with aspirations to increase TNE (for instance, in China).

In addition, in 2017, DCU initiated a project to secure and roll-out a new Student Information Service (SIS) to include business intelligence capabilities for the strategic and operational interrogation of student data (as recommended in the 2010 Audit Report). The intention was also to improve ease of student access to information, and to develop leaner processes and operational excellence. The concurrence of so many IT projects in the University gives rise to a large operational risk. There was evidence that the University is well aware of this. Risks are appropriately identified on the University's Risk Register (see **Risk Management** above) and it has well-tested business continuity arrangements. The University is aware of how critical security is (as a risk), and the Team heard that a new IT Security Officer is being appointed to address security concerns. On the basis of interactions with multiple staff and students, the Team believed that the University's goal of being a digital campus was lived and breathed by its staff and students rather than being simply a vision. DCU's innovative focus and entrepreneurial approach was applauded. Nevertheless, in the Team's view the University would need to remain alert in order to future-proof itself. The speed of change in the current environment, the potential for digital disruption and the need for technology to remain fit for purpose for

new methods of working and teaching all constituted challenges.

Whilst there were significant expectations for what new systems (in particular the SIS) could deliver, the success of the implementation will depend heavily on staff readiness to absorb changes. It will therefore be a challenge to ensure that both staff and students are sufficiently well trained and engaged both to use and understand the system.

## STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT, AND DEVELOPMENT

### GENERAL

It was clear to the Team that the current HR department and Teaching Enhancement Unit (TEU) had been stretched by the additional demands placed by the Employment Control Framework, the post-recession context (with people in demand), and, in particular, by the incorporation of the three colleges (see **Introduction** above). The latter had added its own burden because the contractual and other implications of the staff transfers were considerable. Additional pressures had arisen as a result of the increase in retirement age (which affected headcount planning), and of the use of rolling contracts. Although rolling contracts provide flexibility, they generate more contract work, and it was clear from meetings with postdoctoral staff that the use of rolling contracts caused increased staff dissatisfaction. A number of post-doctoral researchers found securing payment on one- or three-month contracts was stressful, and the Team were of the view that sign-off processes might need to be reviewed. The University's development of TNE (particularly in Saudi Arabia and Arizona) had added complexity to processes and placed additional demands for appropriate due diligence and informed intelligence on transnational legal requirements affecting staffing. Nevertheless, staff involved in the HR function were positive about the work, although they felt under-resourced for the demands placed upon them. The HR department did not have an up-to-date and fit-for-purpose IT system. It had, however, been proactive in seeking out external reviews from Cpl and IBM. Since the 2010 IRIU review, Ireland has become a country with full employment. As a consequence, there is an increased challenge in attracting and retaining the best talent.

The task of supporting staff, keeping them motivated and satisfied has therefore become significant. This applies to both support and academic staff. A staff satisfaction survey was conducted in 2018 after the development of the ISER.

### **RECOMMENDATION 7**

**The Review Team recommends the implementation of a regular staff satisfaction survey for all staff in order to monitor the prevailing culture and identify the support and development required.**

### RECRUITMENT

DCU has in place a *Policy for Recruitment, Selection, and Promotion* which aims to quality assure these processes, aligning them with principles of equity, fairness and flexibility. All posts must be sanctioned by the Executive on the advice of the University's Budget Committee and take account of strategic priorities. The feedback provided by academic heads indicated that the recruitment process was "burdensome". There was a feeling that, whilst there were important compliance fail-safes, there was too much process and insufficient focus on the key outcome (so, for example, it could take up to one year to hire the right person). There was no wish to move the HR function into faculties, but merely to improve the streamlining of the process, particularly as DCU was now competing with the business world and not just with other academic institutions.

There appeared to have been no annual or regular review of recruitment processes which might have led to beneficial changes. Meetings with academic staff indicated that dissatisfaction related to the time taken to hire, the dependence on manual processes, and the lack of feedback. These were all areas that would have been identified for improvement had such reviews been conducted. In the context of the new employment market, where there will be more recruitment on both a permanent and contract basis, it is imperative to ensure that the new e-recruit system comes on stream as soon as possible, cascades down through the institution and is used by all. This will be only the first phase of a more extensive system and will entail much manual intervention. The Team was of the view that the whole recruitment process would benefit from review.

**RECOMMENDATION 8**

**The Review Team recommends that the University continue to implement operational changes to build a more systematised recruitment process focusing on increased efficiency, speed and the adoption of online rather than manual transfer of data.**

DCU needs to ensure it has swift and responsive systems in order not to lose out on key talent to other academic institutions or the corporate world. Better communication with faculties also needs to be considered (such as a status bar clarifying the point reached in the recruitment process and promoting improved understanding of timelines). Staff in faculties would require additional support to implement a revised recruitment process and introduction of new systems. Although there were currently HR professionals linked to each Dean, staff turnover amongst them has slowed progress and the causes of the turnover need to be identified.

**PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

There was no formal structure for performance management or support. A Performance Management Scheme was introduced in 2005, but had been used inconsistently in a limited number of faculties and units, where staff opted to participate on a voluntary basis. The 2010 IRIU review recommended the implementation of a robust performance appraisal system for staff. The University had not been able to do so, mainly due to factors outside of its control. The public sector agreements in place since 2010 hindered progress on the development of a scheme until agreement was reached across the sector to introduce a common scheme in 2013/14. This coincided with the initiation of the incorporation process at DCU and, given the sensitivities about transferring staff, it was deemed inappropriate to introduce a such a scheme at a point of major structural disruption. The absence of performance management could have a detrimental impact on an institution; staff might focus only on areas that would better their personal career, rather than the entire institution. The Team heard from staff, for instance, that few want to be a head of school which is regarded as a chore. Post-doctoral researchers expressed the view that they would welcome a more formal process to support and manage their careers at the University. As people are the principal resource of a university, it

is vital to attract and retain high quality staff and to underpin their support and development through a strong performance management process.

DCU set up a steering group and a cross-institutional working group to implement a revised scheme by the third quarter of 2019. The Team heard that there was agreement in principle for the scheme to be implemented online, but not linked directly to remuneration. In the Team's view, the importance of staff morale should not be underestimated. It is essential that staff feels that good work is rewarded, and also that poor performance is not. The Team were of the view that DCU should consider using outcomes of performance management as part of probation or promotion processes, applications for sabbatical leave or flexible working, or opportunities for supported study and courses related to personal/career development.

**RECOMMENDATION 9**

**The Review Team recommends that it is essential for the revised Performance Management Development Scheme to be implemented, on schedule, by the third quarter of 2019 in order to underpin quality and provide staff support (for example through links to probation, sabbaticals, and promotion applications).**

**STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

The HR Learning and Development Unit provides opportunities for professional development for all staff. It offers centrally organised courses, as well as bespoke development for specific groups or faculties and customised training interventions. The portfolio available to academic staff includes development opportunities in leadership and management, researcher development, professional and interpersonal development together with career development.

**GLOBALISATION****GLOBAL EXPERIENCE AND CITIZENSHIP**

The Team noted that Goal 6 of the Strategic Plan 2017-2022 was to develop DCU as a global university. The University's intention was to establish a Global Experience and Citizenship Plan. The aim was to increase the percentage of programmes incorporating international experience (including innovative

proposals for global learning and online collaborative learning with student teams in different countries on global challenges).

The goal also included aspirations to develop a DCU Language Plan to increase conversational ability and cultural appreciation of Asian and European languages within the University community. The Team noted that these initiatives responded well to employers' needs, as confirmed by the support of the employers and external stakeholders whom the Team met. The Team applauded the initiative as a way to prepare 21<sup>st</sup> century professionals, ready for innovation through multi-disciplinarity, and for the global context through multilingualism.

#### **COMMENDATION 7**

**The Review Team commends the proposed development of the Global Experience and Global Citizenship Plan and its associated Language Plan.**

#### **INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKING**

The Team found that DCU was active in various alliances (e. g. The European Consortium of Innovative Universities (ECIU), European Distance and E-Learning Network (EDEN), European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU)) and acknowledged the potential for international benchmarking. There was some evidence of this already being in place in the area of open and online learning. DCU was also planning to host the 28<sup>th</sup> International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) World Conference on Online Learning in 2019.

