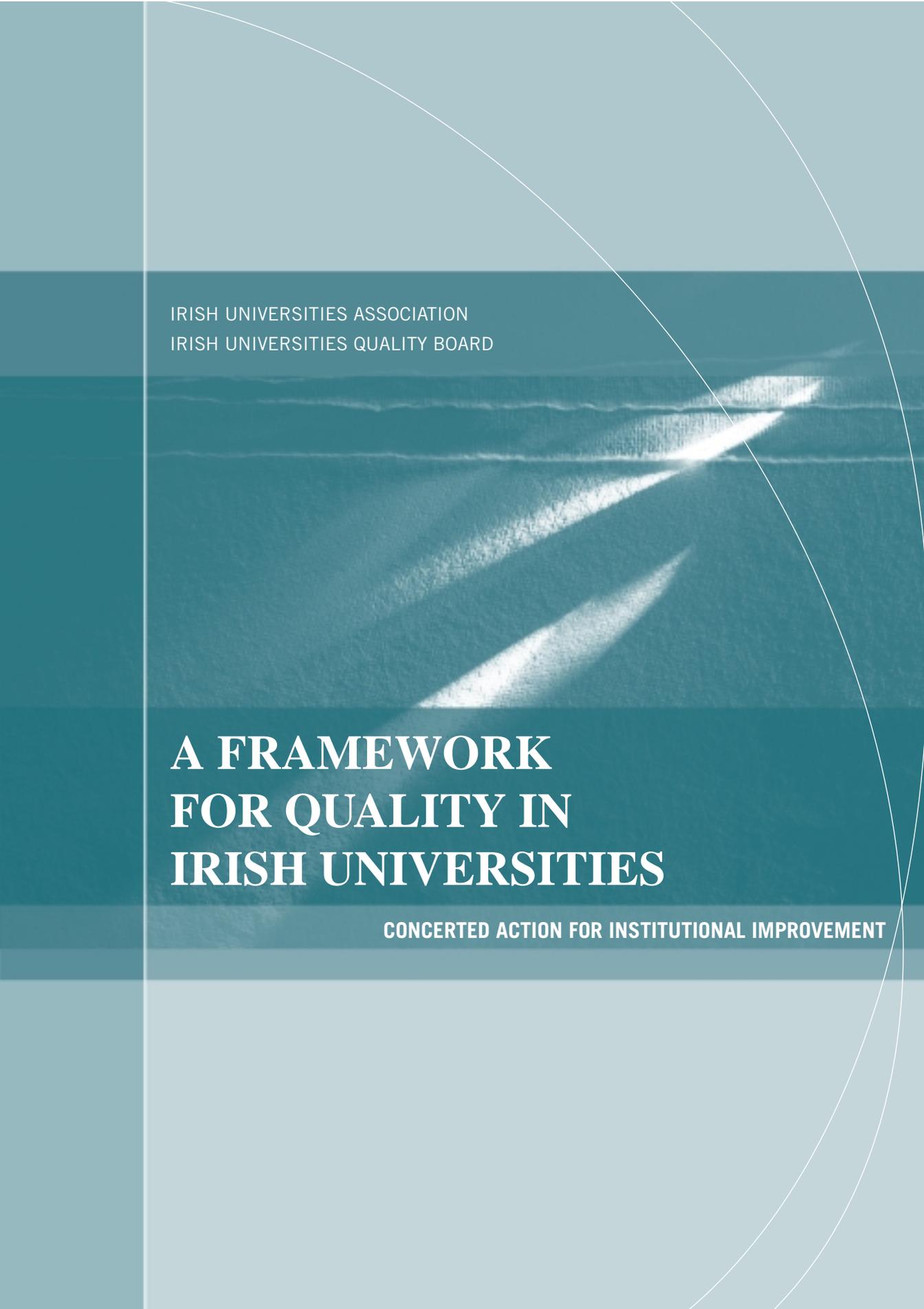IRISH UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATION
IRISH UNIVERSITIES QUALITY BOARD

A FRAMEWORK FOR QUALITY IN IRISH UNIVERSITIES

CONCERTED ACTION FOR INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

SECOND EDITION, 2007

IUA
Irish Universities Association
Cumann Ollscoileanna Éireann

IUQB
IRISH UNIVERSITIES
QUALITY BOARD

DCU

National University of Ireland, Galway
Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

NUI MAYNOOTH
Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
Trinity College

UCC
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

UCD
DUBLIN

UNIVERSITY of
LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

IRISH UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATION
IRISH UNIVERSITIES QUALITY BOARD

A FRAMEWORK FOR QUALITY IN IRISH UNIVERSITIES

CONCERTED ACTION FOR INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

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FOREWORD

T he Irish universities are much more highly developed and effective institutions than in 1995 when new quality procedures were initiated, or even in 2003 when the first edition of this document was published. Many factors have contributed to the enhancements that can be observed, but the quality initiatives and procedures described in these pages have been highly significant. To maintain the momentum of these developments, with the support of the IUA, the IUQB was established in 2003 by decisions of the governing authorities of all seven universities. Throughout this period, government perception of the national importance of quality in higher education was clearly demonstrated by significant funding to the universities and the IUQB by the Higher Education Authority under the National Development Plans.

The review in 2004–05 by the European University Association of the quality systems and their outcomes in all seven Irish universities endorsed the systems of this Framework, provided invaluable advice for their enhancement, and established internationally a new general model for systematic national reviews of higher education — implemented since by other European countries.

The adoption in 2005 by the European ministers for higher education of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area was an additional significant development. Importantly, it is gratifying that these standards and guidelines are entirely consistent with the quality assurance provisions of the Irish Universities Act (1997) and this Framework.

The publication of this 2nd edition of the Framework has been made possible by active cooperation between the IUA and the IUQB through the work of the IUA Quality Committee. Both IUA and IUQB intend this document to present an accurate and comprehensible description of the appropriate balance that has been developed between the internal quality assurance procedures in Irish universities and the periodic external evaluation of the effectiveness of these procedures by IUQB.

A fundamental objective of the Irish Universities Association (IUA) is the development of a distinctive and internationally known brand image for the Irish universities that will facilitate individual and group participation in European and global initiatives, enhance the employability of graduates and facilitate the attraction of the best students and staff. The procedures of this Framework may be one of the most valuable characteristic of this emerging brand.

Dr John Hegarty
President
Irish Universities Association

Mrs Justice Catherine McGuinness
Chair
Irish Universities Quality Board
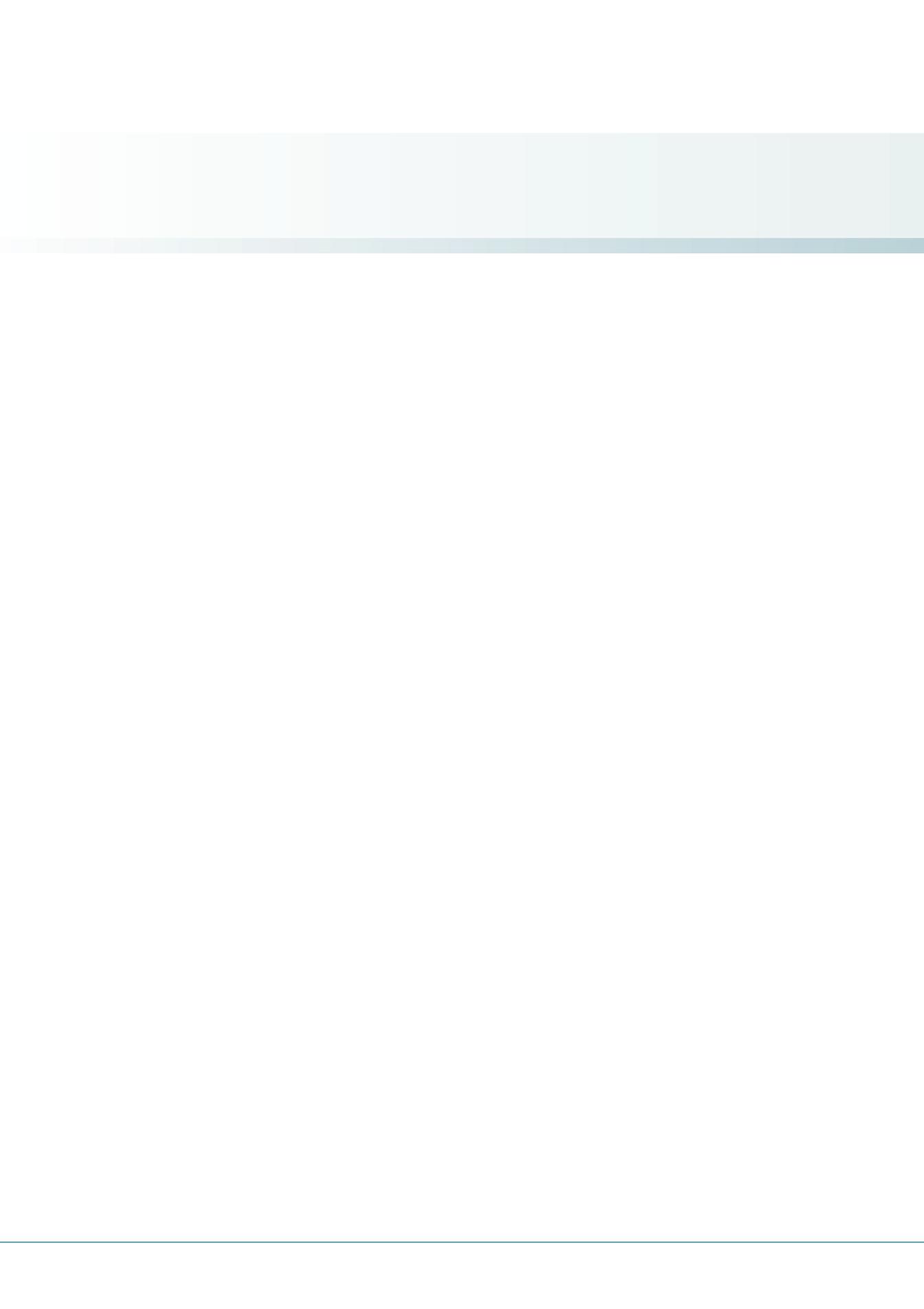
PREFACE

"This systematic organisation and promotion of quality assurance at the initiative of the universities themselves is, in the opinion of the EUA teams, unparalleled in any other country in Europe, or indeed in the United States and Canada. The system would appear to strike the right tone and combination of public interest, accountability, and university autonomy. It encourages a greater focus on quality and improvement than some systems worldwide, while at the same time being less intrusive than some other systems in Europe."

EUA 'Review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities – Sectoral Reports' (HEA/IUQB, 2005)

In the knowledge-based society of the twenty-first century, higher education has key roles in shaping the future world. The broad spectrum of disciplines found in universities — including the arts, humanities, social studies, sciences, technologies and professions — facilitates inter-disciplinary research and teaching, and equips both staff and graduates for important integrative, interpretive and judicial roles in a changing society. However, in a world where a high level of participation in higher education is a goal and where social, economic, technological and environmental change is pervasive, it is essential that universities work more closely with students and other stakeholders to meet these challenges. Further reforms and developments as part of the Bologna Process to ensure greater international mobility of students, staff and graduates, coupled with improved recognition of qualifications — in both directions — are also essential.

The seven universities in Ireland, in striving to meet these challenges, are making many significant and fundamental changes: in their cultures and structures, in their management, in their use of resources, in their relationships with students and society, and in how they approach their core functions of learning and teaching, research, and service to the community.

The universities cannot act alone. With targeted funds provided by government, their research environments have been transformed by the building, equipping and staffing of potentially world-class research centres. Since 1996 very large contributions from Atlantic Philanthropies and many other private donors have enabled dramatic improvements in physical infrastructure and supported other important initiatives. Government (through the National Development Plans 2000–2006 and 2007-2013) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) have provided incentives and much needed support by means of the Quality Assurance Programmes 2000-2004, the Strategic Initiative Schemes 2005-2006 and other targeted mechanisms. However, low levels of baseline funding for undergraduate learning and teaching continue to result in high student to staff ratios and sub-optimal support mechanisms, particularly in comparison with university systems abroad that the Irish universities wish, and are expected to emulate.

The new Recurrent Grant Allocation Model introduced by the HEA in 2007 (which provides greater transparency) together with the Strategic Innovation Fund (which focuses extra resources on key areas) have

the potential to create a new environment that facilitates the achievement of some national ambitions for the Irish university system.

CONTEXT

In the enlightened context of the Universities Act 1997, the Irish universities have developed an approach to quality based on sound policies and principles, and on good international practice. The Irish approach is based on a holistic view of quality in an institution and involves external experts, students and the major stakeholders in the process; thereby preserving institutional autonomy, ensuring public accountability and international benchmarking, and emphasising quality improvement and enhancement.

The first edition of *A Framework for Quality in Irish Universities* in 2003 (CHIU, 2003) marked an important stage in the evolution of what is increasingly seen worldwide as the *'Irish Universities Quality System'*; a system that is worthy of investigation and, maybe, even emulation. The parallel establishment of the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) (See Appendix 10 for a list of relevant organizations and their Web addresses) consolidated the implementation of a systemic approach to quality improvement.

Like its predecessor, this second edition is aimed at a broad readership, including staff in the universities, peer reviewers involved in the quality processes, current and prospective students, national and international policy makers, the wider education community, business and industry interests, the media and the general public. As before, the quality framework described does not represent a set of rigid procedures that must be applied across diverse institutions but represents common principles and practices in the seven universities, and allows for healthy diversity and evolution.

Achievements since the first edition in 2003 have collectively transformed the quality landscape for the seven Irish universities. The most important of these include the:

- Integration of quality assurance and enhancement systems into the university communities,
- Development and reconfiguration of the IUQB (2006),
- EUA review of the Irish universities quality system (2004/05),
- Establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications (2003),
- Adoption by the Irish Minister for Education and Science of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2005) (European Standards and Guidelines, or more simply the ESG (ENQA, 2005) within the wider context of the Bologna Process).

In addition to these, other broader developments have taken place which influence the context in which the universities' quality assurance and improvement activities operate:

- Recommendation in 2006 of the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers on further European cooperation in Quality Assurance in Higher Education (European Parliament and Council, 2006),
- London Communiqué in 2007 from ministers responsible for higher education to review progress in the Bologna Process including the establishment of a European register of quality assurance agencies (Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2007),

• External reviews of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) in 2006, of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) in 2007 and of the IUQB in 2007–08, all under ESG.

This second, updated, edition of a *Framework for Quality in Irish Universities* is therefore of special significance, given the changing international and national contexts and the need to keep pace with these ongoing developments. It presents a picture of a more developed system and aims to facilitate constructive debate and to encourage fundamental innovation, while providing up to date information on developments at institutional, national and international levels.

