



POLICY:	QUALITY ASSURANCE & CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT POLICY
FIRST DRAFT:	ET 2015#13
ADOPTED:	BR 2015#04 <i>pro-tem</i> ¹ UR 2016#03
AMENDMENTS:	None to Date
REVIEW:	October 2021

¹ Subject to consultation in accordance with the Protocol for Policy Development.

1.0 POLICY OBJECTIVE

All policies, guidelines and protocols of Mary Immaculate College, will reflect the Colleges commitment to the promotion of equality and will be fully compliant with the provisions of prevailing equality legislation.

1.1 The objectives of the *Quality Assurance & Continuous Quality Improvement Policy* are two-fold. They are:

- (i) to clearly state the commitment of Mary Immaculate College (MIC) to the highest standards of quality in its core mission of academic teaching, learning and research, through a process of Quality Assurance and continuous Quality Improvement and enhancement.
- (ii) to set out the key principles and processes that give impetus to the processes of quality assurance and continuous quality improvement at MIC.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

2.1 **Quality Assurance (QA)** is the process of measuring compliance against necessary standards. This is a required process under the regulatory framework for quality in higher education that is evidence based and designed to give rise to recommendations for cyclical quality enhancements, as well as to comply with external, peer-based interrogation of requisite quality standards.

2.2 **Quality Improvement (QI)** is a proactive process of ensuring that a commitment to continuous enhancement of performance against agreed quality indicators, including the standards and measures required for statutory and regulatory compliance. This process is ongoing, rather than cyclical (and responsive to external requirements), and serves to strengthen institutional quality culture and also to generate recommendations for improvements against given quality indicators.

3.0 QUALITY PRINCIPLES

3.1 The following key principles underpin the quality culture at MIC:

- Quality teaching, learning, research and support services, and a commitment to continuous quality improvement are **core values** of the institution and quality assurance and continuous quality improvement are understood to be the **joint responsibility** of staff, management and the governance bodies of the College.
- The College is committed to appropriate quality **benchmarking** and an **evidence-based** approach to quality assurance and continuous improvement. The College evaluates its performance (outputs and outcomes) against national and international benchmarks and its quality processes are evidence-based where

information and data generated by engagement with stakeholders (students, staff, employers, partners, regulatory bodies and the wider community) provide the basis for analysis, conclusions and recommendations toward quality improvement plans.

- The College's quality processes are governed by a commitment to **collegiality** through rigorous peer review, collaboration and exchange of best practice, driven by an ethos of critical self-evaluation.
- The quality process of MIC recognises, respects and seeks to reinforce the core value of academic freedom.

4.0 POLICY SOURCES

4.1 The primary source for the commitment of the College to the most stringent standards of quality lies within the university paradigm of higher learning and the will to constantly expand the boundaries of knowledge creation and understanding. As a foundational *raison d'être*, this shared precept of the Academy finds expression in the opening paragraph of the Mission Statement of the College:

"The College community promotes excellence in teaching, learning and research at undergraduate and postgraduate levels."

4.2 The secondary sources of this policy are the intra- and extra-mural regulatory measures and standards that, collectively, provide the framework for quality assurance and continuous quality improvement at MIC.

These include:

- The Bologna Process of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA);
- The directives and protocols of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA);
- The European Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance (revised and approved by the Ministerial Conference in Yerevan, May 2015);
- The European Qualifications Framework;
- The Universities Act, 1997²;
- The Code of Governance for Irish Higher Education Institutions;
- The Qualifications & Quality Assurance Act, 2012 (and associated directives of Quality & Qualifications Ireland / QQI);
- The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ);

² MIC is not formally included within the ambit of the Universities Act. However, the College is required to observe the key precepts of the Act and is expected to demonstrate its adherence to these in the mechanisms for accountability to the Higher Executive Authority (HEA) and the Office of the Comptroller & Auditor General.

- The academic regulations of the University of Limerick (Designated Awarding Body);
- The policies and procedures for academic affairs adopted by the Academic Council of MIC - *An Chomhairle Acadúil*;
- The policies and procedures for resourcing the College support services adopted by the Executive Team of MIC.