#### **TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION (TNE) AND COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITY**

Study abroad experience seemed to be stimulating and well administered. Outgoing students under ERASMUS were required to have International Learning Agreements signed before departure. TNE provision was not addressed in the ISER and appeared not to be reported in AIQRs. However, the Strategic Plan 2017-22 described the significant developments in TNE during the lifetime of the previous strategic plan – in particular, a partnership with Princess Norah Bint Abdul Rahman University (PNU) in Saudi

Arabia. This entailed DCU accredited programmes in business studies being delivered to students on the PNU campus (who are registered students of DCU) and delivered by staff employed by DCU. The scheme was to be expanded to programmes in the Faculty of Engineering and Computing and the Faculty of Science and Health. The strategic plan also identified aspirations to replicate the model with a small number of what was described as “deep partnerships” with Arizona State University and Wuhan in China. The Team was concerned that the absence of discussion of the management and quality assurance of TNE in the ISER suggested that it was not well integrated into the mainstream of the University’s quality assurance activities. In response to a question about where responsibility lay for the quality assurance of partnerships, the Team was advised that projects were the responsibility of individual members of SMG, whilst the programmes fell within the oversight of the respective Faculty Dean. However, this view did not appear to be widely shared or understood by other members of staff, where there was confusion and lack of clarity as to how the process was managed. Some thought it was the responsibility of the International Office, others the QPO, and the uncertainty seemed to be compounded by the establishment of the Strategic Partnership Office. The QQI Core Quality Assurance Guidelines state that strategic partnerships and transnational provision should be subsumed under an institution’s routine quality assurance arrangements. However, it seemed to the Team that the development, management and quality assurance of the initiatives and partnerships were operating in a separate silo (with the exception of the academic programmes, which, it was acknowledged, were subject to the usual approval, examination, APR and PPR arrangements) from the bodies responsible for quality assurance activity. The QQI Core Quality Assurance Guidelines also state that all transnational arrangements in which the provider is involved are to be published separately in one place (para 10. 2 of the Guidelines). No evidence was found that this had been implemented. The Team was reassured, however, that global activities (including TNE) were included in the institutional risk register and regularly reviewed as part of risk management.

**RECOMMENDATION 10**

The Review Team recommends, in the light of the University's plans for the expansion of Transnational Education (TNE) and as a matter of urgency, that it mainstream the quality assurance and enhancement of TNE under the University's existing structures and clarify the roles of the Deans, members of Senior Management Group, and the various professional units (in particular the role of the Strategic Partnership Office in relation to the International Office and Quality Promotions Office).

*A Partnership Approval Protocol and a Collaborative Provision Approval Protocol* had recently been developed, subsequent to the initiation of the PNU arrangement in 2013 and are in the process of being refined. It was clear that the University is intent on moving away from *ad hoc* responses to initiatives toward the development of a pro-active DCU-wide reference framework for global operations. The *Collaborative Provision Approval protocol* was sensitive to the many diverse collaborations possible and adopted a risk-based approach to developing and approving collaborations. However, the Team found that the Partnership Approval Protocol was limited in the extent to which it addressed the cultural appropriateness of the potential partner institution and host country. Indeed, from the documentation provided to the Team, it was not clear to what extent the due diligence on PNU had included an assessment of any conflict with national legislative requirements, and congruity (or conflict) with DCU on matters such as ethical principles, legal requirements, academic integrity and freedom, and data requirements. There appeared to be no provision in the new protocol for formal consideration of a potential partner (if involved in delivering programmes) to be conducted by a peer Review Team (with external and independent input), which would constitute best practice nationally and internationally. It was also unclear how the outcomes of decisions to recognise partners were reported into the committee system with sufficient information to enable informed sign off by the relevant quality assurance deliberative bodies. The Memorandum of Agreement with PNU had recently been renewed, but there appeared to have been no formal review of the quality and effectiveness of the partnership, nor any refreshing of due diligence, notwithstanding the fact that four years had elapsed since the inauguration of the partnership.

**RECOMMENDATION 10 (CONTINUED)**

The Review Team also recommends that the University continue its ongoing efforts to refine its global strategy and its *protocol for partner approval, protocols for collaborative provision* and requirements for legal memoranda /agreements in the light of best practice nationally and internationally. In so doing, it is recommended to build more control into the procedures for partner selection and due diligence, setting explicit criteria for academic integrity, ethical standards for student enrolment and staff recruitment, the monitoring and review of partnerships, risk management, exit strategies and refreshing due diligence.

**LINKED PROVIDERS AND COLLABORATIVE PROVISION**

DCU has a partnership with Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT), which commenced in the 2014/15 academic year and constitutes its sole Linked Provider arrangement. DCU currently awards all postgraduate research qualifications at NFQ levels 9 and 10 delivered at Dundalk. The nature of the arrangement, and the quality assurance procedures that govern it, were set out in a Linked Provider schedule, an agreement which covered a five-year period until 2018/19. The DkIT regulations governing postgraduate research degree programmes were amended to align with those of DCU, and the supervision and management of the research programmes were delivered by Dundalk staff. Applications to transfer to PhD status, external examiner nominations, early submission of theses, extensions, and the recommendations for the award of qualifications all required the approval of DCU's Graduate Research Studies Board (GRSB). There was cross representation of the two institutions on relevant committees. Comprehensive Annual Reports were submitted through the GRSB to Academic Council. A review of the effectiveness of the quality assurance arrangements (in line with the QQI Act of 2012 and QQI sector-specific DAB Guidelines) was scheduled for the final quarter of 2020, although there appeared to be no provision for a review of either the partnership or the DkIT arrangement prior to the renewal of the Linked Provider schedule, which was due in 2019.

The Team was concerned that, although students had been admitted under the scheme since 2014/15,

there were no arrangements in place indicating how students would be facilitated to complete the same or similar award in the event of the initial provider ceasing to offer the programme (including as a result of withdrawal of approval of the arrangement) as indicated in the Statutory QA Guidelines for DABs. In order to ensure the protection of enrolled postgraduate research students, DCU needs to be confident at the point of *admission* of these students that it can secure alternative equivalent supervisory arrangements and an appropriate research environment for students to complete their studies. The Team urged the University to address this as soon as possible. While the Team acknowledged and applauded DCU's dynamism in forming strategic partnerships, the Team's view was that procedures should have been developed in Phase 1 of the arrangement. In addition, the University had yet to develop procedures for the withdrawal of approval of the arrangement by DCU and any subsequent appeal against that. The Team also suggested that the University should consider allowing DkIT students the ultimate right of appeal to DCU as their designated degree awarding body.

**RECOMMENDATION 11**

**The Review Team recommends that the University address arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners at linked providers, procedures for the withdrawal of approval of linked provider arrangements (and appeal against them) as soon as possible.**

The quality of research degree programmes rests on the quality of supervision and of the research environment. The Linked Provider schedule did not currently indicate what criteria should be used to evaluate the proposed research capacity /research environment at Dundalk, nor what criteria should be used to identify appropriate supervisory capacity. In order to assure the quality of the research degree programmes delivered at Dundalk and their equivalence to delivery at DCU, the Team concluded that clear criteria and procedures for these should be developed and articulated.

**RECOMMENDATION 11 (CONTINUED)**

**The Review Team also recommends that clear criteria be developed for the selection of research degree supervisors and the identification of adequate research capacity at Dundalk Institute of Technology. These should be reflected in the Linked Provider schedule and implemented when admission of a student is being considered.**

As noted in the overall assessment of quality assurance procedures above, the Team recognises that DCU has perhaps been in a reactive mode to approaches for various partnerships in the last five years. In some cases, this means that procedures were being drafted and approved in tandem with specific initiatives being evaluated and approved – and this may be unavoidable. However, in light of its ambitions to expand TNE and strengthen various strategic inter-institutional partnerships, the Team is of the view that DCU needs to work faster to embed appropriate protocols and procedures for the recognition, oversight and renewal of partnership arrangements in addition to – and distinct – from specific arrangements for the transnational and /or joint delivery of programmes. These need to take account of best practice nationally and internationally and exploit the learning experiences of other institutions. Given the national importance of providing robust and successful TNE, the Team was of the view that it might benefit the sector as a whole if QQI were to consider the development of specific guidelines on the challenging area of development, approval, monitoring and review of collaborations and TNE.

**PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION**

Communication is important from the perspective of the external world and, in this respect, the Team found that DCU was performing well.

The range and quality of the brochures describing various programmes of teaching and research and other initiatives undertaken by the University were good. The quality of the material aimed at prospective undergraduate students and its presentation on the 'Study at DCU' webpage was particularly impressive.

There was a specific location on the University website for University policies, accessible from the homepage. It delivered a single source of information on University policies to both internal and external stakeholders. The outcomes of all Quality Reviews (both the peer Review Report and Quality Improvement Plan once approved by the Governing Authority) have been published on the University website and are accessible to both internal and external visitors.

The Review Team welcomed DCU's commitment to public communication and information sharing. This was important in an era when universities could develop and support the knowledge economy and society. In the Irish context, it was particularly relevant given the need for state and taxpayer support at a time of so many competing demands on the state's finances.

## SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

All academic and professional units at DCU have been the subject of cyclical Quality Reviews since 2000/01. These are organised by the QPO and the structural elements involve the development of a self-assessment report and a peer review group visit and report. Several groups that the Team met cited the benefit that formal reviews afforded for analysis and reflection outside daily work operations. The effectiveness of these reviews is discussed in the section on **Quality Enhancement** below. The Review Team noted that the academic Quality Reviews are organised at faculty level with the exception of the Faculty of Science and Health where the Quality Reviews are conducted on a school basis. It was not clear why this faculty warranted separate treatment and the Review Team welcomed the University's intentions to review current procedures.



## 4. Objective 2 - Quality Enhancement

### OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

DCU has effective policies and procedures designed to identify improvements required and potential enhancements resulting from its quality assurance processes. The introduction of an independent student evaluation scheme of teaching and learning at module level would offer further scope for effective management and enhancement of teaching (see recommendation in the section on **Student Evaluations**). Similarly, the further development of data analytics capacity and increased use of benchmarking would allow the University to monitor and identify quality enhancement opportunities in a systematic and regular way aligned to its strategic objectives (see recommendation in the section on **USE OF DATA AND ANALYTICS IN THE QUALITY ASSURANCE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING**).