1

INTRODUCTION
AND OVERVIEW
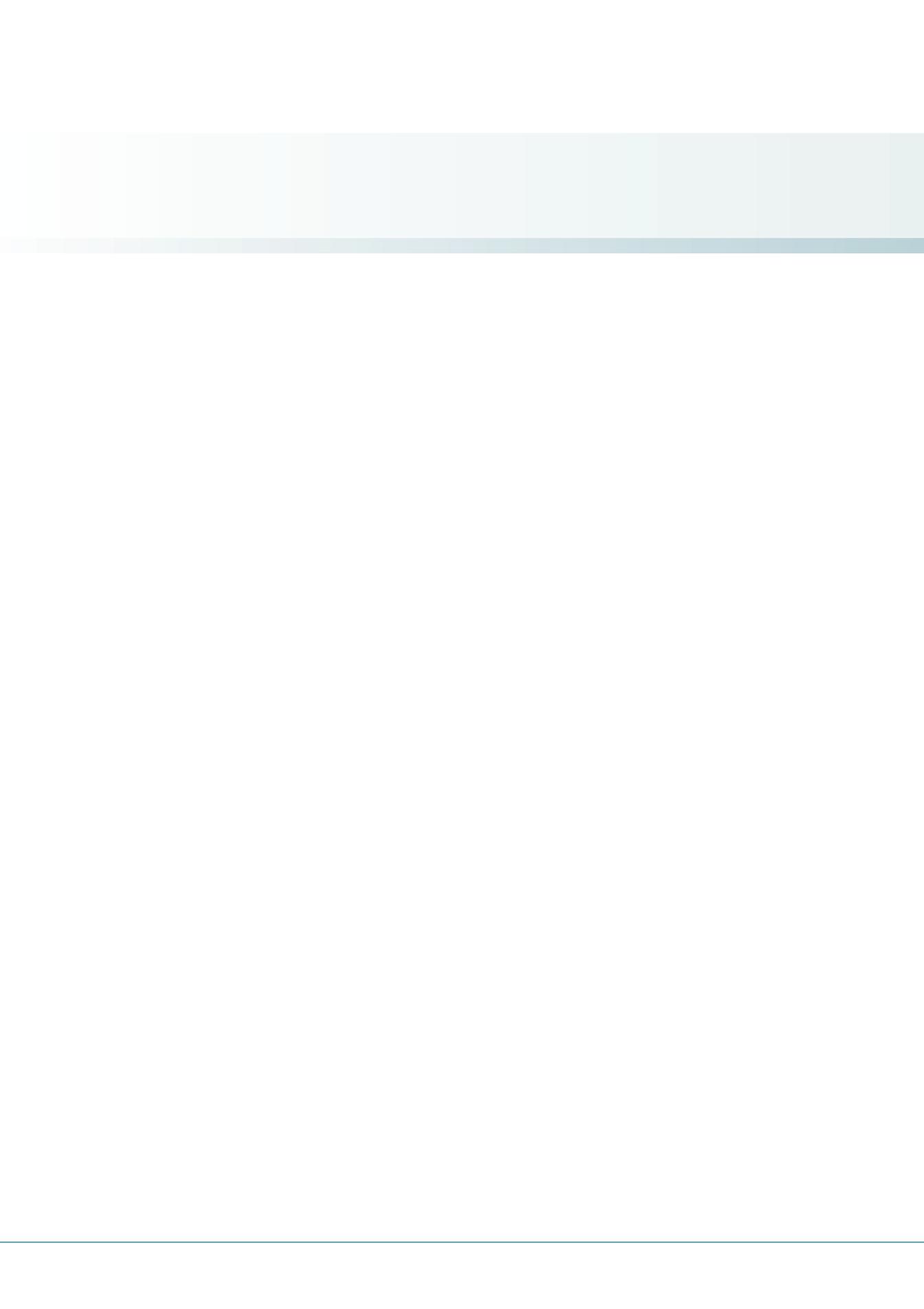
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

"International comparisons of expenditure data confirm the enormous strides Ireland has made over the last 15 years in raising its tertiary age participation rate without any evidence of lack of quality."

"Ireland was one of the first European countries to grasp the economic importance of education and economists suggest that this upskilling of the workforce accounts for almost 1% per annum of additional national output over the past decade or so."

"There is general agreement among representatives of Government and of tertiary education that the expansion has been enormously beneficial both to Irish society and to the economy."

Review of Higher Education in Ireland: Examiners' Report (OECD, 2004)

1.1 THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR IN IRELAND

Though differing in age and traditions, the seven existing universities are a reasonably homogeneous group with respect to national and international perceptions of the qualifications they award and of their general contributions to society. Four of the seven are linked as constituent universities of the National University of Ireland. Qualifications awarded by the universities are self-regulated and are included in the National Framework of Qualifications (www.nfq.ie). The Irish Universities Association (IUA) represents the collective interests of the seven universities, and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) oversees matters relating to external quality assurance in the universities and their affiliated colleges.

Quality processes in Irish universities operate within national legislative and regulatory contexts (particularly the Universities Act 1997, see Appendix 1) that respect institutional autonomy and allow 'quality improvement' to be the fundamental principle governing all the associated procedures and practices. These processes are inclusive of programmes of instruction, scholarship and research and contributions to the broader community. Student learning and wellbeing are considered in these broader contexts.

The overall higher education system also includes the very large Dublin Institute of Technology, 13 other institutes of technology, a range of smaller state-funded institutions and a number of private colleges. Institutes of Technology Ireland (IOTI) (formerly Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology) represents the interests of the Institutes of Technology, while the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) represents a number of the private third level colleges. The Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) in cooperation with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), validates and monitors most of the qualifications granted in these sectors.

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is the statutory planning and development body for higher education and research in Ireland, and has wide advisory powers throughout the whole of the third-level education

sector. In addition it is the funding authority for the universities, the institutes of technology and a number of other designated higher education institutions. The HEA also has functions and responsibilities under the Universities Act 1997 regarding the review of quality assurance and strategic planning activities in the universities. The Department of Education and Science has overall responsibility for higher education.

By custom and practice, and reinforced by acts of the Oireachtas (the Legislature), the term 'university' is protected in Ireland. Additional institutions can only achieve university status following an explicit enquiry by an international commission and a positive recommendation to government.

1.2 REVIEWS

The evaluation system that has been developed in Ireland is enhancement–led and characterised by an emphasis on:

- Alignment with institutional goals and plans,
- University infrastructure for the promotion of quality,
- All the activities of the unit under review, including (for academic units), teaching, research and contributions to the community,
- Self-assessment as the key part of all review processes,
- The involvement of students, other stakeholders and external (including international) assessors,
- Transparency through the publication of guidelines for the processes,
- Accountability through the publication of peer review reports and plans for improvements arising from reviews.

The combined emphases on institutional planning and the primacy of self-assessment in all reviews promote a balanced approach to quality improvement that incorporates 'bottom-up' initiatives that favour change and enhancement.

This balanced approach leads to reflection on mission, aims and objectives; on the systems and procedures in place and their suitability to fulfilling the mission; on the routine quality measures in use, including feedback from students, staff, employers, and all stakeholders; on strategic planning procedures; and on capacity to change and meet new challenges.

In following procedures that embody the above principles and characteristics for comprehensive programmes of internal evaluations, the Irish universities are in accord with international good practice.

1.3 COMPLEMENTARY MECHANISMS

In order to understand fully the purpose of these evaluations of quality, they must be seen in the context of a range of other mechanisms in the universities, with which they must interact and which they must support if they are to be fully effective. Integrated institutional approaches to quality improvement also eliminate unnecessary duplication, reduce burden and, most importantly, promote synergies. These other

mechanisms include:

- Approval and review procedures for study programmes,
- The external examiner system,
- Procedures for staff appointments and promotions,
- Regular student feedback and complaints procedures,
- An institutional research function that generates indicators of performance,
- Facilities and resources for staff development and training,
- Recognition, rewards and incentives for exceptional contributions by staff and students,
- Institutional and local strategic planning processes.

Some of these mechanisms are long established. However, one of the major institutional outcomes of the review processes described here has been the creation of such mechanisms where they did not already exist, and promotion of their modernisation and improvement where they did.

Within the requirements of the Universities Act 1997, the Irish universities have worked together for over a decade to develop a shared approach to quality assessment and improvement based on agreed common principles. As outlined in this document, *A Framework for Quality in Irish Universities*, this common approach is built on their collective experience, has been integrated with pre-existing assurance mechanisms, and has taken account of best international policy and practice. Continuation of this process provides assurance to the university community and its stakeholders and supports continued international recognition of university education in Ireland as being comparable to high international standards.

2 THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT
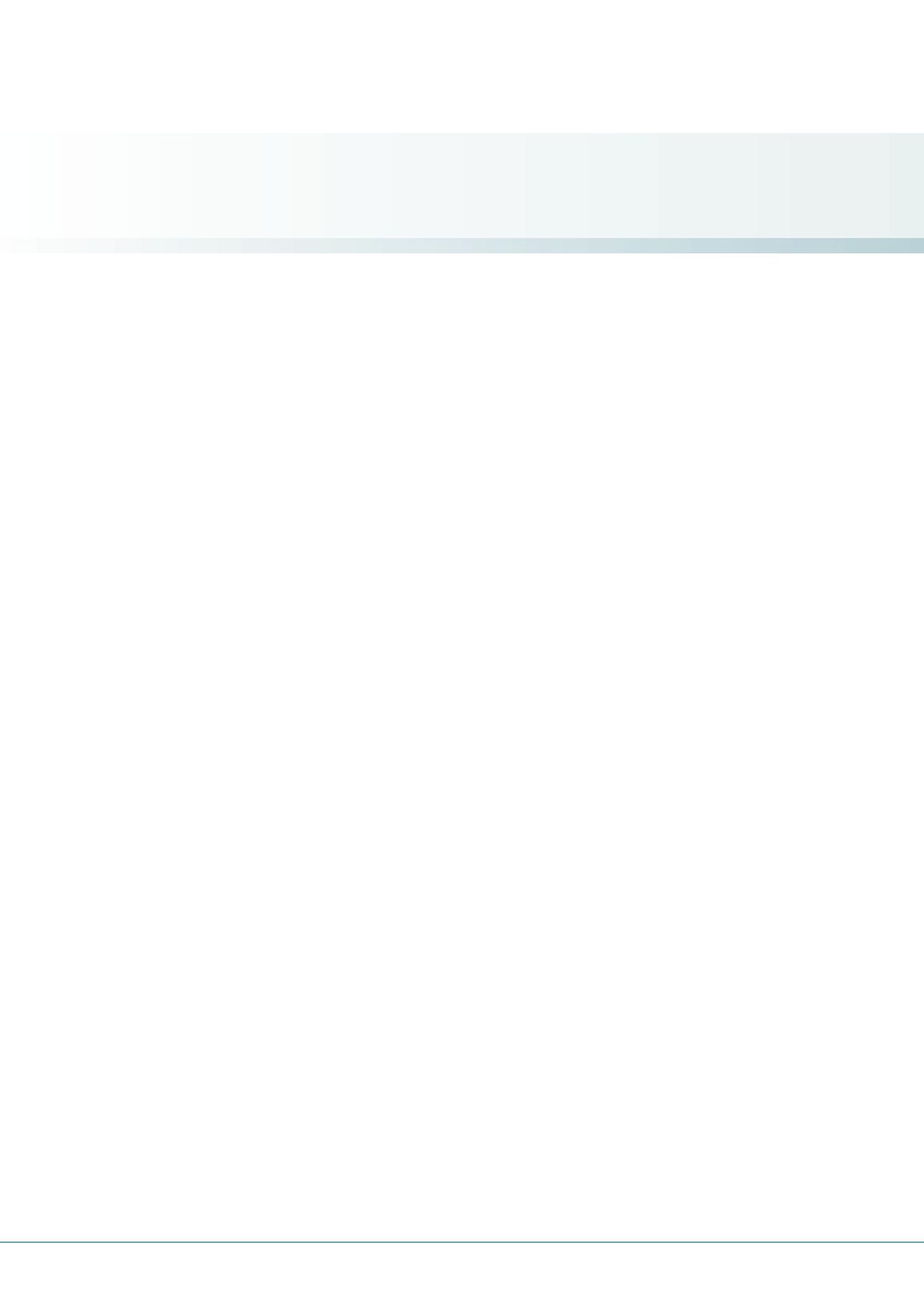
THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

"Europe's universities are a major force in shaping the Europe of Knowledge. They accept the responsibilities which this brings and, in return, ask that governments, and civil society in general, should recognise their responsibility to enable universities to secure the resources which will permit them to fulfil their mission not just well, but with excellence and in a way which allows them to compete with the higher education systems of other countries. Not just Europe, but the whole world, is becoming a "Knowledge Society" and the Lisbon Strategy, the creation of the European Higher Education and Research Areas, together with the efforts of national governments, will require constant reconsideration in order to meet the challenges which this presents."

"The European Quality Assurance dimension should be developed in a partnership with higher education institutions, students, quality assurance agencies and governments. The proposed governance of the European Register of Quality Assurance agencies – based on a partnership of stakeholders that ensures a system of checks and balances – will provide the basis for trust and transparency and thus increase the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area."

Lisbon Declaration 'Europe's universities beyond 2010: diversity with a common purpose' (EUA, 2007)

2.1 INTERNATIONALISATION

Since the 1970s, universities all over the world have become increasingly responsive to a variety of international influences. In Europe, there has been the success of a range of EU-sponsored mobility and student exchange initiatives (such as ERASMUS and SOCRATES) and the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) with associated quality standards and guidelines. In parallel, higher education institutions have become aware of new mechanisms to assure and enhance quality in equivalent institutions in other countries, and of the quality mechanisms (for example, those of the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) and the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM)) that have been adopted to great effect in business.

The European University Association (EUA), a representative group of almost eight hundred universities and thirty-four university rectors' conferences, has, for many years, supported the development of an institutional commitment to quality and a strong quality culture for higher education institutions throughout Europe. The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) is an association of external quality assurance agencies that greatly influences procedures and standards across European higher education.

Increasing student mobility brings a requirement that students be protected from low-quality provision and disreputable providers, with both 'sending' and 'receiving' countries sharing the responsibility for quality in such cases. In response to this need, the OECD and UNESCO have developed 'Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education' (OECD, 2005), and the NQAI acts as the relevant national contact point in Ireland.

2.2 THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

The Bologna Declaration of 1999 (Conference of European Ministers of Higher Education, 1999) contained a commitment to the "promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies". By 2007 there were 46 signatory states working towards this goal, with quality assurance becoming a central element and key action line in the overall process. The reports produced by the Bologna Follow-Up Group, by EUA and by the European Students' Union (ESU) for the ministerial meetings every two years all contain a particular focus on quality assurance.

The ultimate aim of the Bologna Process is to establish a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010 in which staff and students can move with ease and have fair recognition of their qualifications, which is attractive to staff and students from the rest of the world, and which will support European economic, technological, social and cultural development. The European Commission provides funding for the national teams of Bologna experts to assist with the implementation of the process within each country. The Irish National Agency for Socrates-Erasmus (a function of the HEA) supports the work of these experts in Ireland, including the development of a national Bologna website (www.bologna.ie).

A number of inter-related initiatives, which are part of, or linked to the Bologna Process, have consolidated the European approach. The most significant of these initiatives include:

1. EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

In the Berlin Communiqué of 19 September 2003 (Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2003), the Ministers for Higher Education invited ENQA, through its members and in cooperation with the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB (ESU from 2007) to develop 'an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance in the EHEA' and 'to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies'.

The main results and recommendations of the subsequent report included the following:

• The establishment of European standards for internal and external quality assurance, and for external quality assurance agencies,
• The requirement that European external quality assurance agencies submit themselves to a cyclical review within (and thereafter every) five years,
• The establishment of a European register of external quality assurance agencies,
• The establishment of a European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

The ESG (see above) were formally accepted by Ministers In May 2005. The list of Standards from this document is included as Appendix 7 and the complete document is available from www.enqa.eu.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS OF FURTHER EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN QUALITY ASSURANCE

On 15 February 2006 the European Parliament and the European Council updated official EU recommendations to member states on further cooperation in quality assurance in higher education, which (in brief):

- Encourage all higher education institutions active within their territory to introduce or develop rigorous internal quality assurance systems, in accordance with the ESG,
- Encourage all quality assurance or accreditation agencies active within their territory to apply the common set of general standards and guidelines (ESG),
- Encourage the setting up of a 'European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies' (European Register) (achieved at the London meeting in 2007) (E4 Group, 2007),
- Enable higher education institutions active within their territory to choose from among quality assurance or accreditation agencies in the European Register an agency which meets their needs and profile, provided this is compatible with their national legislation or permitted by their national authorities,
- Allow higher education institutions to work towards a complementary assessment by another agency listed in the European Register,
- Promote cooperation between agencies in order to build up mutual trust and recognition,
- Ensure public access to the assessments made by the quality assurance or accreditation agencies listed in the European Register.

3. REGISTER FOR EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

Following the adoption of the ESG in 2005, Ministers requested that a study be undertaken to examine the practicalities of establishing a European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAR). Authorised by the London Ministerial Conference in May 2007 EQAR lists external quality assurance agencies operating in the EHEA that fulfill the conditions required by the ESG, including five-yearly external reviews.

2.3 IRISH HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The Irish higher education sector is committed to the Bologna Process and continues to invest heavily in all the associated reforms in order to achieve its ambitious goals and objectives. This applies in particular to programmatic reform whereby all courses and each study programme must have learning outcomes defined in accordance with agreed criteria and standards. In some important respects the achievements of the sector to date in the Bologna Process are impressive:

- The Irish university quality system is already broadly consistent with the ESG.
- In November 2006, Ireland became the first European country to verify the compatibility of its National Framework of Qualifications (a statutory framework based on learning outcomes) with the Bologna Framework for Qualifications in the EHEA.

• Ireland was placed as the leading country (of 48 higher education systems) in terms of implementation of the Bologna goals and objectives during the stocktaking exercise leading to the London meeting of ministers responsible for higher education in 2007. (Department of Education and Skills, 2007).