4.3 In addition to these sources of the overarching regulatory quality framework the standards and requirements set by key professional regulatory bodies also serve to inform programme-specific structure, content, assessment and review processes. The Irish Teaching Council and the Psychological Society of Ireland bestow accreditation upon the degrees of Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Education in Education and Psychology, the Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and cognate graduate level and professional development programmes, subject to adherence to their respective standards and conformance to their peer-led review processes.

5.0 STANDARDS FOR INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

3.1 The standards for internal quality assurance against which all measures of quality are set derive from the European Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance set for the European Higher Education Area. These are:

(i) **Policy**

MIC shall have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders shall develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.

(ii) **Design and Approval of Programmes**

MIC shall have processes for the design and approval of its programmes. The programmes shall be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme shall be clearly specified and communicated, and shall refer to the correct level of the National Qualifications Framework (NFQ), as linked to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

(iii) **Student-Centred Learning, Teaching & Assessment**

MIC shall ensure that its programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

(iv) **Student Admission, Progression, Recognition & Certification**

MIC shall consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student 'life-cycle,' including enrolment (admission), registration, progression, recognition and certification.

- (v) **Academic Staff**
MIC shall assure itself of the teaching competence of its Academic staff. The College shall apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of Academic staff.
- (vi) **Learning Resources & Student Support**
MIC shall seek to ensure the provision of appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and shall also ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.
- (vii) **Information Management**
MIC shall ensure that it collects, analyses and uses relevant information for the effective management of its programmes and other activities.
- (viii) **Public Information**
MIC shall publish information about its activities, including programmes, that is clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible.
- (ix) **On-Going Monitoring & Periodic Review of Programmes**
MIC shall ensure the monitoring and periodic review of its programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews shall lead to continuous improvement of programmes and any planned action or action taken as a result of review shall be communicated to all those concerned.
- (x) **Cyclical External Quality Assurance**
MIC shall undergo external quality assurance, in line with European Standards & Guidelines and Irish statutory provision on a cyclical basis.

6.0 GOVERNANCE & OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 The governance of quality assurance and continuous quality improvement at MIC is the responsibility of the MIC Governing Authority – *An tÚdarás Rialaithe*. *An tÚdarás Rialaithe* has established a governance-level body – the MIC Quality Committee – to oversee the process of quality assurance at the College, and to report on the outputs and effectiveness of the continuous quality improvement process. The terms of reference for the Quality Committee, which is chaired by an external member of *An tÚdarás Rialaithe*, are attached at Appendix A.
- 6.2 Responsibility for operational management and decision-making in respect of quality assurance and continuous quality improvement is bifurcated. *An Chomhairle Acadúil* is charged with setting out the procedures and systems for maintaining quality academic standards (in line with the regulatory sources set out in Paragraph 4.2). The design, development and modification of academic programmes is overseen and approved by *An Chomhairle Acadúil* under powers delegated to it by the Academic Council of the University of Limerick, which

ratifies the College's awards. Programmes at Level 10 on the NFQ framework are processed through the University's Academic Programme Review Committee (APRC) and must be validated directly by the University's Academic Council. The Executive Team is mandated to resource academic programmes, research activity and professional support services.

- 6.3 Day-to-day coordination is the function of the MIC Quality Office which has a reporting relationship to *An Chomhairle Acadúil* through the Vice-President Academic Affairs and to the Executive Team through the Associate Vice-President Administration.