The Team was impressed by the University's commitment to digital learning as an enhancement tool, not only for learning, but also for creating learning opportunities and widening access. Similarly, the University's INTRA programme for providing work placements demonstrably enhanced the student experience and the aspiration to extend this opportunity to all programmes would further embed this.

### EFFECTIVE PROCEDURES

DCU had embraced the full life cycle of quality assurance by not only embedding review processes within all aspects of its operations, but also in the use of the outcomes of APR and PPR processes to provide enhancements to the student experience. These were evidenced throughout the ISER and its appendices by the many improvements cited and examples of impact reports of changes flowing from the annual monitoring. Some improvements were resource-neutral, but for those that required investment, funding was available through competitive application to the Quality Improvement Fund initiative (QuiD). Since 2012, the QPC had coordinated the allocation of grants to both academic and professional support

units and some 100 cross-institutional projects had been supported in the period to 2018 with allocations accruing to 180,000 euros. Examples included:

- Improvement of library seating and noise reduction based on student feedback in LibQual survey
- Resource Guide for Postgraduate Students
- Enhanced technology in classroom/teaching environments
- Development of DCU Research Information System

The principal tool for quality enhancement was perceived by the Review Team to be the externally-led Quality Reviews of academic units and the professional and support units coordinated by the QPC on a seven-year cycle. These are the third element of the Quality Framework (in addition to, and building upon, APR and PPR) and the Governing Authority (GA) has specific responsibility for the establishment and oversight of procedures for their operation. The process involves the preparation of a self-evaluation document, a peer review visit resulting in a report and recommendations, and the production of a Quality Improvement Plan (QuIP). The reports and QuIPs are considered by QPC, Executive Committee and the SMG. The latter also provides a response to Quality Review recommendations as part of the preparation of QuIPs. Regular progress reports on the implementation of the QuIPs are also presented to the GA. It was laudable that the same process is followed for professional support units, albeit with a greater focus on the evaluation of strategic, organisational and management issues. The full review documentation is considered by the GA liaison officer and summaries presented to the full committee. Once signed off by the GA, reports and QuIPs are published on the website. Case studies provided to the Team illustrated the full cycle of a Quality Review and evidence of subsequent developments and improvements. The process was found to be comprehensive, woven throughout each facet of DCU operations, and effective.

## THE ALIGNMENT OF THE INSTITUTION'S MISSION AND TARGETS FOR QUALITY

The Strategic Plan 2017-2022 identified the provision of a transformative student experience as one of its strategic goals. The Teaching and Learning Strategy was one of the five thematic strategies associated with the Strategic Plan and set out objectives for realising this. The Teaching and Learning Strategy identified an ambitious project for a root-and-branch review of the curriculum and learning design of all of DCU's programmes. The focus was on enhancing the ability of individual students to flourish in and engage with the world outside the University, including recognising the importance of industry engagement, inter-cultural competences, and the challenge of global citizenship. There are proposals for greater flexibility in programme delivery, increasing opportunities for international experience, an extension of the work-based learning (INTRA) scheme, and a broadening of the curriculum by the inclusion of optional modules. Digital learning enhancements are also planned, with an increase in blended learning as a key driver of curriculum design. These initiatives are aligned with strategic initiatives to increase student numbers (from increasingly diverse international and national populations), to develop employability in students and better prepare them for dynamic and flexible careers. DCU has also identified programme approval processes as an area for review in order to identify any unnecessary structural impediments to swift and efficient approval (whilst maintaining appropriate and effective quality assurance checks). Also embedded in the Strategic Plan is the establishment of the Professional Development Framework for Teaching and Learning to assure the quality of, and professionalise, teaching.

The Team found that the Strategic Plan and its aspirations for improvements to quality and the student experience were in close alignment.

## INNOVATIVE AND EFFECTIVE PRACTICES FOR QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

### NATIONAL STUDENT ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME (NSTEP)

In 2017/18, DCU participated in the National Student Engagement Programme (NSTEP). A cross-institutional working group (co-chaired by the Deputy

President and the President of the DCU Students' Union) was established to analyse and evaluate student representation and engagement. Student representation was mapped on key committees related to student learning, quality assurance, and the student experience. Representation at appropriate levels was identified, including on the Governing Authority. At a local level, also as part of NSTEP, student-staff fora were piloted in the School of Applied Languages and the Faculty of Engineering and Computing. This proved very popular amongst both staff and students. As discussed in meetings during the main review visit, these fora allow for an immediate discussion of programmatic issues (down to the modular level). They are particularly popular with staff as they allow for any issues to be rectified "mid-semester", as opposed to receiving the information after the teaching term has ended. They thus facilitate an expeditious resolution of any issues raised by students. The Team noted that work was underway to implement fora on a University-wide basis. The Review Team supported this and considered that the systematic roll out of these fora should be considered a priority for University management.

### DIGITAL LEARNING AND DCU CONNECTED

The new Strategic Plan and the associated Teaching and Learning Strategy are committed to a range of initiatives to deploy digital technologies to support the enhancement of student learning in all academic programmes and to increase opportunities for flexible delivery of educational opportunities. Both the ISER and discussions in meetings provided ample evidence of developmental work. The National Institute for Digital Learning (NIDL) was established at DCU in 2013 with the aim of becoming a world class leader at the forefront of designing and implementing new blended online and digital models of education. NIDL provides both continuing professional development opportunities and postgraduate and doctoral programmes in online and digital learning. It is involved in a number of international networks and professional bodies (which are also useful in benchmarking their practice). DCU will host the ICDE World Conference on Online Learning in 2019. The Jisc Digital Tracker Survey, in which DCU participated in 2017, evidenced that a larger proportion of DCU students rated the digital teaching and learning

on their courses as good (or better), rated their preparedness for the digital workplace more highly, and indicated a greater appetite for the use of digital technologies on their course than the benchmark group of other universities in the UK and Ireland.

DCU Connected provides opportunities for online learning (both short open courses and degree programmes) to a range of students disproportionately under-represented in higher education (including mature students, job-seekers through the government-funded Springboard initiative and those with refugee status). The portfolio falls broadly into three categories: postgraduate programmes (roughly mirroring faculty offerings but with more exit points and associated qualifications, i. e. certificates/diplomas); undergraduate IT programmes, which provide opportunities for upskilling whilst in full- or part-time employment; humanities offerings, where students tend to be less focused on vocational opportunities. The programmes are delivered and administered by the Open Education Unit which works University-wide across, but deliberately outside, faculties. It delivers non-faculty (and school equivalent) processes such as APR, PPR and examinations. Examination boards incorporate representatives of relevant faculties in order to ensure consistency of standards. The Open Education Unit was originally funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and was the original location for the NIDL. However, the subsidy was phased out and the Open Education Unit is now funded through student fees and the Springboard+ initiative. Its portfolio makes a significant contribution to the University's mission to widen participation and open access. Student satisfaction, progression and completion rates are all carefully monitored by the Open Education Unit. Risks and recovery planning are appropriately monitored on the University's risk register. Student support is tailored to the client group; a 24-hour online counselling service has been provided to provide accessible support to those students who are not studying on campus. The unit is piloting, for a year, a system of 24-hour provision of feedback on assignments (called Studiosity). If successful, its wider implementation on campus will be explored.

#### **COMMENDATION 8**

**The Team commends the operation of DCU Connected, its strategic and dynamic approach, and its alignment with the Institutional Mission in terms of opening access and delivering online learning.**

DCU has become one of a small number of strategic partners involved in the FutureLearn platform (a subsidiary of the UK's Open University). This is seen by DCU as an important means of future proofing its online learning and delivery in an environment where the higher education market is perceived to be becoming inherently more global. DCU wishes to acquire the necessary resilience and application to be at the forefront of future directions and to shape these. One option being explored through FutureLearn is scope for internationalising the curriculum for campus-based students by deploying MOOCs as mini-modules to enhance the learning experience.

#### **DCU VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT/DCU LOOP**

DCU employs a virtual learning environment (VLE) called DCU Loop, which acts as an umbrella platform for all digital learning tools in the University. DCU sees Loop as part of its culture of digital pedagogy, a brand, and it is crucial to DCU's narrative of digital learning provision. It is widely utilised in various ways by staff and students alike in their teaching and learning. Encouragingly, DCU promotes the individuality of the student digital learning experience by advocating that learners use their own "tools" as part of the wider VLE, Snapchat being given as an example. The Jisc Digital Tracker survey revealed, perhaps unsurprisingly, that Loop is seen as most beneficial by DCU distance learners, as opposed to campus-based students. The survey highlighted that there was clear room for improvement to the Loop, both in terms of the usability and presentation of the system. It appeared that the benefits drawn from the VLE system were dependent on engagement from both the teacher and learner. The use of the VLE at DCU was widely encouraged and there appeared to be an appetite for its use to become broader and more consistent, so that both teacher and learner reap the full benefits of this tool. The review noted the consistent process of updating DCU Loop, and the wide provision of staff training for DCU Loop. The excellent work of the TEU has allowed this tool to evolve and the Review

Team welcomed the continuation of this (see the commendation below).