The Irish universities also have a long standing commitment to their students to ensure, to the best of their ability, that their qualifications are automatically accepted in many countries across the world. This commitment is supported increasingly by the Bologna Process, but is also, in many respects, independent of it. Therefore, explicit links and collaboration with appropriate agencies and individual institutions in Australia, Canada, China, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, the US and other countries, as well of course in a range of European countries, in particular the UK, are also maintained and further developed on a regular basis.

For example, by means of the Washington Accord (of which Ireland was a founding member), the Sydney Accord, the Dublin Accord and bilateral agreements, accreditation of engineering degrees by Engineers Ireland leads to their recognition on the same basis as accredited engineering degree programmes in a substantial number of other countries.

3

THE NATIONAL CONTEXT
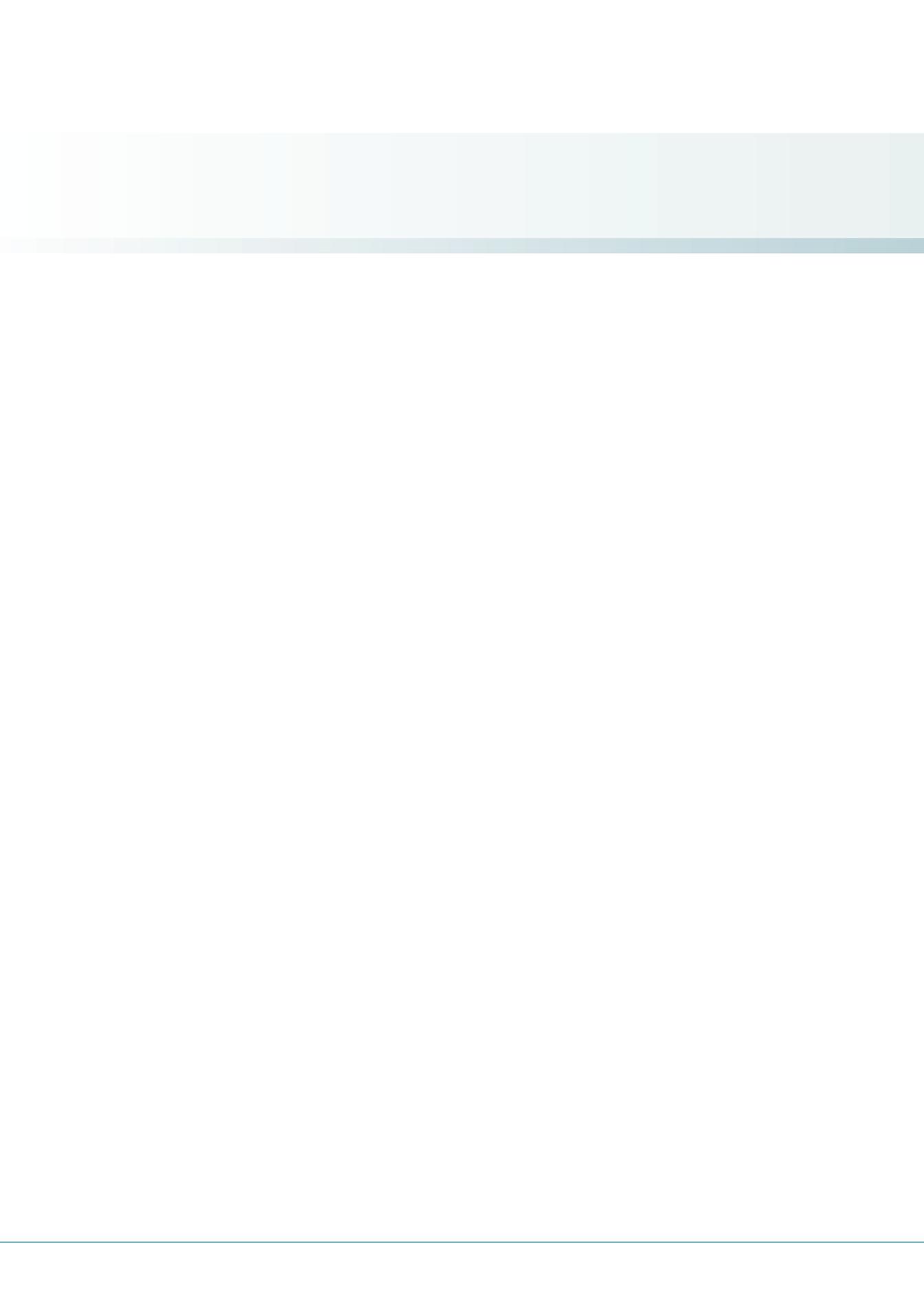
THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

"The last ten years have seen a worldwide movement to examine the accountability of higher education institutions, particularly universities, and to look for value for money in investing public and private funds in these institutions. The Irish higher education system has been endeavouring to respond to these challenges, which are expressed both explicitly and implicitly through the 1997 Universities Act."

EUA 'Review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities – Sectoral Report' (HEA/IUQB, 2005)

3.1 'TRADITIONAL' MEASURES FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF STANDARDS AND QUALITY

Universities in Ireland and elsewhere have long established mechanisms to assure the standards of their study programmes and research activities. In Ireland, well-established examples include:

- Involvement of external examiners (drawn from institutions abroad in a large proportion of cases) in all undergraduate and postgraduate study programmes,
- External members are included in interview panels and selection groups for all permanent academic appointments,
- External accreditation of programmes in the practice professions.

In accord with global practice, as academic staff carry out scholarship and research and make their findings known, they are also subject to expert scrutiny:

- Review by experts in the relevant areas of all research grant applications. The Irish research funding bodies increasingly use experts from outside Ireland in such review processes,
- Peer review and professional editorial examination of all significant research publications.

Because a high proportion have studied and/or trained abroad, academic staff in Irish universities have close ties with educational institutions across the world and are open to positive influences from them.

As student numbers in Irish higher education continued to grow during the last decades of the 20th century, and a very high level of participation became a national objective, the above mechanisms were increasingly seen as insufficient. Many in academia and in government saw that additional mechanisms were necessary to provide transparency while ensuring explicit international standards in all aspects of the universities' activities. This need was emphasised by the adoption (or strengthening) by many other countries of systems to assure the quality of teaching and research in their own higher education sectors. Mechanisms and procedures that at that time were *not* in place or systematically implemented in all Irish universities included:

- Feedback mechanisms for student evaluation of teaching, administration and other services,
- Regular review of academic, administrative, service and support units,
- Formal mechanisms for approval and review of study programmes with external inputs.

In Ireland from about 1990, the universities debated quality-related themes, and the Government (facing increasing university budgets and persistent arguments that they be increased further) became more concerned with value for money. It was in this context that the Government published policy papers and prepared what became the Universities Act 1997. In this context also, the IUA (then the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities - CHIU) initiated in 1995 a 'pilot programme for quality reviews'. Appendix 3 lists the main reports and acts of the Oireachtas relevant to higher education in Ireland since the influential Report of the Commission on Higher Education, published in 1967.

3.2 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

A number of quality assurance agencies operate in Irish higher education. The IUQB is authorised to carry out periodic external reviews of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures of the Irish universities. NQAI has statutory quality assurance functions in relation to the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), and HETAC has responsibility for the other institutes of technology. The HEA may also exercise the right to arrange reviews of the quality assurance procedures in the universities.

In line with the requirement that external quality assurance agencies submit themselves for review every five years:

- In 2006 and 2007, HETAC and NQAI, respectively, underwent external review under the ESG, being among the first agencies in Europe to do so.
- In 2007, IUQB began a similar external review process.

3.3 IRISH HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY NETWORK (IHEQN)

The IHEQN originated from a discussion among higher education and training stakeholders at a National Conference on the Bologna Process, held under the aegis of the Department of Education and Science on 23 July 2003. It was agreed in October 2003 to create the IHEQN as a formal grouping with a membership consisting of the principal stakeholders - practitioners, policy makers and students - involved in quality assurance in Irish higher education and training.

The roles of the IHEQN are to:

- Provide a forum for discussion of quality assurance issues amongst the principal national stakeholders involved in the quality assurance of higher education and training in Ireland,
- Provide a forum for the dissemination of good practice in quality assurance amongst practitioners and policy makers involved in the Irish higher education and training sector,
- Endeavour, where appropriate, to develop common national principles and approaches to quality assurance in Irish higher education and training.

The Network meets at least four times a year. In 2005, IHEQN published a document entitled 'Principles of Good Practice for Quality Assurance / Quality Improvement in Irish Higher Education and Training' (IHEQN, 2005). The network organised its first conference in October 2006.

3.4 COMPLIANCE OF IRISH UNIVERSITIES WITH THE EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

A minimum quality assurance objective for Irish universities is compliance with the ESG. In accordance with good practice, it is for external processes to decide to what extent this objective is being achieved and these external quality assurance processes in Irish universities are described in Section 9. The following subsections are commentaries on current and developing policies and practices in the context of each of the seven ESG Standards for internal quality assurance (Appendix 7).

1. POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE:

This Framework document and the reports of the EUA teams who carried out reviews of all seven universities in 2004–05 (Section 9.3) indicate the existence across the whole sector of formal, active and satisfactory institutional policies and participatory procedures that support continuous enhancement of quality.

2. APPROVAL, MONITORING AND PERIODIC REVIEW OF PROGRAMMES AND AWARDS:

Procedures targeted specifically at academic programmes and awards depend on the universal use of external examiners, and formal, if largely internal, procedures for initial and on-going programmatic approval. As part of all approval procedures, every new award is also placed on the ten-level National Framework of Qualifications. Although the focus of external reviews in Irish universities is on the academic department or school (see Section 7), periodic external reviews of programmes are also undertaken, apart from externally initiated evaluation exercises linked to the accreditation of professional programmes.

3. ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS:

The assessment of student learning is controlled by internal examination boards with inputs from formally appointed external examiners. The criteria, regulations and procedures used for these mechanisms are published and are applied consistently. They are reviewed and, where necessary, updated on a regular basis.

4. QUALITY ASSURANCE OF TEACHING STAFF:

All permanent and contract teaching staff are appointed by means of formal public procedures and, in the majority of discipline areas, all appointees have doctoral qualifications. In certain developing professional areas suitable candidates with master level degrees are also appointed and supported when they register for doctoral programmes. All universities now have permanent teaching support units that provide training programmes for academic staff ranging from regular colloquia to accredited master degrees in higher education teaching. Promotion procedures up to senior lecturer grade commonly include evaluations of teaching, research and community contributions. Student feedback on teaching is universal and increasingly being implemented systematically. Review groups have direct access or can request access, to all relevant records, and teaching quality is a standard topic for comment in review reports.

A nationally agreed individual 'Performance Management and Development System', which applies to all members of staff, is currently being implemented in all the universities.

5. LEARNING RESOURCES AND STUDENT SUPPORT:

All seven Irish universities provide resources to support student learning that are appropriate for the academic programmes offered. The adequacy of these resources and the need for improvements to enable more diverse and innovative teaching are common themes in internal review reports.

6. INFORMATION SYSTEMS:

While all seven universities collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their study programmes and other activities, they have also recognised the importance and usefulness of 'enterprise data' as an important strategic objective for the university sector. This involves the agreement of definitions regarding key data across the sector, as well as putting in place systems which can collect and analyse this information. Both IUA and IUQB have initiated important and co-ordinated sector-wide projects to support these objectives. As part of these moves, 'institutional research officers' have been appointed to coordinate data and information management in their own institutions.

7. PUBLIC INFORMATION:

All Irish universities regularly publish up-to-date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering. In particular, reports of external and internal peer reviews are published on university websites, and are accessible also via the IUQB website.

4

PRINCIPLES AND
STRUCTURES FOR
EVALUATIONS
INITIATED INTERNALLY

PRINCIPLES AND STRUCTURES FOR EVALUATIONS INITIATED INTERNALLY

"Quality assurance is not a static but a dynamic process. It should be continuous and not "once in a lifetime". It does not end with the first review or with the completion of the formal follow-up procedures. It has to be periodically renewed. Subsequent external reviews should take into account progress that has been made since the previous event".

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, (ENQA, 2005)

4.1 THE EVOLUTION OF SYSTEMATIC QUALITY REVIEW PROCEDURES BY THE UNIVERSITIES

While systematic and regular quality reviews of all elements of Irish universities are now accepted as routine by university staff, this came about via several distinct stages stretching over a number of years.

EUROPEAN PILOT QUALITY REVIEWS

The European Union Pilot Project on Quality in Higher Education was a SOCRATES initiative that involved the participation of 46 institutions in 17 countries, organised nationally. While the Irish component of this project, commenced in 1995, involved reviews of just two academic departments, it represented a significant initiative for the Irish higher education sector. In terms of institutional cultures, this limited exercise 'broke the ice', thereby facilitating subsequent developments.

CHIU PROGRAMME OF PILOT REVIEWS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF IUQSC

A paper published by CHIU (now IUA) in 1995 documented the universities' proposed quality framework (CHIU, 1995). This formed the basis of the 'CHIU pilot projects', a multi-year programme, by which quality reviews of two to three volunteer departments per year were conducted in most of the universities, over the period 1995–98. To oversee this programme of reviews, the Inter-University Quality Steering Committee (IUQSC, now the Irish Universities Association Quality Committee, IUAQC) was formed. The IUAQC, which includes the registrar and quality officer from each university, meets four times per year to share experiences, and act as a forum for policy discussions and as an advisory body for the IUA.

The outcomes of these projects were documented in a report prepared for the HEA in 1998 (IUQSC, 1998). The subsequent development of the quality framework described in the present document was influenced greatly by the experience gained during the pilot projects, especially in relation to the acceptance by staff of quality reviews as exercises that could support them in their endeavours.

THE UNIVERSITIES ACT 1997 AND INITIATION OF REGULAR REVIEW CYCLES

The requirements of the Universities Act 1997 relating to quality assurance (Section 35 and 49) were widely anticipated in the universities (Appendix 1). Therefore, by 2000, regular review programmes had been established in many of them. By 2008, all universities had commenced a second cycle of reviews.

AFFILIATED COLLEGES

Many if not most of the qualifications offered in colleges affiliated to the universities are awarded in the name of the relevant university. Given this situation, these colleges have already adopted, or are in the process of adopting the quality procedures used throughout the university sector and outlined in this document. The second series of reviews of the effectiveness of quality assurance in the Irish universities in 2009-10 will include explicit consideration of the quality assurance procedures applied to such awards.

4.2 PRINCIPLES AND CHARACTERISTICS

The framework for quality improvement and assurance in Irish universities is informed by key principles and characteristics:

• Continual improvement,
• Strategic planning and change,
• Autonomy,
• Individual and collective ownership,
• Inclusiveness,
• International and national standardisation,
• Implementation of recommendations,
• Public accountability
• Publication of outcomes, and
• Transparency.

These reflect the legislative requirements of the Universities Act 1997, making the Irish university system distinctive, since in only a few countries are the requirements for internal university quality processes specified in primary legislation.

As internal review procedures have developed, universities, other higher education players, government and stakeholders have accepted the concept of a national quality system that focuses on improvement and planning. For the universities, it was clear that quality reviews, as well as helping staff to identify ways for the more effective use of their time and facilities, would identify unambiguously fundamental issues that could only be properly tackled with improved national funding. For government and the HEA, regular reviews of all academic departments promised the assurance that any improved funding would be used to the greatest effect, thereby underpinning the developing economy. At internal levels within each institution, there was also a natural commitment to focus on quality improvement. These may be the most

important reasons why the new procedures — initiated relatively suddenly — have been accepted, and even welcomed, by the great majority of Irish university staff.

Ownership of quality processes rests with each university, and individual management teams now view them as an essential tool to enable *continual improvement* and the achievement of *planning* and *strategic change*. Thus, while the common principles and operating framework described here apply to each institution's processes, there is *institutional autonomy* and responsibility regarding the exact nature of quality procedures and protocols. This allows for diversity to be maintained, in keeping with the spirit of the Universities Act 1997, which refers in Section 14 to the "independent ethos and traditions" of the universities. This approach also provides opportunities for the local development of procedural improvements that may later be adopted more widely in the sector.

Self assessment is an obvious and crucial step in a review process aimed at continuous improvement based on *individual and collective ownership*, and *inclusiveness*; especially when conducted with an emphasis on analysis, reflection and self-criticism. Inclusiveness also applies to the activities of the unit under evaluation. For example, for an academic department all activities are reviewed; management, study programmes, scholarship and research, and contributions to the institution and to the external community. Appropriate aims, objectives and plans are formulated, or revised. To promote critical reflection, self-assessment reports are confidential to each institution.