7.0 POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

- 7.1 As Chief Officer, the College President has final responsibility for implementation of the *Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy* and he/she retains the authority to approve the internal schedule and methodologies used to give effect to the continuous quality improvement process, subject to the advice and guidance of *An Chomhairle Acadúil*, the Executive Team, and the various College Officers with distributed functional responsibility for the policy.
- 7.2 The decisions of the President on the implementation of the policy are taken in accordance with directives and imperatives set out by those external bodies who hold authority within the regulatory environment to do so.
- 7.3 The Vice-President Academic Affairs has particular responsibility for continuous quality assurance and enhancement in respect of the academic interests of the College and has operational responsibility for the linkage between MIC and UL, as set out in the QQI Act, 2012.
- 7.4 The methodologies employed to ensure continuous quality assurance and enhancement are subject to adaptation and change in accordance with recognised best practice and in line with the stated requirements of those bodies with the authority to regulate and evaluate quality standards linked directly to the mission and affairs of the College. These methodologies may include, but shall not be limited to, the following:
- Cyclical Institution Self-Assessment Review (ISAR) with Review Report (RR)
 - Cyclical Unit-level or Thematic Self-Assessment Review (SAR) with Peer Review Report (PRR)
 - Cyclical Professional Accreditation Reviews (by external bodies)
 - Annual Student Exit Surveys
 - Cyclical Module Satisfaction Surveys (MSS)
 - Intra-Semester Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs)
 - Periodic student/staff/customer survey and focus group data collection
 - Performance Output Benchmarking and Outcome Analysis
 - Annual and periodic review of all taught programmes

- Implementation of the recommendations of external examiners
- HEA Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE)

7.5 In addition to the focused evaluation methodologies described above, the College shall also set and monitor quality assurance and enhancement targets, and respond to output analysis, through the process of strategic planning, annual operations planning, formation of target-driven performance compacts with partner agencies and institutions, tracking of responses and outcomes linked to external examiners' recommendations, and risk management at institutional and local levels.

8.0 REVIEW

The MIC Quality Assurance and Continuous Quality Improvement Policy shall be reviewed following five-year intervals normally, except where circumstances arising from the regulatory framework or internal requirements arise.

Appendix A:

QUALITY COMMITTEE

Terms of Reference

Chair:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A current and external member of <i>An tÚdarás Rialaithe</i>, as appointed by the Trustees 	<p>Overall Aim: <i>High quality and externally validated outcomes in delivery of the College Mission, with particular emphasis on the excellence of teaching, learning and research activities, and the character of the student experience.</i></p>
Members:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College President, <i>ex officio</i> Vice President Academic Affairs, <i>ex officio</i> Associate Vice President Administration, <i>ex officio</i> Associate Vice President Research, <i>ex officio</i> Dean of Arts, <i>ex officio</i> Dean of Education, <i>ex officio</i> Head of Graduate School, <i>ex officio</i> Director of Teaching & Learning One representative of Academic staff, drawn from the current membership of <i>An tÚdarás Rialaithe</i>, as appointed by the Trustees One representative of Professional Services staff, drawn from the current membership of <i>An tÚdarás Rialaithe</i>, as appointed by the Trustees President of the Students' Union Vice President of the Students' Union Director of Student Life <i>ex-officio</i> Director of Quality 	
		<p>Responsibilities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure due accountability to students, staff, peers, sectoral partners, funders and the wider community, by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ oversight of progress towards relevant performance indicators and quality assurance targets as set out in the College Strategic Plan and informed by national policy and appropriate international benchmarks; ✓ fostering effective communication and coordination with (and between) the Executive Team and <i>An Chomhairle Acadúil (ACA)</i>, as the bodies with operational responsibility for quality assurance. ✓ direct reporting to <i>An tÚdarás Rialaithe</i> in relation to quality assurance developments, in alignment with approved targets, indicators and funder requirements; To promote a total quality culture throughout the College in order to assure and improve the quality of teaching, learning, research and professional services provided by the College. To ensure that awareness of the latest developments in the field of quality assurance/improvement, based on best national and international practice is fostered throughout the College. To promote the development of relevant and effective policies and procedures relating to quality assurance and improvement, within the context of the Strategic Plan for the College, and in a manner that is consistent with the standards applying throughout the third level sector To ensure ongoing monitoring of the manner and extent to which the College's practices serve to assure and improve the quality of all its programmes and services. To prepare an annual statement of risk; To draft (in due consultation) quality review schedules for approval by <i>An tÚdarás Rialaithe</i> and to ensure successful

Attendance	• Quality Officer, <i>ex officio</i>	completion of approved quality reviews
Recording Secretary:	• Information & Compliance Officer	
Version:	1 Adopted by Trustees, October 2013	
	2 Approved by AUR, December 2013 and adopted by Trustees, January 2014	
	3 Amended by AUR 2015#01, adopted by Trustees 2015#02	
	4 Adopted by Trustees 2016#01[<u>current</u>]	