### THE INTRA PROGRAMME

DCU has pioneered the optional INTRA programme which provides year-long work placements in undergraduate programmes to enhance employability and further develop graduate attributes through real-world experience. From speaking with students, the Review Team found their feedback on their INTRA placements and support received while on placement to be overwhelmingly positive, beneficial, and an excellent opportunity for learning in the workplace. Some students who participated in the focus groups as part of the development of the ISER and who did not have INTRA placement as part of their degree programmes said they felt underprepared for life after university. In the light of this feedback, the Review Team welcomed the review of the INTRA scheme as part of DCU's Strategic Plan 2017-2022, with a view to it being extended to all undergraduate programmes. DCU has long-standing ties with Irish Industry partners. When meeting with external stakeholders, all spoke very positively of DCU graduates and, in particular, of the beneficial and practical nature of the INTRA scheme. One external stakeholder stated that he felt "DCU graduates tend to be much more rounded after the year of work placement that is built into their degree".

#### **COMMENDATION 9**

**The Review Team commends DCU for the innovative INTRA programme and welcomes its potential roll out to all undergraduate programmes as part of the new DCU Strategic Plan.**

A programme of this nature benefits students immeasurably in terms of their learning, their future careers and their personal development.

### THE TEACHING ENHANCEMENT UNIT

The DCU Teaching Enhancement Unit provides research-informed leadership in teaching and learning for HE guided by the University's strategic plan and responding to developments in contemporary higher education. It provides a wide

range of accredited modules, demand-led workshops and informal learning opportunities to support pedagogical practice. It supports the work of DCU Connected and distance learning. A priority, given the aspirations of the Strategic Plan, is the need to make staff more aware of how to meet the needs of learners through digital learning. There has been increased participation in these as staff perceive blended learning as a means to relieve teaching workloads and enhance learning. Recent examples of work to support the digital learning experience have been work with the library and the Business School to provide online modules providing guidance to students on research and referencing. Staff are very supportive and appreciative of the provision. The TEU launched a pilot peer observation scheme in 2017 in collaboration with Maynooth University and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI).

The University's Strategic Plan included the specific objective of establishing a Professional Development Framework for teaching and learning, which was welcomed by the Team. This includes the development of a DCU accredited award in teaching/learning and pedagogy in higher education which would be delivered by the TEU (with input from the Institute of Education and other Faculties). The intention is to offer it by accredited modules which could be accrued to a full postgraduate qualification. Although acquisition of the qualification is not intended to be mandatory initially, it is assumed that it would come to be regarded as demonstrable evidence of a commitment to learning and teaching and in due course become key to promotion and thus attractive to staff. The Team suggests that the University keep the resourcing of the TEU under review in the light of: the University's aspirations in the strategic plan for a full curriculum review; the implications of a Professional Development Framework; and the introduction of an accredited programme in higher education pedagogy.

#### **COMMENDATION 10**

**The Review Team commends the proactive work of the TEU aligned to the institutional strategy and its responsiveness to staff demand.**

## 5. Objective 3 – Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression

### OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION

DCU procedures for access, transfer and progression are in keeping with the QQI *Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression*.

### THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ATP

#### ACCESS

Engrained in DCU is a pervasive culture of widening access to third level education. This is extended to learners from various demographics with designated supports, catering to specific cohorts of students traditionally under-represented in the sector. DCU has seen the number of students from under-represented groups double in the last nine years. In meetings with students who were part of the Access programme, they commended DCU for the continued support provided to them on an individual basis, which allowed them to flourish in their programme. These supports have been comprehensively restructured in order to best facilitate this increase in student numbers without any evident impact on provision of support or student progression. A critical factor in the progression and success of traditionally under-represented students is the provision of one-to-one supports, an area in which DCU performed extremely well. The Review Team particularly noted DCU's efforts to support and welcome asylum seekers and refugees into the University community and to foster a culture of inclusion for all. This commitment had been recognised by DCU becoming the first Irish university to be designated a "University of Sanctuary" in December 2016. DCU had, since its founding, been a leader in widening participation in the Irish higher education sector. It was clear that DCU in the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan acknowledged this history and there were clear processes and plans in place to see this go from strength to strength, which the Review Team applauded.

#### COMMENDATION 11

The Review Team commends DCU's existing commitment to widening participation in third level education and its new initiatives relating to prospective learners with autism, learners within the asylum system, and to students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds pursuing a teacher education programme.

#### PROGRESSION

Education Committee routinely monitors analyses produced by the QPO regarding student attainment and progression. Over the last 8 years these data had also been used to identify students who might be at risk of academic non-progression, allowing Student Support and Development (SS&D) to begin an intervention process. Identified students were contacted on a personal basis by SS&D to discuss plans that could be implemented to aid their learning and personal development. Students were contacted by email and the decision to engage with the process was taken by the individual student. Thus, the student could remain in control of their own progression with additional supports and aid provided where necessary. The results of this intervention process are quite impressive, with a clear difference in the progression of students who engaged in the process and those that did not.

#### COMMENDATION 12

The Review Team commends DCU's procedure for students at risk of academic non-progression, not only for a clear methodology for identifying at risk students but also for ensuring that it is a student-centred and student-led approach.

## 6. Objective 4 – Provision of Programmes to International Learners

The Team considered that, on the whole, the University's approach to the provision of education to international learners was consistent with the QQI's *Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes to International Learners*. However, DCU needs to dedicate greater attention to the specific experience and well-being of international students on DCU campuses, particularly in the light of its aspirations to expand the numbers of international learners

The 2010 IRIU review recommended that DCU improve support for international students on their arrival in Ireland and arrange to provide them with better induction support and guidance as a matter of routine, rather than on referral or self-referral. Clear steps have been taken to address this (including improvements to information on the International Office website, the introduction of an International Student Handbook and improvements to the orientation programme, extending it to postgraduate research students). However, the Team found that the recommendation has not been effectively fulfilled for postgraduate research students (who now represent a substantial and growing proportion of the postgraduate student population).

Meetings with international students revealed that they felt isolated, were not integrating much with domestic students, would "not be interested in soft/personal skills modules", and might not be able to afford extra-curricular activities, such as outings, etc. The Team formed the impression that the student experience and student satisfaction of international learners was not sufficiently high on the radar of senior managers and officers of the student support units and there was a lack of awareness of their specific needs. The Team also found that there was a lack of clarity about the respective responsibilities of, and boundaries between, the International Office and the Graduate Studies Office in respect of postgraduate research students. The division of labour and lines of communication between the two offices needed to be addressed.

### RECOMMENDATION 12

**The Review Team recommends that improved support for international students continue to be addressed. In particular, the respective roles of the Graduate Studies Office and the International Office should be clarified in respect of international postgraduate research students in order to provide proactive information and support in a timely way.**

Housing was another area of challenge for new international students and it is understood that DCU has plans for new housing for international students. It was suggested that the needs of postgraduate students should specifically be considered and that student input into the design process should be facilitated.

In the Team's view, DCU needed to dedicate greater attention to the specific experience and well-being of international students on DCU campuses, particularly in the light of its aspirations to expand the numbers of international learners.



# Section D

## Conclusions

### Overall Findings

- Commendations
- Recommendations
- Top 5 Commendations and Recommendations

# Conclusions

## 7. Overall Findings

The Review Team found that there was a spirit of cooperation and engagement at DCU, which was woven throughout all its interactions with students and staff. It was clear that many members of the community were deeply committed to the institution and its mission, and there was a justifiable pride in the DCU 'brand'. Support for the learning environment of students was clearly important at DCU, and this was reflected at all levels. The positive culture, dedicated to quality, was particularly admirable, given that DCU had recently undertaken the incorporation of three separate colleges of education (a development that can frequently create stresses and division in a campus climate). In the Team's view DCU had navigated this transition well, and it had strengthened the institution. The Team's overall impressions of DCU were of a vibrant, student-centered university, committed to embedding a quality culture at all levels, with increasing capacity for innovation and research. The Team's recommendations are intended to support and sustain the University's growth as it moves forward.