International and national comparisons are facilitated by the composition of review groups and this is specified explicitly in the 1997 Universities Act. International members of review groups are drawn from relevant institutions in many countries, including the most prestigious universities in the world (Appendix 6), on the basis of their relevant expertise. Together with reviewers from other Irish universities, they are asked to make recommendations on how the unit under review can improve and what might be needed for this to happen. Often, another member of the group is, for example, from a company or agency employing the relevant graduates or from a professional organisation or association. The external perspectives and additional expert input of such reviewers is highly valued (see also Section 5.4).

Institutional quality committees, specific 'follow up' meetings and other activities facilitate the preparation and monitoring of an action plan following each review, thereby ensuring the *implementation of recommendations*. Commonly, reviews are now part of a 'second cycle' allowing units to be seen in the context of their first reviews, which inevitably means that special attention will be given to the implementation and further development of previous agreed actions.

Public accountability and transparency in the operation and use of reviews is ensured by the routine publication of the review reports arising from reviews. These are accessible via the individual university web sites, and via the web site of the IUQB.

4.3 QUALITY OFFICES

Each of the universities has a quality office with responsibility for quality assurance and quality improvement in academic, administrative, service and support areas. Working within the common set of principles outlined above, each institution has devised a quality assurance and improvement framework.

The roles of the quality offices vary according to institutional structure but normally include:

• Providing professional support for the development of university policy in relation to quality assurance and improvement in line with good international practice,
• Driving new initiatives designed to resolve issues arising repeatedly in review reports,
• Promoting a sense of ownership by individual departments and units of the university's quality assurance and improvement systems and procedures,
• Supporting departments and units in implementing internal and external quality review processes,
• Publishing review reports and other relevant reports,
• Working with the other universities and with the IUQB to improve cooperation in support of the Board's programme of sectoral projects and annual conferences.

LOCAL DRIVE AND COOPERATION

The commitment to collective action on quality has been realised since 1995 through the work of the IUAQC and its precursor committees. Complemented by regular meetings of the quality officers, the IUAQC plays a pivotal role in maintaining the inter-university cooperation on quality matters and its importance has increased since the EUA reviews of the Irish Universities in 2005.

In particular, this collaboration has promoted awareness of quality, dialogue, flexibility, collaboration and consultation with IUQB.

EMBEDDING A QUALITY CULTURE

When systematic quality reviews were first introduced, the focus was on the procedures and preparation for the review visits and on the reviewers' reports. As these procedures became established and accepted by the university community, the emphasis and focus moved towards the implementation of recommendations and quality improvement.

Over the first few years certain generic issues were identified as being of particular importance and worthy of new investment, in particular supports for teaching, institutional research and a focus on all aspects of the student experience. This led to heightened awareness of the quality agenda among all staff (academic, research, administrative, and support staff) and students.

PROMOTING AND SUPPORTING NEW INITIATIVES AND INNOVATION

There is a particular emphasis within the quality offices on encouraging innovation in teaching and learning, together with the promotion of teaching excellence as a scholarly activity. All of the universities

now have substantial resources and programmes devoted to the development and recognition of teaching and learning. Parallel national initiatives and developments have ensured the establishment of research offices. Therefore, in any Irish university, in addition to the standard central, college/faculty and school/departmental structures, innovation can now be promoted and supported by the quality office, the research office and the teaching centre, working cooperatively and individually.

EXPANDING MANDATES

From their inception, the university quality offices had a commitment to quality improvement mainly (as we have seen) by means of regular reviews across the entire institutions. However, as the internal and external environment of quality improvement and quality assurance developed, the remits of individual quality offices have expanded to include some additional functions, such as:

- Staff and teaching development,
- Institutional research,
- Student feedback,
- Satisfaction surveys,
- Support of applications for programme accreditation,
- External examiner system,
- Participation in IUQB sectoral projects, and
- Participation in European quality projects.

This expanding agenda has also contributed to a more holistic approach to quality within each institution, and has likewise helped to reinforce the development of an internal quality culture.

5 THE INTERNAL EVALUATION OF UNIVERSITY UNITS

THE INTERNAL EVALUATION
OF UNIVERSITY UNITS

"The European Higher Education Area needs to build on academic core values while meeting stakeholders' expectations, i.e., demonstrating quality. Indeed, quality assessment must take into consideration the goals and mission of institutions and programmes. It requires a balance between innovation and tradition, academic excellence and social/economic relevance, the coherence of curricula and students' freedom of choice. It encompasses teaching and research as well as governance and administration, responsiveness to students' needs and the provision of non-educational services."

"Inherent quality does not suffice, it needs to be demonstrated and guaranteed in order to be acknowledged and trusted by students, partners and society at home, in Europe and in the world."

"Quality is the basic underlying condition for trust, relevance, mobility, compatibility and attractiveness in the European Higher Education Area."

Salamanca Declaration 'Shaping the European High Education Area', (EUA, 2001)

5.1 ELEMENTS OF THE PROCESS

The Irish universities have collectively agreed a framework for their quality improvement / quality assurance systems which is consistent with both the legislative requirements of the Universities Act 1997 and international good practice. Quality reviews are carried out in academic, administrative and service departments, and as appropriate in schools, faculties, and study programmes. Thematic reviews of university-wide issues (e.g. research, examination and assessment procedures) are also carried out. For simplicity, all of these are referred to as "units" in the outline of the review process below. Within the cycles of reviews adopted by the institutions, units have adequate advance notice of their review schedule (see Appendix 4 for a typical review timescale for a unit being evaluated). Typically, the review model comprises four major elements:

- Preparation of a self-assessment report,
- Visit by a peer review group that includes external experts, both national and international,
- Preparation of a peer review group report that is made public,
- Agreement of an action plan for implementation of the review report's recommendations.

As described in the previous chapter, a dedicated quality office in each institution assists with the planning and management of the quality review process, although the responsibility for each review lies with the unit in question. In the following chapter the elements of the process are outlined.

5.2 CYCLES AND FREQUENCY

While the quality assurance evaluations required by the Universities Act 1997 are specified as being at "regular intervals and in any case not less than once in every 10 years", the universities recognise that a 10 year cycle is insufficient to keep pace with external challenges. In practice, although inevitably starting at relatively low numbers of units per year, all institutions had commenced second cycle reviews by the end of academic year 2007–08 i.e. 10 years after the signing of the Act in 1997.

SCHEDULING REVIEWS

The universities give the units notice of impending reviews well in advance of any visit by external reviewers, so that evaluations can involve sufficient critical reflection. Typically, reviews are announced at least two years in advance. In some cases a provisional schedule for five years, or a full cycle, may be published with revisions taking place as conditions change. The advance publication of review cycles also helps to provide confidence and give notice to other stakeholders (including students) of the university's seriousness in relation to quality assurance and improvement.

5.3 PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS

The quality system in each university recognises explicitly the importance of active student involvement in evaluations, particularly in reviews of academic departments and units providing services directly to students. As is necessary for effective participation, individual students, class representatives and Student Union officers are involved in many levels of the evaluation processes. The following bodies, all of which have roles in evaluations, usually have student representatives:

- Governing authorities,
- Faculty or College boards,
- University quality committees.

All relevant units preparing for review are required to seek the views of all students availing of their services (education, support, etc.). These provide valuable information to the staff of the unit in their critical analysis of the quality of their activities and how these impact on their students. Student views are sought by means of questionnaires, focus groups and other feedback mechanisms. In many instances representative students are directly involved as members of self-evaluation coordinating committees and thus are continuous participants in the self-evaluation process.

In addition, review groups are required to evaluate the scope and effectiveness of student feedback mechanisms. Such information is tested when the reviewers meet groups of students privately, which is a core part of every site visit. At these meetings, review groups hear directly student opinions on the quality of teaching, of support services and other relevant issues, and thus can gauge the general quality of the education and services the students receive and of their university lives.

5.4 PARTICIPATION OF OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

In addition to students, universities have a wide range of internal and external stakeholders, all of whom have legitimate interests in the quality of services provided by the institutions. For individual universities, the list may vary but typically includes:

- All staff in all categories,
- Graduates/alumni as individuals and as members of alumni organisations,
- A wide range of enterprises, businesses and agencies as
  - ~ Employers of graduates
  - ~ Research and project partners,
- Professional bodies corresponding to the relevant qualifications offered,
- Local and regional communities,
- The national community as represented by
  - ~ Government
  - ~ Agencies, particularly those concerned with higher and university education,
- The European Union,
- International bodies and agencies acting in many roles.

Clearly, *direct* inputs from all stakeholders for every evaluation is impracticable. However, nearly everyone who does have an input will have one or more secondary dimensions that may be influential. Some of the most important of these interests are represented on governing authorities. In addition, some academic units already have advisory bodies consisting mainly of external stakeholders, and the quality review system actively encourages this trend, which is supported in the ESG.

Where the relevance and importance is clear, specific stakeholder groups will usually be represented explicitly by a designated member of the review group, or by representatives being given the opportunity to meet the group. For example, the views of employers are seen as particularly relevant in the case of units educating graduates for specific industries or sectors and a representative is usually included on review groups in these cases. Where the opinions of professional bodies are important, there is usually a parallel accreditation process with reports shared across both processes.

5.5 VARIATIONS BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES

While the above sections and following chapters illustrate common features of the review systems in the seven universities, it must be appreciated also that, between the institutions, there are differences in details of organisation, approach, procedures and mechanisms. Therefore, the typical stages and features of the systems are described in a broad manner, illustrated with some specific examples. The differences, which are evident on examination of the practices in each institution, are a consequence of institutional individuality and autonomy, and of the broad specifications for evaluations outlined in the Universities Act 1997. In practice, this procedural variety facilitates greatly a high degree of alignment with the common framework.

This allowance for diversity also enables procedures to work effectively and efficiently by facilitating adaptations to local circumstances and the needs of the individual units under review. There may be variations between units that suggest a different balance to the membership of the review group, or circumstances that require reviews to be rescheduled, or changed at short notice. Rigid common regulations and processes would undoubtedly be sub-optimal for many reviews, whereas responsive, locally owned systems with shared principles offer more effective outcomes. The sharing of experiences with local variations and pilot projects has led to the generation of better practice nationally.

Overall, a sensible balance between procedures that align closely with this Framework and local variations may be ideal, provided that all institutions apply the Framework itself coherently and consistently, and, most importantly, that the periodic institutional reviews are effective in assuring the 'fitness-for-purpose' of each institution's overall quality systems. This is the chief reason why the 'cross-cutting' sectoral report from the EUA review teams in 2005 was so important, and why such an overview report will also form part of the second set of institutional reviews, already scheduled for 2009–10.

6

SELF-ASSESSMENT
OF A UNIVERSITY UNIT

SELF-ASSESSMENT OF A UNIVERSITY UNIT

"The EUA teams noted that the self-assessment processes at unit level in each university appeared to be conducted in a positive way. For many of the units reviewed so far, this was their first such experience, and the self-assessment process was an opportunity to undertake a systematic internal examination of the unit, its goals and functions, and for writing these observations down in a structured way."

"The EUA teams were informed that the process had helped to bring staff together around shared themes and to encourage greater understanding of what they were doing, at both pedagogical and management levels. Most units across the seven universities agreed that this self-assessment experience had in itself been most useful and revealing".

EUA 'Review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities – Sectoral Report' (HEA, IUQB, 2005)

6.1. SELF-ASSESSMENT RATIONALE

Self-assessment is the first crucial step that a unit takes in preparing for a quality review. The European University Association suggests that four basic questions are asked and addressed as a part of this process, namely:

- What are you trying to do?
- How are you trying to do it?
- How do you know it works?
- How do you change in order to improve?

The self-assessment exercise is a process by which a unit (faculty/college, academic department/school, study programme, administrative, research, support or service) reflects on its mission and objectives, and analyses critically the activities it engages in to achieve these objectives. It provides for an evaluation of the unit's performance of its functions, its services and its administration. By means of the detailed criteria and guidelines developed by each university, the unit records these evaluations in a self-assessment report. The self-assessment report:

- Presents detailed information about the unit, its mission, functions and activities,
- Presents a succinct but comprehensive statement of the unit's strategic aims and objectives and discusses how these are aligned with those of the university,
- Describes the quality systems and processes that are already in place along with sample outcomes,
- Provides a comprehensive self-critical analysis of the activities of the unit and its associated strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges (a SWOT analysis), which may be complemented by a formal benchmarking exercise with one or more comparable units in Ireland and/or abroad,
- Identifies weaknesses and shortcomings in procedural, organisational and other matters that are under the control of the unit, and which can be remedied internally,

- Describes the collective perception of staff and students of their roles not only in the unit and in the university but, where appropriate, in the social, cultural, scientific and economic development of the external community; regionally, nationally and internationally,
- Provides evidence of the views of external stakeholders,
- Identifies shortfalls in resources and provides an externally validated case for increased resource allocation,
- Facilitates (in conjunction with the peer review report) the preparation of an action plan by which the unit can continue to work for continuous quality improvement.

Regular, formal self-assessment is the core component of the Irish universities' quality framework, where the emphasis is placed on the immediate value to the unit of this analytical and self-critical process. The preparation of the self-assessment report acts as a stimulus and provides opportunities for reflection and consultation, enabling units to plan and manage strategically, and to align their development plans with those of the whole university. The main emphasis in all of the self-assessment processes is on both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative data are provided to support the evaluation, providing a statistical overview of the size and level of activities of the unit under review.

For university-wide thematic reviews, the self-assessment process is headed by a relevant high level staff member and the members of the self-assessment committee are drawn from all relevant parts of the institution.

Ideally the process followed by the unit in carrying out the self-assessment should be outlined in the completed self assessment report, including descriptions of the methods by which the views of all stakeholders, internal and external, were ascertained.

Representing the first major stage in the overall review procedure, the self-assessment report also provides the peer review group with essential information necessary to prepare for the review visit and for writing the review report. The preparation of self-assessment reports follows a similar process for all units within an institution but, of course, the balance and content of reports will vary greatly with the nature of the unit.

6.2 ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

At the outset of the process the unit usually appoints a co-ordinating committee that is responsible for preparing the self-assessment report. The committee is representative of all staff in the unit, has members from all categories of staff and may also include a user representative. Units are required to ensure that students are involved systematically in all appropriate aspects and stages of the self-assessment phase.

The committee is an operational one and meets frequently, usually every month at the start of the process, but often on a weekly basis when the report is being finalised. All staff members of the unit are kept fully informed about the self-assessment process and are given clearly signalled opportunities to contribute their views.

6.3 PREPARATION OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT

Each university has developed guidelines, templates, survey forms and other tools to facilitate the conduct of self-assessment exercises. In practice, to allow for internal diversity, these may be adapted to the specific needs of the unit under review.

In conducting the self-assessment and writing the report units are encouraged to adopt practices that are inclusive of all staff and to ensure that all internal stakeholder groups are consulted. There is an additional requirement that every effort must be made to ensure that the views of external stakeholders are ascertained, by questionnaire and/or focus group meeting and/or other means as deemed appropriate.

The units are encouraged to adopt a self-critical and reflective approach, in the spirit of quality improvement. The preparation of a concise report (typically no longer than 30 pages) is recommended, with additional appendices.

6.4 ROLE OF THE QUALITY OFFICE

During the preparation of the report the quality office is available to assist the unit self assessment committee in a variety of ways: to organise preliminary information sessions, to interpret the guidelines, to prepare suitable questionnaires, and to provide advice on the methodology of the self-assessment. The quality office forwards the self-assessment report to the members of the peer review group some weeks before the site visit.

6.5 EXAMPLES OF SELF-ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGIES

AN EXAMPLE OF A COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR AN ACADEMIC SCHOOL OR DEPARTMENT
Head of Unit
Academic staff members at a range of grades
Unit secretary/executive assistant
Member of technical/support staff (where appropriate)
Member of the full-time research staff
Postgraduate student(s)
Undergraduate student(s)
Subgroups may be formed with additional members from outside the core committee with specific responsibility for the preparation of aspects of the self-assessment report. All members participate in the drafting of the self-assessment report prior to its consideration by all members of the unit.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT: ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Quality Assurance: Information on

Mission and strategic objectives, including a copy of the unit's strategic plan and research plan

Unit details, facilities, budget, staffing etc.