### COMMENDATIONS

1. The Review Team commends the progress achieved by DCU in the incorporation process. It applauds the University's commitment to securing buy-in to the concept of "one DCU", the creation of a new, shared, mission and values, and the singularity of purpose of the Faculty Deans.
2. The Review Team commends the engagement of the Governing Authority's external members with the quality assurance and enhancement agenda.
3. The Review Team commends the creation of the Quality Promotions Office and the co-location within it of the institutional research function. It has the capacity to inform both quality assurance and strategic planning activities and to facilitate greater congruity between the two. It has greatly improved quality assurance and enhancement activities at the University, providing focussed process support for improvements.
4. The Review Team commends the University's comprehensive and inclusive approach to the development of the 2017-22 strategic plan and its 'rolling planning' process.
5. The Review Team commends DCU on its University-wide commitment to research and its continuing efforts to identify and refine its research priorities.
6. The Review Team commends the extensive range of services provided by the Student Support and Development Centre (welcoming in particular the proposed Leadership and Life-skills centre) and its informed approach to developing, evaluating and adapting its services.
7. The Review Team commends the proposed development of the Global Experience and Global Citizenship Plan and its associated Language Plan.
8. The Review Team commends the operation of DCU Connected, its strategic and dynamic approach, and its alignment with the Institutional Mission in terms of opening access and delivering online learning.
9. The Review Team commends DCU for the innovative INTRA programme and welcomes its potential roll out to all undergraduate programmes as part of the new DCU Strategic Plan.
10. The Review Team commends the proactive work of the TEU aligned to the institutional strategy and its responsiveness to staff demand.
11. The Review Team commends DCU's existing commitment to widening participation in third level education and with its new initiatives relating to prospective learners with autism, learners within the asylum system, and to student from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds pursuing a teacher education programme.
12. The Review Team commends DCU's procedure for students at risk of academic non-progression,

not only for a clear methodology for identifying at risk students but also for ensuring that it is a student-centred and student-led approach.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Review Team recommends that the University provide training and support for student representatives on Governing Authority to enable them to make an effective contribution in that role.
2. The Review Team recommends that, as a matter of urgency, DCU should implement a fit-for-purpose, University-wide system of independent evaluation of the student learning experience at the module level. Resulting reports should be used as a regular part of Annual Programme Review, Periodic Programme Review and internal Quality Reviews and effective feedback provided to students.
3. The Review Team recommends that the University take steps to ensure effective communication to staff and students about responses to feedback provided and changes implemented (or not) as a result of quality assurance activities.
4. The Review Team recommends that the University develop a Data Analytics Support Plan to ensure that the Quality Framework is supported by appropriate analytic capacity, enabling the University to better identify and understand differences in student progression and performance. In addition, the Team recommends that the regular use of internal and external benchmarking data be increased.
5. The Review Team recommends that the University a) develop systematic sets of University-wide policies clarifying the minimum expectations of what faculties and schools should provide to secure a consistent student learning experience and b) monitor their implementation. The Team recommends that these initially include guidance on standard sets of assessment information and marking/grading criteria to be provided at module level, expectations for a point of contact for students for discussion of their academic progress on a programme (e. g. year tutor/personal tutor/subject lead), timelines for return of assessed work, and appropriate training for all postgraduate research students who teach on undergraduate courses.
6. The Review Team recommends that the University consider both setting and monitoring expected targets in order to clarify expectations for both research students and supervisors.
7. The Review Team recommends the implementation of a regular staff satisfaction survey for all staff in order to monitor the prevailing culture and identify the support and development required.
8. The Review Team recommends that the University continue to implement operational changes to build a more systematised recruitment process focusing on increased efficiency, speed and the adoption of online rather than manual transfer of data.
9. The Review Team recommends that it is essential for the revised Performance Management Development Scheme to be implemented, on schedule, by the third quarter of 2019 in order to underpin quality and provide staff support (for example through links to probation, sabbaticals and promotion applications).
10. The Review Team recommends, in the light of the University's plans for the expansion of Transnational Education (TNE) and as a matter of urgency, that it mainstream the quality assurance and enhancement of TNE under the University's existing structures and clarify the roles of the Deans, members of Senior Management Group, and the various professional units (in particular the role of the Strategic Partnership Office in relation to the International Office and Quality Promotions Office). The Review Team also recommends that the University should continue its ongoing efforts to refine its global strategy and its *protocol for partner approval*, *protocols for collaborative provision* and requirements for legal memoranda /agreements in the light of best practice nationally and internationally. In so doing, it is recommended to build more control into the procedures for partner selection and due diligence, setting explicit criteria for academic integrity, ethical standards for student enrolment and staff recruitment, the monitoring and review of partnerships, risk management, exit strategies and refreshing due diligence.

11. The Review Team recommends that the University address arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners at linked providers, procedures for the withdrawal of approval of linked provider arrangements (and appeal against them) as soon as possible. The Review Team also recommends that clear criteria should be developed for the selection of research degree supervisors and the identification of adequate research capacity at Dundalk Institute of Technology. These should be reflected in the

Linked Provider schedule and implemented when admission of students was considered.

12. The Review Team recommends that improved support for international students should continue to be addressed. In particular, the respective roles of the Graduate Studies Office and the International Office should be clarified in respect of international postgraduate research students in order to provide proactive information and support in a timely way.

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## Top 5 Commendations and Recommendations

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The Review Team wishes to highlight the following 5 commendations:

1. The Review Team commends the creation of the Quality Promotions Office and the co-location within it of the institutional research function. It has the capacity to inform both quality assurance and strategic planning activities and to facilitate greater congruity between the two. It has greatly improved quality assurance and enhancement activities at the University, providing focused process support for improvements.
2. The Review Team commends the University's comprehensive and inclusive approach to the development of the 2017-22 strategic plan and its 'rolling planning' process.
3. The Review Team commends the operation of DCU Connected, its strategic and dynamic approach, and its alignment with the Institutional Mission in terms of opening access and delivering online learning.
4. The Review Team commends DCU for the innovative INTRA programme and welcomes its potential roll out to all undergraduate programmes as part of the new DCU Strategic Plan.
5. The Review Team commends the extensive range of services provided by the Student Support and Development Centre (welcoming in particular the proposed Leadership and Life-skills centre) and its informed approach to developing, evaluating and adapting its services.

The Review Team wishes to highlight the following 5 recommendations:

1. The Review Team recommends that, as a matter of urgency, DCU should implement a fit-for-purpose, University-wide system of independent evaluation of the student learning experience at the module level. Resulting reports should be used as a regular part of Annual Programme Review, Periodic Programme Review and internal Quality Reviews and effective feedback provided to students.
2. The Review Team recommends that the University develop a Data Analytics Support Plan to ensure that the Quality Framework is supported by appropriate analytic capacity, enabling the University to better identify and understand differences in student progression and performance. In addition, the Team recommends that the regular use of internal and external benchmarking data should be increased.
3. The Review Team recommends that the University should a) develop systematic sets of University-wide policies clarifying the minimum expectations of what faculties and schools should provide to secure a consistent student learning experience and b) monitor their implementation. The Team recommends that these initially include guidance on standard sets of assessment information and marking/grading criteria to be provided at module level, expectations for a point of contact for students for discussion of their academic progress on a

- programme (e. g. year tutor/personal tutor/subject lead), timelines for return of assessed work, and appropriate training for all postgraduate research students who teach on undergraduate courses.
4. The Review Team recommends that it is essential for the revised Performance Management Development Scheme to be implemented, on schedule, by the third quarter of 2019 in order to underpin quality and provide staff support (for example through links to probation, sabbaticals and promotion applications).
  5. The Review Team recommends, in the light of the University's plans for the expansion of Transnational Education (TNE) and as a matter of urgency, that it mainstream the quality assurance and enhancement of TNE under the University's existing structures and clarify the roles of the

Deans, members of Senior Management Group, and the various professional units (in particular the role of the Strategic Partnership Office in relation to the International Office and Quality Promotions Office). The Review Team also recommends that the University should continue its ongoing efforts to refine its global strategy and its *protocol for partner approval, protocols for collaborative provision* and requirements for legal memoranda /agreements in the light of best practice nationally and internationally. In so doing, it is recommended to build more control into the procedures for partner selection and due diligence, setting explicit criteria for academic integrity, ethical standards for student enrolment and staff recruitment, the monitoring and review of partnerships, risk management, exit strategies and refreshing due diligence.

## Overarching statements about QA

The Review Team restates the following overarching statements regarding the quality assurance arrangements at DCU:

1. **The effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of the Institution, the extent of their implementation, and the extent to which the quality assurance procedures can be considered compliant with the ESG and having regard to QQI's statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (QAG).**

The Review Team concluded that there was sufficient evidence to confirm that institutional quality assurance procedures are effective and appropriate and cover teaching, learning and assessment in a comprehensive way. The Review Team found that, overall, the quality assurance mechanisms adopted by DCU were compliant with the requirements of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and had regard to the QQI core Quality Assurance Guidelines (QAG). The AIQRs, appendices to the ISER and additional documentation supplied on programme approvals evidenced that comprehensive procedures were in place for the approval, monitoring and review of academic programmes and were effectively implemented. A deep commitment to a quality assurance culture was evident at all levels and

evidenced in the University's approach to the incorporation of the three teacher education colleges. The Quality Promotions Committee, in conjunction Education Committee and Academic Council, take the lead on quality assurance and are accountable to the Governing Authority. At University level, the implementation of procedures and policy was sound. However, the Review Team found through meetings with both students and staff and examination of documentation that the quality of the student experience in relation to teaching, learning and assessment (which was delegated to faculties and academic schools) varied according to individual programmes, modules or lecturers. The Review Team were of the view that the University needs to be more proactive in assuring and monitoring a consistent student experience, irrespective of programme, to a defined threshold level.

Reporting on quality and the outcomes of quality assurance are comprehensive and transparent but efforts could be continued to close the feedback loops to both staff and students. There are effective innovations in both quality assurance and quality enhancement.

On the whole the student experience is in keeping with the University's mission and strategy and its

quality assurance regime aligns with this. The University has made substantial achievements in quality assurance and enhancement but four of the Review Team's recommendations relate to recommendations made in the previous review suggesting that more focus needs to be given to specific targets.

TNE was not addressed in the ISER and the absence of discussion of this significant development seemed to confirm that TNE and arrangements for the development, approval, oversight, monitoring and review of partnerships (as opposed to the academic programmes delivered) were not well integrated into the mainstream of the University's quality assurance activities.