Individual profiles of all staff: academic, research, administrative and support
(in an appendix or separate accompanying document)

Unit planning and organisation

Teaching and learning, feedback from students

Curriculum development and review, including a description of all programmes offered by the department
and the positioning of the associated qualifications within the National Framework of Qualifications

Research and scholarly activity, including a statement on the research strategy of the unit

Staff development

External relations

Support services

Methodology for preparation of the self-assessment report

AN EXAMPLE OF THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE CO-ORDINATING
COMMITTEE FOR AN ADMINISTRATIVE/SUPPORT SERVICE UNIT

Head of unit

Representative of staff at each grade

Unit secretary/executive assistant

For a large unit it may be necessary to have a number of subcommittees dealing with the co-ordination of the
preparation of the self-assessment report at the level of each section, and a unit co-ordinating committee consisting
of the chair/representative of each of the section committees.

AN EXAMPLE OF THE OUTLINE OF A SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR AN ADMINISTRATIVE/SUPPORT SERVICE UNIT

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT: ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Quality Assurance: Information on

Mission and strategic objectives

Unit details

Individual profiles of all staff (in an appendix or separate accompanying document)

Definition and description of services and procedures, including standard operating procedures and service level agreements, where applicable and existing

Budget and financial issues

Users of services

Identification of measures of performance

Feedback from users on quality of service

Review of objectives and performance

Staff development

Communication

External relations

Methodology for preparation of the self-assessment report

AN EXAMPLE OF THE OUTLINE OF A SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR A COLLEGE/FACULTY

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT: ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Quality Assurance: Information on

College/faculty details

Mission and strategic objectives

Strategic plan and research plan

Planning and budgeting

Organisation

Study programmes

Students

Teaching and learning

Research and scholarly activity

Staff

Quality systems

Support services

External relations

Methodology for preparation of the self-assessment report

AN EXAMPLE OF THE OUTLINE OF A SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR AN ACADEMIC PROGRAMME

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT: ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Quality Assurance: Information on

Details of study programme

Individual profiles of all staff involved in delivery of programme: academic, administrative and support (if necessary in an appendix or separate accompanying document)

Programme planning and organisation

Teaching and learning, feedback from students

Curriculum evaluation and review

Support services

Methodology employed in preparation of the self-assessment report

6.6 THE SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR AN ACADEMIC UNIT

DIVERSITY OF ACADEMIC UNITS

All academic schools or departments can be evaluated under headings related to management, teaching, scholarship/research and community contribution, and other academic units such as faculties/colleges, research institutes and undergraduate and postgraduate study programmes are sufficiently similar for the same basic academic review procedure outlined below (with modifications that are mostly self-evident) to be applied to them also.

MISSION AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Formulation of an agreed mission statement for an academic unit is a valuable exercise that facilitates shared ownership by academic, administrative, research, support and technical staff (permanent, contract, full-time and part-time) and students of the unit's plans and objectives.

The self-assessment report highlights strategic plans for improving the work of the unit, with emphases, as appropriate, on relevant aspects of administration, academic programmes, research, etc. These may have been developed during the self-assessment process, or increasingly, are normal constituents of the unit's organisational processes. Wide participation in the development (and regular revision) of plans also strengthens staff (and student) morale and commitment. Parallel consideration of university and college/faculty, school and programme plans is undertaken to ensure complementarity and, where possible, synergy between plans.

Where appropriate, and at suitable levels in the university, advisory boards with the participation of employers and other external stakeholders also provide valuable inputs.

ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

Information is provided in the self-assessment report on committee structures within the unit; mechanisms for budget allocation, workload measurement and assignment; means of communication with staff and students; relations with faculty offices and other administration and service units in the university.

The formal description of a unit's management structures and processes facilitates internal recognition that current arrangements and informal practices may be no longer suitable, especially in units that have grown and diversified significantly.

STAFF AND FACILITIES

Reports contain profiles of all staff (usually in appendices); a description and analysis of staff composition and status, including gender balance and age profile; and the physical facilities available to the unit.

There are also descriptions of how professional development needs of staff are systematically identified and

supported, particularly in relation to individual aspirations and how the skill needs of the unit are assessed. The report also catalogues staff participation in professional developmental activities; evaluates the performance management systems in place; assesses the involvement of academic staff in teaching development activities; and identifies where improvements should be made.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Also included are plans for improving the quality of all activities of the unit; the strategies for achieving these aims; the unit's proposals for measuring its success in achieving its aims, with special reference to improving the quality of teaching and learning and enhancing the quality of research.

TEACHING AND LEARNING, AND FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS

The report describes and analyses all taught programmes, teaching and learning evaluations, feedback from student questionnaires, external examiners and employers/professional bodies. Student statistical data for all programmes is also provided.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW

Details of programmes and modules are provided, including specific reference to the positioning of each associated qualification in the National Framework of Qualifications, with sufficient information provided to allow the reviewers to understand the appropriateness of the level and type of the award. Increasingly, the procedures used also request demonstration of adherence to the Bologna process and the National Framework, including the implementation of a learning outcomes approach to teaching and learning. (This will be required by 2010.)

The unit also describes the processes by which the curricula of its programmes are developed and reviewed on a periodic basis. The benchmarking of the programmes against similar programmes elsewhere in Ireland and internationally is an important option. Units are also asked to describe how all stakeholders (internal as well as external) are specifically involved in this review process and how often this is undertaken.

RESEARCH & SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY

The report provides evidence of research activities in the previous five years, and brief outlines of the research interests and summarised outputs of each staff member are included. Data provided include information on all publications, research grants obtained, research degrees awarded, both Masters and PhD, and the research strategic plan for the unit.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The unit describes its relations with other groups within the university and the wider community, with other educational institutions in Ireland and abroad, private businesses, public agencies, professional bodies and employers. Evidence of the views of external stakeholders should be provided.

SUPPORT SERVICES

This section details the views of the unit on the effectiveness of the student and staff support services in the university, including the library and IT support. Units may include reference to their involvement in collaborations with these services with the objective of assisting their improvement.

COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRES

Copies or samples of questionnaires completed by students and academic, administrative and support staff, and the results of such surveys conducted may be included with the report, but, alternatively, these may be made available to the review group for consultation during their visit.

6.7 THE SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR AN ADMINISTRATIVE/SERVICE UNIT

QUALITY ASSURANCE

In many respects the work of university administrative, service and support units corresponds to activities in the private and wider public sectors and equivalents of the tried and tested quality assurance practices found there have been developed for use in the corresponding university settings. A good self assessment report will demonstrate awareness of external good practices and describe the quality assurance procedures in place, supplying sample data as appropriate (either in the report or during the review visit).

DIVERSITY

The administrative and support services in a university are diverse, each with its own distinctive roles, objectives and work practices. Consideration of the differences between, for example, the roles of the Library, the Registrar's Office, Student Services, or the Computer Centre/IT Services Unit highlights this point. Units that operate relatively independently may be large and perform multiple tasks and/or offer a range of services or, alternatively, perform a single function with only one or two staff members. Therefore, university guidelines for such reviews must be highly flexible. Externally defined quality management systems are also used in some cases.

MISSION AND STRATEGIC PLAN

The self assessment report for an administrative, service or support unit highlights the mission and roles of the unit, a self-critical analysis of the functions and activities of the unit and strategies for improving the work of the unit. A strategic plan that allows for anticipated developments and responses to them is included, with emphases, as appropriate, on relevant aspects of organisation, administration, etc. Like for academic units, these are increasingly normal constituents of the unit's organisational processes that are revised regularly.

DEFINITION OF SERVICES, PROCEDURES AND PERFORMANCE

The report describes the key functions and activities of the unit and indicates the nature and scope of services provided to its clients. In addition, the report identifies appropriate measures of performance that facilitate the unit in assessing the extent to which it is meeting its key aims and objectives.

DEFINITION OF USERS OF SERVICES

The report identifies the unit's key user groups, the individuals and other units to whom it provides a service, both within the institution and external to it.

FEEDBACK FROM USERS ON QUALITY OF SERVICE

The report describes and analyses feedback from users by means of questionnaires, interviews and focus groups, as appropriate.

REVIEW OF OBJECTIVES AND PERFORMANCE

In this section the unit is asked to review its performance and the achievement of its objectives; and to consider whether changes are appropriate in order to fulfil its core mission.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The report considers how staff development needs are systematically identified and supported in relation to individual aspirations, the needs of the unit and institutional requirements; evaluates staff participation in developmental activities, indicating the role these activities play in attaining the strategic goals of the unit.

COMMUNICATION

The report considers the unit's internal and external communications systems, including mechanisms for communication between the unit and its user groups.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

In this section the unit reflects on the extent to which staff members contribute to the development of the university, the development and maintenance of standards in their particular area, and the broader needs of society at local, regional and national level.

COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRES

The report includes copies or samples of questionnaires completed by 'customers' including students and academic, administrative and support staff, and the results of such surveys conducted.

7

PEER REVIEW OF
A UNIVERSITY UNIT
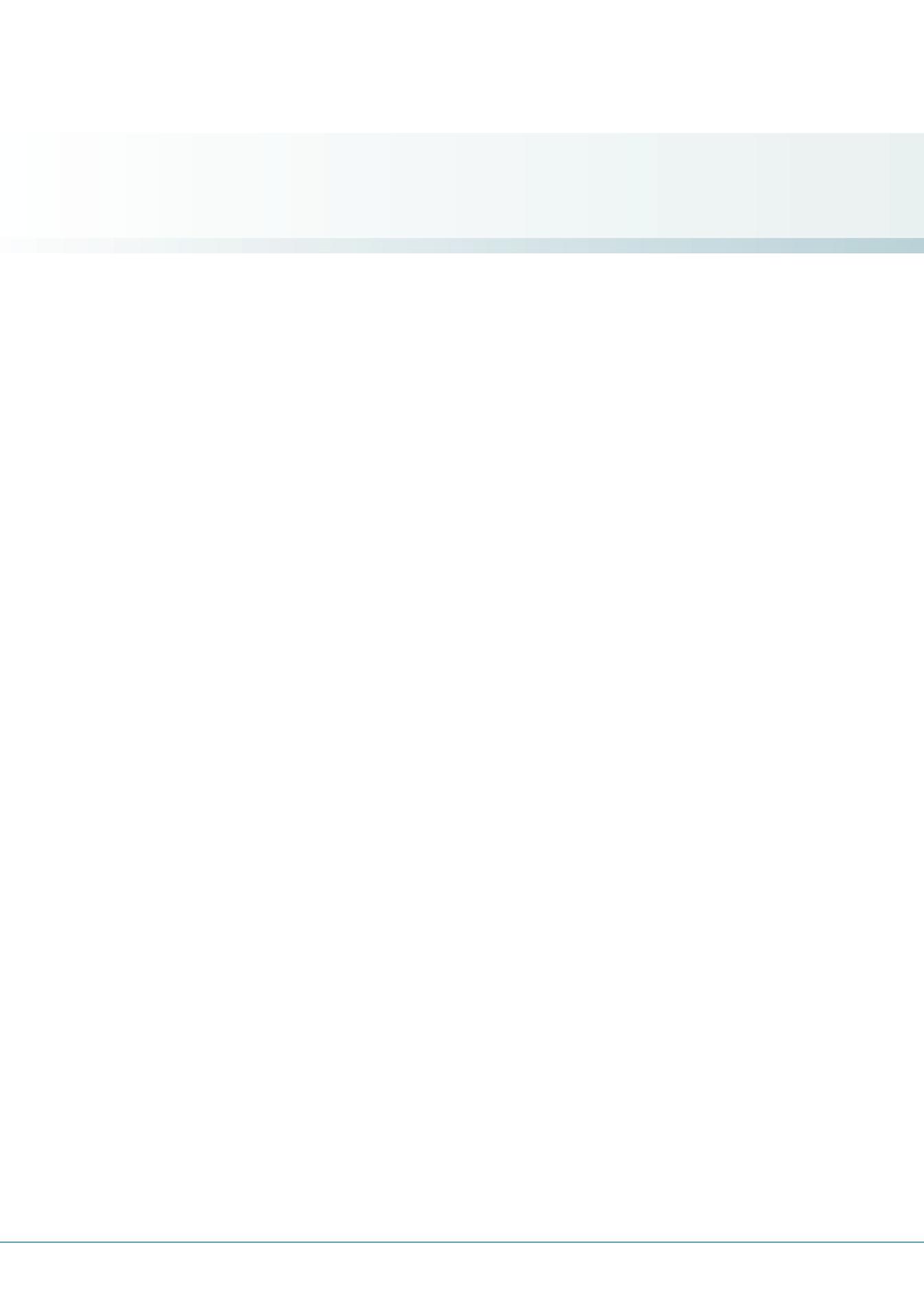
PEER REVIEW OF A UNIVERSITY UNIT

"Since Ireland and its universities must now compete at European and global levels, it might be useful for units under review to use the opportunity to benchmark themselves against a wider variety of universities and higher education systems, and to select peer reviewers on that basis."

EUA 'Review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities – Sectoral Report' (HEA/IUQB, 2005)

7.1 PEER REVIEW GROUP

Soon after the completion of the self-assessment report the unit is visited by a peer review group that includes at least three external experts who are capable of making national and international comparisons with respect to the activities of the unit. The group may also include up to two senior staff members of the university, one of whom will normally act as rapporteur. The fundamental issues dealt with by the peer review group are once again contained in the four basic questions posed earlier in Chapter 6, with special emphasis on the final two questions: *"How do you know it works?"* and, especially, *"How do you change in order to improve?"*.

For most, if not all, academic units and programmes a representative of an organisation that employs a significant number of graduates should be included. For administrative and support service units external peer reviewers are generally experts from a relevant professional background with appropriate expertise in the area under review. The independence of external review group members is assured by excluding potential reviewers who are currently associated with the unit, for example as a research collaborator or external examiner or commercial client.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the peer review group are to:

- Clarify and verify details in the self-assessment report,
- Verify how well the aims and objectives of the unit are fulfilled, having regard to the available resources, and comment on the appropriateness of the unit's mission, objectives and strategic plan,
- Confirm the unit's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges as outlined in the self-assessment report,
- Discuss any perceived strengths and weaknesses not identified in the self-assessment report,
- Check the suitability of working environments,
- Comment on the recommendations for improvement proposed by the unit in its self-assessment,
- Make any additional recommendations for improvement, as deemed appropriate, but with due consideration for resource implications of the recommendations.

FUNCTIONS

Typically, the functions of the peer review group are to:

• Study the self-assessment report,

• Visit the unit over two to three days, meet staff, students, senior university officers, graduates, employers, and representatives of all categories of users of the services of the unit, as appropriate, including representatives of external stakeholders,

• Clarify and verify details in the self-assessment report, and consider other relevant documentation,

• Review the activities of the unit in the light of the self-assessment report,

• Prepare a draft report and present the main findings in an exit presentation to the staff of the unit, and

• Write the peer review group report.

The peer review group report is a crucial element in ensuring the impact of the quality review process. This report presents conclusions on the quality of the unit's activities and recommendations for improvement based on consideration of the self-assessment documentation and the outcomes of the site visit.

7.2 SELECTION OF THE PEER REVIEW GROUP

Normally the selection of members of the peer review group is made by the university committee responsible for quality assurance. The selection is made independently of the unit to be reviewed by a means determined by the university committee responsible for quality assurance. A review group always includes a majority of external (national and international) experts and may include senior staff of the university who are not members of, or closely associated with, the unit under review.

As an example, a typical peer review group for an academic unit might include:

• Two external experts, one from abroad and one from another Irish university,

• A representative of an employer group or professional body relevant to the unit under review, and

• One or two internal senior academics from departments not closely associated with the unit being reviewed.

The Chair of the group is generally appointed by the group itself by agreement at the commencement of the site visit, usually from among the external members of the group. Alternatively, the chair may an external member, selected in advance of the visit.

7.3 CONTACT WITH THE PEER REVIEW GROUP

The quality office contacts the nominated members of the review group to confirm their participation. Once the full membership of the group is confirmed, the quality office informs the unit accordingly. At this stage the quality office sends background information about the university and the unit to the review group, as well as the university guidelines for quality review and some background on the statutory aspects of the

quality review process in Irish universities. All contact with the peer review group, including planning for the site visit, is made directly by the quality office.

The guidelines and terms of reference supplied to peer review teams encourage a broad view of quality, including appropriate emphases on research, interdisciplinarity and internationalisation.

The peer review group visits the unit over a one to three day period, but the length of the visit reflects the size of the unit and the complexity of the activities of the unit. The visit, which is central to the peer review process, is carefully planned and normally takes place during the semester or term, ensuring that students, among other key stakeholders, are available to meet with the review group.

7.4. STRUCTURE OF THE SITE VISIT

The detailed structure and timetable of the site visit are organised by the quality office in consultation with the unit's co-ordinating committee. The timetable is agreed as far as possible in advance of the visit. Students, employers, external stakeholders and other users of the unit who will meet the review group are selected by means of a consultation process with the quality office.

During the course of the visit the review group usually:

- Meets with the unit co-ordinating committee, the head of the unit, members of the staff not on the unit co-ordinating committee, past and present students (including postgraduates where appropriate), users of the unit, and other external stakeholders as appropriate, such as representatives of employers,
- Visits the facilities that support the activities of the unit, including as appropriate, lecture rooms, laboratories, offices, the library and other relevant services and
- Completes the first draft of the report and presents its principal findings and recommendations to a meeting of all available staff of the unit prior to departure.

A typical timetable for a peer review group visit appears in Appendix 4.

7.5 THE PEER REVIEW GROUP REPORT

In keeping with the formative nature of the process review groups express their recommendations in a positive manner that encourages quality improvement. Such an approach is in keeping with the spirit of an exercise in which an ethos of partnership and trust ensures that real enhancement can result.

As part of the report the peer review group is asked (for example):

- To confirm and comment on the details of the Self-Assessment Report,
- To provide an overview of the present state of the department/unit under review,
- To comment briefly on each aspect of the department's/unit's activities,
- To acknowledge achievements and quality where they exist,
- To point out unambiguously any deficiencies or inadequacies in management and operations that might be eliminated or ameliorated,

- To identify critical resource limitations (if any) that bar the way to successful improvements,
- To comment on all plans for improvement that the department/unit has made in the self-sssessment report, and
- To emphasise the recommendations for improvement that the Peer Review Group consider appropriate.

The report is written as an independent document. In the report summary any deficiencies identified should be categorised as follows:

1. Strategic i.e. involving University policies, regulations or practices, or dependent on the college/faculty or other schools/departments, where appropriate,
2. Due to limited resources, and/or
3. Caused by poor management, policies, or operations within the department, and rectifiable with current resources.

A template for the report is supplied by the quality office as an aid to efficient completion of the report and to ensure that all major aspects are covered in the report. The report may also include any other issues that the peer review group deems appropriate. The review group will generally identify the strengths and weaknesses of the unit, point to examples of good practice to be disseminated throughout the university, and make constructive recommendations on matters that require improvement.

When the draft report of the review group has been completed a copy is sent to the quality officer, who forwards it to the Chair of the unit's co-ordinating committee and Head of Unit. The Chair circulates it to all members of the committee and invites the committee to indicate any errors of fact. Although the actual details and series of events varies among universities, generally the quality office then sends the final report to the relevant university authorities/committees for consideration, and forwarding to the governing authority. The unit also receives a copy of the final report for dissemination to all members of staff of the unit. The unit is required to respond initially to the report, and to indicate how it intends to implement the recommendations of the report.

7.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

In the experience of many of the universities to date, there has been remarkable consistency in recommendations dealing with departmental planning, organisation, teaching and learning, and student care. These recommendations point to an international consensus as to what constitutes best practice in these important areas and their implementation is often supportive of institutional strategic objectives. Recurring recommendations in earlier years (e.g. support for teaching staff development or better provision of information in support of decision making) have also led directly to new institution-wide policies and initiatives.

7.7 QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLANS

Without a consequential action plan, a quality review could easily have little longer-term effect. How such plans are developed and agreed varies, but the following sequence of events is reasonably representative.

Following consideration of the report and its recommendations by the relevant university committee the unit is asked to develop a quality improvement plan, usually according to guidelines developed by the quality office. The quality improvement plan must be a realistic one with specific achievable actions, timelines and, where feasible, measurable outcomes. The unit is required to agree this plan with the budget holder for the unit (Vice-President/Dean of Faculty/Head of College). This plan is used as a basis for actions and also for the follow-up review that takes place subsequently. The plan will also include actions to be taken by the University, where appropriate and agreed. In some of the universities this plan is approved by the relevant university committee responsible for quality assurance.

7.8 PUBLICATION

The Universities Act 1997 provides for publication "in such form or manner as a governing authority thinks fit" of findings arising out of the application of quality assurance procedures, and the governing authority is required to implement the findings having regard to the resources available, unless it would be unreasonable to do so.

Following approval by the governing authority, peer review group reports are published on the universities' web sites. However, self-assessment reports are confidential to each university and thus these reports are not published or made available publicly. This is in line with international practice and is conducive to honesty in the self-critical analysis required in all self-evaluation exercises.

Consequential action plans and progress reports are also published by some of the universities.

8 FOLLOW-UP TO A QUALITY REVIEW OF A UNIVERSITY UNIT

FOLLOW-UP TO A QUALITY REVIEW OF A UNIVERSITY UNIT

"Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently"

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ENQA, 2005)

In order to ensure that action is taken on the recommendations in the peer review reports, the quality office monitors the development, completion and approval by the unit (and the relevant university officers) of the consequential quality improvement plan. In addition, through the local quality committee, implementation of this plan is monitored by means of subsequent reports and/or internal reviews.

For example, a follow-up exercise may be conducted within eighteen months to two years of the review, without external participation. The head of the unit submits a report on the actions taken since the review with (if necessary) the reasons why agreed actions have not been completed.

Each progress report may be considered by the university committee responsible for quality assurance (often a committee of governing authority), which may comment on it, sometimes requesting further information from the unit and/or relevant services within the university.

In some cases progress reports (as well as the original review report and quality improvement plan) may also be submitted directly to the governing authority of the university for consideration and approval, thus assuring the authority's continued responsibility for the implementation of recommendations arising from the quality reviews.

9 EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE IN IRISH UNIVERSITIES

EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE IN IRISH UNIVERSITIES

"An appropriate balance has been sought between the creation and development of internal quality cultures, and the role which external quality assurance procedures may play"

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, (ENQA, 2005)

9.1 BACKGROUND

In some national jurisdictions regular reviews of universities by external bodies are long established, for example ten-year re-accreditation reviews by regional associations in the US. Since the mid 1990s, many countries throughout Europe have established new external quality assurance agencies to conduct evaluations at university level.

Irish universities are required under Section 35 of the Universities Act 1997 to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance and, more relevantly, to arrange for a review of the effectiveness of these procedures *"from time to time and in any case at least every 15 years"*. These reviews of effectiveness are designated in the Act as the responsibility of the individual governing authorities. In this way the autonomy permitted in the organisation of internal reviews is complemented by accountability.

However, the Irish universities recognised the need to go beyond the strict requirements of the Act and decided to establish a new body responsible for the implementation of external quality assurance processes.   In 2002, therefore, the governing authorities of all seven universities authorised the establishment of the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB, see below) and delegated to the IUQB the function of arranging regular reviews of the effectiveness of quality procedures, which are institutional in their scope. Internationally, such reviews would be commonly characterised as 'institutional quality audits'.

9.2 THE IRISH UNIVERSITIES QUALITY BOARD

The IUQB is a full legal entity, incorporated as a non-profit making company. The Board of Directors has seventeen members, with members from outside the universities in the majority. Meetings are convened by an independent Chair who is nominated jointly by the Irish Universities Association and the Higher Education Authority. Members from universities comprise nominees of the Irish Universities, nominees of other stakeholders in Irish higher education and nominees representative of university education in Europe and North America. IUQB is funded by subscriptions from the seven Irish universities and by an annual grant from the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

PRIMARY AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To maintain and promote co-operation between the Irish universities in quality assurance procedures and processes, supporting the universities in their goal of achieving a culture of quality through continuous improvement in all their activities,

- To arrange regular, cyclical reviews or evaluations of the effectiveness of the quality assurance and quality improvement procedures in the Irish universities as may be required by law,

- To identify international best practice in maintaining and improving quality and to promote its adoption by the Irish universities,

- With the co-operation of the Irish universities and other higher education partners, to organise and direct cross-university projects in quality improvement, with the goal of establishing and publishing national guidelines of good practice in specific areas,

- To co-operate and interact with national and international organisations in relation to quality assurance in higher education,

- To provide a source of information to stakeholders on important Irish, European and other international developments in the quality assurance of higher education.

CORE ACTIVITIES

IUQB performs the following 4 core activities in relation to quality assurance in the Irish university sector:

- Conducting regular external reviews of Irish universities including reviews of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures in individual universities in accordance with Section 35 of the Universities Act 1997 and consistent with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG),

- By means of sector-wide projects (see below), establishing good practice and publishing national guidelines of Good Practice in aspects of Teaching and Learning, Research and Strategic Planning/Management,

- Co-operating with national and international organisations such as IHEQN, ENQA and EUA,

- Disseminating information to stakeholders through the IUQB website, newsletter, seminars and workshops and an annual conference.

QUALITY ASSURANCE ACTIVITIES (INSTITUTIONAL AND SECTORAL REVIEWS)

In October 2006, after consultation with the universities, the following programme of reviews was agreed:

- 2008: Thematic evaluation of the organisation of PhD Programmes in the individual Irish universities,

- 2009-10: A second omnibus round of evaluations of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures in the individual Irish universities. By extension this will include the quality assurance provisions agreed by a university for any linked college, recognised college or other higher education institution where a university makes awards or agrees quality assurance procedures. This review will take place 5 years after the first review and well within the 15-year timeframe required by the Universities Act 1997.

Further thematic reviews are envisaged in 2011 and beyond, which may include topics such as the mechanisms for approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes, and the external examiner system.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES

In keeping with the principles of its establishment and the spirit of the quality assurance legislation for Irish universities, IUQB balances its activities between quality assurance and quality improvement.

SECTORAL PROJECTS

In accordance with its objective of increasing the level of inter-university co-operation in developing their quality assurance processes, IUQB has, since 2003, commissioned a series of National Guidelines of Good Practice. The aim of the series is to establish and publish good practice for Irish universities in the key areas of teaching and learning, research and strategic planning/management. The booklets are the result of inter-university projects, supported by the quality offices of the universities, on topics deemed to be of central importance. These projects are organised and coordinated by the IUQB with the close collaboration of the universities, and funded by the HEA.

The selection of the projects is based on recommendations for quality improvement contained in (a) the internal quality assurance reviews of academic and administrative units organised by the universities as part of their statutory responsibilities (b) the IUQB/HEA jointly-commissioned external review of quality assurance procedures in the Irish university sector and the external reviews of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures in the individual universities.

The following booklets of National Guidelines of Good Practice have been published:

* *Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Universities (IUQB, 2005)*
* *Good Practice in the Organisation of Student Support Services in Irish Universities (IUQB, 2006).*

In 2007 and beyond, the series will extend to the publication of National Guidelines of Good Practice in the areas of:

* Mathematics Teaching and Learning
* Strategic Planning in Academic Departments
* Quality Improvement in Teaching and Learning
* Academic Workloads
* Institutional Research
* Student Evaluation and Feedback Mechanisms in Quality Assurance

ANNUAL CONFERENCES

The IUQB annual conferences are held each year in one of the universities. They have become standard events attended by academics and administrators from the universities and the institutes of technology, and officers from the regulatory agencies. After the highly successful first conference on a very broad agenda, more specific themes were selected:

2003: Quality Improvement in Irish Universities, University College Cork

2004: Ireland in the Europe of knowledge, National University of Ireland, Galway

2005: Engaging students: Universities, Communities and the Quality of the Student Experience, National University of Ireland, Maynooth

2006: Advancing Research in Ireland, Dublin City University

2007: Institutional Research, National University of Ireland, Galway

EXTERNAL REVIEW OF IUQB

Consistent with the European Standards and Guidelines, IUQB will undergo an external quality review, every five years. In October 2006, the Board of IUQB requested the HEA to commission the first such review, to take place in 2007–08.

9.3 REVIEW OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN IRISH UNIVERSITIES (2004–05)

BACKGROUND

In addition to the requirements of Section 35 of the Universities Act 1997 (see above), under Section 49 of the Act the Higher Education Authority (HEA) may initiate reviews of quality assurance procedures in the universities. Separate legislation (Qualifications Act, 1999) provides for the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) to have a consultative role in relation to any such HEA-initiated reviews. In 2002, the HEA announced its intention to carry out 'Section 49 reviews' of all seven universities.

In 2003 the HEA and the IUQB jointly appointed the European University Association (EUA) as the reviewing body. The EUA, which is highly experienced in the organisation of reviews of higher education institutions, undertook to carry out coordinated reviews of all seven universities, configured both to allow the HEA to exercise its power under Section 49 of the Universities Act and the IUQB to fulfil its delegated role under Section 35 of the same Act.

PROCESS ADOPTED

Accordingly, preparation for the first formal reviews of quality assurance procedures and their effectiveness in the seven Irish universities commenced in January 2004, self study reports were submitted in April, all site visits were completed by December 2004 (a typical timetable for a site visit is given in Appendix 5) and the resulting review reports were published in April 2005.

Under the terms of reference for the reviews, the EUA review teams were requested to report on the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures in each university and the implementation of findings arising out of the application of those procedures, in the context of the university's overall institutional decision-making and strategic planning. It was further requested that these key elements should be placed within an institutional context, allowing the review teams to comment on institutional obstacles and success factors for effective internal quality management.

In addition, the HEA, in consultation with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, established a High Level Reference Panel (HLRP), comprised of stakeholders from wider society and the economy, to provide an external perspective on the social, cultural and economic context within which the Irish universities operate. This panel had extensive discussions with the EUA review teams and went on to prepare a 'reflections' document on the final EUA review reports (HLR, 2005).

CONSISTENCY OF THE PROCESS WITH INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICE

It is worth noting that, though these reviews preceded the adoption in May 2005 of the ESG, they were consistent with these standards and guidelines. For example:

- As institutional audits, the reviews were designed to take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance procedures in place in the universities (ESG 2.1). As such, if the universities were able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance processes, and if those processes were shown to properly assure quality and standards, any subsequent (external review) processes might be less intrusive than otherwise.
- The aims and objectives of the reviews were designed and developed through a process involving key stakeholders, including the universities. The procedures that were finally agreed were published and contained explicit statements of the aims and objectives of the processes as well as a description of the procedures to be used (ESG 2.2).
- The nomination and appointment of the members of the external review teams were undertaken autonomously and independently from the government and universities and while relevant stakeholders in the universities were consulted, the final reports of the reviews of effectiveness were received by IUQB (ESG 3.6).
- The review process included a self-assessment, an external assessment by a group of experts and site visits, the publication of reports, including recommendations and a follow-up process. (ESG 3.7).

THE REPORTS AND THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS

The EUA review teams saw *"the systemic organisation and promotion of quality assurance at the initiative of the universities themselves"* as being *"unparalleled in any other country in Europe, or indeed in the United States and Canada"*. They deemed the system *"to strike the right tone and combination of public interest, accountability and university autonomy"*.

The review teams also acknowledged that the Irish universities *"have established a quality assurance system which is functioning, well organised and yielding results"* and to *"have gone well beyond the legislative requirement contained in the Universities Act 1997, and have put in place a system which holds much promise for the development of higher education in Ireland"*.

The Sectoral Report (HEA/IUQB, 2005) concluded that it was time to move to a new phase that *"should build on the existing system, linking it more closely to strategic management, and feeding its outputs into the ongoing development of the universities, individually and collectively"*.

The Sectoral Report invited the universities to consider whether the next cycle of evaluation should focus on weaknesses identified during the first round and other issues not always fully covered in the first cycle.

The weaknesses identified included:

• Students having almost no formal input into monitoring or evaluating the quality of teaching and learning in Irish universities,
• Little evidence to suggest that the QA evaluations are explicitly linked to other more specific QA mechanisms for teaching and learning,
• No system in place for the performance appraisal of individual staff members, with the possibility of incentives or sanctions,
• Not linking the quality evaluation cycle with the length of any other cycle, such as strategic planning,
• A dearth of capacity for institutional analysis and monitoring,
• Little substantial evidence of systematic follow-up or monitoring at university level of the quality improvement plans of the various units.

All of the 29 recommendations in the Sectoral Report are listed in Appendix 8.

In April 2005, the full set of review reports of the *Review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities* and the HLRP 'Reflections' document were launched by the Minister for Science and Education, Ms Mary Hanafin, T.D. Following the launch, the individual universities reports were made available on the university websites and the Sectoral and HLRP reports were published on the HEA and IUQB sites.

FOLLOW-UP TO THE REPORTS

Following receipt of the reports, the IUQB established a task force to work with the universities in implementing the recommendations contained in the individual university reports and in the sectoral report. In 2006, the universities published follow-up reports on their institutional evaluations detailing actions taken to implement the recommendations in the reports. All reports emanating from the review were also published on the IUQB website.

This was the first time that EUA-organised reviews of higher education institutions took the form of a complete review of all universities in a country. The success of the process can be judged by the fact that the EUA have since been commissioned to undertake third level system reviews in Catalonia, Portugal and Slovakia.