The Team recognised that DCU had perhaps been in a reactive mode to approaches for various partnerships in the last five years. In some cases, this meant that procedures were being drafted and approved in tandem with specific initiatives being developed and this was unavoidable. It was clear that the University was now intent on moving away from ad-hoc responses to initiatives toward the development of a pro-active DCU-wide reference framework for global operations. However, the emerging protocols and procedures approved so far could benefit from further work in the light of national and international best practice and the learning experiences of other institutions. In the light of its ambitions to expand TNE and strengthen various strategic inter-institutional partnerships, the Team was of the view that it needed to work faster in particular to embed appropriate protocols and procedures for the recognition, oversight and renewal of partnership arrangements (as distinct from specific arrangements for the transnational and /or joint delivery of programmes). Similarly, the Review Team found that the agreement with a linked provider could usefully have addressed the monitoring and review of the partnership arrangement (as opposed to the research programme delivery).

AIQRs were consistent and coherent in describing developments in quality assurance and enhancement. However, no reference was made to transnational education and collaboration in Saudi Arabia and Arizona which were significant omissions.

**2. The enhancement of quality by the Institution through governance, policy, and procedures.**

DCU has effective policies and procedures designed to identify improvements required and potential enhancements resulting from its quality assurance processes. The introduction of an independent student evaluation scheme of teaching and learning at module level would offer further scope for effective management and enhancement of teaching (see recommendation in the section on **Student Evaluations**). Similarly, the further development of data analytics capacity and increased use of benchmarking would allow the University to monitor and identify quality enhancement opportunities in a systematic and regular way aligned to its strategic objectives (see recommendation in the section on **USE OF DATA AND ANALYTICS IN THE QUALITY ASSURANCE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING**).

The Team was impressed by the University's commitment to digital learning as an enhancement tool not only for learning but also for creating learning opportunities and widening access. Similarly, the University's INTRA programme for providing work placements demonstrably enhanced the student experience and the aspiration to extend this opportunity to all programmes would further embed this.

**3. The extent to which the procedures are in keeping with QQI policy for Access, Transfer and Progression.**

DCU procedures for access, transfer and progression are in keeping with the *QQI Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression*.

**4. The extent to which the procedures are compliant with the Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes to International Learners**

The Team considered that, on the whole, the University's approach to the provision of education to international learners was consistent with the QQI's *Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes to International Learners*. However, DCU needed to dedicate greater attention to the specific experience and well-being of international students on DCU campuses, particularly in the light of its aspirations to expand the numbers of international learners

# APPENDICES

A photograph of two young women sitting on a wooden bench in front of a window. The woman on the left has blonde hair and is wearing a pink top and blue jeans, smiling as she looks at a notebook. The woman on the right has dark hair and is wearing a white top, looking down at the notebook. The window behind them has a decorative stained glass pattern. The word 'APPENDICES' is written vertically in white capital letters on the left side of the image.

## Appendices

A: Terms of Reference

B: Main Review Visit Schedule

C: Institutional Response

# Appendix A:

## Terms of Reference

(Terms of Reference for the Review of Universities and other Designated Awarding Bodies)

### SECTION 1

#### Background and Context for the Review

##### 1.1 Context and Legislative Underpinning

These are the Terms of Reference for the Review of a Designated Awarding Body (DAB). The concept of a Designated Awarding Body is derived from the [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act, 2012](#) (The 2012 Act) and is defined as '*a previously established university, the National University of Ireland, an educational institution established as a university under Section 9 of the Act of 1997, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland*'. The following institutions are Designated Awarding Bodies:

- Dublin City University
- Dublin Institute of Technology
- University College Cork
- University College Dublin
- University of Limerick
- National University of Ireland, Galway
- Maynooth University
- The National University of Ireland
- The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

Trinity College Dublin In 2016, QQI adopted a [policy](#) on cyclical review in higher education which sets out in greater detail the scope, purposes, criteria, model and procedures for review. These are represented in the Terms of Reference and the Handbook for the Review of Designated Awarding Bodies. QQI has introduced an annual reporting process for institutions whereby institutions are required to submit an Annual Institutional Quality Report (AIQR). The aim of the AIQR is to provide a contemporary account of quality assurance (QA) within an institution. Information is provided through an online template and it is published. Collated annual reports are provided to periodical Review Teams. Annual reporting allows institutions and QQI to engage on a regular basis. Published annual reports assist with documentation management for institutions in reviews and lessen the burden on institutions in the lead-up to a review.

This 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](#) 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. Further details of the agreement can be accessed [here](#).

This is the third review round of Designated Awarding Bodies. Previous rounds took place in 2004-2005 and 2009-2012.

The 2018-2023 Review Cycle Schedule is:

INSTITUTION	COMPLETION DATES			
	ISER	Planning Visit	Main Review Visit	Report
Dublin City University	Q2 2018	Q3 2018	Q4 2018	Q1 2019
Maynooth University	Q2 2018	Q3 2018	Q4 2018	Q1 2019
National University of Ireland, Galway	Q4 2018	Q1 2019	Q2 2019	Q3 2019
University College Dublin	Q2 2019	Q3 2019	Q4 2019	Q1 2020
University of Limerick	Q4 2019	Q1 2020	Q2 2020	Q3 2020
Dublin Institute of Technology	Q2 2020	Q3 2020	Q4 2020	Q1 2021
Trinity College Dublin	Q4 2020	Q1 2021	Q2 2021	Q3 2021
University College Cork	Q2 2021	Q3 2021	Q4 2021	Q1 2022
National University of Ireland	Q4 2021	Q1 2022	Q2 2022	Q3 2022

## 1.2 Purposes

The Policy for the Cyclical Review of Higher Education Institutions highlights 4 purposes for individual institutional reviews. These are set out in the table below.

PURPOSE	ACHIEVED AND MEASURED THROUGH:
<p>1. To encourage a QA culture and the enhancement of the student learning environment and experience within institutions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- emphasising the student and the student learning experience in reviews</li> <li>- providing a source of evidence of areas for improvement and areas for revision of policy and change and basing follow-up upon them</li> <li>- exploring innovative and effective practices and procedures</li> <li>- exploring quality as well as quality assurance within the institution</li> </ul>
<p>2. To provide feedback to institutions about institution-wide quality and the impact of mission, strategy, governance and management on quality and the overall effectiveness of their quality assurance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- emphasising the ownership of quality and quality assurance at the level of the institution</li> <li>- pitching the review at a comprehensive institution-wide level</li> <li>- evaluating compliance with legislation, policy and standards</li> <li>- evaluating how the institution has identified and measured itself against its own benchmarks and metrics to support quality assurance governance and procedures</li> <li>- emphasising the improvement of quality assurance procedures</li> </ul>
<p>3. To contribute to public confidence in the quality of institutions by promoting transparency and public awareness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adhering to purposes, criteria and outcomes that are clear and transparent</li> <li>- publishing the reports and outcomes of reviews in accessible locations and formats for different audiences</li> <li>- evaluating, as part of the review, institutional reporting on quality and quality assurance, to ensure that it is transparent and accessible</li> </ul>
<p>4. To encourage quality by using evidence-based, objective methods and advice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- using the expertise of international, national and student peer reviewers who are independent of the institution</li> <li>- ensuring that findings are based on stated evidence</li> <li>- facilitating institutions to identify measurement, comparison and analytic techniques, based on quantitative data relevant to their own mission and context, to support quality assurance</li> <li>- promoting the identification and dissemination of examples of good practice and innovation</li> </ul>

## SECTION 2

### Objectives and Criteria

#### 2.1 Review Objectives

##### OBJECTIVE 1

To review the effectiveness and implementation of the QA procedures of the institution through consideration of the procedures set out, primarily, in the AIQR. Where necessary, the information provided by the AIQR is supplemented by additional information provided through documentation requests and interviews. The scope of this includes the procedures for reporting, governance and publication. This also incorporates an analysis of the ways in which the institution applies evidence- based approaches to support quality assurance processes, including quantitative analysis, evidence gathering and comparison. Progress on the development of quality assurance since the previous review of the institution will be evaluated. Consideration will also be given to the effectiveness of the AIQR and ISER procedures within the institution.

The scope of this objective also extends to the overarching procedures of the institution for assuring itself of the quality of its research degree programmes and research activities.

This objective also encompasses the effectiveness of the procedures established by the institution for the assurance of the quality of collaborations, partnerships and overseas provision, including the procedures for the approval and review of linked providers, joint awarding arrangements, joint provision and other collaborative arrangements such as clusters and mergers.

##### OBJECTIVE 2

To review the enhancement of quality by the institution through governance, policy, and procedures.

To review the congruency of quality assurance procedures and enhancements with the institution's own mission and goals or targets for quality.

To identify innovative and effective practices for quality enhancement.

##### OBJECTIVE 3

To review the effectiveness and implementation of procedures for access, transfer and progression.

##### OBJECTIVE 4

Following the introduction of a statutory international education quality assurance scheme, to determine compliance with the Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes to International Learners.

#### 2.2 Review Criteria

##### CRITERIA FOR OBJECTIVE 1

The Review Report will include a specific qualitative statement on the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of the institution and the extent of their implementation. The report will also include a specific statement about the extent to which the quality assurance procedures can be considered compliant with the ESG and as having regard to QQI's statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (QAG). These statements will be highlighted in the report of the review.

The statements may be accompanied by a range of ancillary statements, recommendations and possibly recommendations for directions in reference to this objective.

The criteria to be used by the Team in reaching conclusions for this objective are:

- ESG
- QQI Core Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines
- QQI Sector Specific QA Guidelines for Universities and Other Designated Awarding Bodies
- Section 28 of the 2012 Act
- The institution’s own objectives and goals for quality assurance

Where appropriate and actioned by the institution, additional QQI Guidelines such as those for research degree programmes will be incorporated.

The QQI Sector Specific Private and Independent Provider QA Guidelines may be an appropriate reference document if they have been adopted by the DAB for their linked providers.

### **CRITERIA FOR OBJECTIVE 2**

The Review Report will include a specific qualitative statement on the enhancement of quality by the institution through governance, policy, and procedures.

This statement may be accompanied by a range of ancillary statements and recommendations in reference to this objective. If identified, innovative and effective practices for quality enhancement will be highlighted in the report.

The criteria to be used by the Team in reaching conclusions for this objective are:

- The institution’s own mission and vision
- The goals or targets for quality identified by the institution
- Additional sources of reference identified by the institution

### **CRITERIA FOR OBJECTIVE 3**

The report will include a qualitative statement on the extent to which the procedures are in keeping with QQI policy for Access, Transfer and Progression.

This statement may be accompanied by a range of ancillary statements and recommendations and possibly recommendations for conditions in reference to this objective.

The criterion to be used by the Team in reaching conclusions for this objective are:

QQI Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression

### **CRITERIA FOR OBJECTIVE 4**

When the statutory international education quality assurance scheme is in place, the report will include a qualitative statement on the extent to which the procedures are compliant with the Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes to International Learners.

This statement may be accompanied by a range of ancillary statements and recommendations and possibly recommendations for conditions in reference to this objective.

The criterion to be used by the Team in reaching conclusions for this objective is the

Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes to International Learners

Key questions to be addressed by the review for each objective

- How have quality assurance procedures and reviews been implemented within the institution?
- How effective are the internal quality assurance procedures and reviews of the institution?
- Are the quality assurance procedures in keeping with European Standards and Guidelines?
- Are the quality assurance procedures in keeping with QQI policy and guidelines, or their equivalent?
- Who takes responsibility for quality and quality assurance across the institution?
- How transparent, accessible and comprehensive is reporting on quality assurance and quality?
- How is quality promoted and enhanced?
- Are there effective innovations in quality enhancement and assurance?
- Is the student experience in keeping with the institution's own stated mission and strategy?
- Are achievements in quality and quality assurance in keeping with the institution's own stated mission and strategy?
- How do achievements in quality and quality assurance measure up against the institution's own goals or targets for quality?



## SECTION 3 The Review Process

### 3.1 Process

The primary basis for the review process is this handbook.

### 3.2 Review Team Profile

QQI will appoint the Review Team to conduct the institutional review. Review Teams are composed of peer reviewers who are students and senior institutional leaders and staff from comparable institutions as well as external representatives. The size of the Team and the duration of their visit will depend on the size and complexity of the institution but in general the Review Team for a Designated Awarding Body will consist of 6 persons. Each Review Team includes a Chairperson and Coordinating Reviewer, and may be supported by a rapporteur, who is not a member of the Team, to take and collate notes of meetings. A single Team may undertake the review of two different institutions.

Reviewers are not QQI employees, but rather peers of the institution. The institution will have an opportunity to comment on the proposed composition of their Review Team to ensure there are no conflicts of interest, and QQI will ensure an appropriate and entirely independent Team of reviewers is selected for the institution. QQI has final approval over the composition of each Review Team.

There will be appropriate gender representation on the Review Team. The Team will consist of carefully selected and trained and briefed reviewers who have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their tasks. The Team will operate under the leadership of the Review Chairperson.

The Review Team will be appointed in keeping with the following profile:

#### 1. A Review Chairperson

The role of the Chairperson is to act as leader of the Review Team. This is an international reviewer who is a (serving or recently former) senior third-level institution leader – usually a head of institution or deputy head of institution or a senior policy advisor who:

- » possesses a wide range of higher education experience;
- » demonstrates a deep understanding of the complexities of the higher education system;
- » understands often unique QA governance arrangements;
- » has proven experience in the management of innovation and change.

#### 2. A Coordinating Reviewer

The role of the Coordinating Reviewer is to act as secretary to the Team as well as to be a full Review Team member. This is usually a person with expertise in the higher education system and prior experience in participating in external reviews. As the coordinating reviewer is responsible for drafting the report, he or she will possess proven excellent writing abilities.

#### 3. A Student Reviewer

The role of the student reviewer is to represent the student voice in the Review Team. The student reviewer will be typically a PhD student with significant experience of higher education or an undergraduate student who has completed a specific programme preparing them for the role or who has previously had a key role in other institutional reviews.

#### 4. An External Representative

The role of the external representative is to bring a ‘third mission’ perspective to the Review Team. In addition to the specific roles above, the full Team complement will include a range of experts with the following knowledge and experience:

- » International reviewer experience
- » EQF and Bologna expertise
- » Experience of higher education quality assurance processes
- » Experience of managing research within or across institutions
- » Experience in governance
- » Experience and proven ability in the advancement of teaching and learning

Details of Review Team roles and responsibilities can be found in Appendix B.

### 3.3 Procedure and timelines

The outline set out in the policy (below) will be elaborated further and timelines will be set out to accompany it, through discussion and consultation.

STEP	ACTION	DATES	OUTCOME
<b>Terms of Reference (ToR)</b>	Completion of an institutional information profile by QQI Confirmation of ToR with institution and HEA	9 months before the Main Review Visit (MRV)	Published Terms of Reference
<b>Preparation</b>	Appointment of an expert Review Team Consultation with the institution on any possible conflicts of interest	6-9 months before the MRV	Review Team appointed
<b>Self-evaluation</b>	Forwarding to QQI of the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER)	12 weeks before the MRV	Published ISER (optional)
<b>Desk Review</b>	Desk review of the ISER by the Team	Before the initial meeting	ISER initial response provided
<b>Initial Meeting</b>	An initial meeting of the Review Team, including reviewer training and briefing	5 weeks after the ISER, 7 weeks before the MRV	Team training and briefing is complete. Team identify key themes and additional documents required
<b>Planning Visit</b>	A visit to the institution by the Chair and Coordinating Reviewer to receive information about the ISER process, discuss the schedule for the Main Review Visit and discuss additional documentation requests	5 weeks after the ISER, 7 weeks before the MRV	An agreed note of the Planning Visit
<b>Main Review Visit</b>	To receive and consider evidence on the ways in which the institution has performed in respect of the objectives and criteria set out in the Terms of Reference	12 weeks after the receipt of ISER	A short preliminary oral report to the institution

STEP	ACTION	DATES	OUTCOME
<b>Report</b>	Preparation of a draft report by the Team	6-8 weeks after the MRV	
	Draft report sent to the institution for a check of factual accuracy	12 weeks after the MRV	
	Institution responds with any factual accuracy corrections	2 weeks after receipt of draft report	
	Preparation of a final report	2 weeks after factual accuracy response	QQI Review Report
	Preparation of an institutional response	2 weeks after final report	Institutional response
<b>Outcomes</b>	Consideration of the Review Report and findings by QQI together with the institutional response and the plan for implementation	Next available meeting of QQI committee	Formal decision about the effectiveness of QA procedures <i>In some cases, directions to the institution and a schedule for their implementation</i>
	Preparation of QQI quality profile	2 weeks after decision	Quality profile published
<b>Follow-up</b>	<i>The form of follow-up will be determined by whether 'directions' are issued to the institution. In general, where directions are issued the follow-up period will be sooner and more specific actions may be required as part of the direction</i>		
	Preparation of an institutional implementation plan	1 month after decision	Publication of the implementation plan by the institution
	One-year follow-up report to QQI for noting. This and subsequent follow-up may be integrated into annual reports to QQI	1 year after the MRV	Publication of the follow-up report by QQI and the institution
	Continuous reporting and dialogue on follow-up through the annual institutional reporting and dialogue process	Continuous	Annual Institutional Quality Report Dialogue Meeting notes

**Note: The total period from start to finish is approximately 15 months but will depend on QQI committee meeting dates.**

# Appendix B

## Main Review Visit Schedule

### Day 1: Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> October, DCU Glasnevin Campus

TIME	MEETING WITH
0900-0910	Institutional Co-ordinator briefing
0910-0930	Finance and HR Briefing
0930-1000	Meeting with DCU President
1000-1045	Meeting with DCU Senior Management Team
1045-1145	Private Review Team Meeting
1145-1230	Meeting with Faculty Executive Deans
1230-1330	Private Review Team Meeting and Lunch
1330-1400	Campus tour – Glasnevin Campus
1400-1445	Meeting with Central Units involved in development and implementation of Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures
1445-1515	Private Review Team Meeting
15. 15-1600	Meeting with DCU Students' Union Sabbatical Team
1600-1645	Meeting with members of DCU Governing Authority
1645-1715	Private Review Team Meeting
1715-1815	Meeting with a range of External Stakeholders