The work undertaken as follow-up to the EUA review, both at individual university and collective levels, has provided significant impetus to the ongoing development of quality assurance and improvement activities across the Irish universities. It has served to underline the existing strengths of the system, but also to highlight significant areas for improvement, particularly in terms of bringing different planning and quality mechanisms and tools into closer synergy. This greater coherence is helping with activities such as strategic planning and reform, but also with providing enhanced delivery of outcomes for students, staff and society.

10 ANTICIPATED DEVELOPMENTS
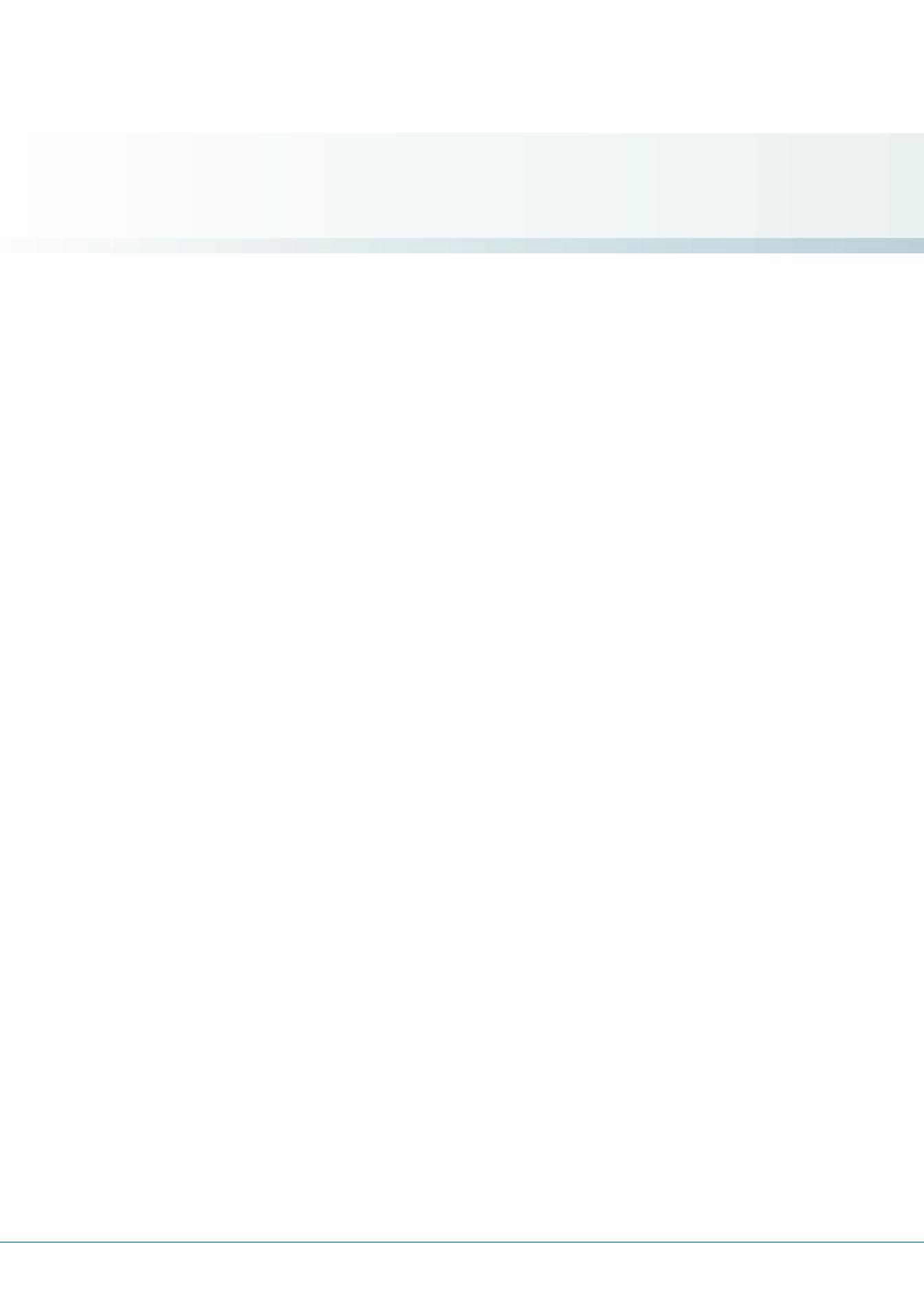
ANTICIPATED DEVELOPMENTS

"The Irish universities have established a quality assurance system which is functioning, well organised and now yielding results. Now that this system exists and has been operating successfully for several years, it is time to move to a new phase. This should build on the existing system, linking it more closely to strategic management, and feeding its outputs into the ongoing development of the universities, individually and collectively."

EUA 'Review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities – Sectoral Report' (HEA/IUQB, 2005)

The review of quality assurance in the Irish universities in 2005 found a well-functioning quality assurance and quality improvement system that is compliant with national legislation and international norms.

The system has continued to operate and by the end of 2007, all the universities will have largely completed and published reviews of all their academic and adminsitrative units, and second cycle reviews will have commenced.

Developments in the Bologna process, including the embedding of the ESG and the establishment of the European Register of External Quality Assurance Agencies, will continue to identify areas for development.

Finally, the second review of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures in the Irish universities planned for 2009-2010 will assess objectively how the system has progressed and how much has been learned from the first national review.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

RELEVANT EXTRACTS FROM THE UNIVERSITIES ACT, 1997
AND THE QUALIFICATIONS (EDUCATION AND TRAINING) ACT, 1999

Universities Act

Section 35 Quality assurance
(1) A governing authority, in consultation with the academic council, shall, as soon as practicable after the governing authority is established under this Act and at such other times as it thinks fit, require the chief officer to establish procedures for quality assurance aimed at improving the quality of education and related services provided by the university.

(2) The procedures shall include

(a) the evaluation, at regular intervals and in any case not less than once in every ten years or such longer period as may be determined by the university in agreement with An tÚdarás, of each department and, where appropriate, faculty of the university and any service provided by the university, by employees of the university in the first instance and by persons, other than employees, who are competent to make national and international comparisons on the quality of teaching and research and the provision of other services at university level, and

(b) assessment by those, including students, availing of the teaching, research and other services provided by the university, and shall provide for the publication in such form and manner as the governing authority thinks fit of findings arising out of the application of those procedures.

(3) A governing authority shall implement any findings arising out of an evaluation carried out in accordance with procedures established under this section unless, having regard to the resources available to the university or for any other reason, it would, in the opinion of the governing authority, be impractical or unreasonable to do so.

(4) A governing authority shall, from time to time, and in any case at least every fifteen years, having regard to the resources available to the university and having consulted with An tÚdarás, arrange for a review of the effectiveness of the procedures provided for by this section and the implementation of the findings arising out of the application of those procedures.

(5) A governing authority, in a report prepared in accordance with section 41, shall publish the results of a review conducted under sub-section (4).

Section 49 Review
An tÚdarás, in furtherance of its general functions under section 3 of the Higher Education Authority Act, 1971, shall assist the universities in achieving the objectives of Chapters IV, VII and VIII of Part III and may review

(a) strategic development plans prepared in accordance with section 34,

(b) the procedures established in accordance with section 35,

(c) the policies set out in the statement provided for in section 36 and their implementation, and

(d) the matters referred to in section 50, having regard to any guidelines issued in accordance with that section and information provided in accordance with section 51, and may, following consultation with the universities, publish a report, in such form and manner as it thinks fit, on the outcome of any such review.

Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999

Section 40 (5) Role of Universities
In performing its functions under sections 35 and 49(b) of the Act of 1997, An tÚdarás [the HEA] shall consult with the Authority [NQAI].

APPENDIX 2

Quality	Actuality	Legislative provision: Text of Section 35 (1-3) of the Universities Act 1997
Ownership	Individual Universities	(1) A governing authority, in consultation with the academic council, shall, as soon as practicable after the governing authority is established under this Act and at such other times as it thinks fit, require the chief officer to establish
Procedures	Quality Assurance	procedures for quality assurance
Objective	Quality Improvement	aimed at improving the quality of education and related services provided by the university.
Cycle	10 years	(2) The procedures shall include (a) the evaluation, at regular intervals and in any case not less than once in every 10 years or such longer period as may be determined by the university in agreement with an tÚdarás of
Focus	Academic and Service Units	each department and, where appropriate, faculty of the university and any service provided by the university
Elements	Self-assessment	by employees of the university in the first instance and by persons, other than employees, who are
	Peer Review	competent to make national and international comparisons on the quality of
Aspects	Teaching, Research, Services	teaching and research and the provision of services at university level, and
Stakeholders	Students, other users	(b) assessment by those, including students, availing of the teaching, research and other service provided by the university
Outcomes	Publication	and shall provide for the publication in such form and manner as the governing authority thinks fit of findings arising out of the application of those procedures
	Implementation	(3) A governing authority shall implement any findings arising out of an evaluation carried out in accordance with procedures established under this section unless, having regard to the resources available to the university or for any other reason, it would, in the opinion of the governing authority, be impractical or unreasonable to do so.

REVIEW OF PROCEDURES

Quality	Actuality	Legislative provision: Text of Section 35 (4-5) of the Universities Act 1997
Initiator	University	(4) A governing authority
Partner	HEA	(having consulted with An tUdaras)
Cycle	15 years	shall, from time to time and in any case at least very 15 years,
Objectives	Audit	arrange for a review of the effectiveness of the procedures provided for by this section
	Implementation	and the implementation of the findings arising out of the application of those procedures
Outcome	Publication	(5) A governing authority, in a report prepared in accordance with section 41, shall publish the results of a review conducted under subsection (4)

Quality	Actuality	Legislative provision: Text of Section 49 of the Universities Act 1997
Initiator	HEA	An tUdaras, in furtherance of its general functions under section 3 of the Higher Education Authority Act, 1971
Partner	Universities	shall assist the universities in achieving the objectives of Chapters IV, VII and VIII of Part III and may
Objectives	Review	review the procedures established in accordance with section 35 and may
Consultation	Universities	following consultation with the universities
	NQAI	[in performing its function under section 35 and 49(b) of the Universities Act of 1997, an tUdaras shall consult with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland]*
Outcome	Publication	publish a report, in such form and manner as it thinks fit, on the outcome of any such review.

* Text of Section 40 of the Qualifications (Education and Training Act, 1999)

APPENDIX 3

POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN IRELAND, 1967–2007

In order to provide a context for current developments in the area of quality in higher education in Ireland, it is useful to trace the chronology of relevant national policy and legislation over the past forty years or so.

Report of the Commission on Higher Education, 1967

In 1960 the Irish government established the Commission on Higher Education. Having conducted extensive research within Ireland and abroad the Commission reported in 1967. In its report the Commission highlighted the role of government as the primary source of finance to the higher education institutions. The Commission drew attention to the lack of coherent planning in higher education and to the absence of an overall planning authority for the sector. It recognised the balance needed between university autonomy and public accountability. The Commission proposed that a planning and regulatory agency be interposed between government and the higher education institutions. The agency would plan and administer the block grant to the institutions in addition to presiding over the planning and expansion of higher education.

Higher Education Authority Act, 1971

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) was statutorily established in 1971. It is the national funding agency for universities, institutes of technology and some other higher education institutes in Ireland. The respective roles of the universities and the HEA in relation to quality assurance were first made explicit by the Universities Act 1997.

National Council for Educational Awards Act, 1979

In 1979, the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA) was given statutory powers over educational awards in a range of non-university institutions funded directly by the Department of Education. The NCEA was empowered to accredit institutions, validate and review programmes of study and to ensure that approved courses had equivalent standards to similar courses in the universities. The NCEA developed quality assurance procedures based on institutional accreditation, the initial validation and periodic review of programmes, and the appointment of external examiners. The role of the NCEA in relation to higher education has now been replaced by that of HETAC.

Charting Our Education Future: Government White Paper, 1995

The White Paper addressed quality assurance in the higher education sector under the general heading of accountability. The White Paper noted that the report of the National Education Convention in 1994 had referred to the development of good quality assurance procedures as being "a central task of management in higher education institutions". It stressed that quality is the "hallmark that underpins the status and mobility of graduates both nationally and internationally". The White Paper acknowledged that quality assurance was a complex issue requiring a careful balance between autonomy and accountability. It referred to the widespread acceptance in higher education of the need for accountability in relation to public funds and the fears that such accountability and efficiency could lead to a diminution of academic control of key academic matters. It was proposed that the responsibility for establishing quality assurance procedures should rest with the institutions themselves. In addition, the institutions directly funded by the HEA would develop general auditing systems. These systems would involve, on a periodic basis, the production of individual internal self-assessments by the faculties or departments involved, followed in each case by an evaluation by national and international peers. The implementation of the recommendations of such audits would be monitored and appropriate performance indicators developed to allow comparisons with national and international benchmarks.

Universities Act, 1997

This was the first piece of legislation to set out specifically the responsibilities of the universities in relation to quality assurance. The Act states that one of the objects of a university is to promote "the highest standards in, and quality of, teaching and research". The legislation requires each university to "establish procedures for quality assurance aimed at improving the quality of education and related services provided by the university". The universities are required to achieve this by a combination of self-assessment and peer review. The universities are required to publish and implement the findings of the evaluations, having regard to the resources available to them. The responsibility for establishing the review timetable and for publication rests with the university governing authorities.

The HEA, following consultation with the universities, may review and report on the procedures established by a university for evaluating the quality of its teaching and research and other services that it provides.

Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999

This Act established the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), together with the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). The Act provides for the establishment of a national framework of qualifications and awards. It also deals with issues of quality assurance and includes some amendments to the Universities Act 1997. The HEA is required to consult with the NQAI in performing its review functions under the Universities Act but its role and the autonomy of the universities recognised by the Universities Act are not otherwise affected. The NQAI has responsibilities under the 1999 Act for quality assurance in relation to the Dublin Institute of Technology and any new university.

OECD Report on the Review of Higher Education in Ireland, 2004

In April 2004, the OECD were requested by the Irish government, to conduct a review of higher education in Ireland. The terms of reference included, inter alia, a request to review the procedures in place to maintain and improve quality in Irish higher education institutions. The OECD examiners' report (OECD, 2004) recommended that the binary system of higher education in Ireland should remain but that the institutes of technology should be brought under the remit of the HEA.

The report also recommended that, in principle, there should be a single national system of quality assurance for higher education but that the quality assurance structures put in place by the universities following the Universities Act 1997 (including the establishment of IUQB) should be allowed to develop before any legislative change was made and should take note of the ongoing developments in quality assurance of higher education in Europe.

Reports of the Review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities, 2005

This paragraph summarises the more detailed account to be found in section 9.3 above. Following the joint commissioning by IUQB and HEA of the European University Association (EUA) to conduct a review under Sections 35 and 49 of the Universities Act, reports on the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures in each of the seven universities, a transversal report on the quality assurance procedures in the university sector and a 'Reflections' document by the High-Level Reference Panel (established by the HEA in consultation and with the secretariat provided by the NQAI) were all published in April 2005 (HEA/IUQB, 2005; HLRP, 2005).

Institutes of Technology Act, 2006

Following the recommendations of the 2004 OECD report on Higher Education in Ireland, this Act provided for the designation of Dublin Institute of Technology and the 13 other Institutes of Technology as higher education institutions under the HEA.

The Act also provided for the designation (by the Minister for Education and Science, on the recommendation of the HEA) of bodies that support the furtherance of higher education in Ireland as bodies that can be directly supported by the HEA.

APPENDIX 4

QUALITY REVIEW OF AN ACADEMIC OR ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT

Typical time-scale and visit timetable

The time-scale below is an example of what is required for an internal review initiated and conducted within a university.