### Day 2: Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> October, DCU Glasnevin Campus

TIME	MEETING WITH
0850-0900	Private Review Team Meeting
0900-0930	Institutional Co-ordinator briefing
0930-1015	Meeting with representatives from key Quality Assurance Committees
1015-1100	Meeting with Academic Heads of Schools/Departments
1100-1130	Private Review Team Meeting
1130-1230	Meeting with DCU Undergraduate Student Group
1230-1300	Private Review Team Meeting and Lunch

TIME	MEETING WITH
1300-1400	Open lunch session with DCU staff
1400-1500	Managers and Officers from Student-Facing Support Units
1500-1530	Private Review Team Meeting
1530-1630	Managers of Service Units
1630-1730	Meeting with Academic Staff representatives from all schools
1730-1815	Private Review Team Meeting

**Day 3: Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> October, DCU Glasnevin Campus**

TIME	MEETING WITH
0850-0900	Private Review Team Meeting
0900-0930	Institutional Co-ordinator briefing
0930-1030	Meeting with Research Directors
1030-1100	Meeting with post-doctoral staff members
1100-1130	Private Review Team Meeting
1130-1230	Meeting with DCU PG Student Group
1230-1315	Meeting with Academic Staff from Strategic Research Centres, Recognised Research Groups etc
1315-1430	Private Review Team Meeting and Lunch
1430-1530	Meeting with staff involved in the delivery of Online/Blended learning Management
1530-1630	Meeting with staff involved in human resource management and staff development
1630-1730	Private Review Team Meeting
1630-1730	Meeting with Academic Staff representatives from all schools
1730-1815	Private Review Team Meeting

**Day 4: Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> October, DCU St Patrick's Campus**

TIME	MEETING WITH
0850-0900	Private Review Team Meeting
0900-0930	Institutional Co-ordinator briefing
0930-1030	Meeting with management and staff involved in Collaborative Provision and Collaborative Monitoring
1030-1115	Open Coffee Morning
1115-1145	Private Review Team meeting
1145-1230	Meeting with management and staff involved in Internationalisation
1230-1300	Follow-up meeting with DCU President
1300-1400	Private Team lunch and campus walk, St Patrick's campus
1430-1730	Private Review Team Meeting

**Day 5: Friday 26<sup>th</sup> October, DCU Glasnevin Campus, Nursing and Human Sciences Building**

TIME	MEETING WITH
0850-0915	Private Review Team Meeting
0915-0945	Oral Report – pre-brief with President, Deputy President, and Institutional Co-ordinator
0945-1030	Oral Report delivered
1030-1400	Private Review Team Meeting

# Appendix C

## Institutional Response



### DCU Response to Institutional Review Report, March 2018

A commitment to excellence in the student learning experience, scholarship, research and innovation, and the University's contribution to wider society are the principal drivers through which Dublin City University achieves its mission of transforming lives and societies. Our approach to quality assurance in delivering on this mission is the foundation for a quality culture that both safeguards the University's highest standards in all that we do, and responds to the needs of all our stakeholders.

DCU welcomed the opportunity for an externally led assessment of the effectiveness of our approach to quality assurance and quality enhancement across our activities, based on alignment with national and international guidelines and best practice. The University extends its thanks to the International Peer Review Team, and is grateful for the expertise, energy, and thoroughness of their engagement with the University during the review. The Review Team have produced a comprehensive and thoughtful report that will assist the University in the continued development of structures, frameworks and approaches to assuring continued quality enhancement in all our activities.

In considering the findings contained within their report, DCU is particularly pleased that the Review Team found that there was a *deep commitment to a quality assurance culture evident at all levels*, within the University, and that the *quality assurance mechanisms adopted by DCU were compliant with the requirements of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and had regard for the QQI Core Quality Assurance Guidelines (QAG)*.

The University welcomes commendations by the Review Team of our comprehensive and inclusive approach to the development of our current strategic plan and the implementation of a "rolling planning process" to meet the challenges of a dynamic, global higher education landscape in an agile manner. In their report, the review team commend and highlight two key initiatives from our current strategy, which contribute to our goal of providing a transformative student experience- the ongoing enhancement of digital learning, and extended opportunities for high-quality, structured work-based learning opportunities for students at DCU.

The University is mindful that this quality review has taken place just two years after the formal completion of the Incorporation Programme in 2017. The completion of this programme has enabled the creation of the DCU Institute of Education, the first Faculty of Education in an Irish university, and an expanded Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Incorporation has further resulted in increasing the DCU student body by more than 4,000, bringing the total number to approximately 17,000, and an increase in staff numbers from 1,100 to 1,500 across both academic and professional support units. The University is pleased that the review team, in noting the significant organisational and structural change within the University, commend the progress achieved to date in the Incorporation process, and the creation of a new shared mission and values for the expanded University community.

The scope of the review included an examination of the effectiveness of procedures in relation to the oversight and quality assurance of transnational education. Following the development of our 2012-2017 Strategic Plan, Transforming Lives and Societies, the University developed its first institution-wide Internationalisation Strategy.

DCU notes the commentary by the review team of procedures in relation to external collaboration, including trans-national education initiatives. In establishing and managing external relationships, the University is



strongly committed to appropriate procedures and processes to assure ourselves of quality in relation to all activities. In relation to the delivery of DCU programmes at Princess Nourah Bint Abdul Rahman University (PNU), this relationship, and the associated memorandum of understanding and legal contract, was subject to extensive due diligence and review. This included the approval of the DCU Governing Authority, which was mindful of the potential impact of the education of women in Saudi Arabia. DCU welcomes the finding of the review team that all DCU programmes delivered at PNU are fully embedded within the DCU's established programme quality assurance processes. Further, all DCU business programmes at PNU are subject to external review accreditation by AACSB, which is an internationally recognised quality standard for business and accounting programmes at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels.

DCU also welcomes the recommendations of the Peer Review Team, some of which reflect areas of enhancement identified by the University in its Institutional Self-Evaluation Report. A number of the recommendations align to actions and initiatives already identified in our current University strategy, *Talent, Discovery and Transformation*. Examples of this include the development of strategic intelligence capacity to enable the University to identify better and understand differences in student progression and performance, and the implementation of a comprehensive Internationalisation Strategy that will support the University's global engagement, including international partnership development.

DCU is looking forward to giving extensive consideration to the findings of this Report. The purpose of these discussions will be to inform the development of a quality improvement plan that will address the recommendations of the Institutional Review report. This plan will include a clear action plan, organisational responsibility for implementation and a timeframe for completion. The University notes that, as a result of strategy implementation, work is already progressing in relation to a number of themes contained within the recommendations of the report, for example, the completion of a renewed performance management framework.

The University thanks the members of the cross-institutional Steering Group who led the development of self-evaluation report for the review. DCU wishes to also express its gratitude to the DCU staff and students, members of our Governing Authority, and external stakeholders who contributed to input and feedback to inform the development of our Institutional Self-Evaluation report and met with the Review Team during the main review visit.

# Glossary

## Glossary of terms, acronyms and abbreviations from this report

2012 Act	Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012
ADTLs	Associate Deans of Teaching and Learning
AIQR	Annual Institutional Quality Reports
APR	Annual Programme Review
ATP	Access, Transfer and Progression
BYOD	Bring Your Own Device
DAB	Designated Awarding Body
DCU	Dublin City University
DCU Connected	Online Learning Platform
DCUSU	DCU Students' Union
DkIT	Dundalk Institute of Technology
EADTU	European Association of Distance Teaching Universities
ECIU	The European Consortium of Innovative Universities
EDEN	European Distance and E-Learning Network
Erasmus	European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
GA	Governing Authority
GRSB	Graduate Research Studies Board
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HR	Human Resources
ICDE	International Council and Distance Education
INTRA	INtegrated TRaining (DCU's internship programme)
IQRs	Internal Quality Reviews
IRIU	Institutional Review of Irish Universities (last cycle of institutional reviews that took place with Irish Universities – predating QQI)
ISER	Institutional Self-Evaluation Report
ISSE	Irish Survey of Student Engagement

IT	Information Technology
MLC	Maths Learning Centre
MOOCs	Massive Open Online Courses
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NFETL	National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning
NIDL	The National Institute for Digital Learning
NIHE	National Institute of Higher Education (which later became DCU)
NStEP	National Student Engagement Programme
NUI	National University of Ireland
PAB	Progression and Award Boards
PBERC	Programme Board Examination Review Committees
PBX	Private Branch Exchange
PG	Postgraduate
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PNU	Princess Nora Bint Abdul Rahman University, Saudi Arabia
PPR	Periodic Programme Review
PSRB	Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body
QAG	Quality Assurance Guidelines
QPC	Quality Promotion Committee
QPO	Quality Promotion Office
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
QuEST	Quality Enhancement and Survey of Teaching (module)
QuiD	Quality Improvement Fund Initiative
RIS	Research and Innovation Support
SciVal	A tool used to gather bibliometric data
SIS	Student Information System
SMG	Senior Management Group
SS&D	Student Support and Development
TEU	Teaching Enhancement Unit
TNE	Transnational education
ToR	Terms of Reference
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
VOIP	Voice over Internet Protocol (phone calls over broadband connections)
WBL	Work Based Learning