STAGE 1	SELF-ASSESSMENT
-12 months	Quality office initiates the formal process of quality review. Information sent from quality office to unit.
- 9 months	Unit selects co-ordinating committee as per university quality committee guidelines
- 8 months	University quality committee considers nominees for peer review group
- 8 months	Peer review group appointed by university quality committee. Quality office conducts all liaison with reviewers.
- 6 months	Unit selects co-ordinating committee as per university quality committee guidelines, and coordinates collection of data, surveys, etc.
- 4 months	Unit prepares self-assessment report, including collection of data, surveys, self-critical analysis and benchmarking exercises
- 1 month	Self-assessment report sent to peer review group

STAGE 2	PEER REVIEW AND SITE VISIT

(see timetable below)

STAGE 3	IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW-UP
+ 1 month	Peer review group report received by quality office and forwarded to unit.
+ 3 months	Peer review group report considered by university quality committee. Peer review group report published on university website. Unit required to prepares quality improvement plan with specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timelined actions.
+ 5 months	Unit's quality improvement plan sent to quality office and considered by appropriate university committee(s)
+ 7 months	University faculty/school/college management group consider unit quality improvement plan and agree a combined unit/faculty/university level plan for implementation of the recommendations in the peer review group report
+ 9 months	Report of the outcome of the review considered by the governing authority of the university and publication of the summary report on the university website
+ 21 months	Follow-up report on the implementation of the quality improvement plan presented to governing authority

TIMETABLE FOR A PEER REVIEW GROUP VISIT TO AN ACADEMIC UNIT

Pre-Visit Briefing, Day Before Site Visit

18.00 - 19.30	Meeting of members of the peer review group. Briefing by university quality officer. Group agrees work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following two days.
20.00	Orientation and social dinner for members of the peer review group

DAY 1

09.00 - 09.30	Convening of peer review group in unit, formal welcome
09.30 - 13.00	Consideration of self assessment report with the writers of the report and other unit staff, including administrative / technical / support staff, as appropriate. Private meetings of members of the peer review group with staff
13.00 - 14.00	Working lunch
14.00 - 14.30	Visit to core facilities of unit
14.30 - 17.00	Meetings with representatives of undergraduate students / post graduate students / recent graduates / employers, as appropriate
17.30 - 22.00	Meeting of peer review group to identify remaining aspects for review and to agree tasks for the following day, with a break for dinner

DAY 2

09.00 - 09.45	Meeting with senior officers of the university
09.45 - 10.30	Visit to library, meeting with library staff
10.30 - 11.00	Visits to facilities such as lecture theatres, computer laboratories
11.30 - 12.30	Meeting with the dean/vice-president for research and the dean of the faculty
12.30 - 13.00	Meeting with head of unit to clarify any outstanding issues
13.00 - 14.00	Working lunch
14.00 - 16.00	Preparation of first draft of peer review group report
16.00 - 16.30	Exit presentation to all staff of the unit by the chair of the peer review group, summarising the principal findings of the review.

APPENDIX 5

REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES IN A UNIVERSITY

Typical Time-scale for an Institutional Audit

Stage 1	SELF-EVALUATION AND PRELIMINARY VISIT
- 7 months	university selects self-evaluation steering group
- 4 months	self-evaluation report sent to evaluation team
- 3 months	preliminary visit
- 2 months	Additional information prepared and sent to evaluation team

STAGE 2	MAIN VISIT

STAGE 3	REPORT AND FOLLOW-UP
+ 1 month	Draft report from evaluation team
+ 2 months	Corrections of error of fact by university
+ 3 months	Report sent to quality assurance agency
+ 4 months	Response from university sent to quality assurance agency
+ 5 months	Report published
+ 17 months	Progress report on implementation of recommendations submitted to quality assurance agency

Typical Timetables for Evaluation Team Visit to a University

Preliminary visit (2 days)
Pre-visit briefing, evening before site visit

18.00 – 19.30	Briefing Meeting: Evaluation team
20.00	Dinner: Evaluation team, chief officer and university liaison person

DAY 1

9.00 – 9.30	Meeting : Evaluation team and chief officer
9.40 – 11.00	Meeting: Evaluation team, chair of the self evaluation steering group and university liaison person

11.10 – 12.30	Meeting: Self-evaluation steering group
12.30 – 14.00	Lunch
14.00 – 15.00	Meeting: External stakeholders
15.10 – 15.45	Meetings: Staff of faculty/college A and B (evaluation team in pairs)
15.55 – 16.30	Meetings: Students of faculty/college A and B (evaluation team in pairs)
16.40 – 18.00	Tour of campus / main university locations
18.00 – 19.00	Debriefing meeting: Evaluation team

DAY 2

9.00 – 10.00	Meetings: staff of Faculty C and Research Unit D (evaluation team in pairs)
10.10 – 11.00	Meeting: University senior management team
11.10 – 12.10	Debriefing meeting: Evaluation team
12.15 – 14.00	Lunch: Evaluation team, chief officer and university liaison person

Main visit (3 days)
Pre-visit briefing, evening before site visit

18.00 – 19.30	Debriefing meeting: Evaluation team
20.00	Dinner: Evaluation team, chief officer and university liaison person

DAY 1

9.00 – 9.30	Meeting: Evaluation team and chief officer
9.50 – 10.50	Meeting: Representative group from governing authority
11.10 – 12.10	Meeting: Quality committee
12.30 – 13.15	Meeting: Students' union representatives
13.15 – 14.15	Lunch: Evaluation team
14.15 – 15.15	Meeting: Staff responsible for university/faculty/college-level research policy
15.30 – 16.30	Meeting: Staff responsible for university/faculty/college-level teaching and learning policy
16.30 – 17.00	Meeting: Non-traditional students
17.15 – 18.00	Meeting: University finance committee

DAY 2

9.00 – 9.50	Meeting: Staff of academic units that have undergone quality reviews (evaluation team in pairs)
10.00 – 10.30	Meeting: Students of academic units that have undergone quality reviews (evaluation team in pairs)
10.45 – 11.45	Meeting: Central administrative staff; communications, alumni, student recruitment, international office
12.00 – 13.00	Meeting: Representative group of heads of administrative units that have undergone quality reviews
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch: Evaluation team
14.00 – 15.00	Meeting: Representative group of heads of academic units that have undergone quality reviews
15.10 – 16.10	Meeting: Executive Heads of Faculties/Colleges
16.20 – 18.20	Debriefing Meeting: Evaluation team alone
20.00	Dinner: Evaluation team alone

DAY 3

9.00 – 10.30	Meeting: Evaluation team, chief officer, university liaison person
10.30 – 11.00	Adjustments to the oral report: Evaluation team only
11.00 – 12.30	Presentation of oral report: Group selected by university
12.30 – 13.30	Lunch and departure of evaluation team

APPENDIX 6

BELGIUM

University of Liège

CANADA

Memorial University, Newfoundland

Saint Mary's University, Halifax

University of Toronto

DENMARK

Aarhus School of Business

University of Odense

ENGLAND

AGCAS, Sussex

De Montfort University, Leicester

Durham University

Imperial College, London

Institute of Education, London

King's College London

London School of Economics

London South Bank University

Oxford Brookes University

Oxford Philanthropic, Oxford

Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham

Royal Holloway London

Royal London School of Medicine & Dentistry, London

Southampton Solent University

St. Mary's Hospital London

University College, London

University of Bath

University of Birmingham

University of Bradford

University of Bristol

University of Cambridge

University of Canterbury

University of East London

University of Essex

University of Exeter

University of Huddersfield

University of Hull

University of Keele

University of Kent

University of Leeds

University of Leicester

University of Liverpool

University of London

University of Manchester

University of Newcastle

University of Nottingham

University of Oxford

University of Plymouth

University of Portsmouth

University of Reading

University of Sheffield

University of Southampton

University of Surrey

University of Sussex

University of Warwick

Wadham College, Oxford

FINLAND

University of Helsinki

University of Jyvaskyla

FRANCE

CRNS/Centre de Physique de Toulouse

University of Paris-Sud Orsay

Universite Rennes 2

GERMANY

Chemnitz University of Technology

Institut für Musikwissenschaft, Munich

Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen

Mathematisches Institut, Tübingen

Saarland University

Universität Regensburg

Universität Gottingen

Wissenschaftzentrum, Berlin

NETHERLANDS

IHE-Delft

UNESCO-IHE-Institute for Water Education

University of Amsterdam

University of Groningen

University of Nijmegen

University of Wageningen

NORTHERN IRELAND

Belfast Institute of Further & Higher Education

Queen's University Belfast

University of Ulster

PORTUGAL

Universty of Lisbon

SCOTLAND

Colaiste A 'Chailsteal, 'Isle of Lewis', Scotland

Department of Health, Edinburgh

Monklands Hospital, Airdrie

Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh

Royal Scottish Academy for Music & Drama

St. Andrew's University

Strathclyde University

University of Aberdeen

University of Dundee

University of Edinburgh

University of Glasgow

University of Stirling

SPAIN

University of Burgos

University of Granada

SWEDEN

IVL Swedish Environment Research Institute Ltd., Gothenburg

Karolinska Institute

Malmo University

University of Göteborg

SWITZERLAND

Institute for Management Development, Lausanne

USA

Arizona State University

Brookhaven, New York

Brown University

Drexel University, Philadelphia

Endicott College, Beverly MA

Harvard University

Hofstra University, Hempstead

Lehigh University, Philadelphia

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Michigan State University

Nebraska Methodist College

Northwestern University

The State University of New York, Buffalo

State University of Washington

Tufts University, Medford MA

University of California (Santa Cruz)

University of Connecticut

University of Maryland, Baltimore

University of Massachusetts, Amherst MA

University of Missouri (Kansas City)

University of Notre Dame

University of Pennsylvania

University of Wisconsin (Madison)

Vanderbilt University, Tennessee

WALES

University of Aberystwyth

University College of North Wales

University of Wales, Cardiff

APPENDIX 7

STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (EHEA)

Background

These standards, which are directly relevant to any consideration of quality assurance systems for higher education, particularly in Europe, are given here for easy reference.

Briefly, these standards were adopted at the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education held in Bergen on 19-20 May 2005. They relate only to the three cycles of higher education covered in the Bologna process and are not intended to cover the areas of research or general institutional management.

The complete guidelines and standards are given in the ENQA report "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ENQA, 2005).

A. European standards for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions

1. Policy and procedures for quality assurance:

Institutions should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.

2. Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards:

Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.

3. Assessment of students:

Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.

4. Quality assurance of teaching staff:

Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved in the teaching of students are qualified and competent with regard to teaching. The methods and procedures for ensuring that this is the case should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports.

5. Learning resources and student support:

Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered.

6. Information systems:

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities.

7. Public information:

Institutions should regularly publish up-to-date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering.

B. European standards for the external quality assurance of higher education

1. Use of internal quality assurance procedures:

External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part A above.

2. Development of external quality assurance processes:

The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

3. Criteria for decisions:

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

4. Processes fit for purpose:

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

5. Reporting:

Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to their intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

6. Follow-up procedures:

Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

7. Periodic reviews:

External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

8. System-wide analyses:

Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

C. European standards for external quality assurance agencies

1. Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education:

The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part B above.

2. Official status:

Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

3. Activities:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

4. Resources:

Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

5. Mission statement:

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

6. Independence:

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

7. External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies:

The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
- an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
- publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

8. Accountability procedures:

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability

APPENDIX 8

The Sectoral Report consists of numbered paragraphs from start to finish, with the main recommendations brought together under subheadings in paragraphs 109 to 137. The 'conclusions' at the very end of the Report (paragraphs 138 and 139) are also included.

Main Recommendations concerning Quality Assurance

Organisation and planning of QA process

109. The contribution of QA to university strategy and planning should be stressed to all involved in the process.

110. It should be clear from the start of the process that the results of each evaluation will be discussed between the senior management, including the President, and the unit evaluated.

111. The university President's overall responsibility for the QA process and role as one of its main beneficiaries should be underlined.

112. This overall responsibility of the President and senior management for the process should not lessen the fundamental ownership of each evaluation by the unit in question.

Self-assessment phase

113. The self-assessment reports produced by any unit under review should not exceed 30 pages, excluding additional annexes.

114. The self assessment phase should not last longer than three months.

115. All units need to ensure that students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, are involved systematically in the self-assessment and that their opinions and contributions are included in the reports.

116. All units need to take proper account of the evolving institutional and external environments when undertaking their self-assessment, looking at the opportunities and threats these may present and situating themselves within these contexts.

117. Units undergoing review need systematically to consider their links to the relevant university services and to make sure these links are covered by the review process.

118. Units undergoing review should make explicit links between the formal quality review process and any other QA mechanisms which they may also operate. The potential synergies between these are vital.

119. The Irish universities need to ensure coherent and regular student feedback on all courses and modules, and for this feedback to be an explicit input to the QA process.

Peer review phase

120. Universities should ensure that the guidelines and terms of reference supplied to peer review teams encourage a broad view of quality, including sufficient emphasis on research, interdisciplinarity and internationalisation. These guidelines should also ensure that any ensuing recommendations are clear, realistic, and distinguish between those needing new investment and those where improvements can be made without significant additional resources.

121. The composition of peer review teams needs to be more flexible, in order to respond to the need for strategic benchmarking with other universities worldwide and to respect the diversity of profiles and structures among the Irish universities.

122. The choice of peers should be independent of the unit under review.

Quality improvement

123. Following each review, the unit and the senior university management should hold a short seminar to discuss the evaluation, together with proposals for improvement and action.

124. A maximum of six months should be set for agreeing a quality improvement plan.

125. These quality improvement plans should be taken into account in the strategic management and other university-wide processes.

126. The university management must respond to these plans, even in cases where resources are scarce.

127. Information on the implementation of agreed quality improvement plans should be included in the university's annual quality assurance reports.

128. The universities should consider their entire budgets as quality improvement funds.

Strategic governance and management

129. The scheduling of evaluations should be approached in a more strategic way.

130. Universities should explore the possibilities for linking the quality review cycle to other strategic cycles.

131. Universities should consider reviewing groups of cognate units (faculties, etc) to achieve a better overview of how teaching, learning and research can develop across these units, and to break down current boundaries to inter-disciplinary work.

132. Universities should also consider reviewing university-wide issues, not linked to any one unit, but essential for the ongoing strategic development of the institution.

133. There is a need to ensure the regular analysis and overview of the QA process and outcomes across each university, and to link these explicitly to strategic management processes.

134. All universities need to strengthen their capacities for institutional analysis and monitoring, in order to provide better information for strategic governance and management. Better management information systems are also needed in most universities. The QA process must both contribute to and benefit from these.

135. Leadership should be aware of the real dangers of "paralysis by analysis". The burden of procedures must not obscure the purpose of establishing a quality culture, and a standardised approach must not obscure the primary focus on quality improvement. Procedures and approaches need to be kept simple and timely.

136. There is a need to maximise collaboration in research, infrastructure, human resources and strategic development across the Irish universities in order to develop the critical mass necessary to be competitive in certain areas. The Irish QA framework can contribute greatly to this collaboration.

137. Given the healthy university-led approach so far, the lack of any governmental agency and the relatively modest investments in QA, it is suggested that the universities estimate how much time and money have been used so far in setting up and operating the quality assurance and quality improvement process, and clarify the benefits obtained. Such an analysis could then help the universities, individually and collectively, to link back to the four basic methodological questions and see to what extent these investments have been effective and efficient in helping to clarify what they are trying to do, how they are trying to do it, how they know it works, and how they change in order to improve.

Conclusions

138. The Irish universities have established a quality assurance system which is functioning, well organized and now yielding results. In doing so, the universities have gone well beyond the legislative requirements contained in the 1997 Universities Act, and have put in place a system which holds much promise for the development of higher education in Ireland. Now that this system exists and has been operating successfully for several years, it is time to move to a new phase. This should build on the existing system, linking it more closely to strategic management, and feeding its outputs into the ongoing development of the universities, individually and collectively.

139. The EUA teams would like to thank the Irish universities, the IUQB and the HEA for their invitation to conduct this review of quality assurance. It has been a challenging and fascinating undertaking for everybody. We have admired the quality assurance system put in place in recent years, and consider that many universities and QA systems elsewhere in Europe and further afield could learn form the Irish experience. We have also put forward a series of suggestions which we believe will help the universities and other stakeholders to develop the system still further and use its potential to ensure the ongoing success of the Irish universities in meeting their missions.

APPENDIX 9

CHIU	Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (now IUA)
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management www.efqm.org
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education www.enqa.eu
ESIB	(now ESU)
ESU	European Students' Union www.esib.org
EUA	European University Association www.eua.be
EURASHE	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education www.eurashe.eu
HEA	Higher Education Authority www.hea.ie
HECA	Higher Education Colleges Association www.heca.ie
HETAC	Higher Education and Training Awards Council www.hetac.ie
IHEQN	Irish Higher Education Quality Network www.iheqn.ie
IOTI	Institutes of Technology Ireland (formerly Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology) www.iotireland.ie
ISO	International Organisation for Standardisation www.iso.org
IUA	Irish Universities Association www.iua.ie
IUQB	Irish Universities Quality Board www.iuqb.ie
NCEA	National Council for Education Awards (now HETAC)
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications www.nfq.ie
NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland www.nqai.ie
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development www.oecd.org

APPENDIX 10

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