

Institutional Review of Mary Immaculate College

Review Panel Report

July 2024

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Foreword

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As a designated awarding body (DAB), University of Limerick (UL) recognises its statutory responsibilities in respect of linked providers and commits to meeting those responsibilities. The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 as amended places an obligation on DABs to approve, monitor and review their linked providers' quality assurance (QA) procedures. Mary Immaculate College (MIC) is a linked provider of UL.

The relationship between UL and MIC is largely framed by an inter-institutional memorandum of understanding (MoU), and the QA and quality enhancement (QE) oversight arrangements are articulated in the University's Linked Provider Framework. The framework requires that at least once every seven years the University schedules a periodic review to be conducted of both the adequacy of the linked provider's QA procedures and the extent to which the provider is implementing the procedures effectively. The terms of reference of the review were agreed with MIC and approved by UL's Academic Council in December 2022.

This review was conducted in April 2024 by an independent Review Panel appointed by UL. This is the report of the Review Panel.



The Review Panel

The review was carried out by an international team of independent experts and peers. The Review Panel was briefed by University of Limerick on 19th February 2024. The Chair and Coordinating Reviewer undertook an online planning visit to MIC on 1st March 2024. The Main Review Visit was conducted by the full team between the 8th and 11th April 2024.

Review Panel Chair

The Review Panel chair, **Emeritus Professor John L. Davies**, has a career which includes various roles in senior management positions in universities. He has also provided extensive consultancy services and policy advice to governments, international higher education (HE) agencies (EU, UNESCO, OECD) and universities in 66 countries, including Ireland.

Professor Davies had a key role as a professor of higher education policy and management in the University of Bath, Anglia Ruskin University and Copenhagen Business School and as a visiting professor at several US universities. He has been a Pro Vice Chancellor at two universities and has served as dean of a business school and graduate school. He has been very active as an institutional reviewer for numerous national quality agencies and ministries and has been instrumental in setting up several reviews as a consultant. His main interests are in strategic institutional development, research strategy, the entrepreneurial and socially responsive university, and QA and QE.



Coordinating Reviewer & Quality Assurance Representative

Dr Paul O'Leary is the SETU Head of Quality Promotion and Academic Policy Development and was previously a full-time lecturer in the Department of Engineering Technology. He has acted as Institutional Review Coordinator and performed roles of chair, rapporteur and member on programme review panels. His role in Quality Promotion includes preparing teams from programme to institutional level for quality review. As an academic, he served for more than 10 years as course leader on engineering programmes at NFQ levels 6-9. He has lectured on both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, acted as internal and external examiner on awards at NFQ levels 6-10 and has supervised six PhDs to completion. Dr O'Leary is currently Review Coordinator for the Cinnte Institutional Review of SETU.

International Representative

Lena Adamson is Associate Professor of Psychology at Stockholm University and is semi-retired since February 2018. She has had a number of different leadership positions within and outside of academia over the years. She retired as Director General of the Swedish Institute of Educational Research in February 2018. The Institute is a government agency where she reported directly to the Minister of Education. The mission of the Institute is to produce systematic reviews on teaching and learning and to fund research within the same area. Professor Adamson's original research field mainly concerns human development issues (psychology) and prevention work (prevention science). Her second interest profile relates to the development of quality, quality systems, and teaching and learning in higher education and within the school system. Within this area she has worked for the European Commission and Council of Europe amongst others.

International Representative

Stella Jones-Devitt is Professor of Critical Pedagogy at Staffordshire University in the UK and Director of SCoLPP (Staffordshire Centre of Learning and Pedagogic Practice) pedagogic research centre. She is a National Teaching Fellow, Principal Fellow (PFHEA) and has been a national Ambassador for Learning and Teaching Excellence in the UK (HEFCE/HEA). She has a strong understanding of how interventions impact student outcomes. She has significant experience and expertise in leading, designing and implementing evaluation research and recently led a longitudinal evaluation of QAA Scotland's Enhancement Themes. Professor Jones-Devitt has facilitated evaluation research for the Office for Students, Advance HE, QAA UK, Leadership Foundation and TASO and has advised the Irish HEA on evaluation methodology.

Learner Representative

Sarah Porcenaluk is a full-time PhD research student at the School of Education, University of Galway. She holds an MEd degree in Mathematics and Science Education and a BSc in Elementary Education from the University of Central Florida, Orlando. Sarah is a member of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) in the United States. Her research focuses on primary mathematics education and collaborating with teachers to develop effective continuing professional development (CPD). Before relocating to Ireland, she was a primary school teacher and Instructional Mathematics Coach in the United States. While studying at University of Galway, she was the Auditor of the Postgraduate Research Society from 2021-2023. In her spare time, Sarah enjoys reading, travelling, and hiking.

Industry Representative

Michelle Moore is the ParentChild+ Senior Specialist at the National College of Ireland. With 16 years of experience in early-years education and leadership and management, she supports the development, delivery, QA and QE of early-year educational programmes nationwide. She also serves on the National College of Ireland's governing body. Michelle currently holds a primary degree in early childhood education and a Master of Business Administration.



1 Introduction and Context

1.1 Introduction and Context

Established in 1898, MIC is the oldest university-level college in Ireland's Mid-West region offering programmes in Education and the Liberal Arts. Originally focused on teacher education, MIC now offers a diverse range of programmes across multiple campuses. The College strives for quality, complete with a strong research culture, and reflects its social justice mission through deep community ties.

MIC's multiplicity of programmes, which are accredited by UL, range from Level 4 to Level 10 and are based across three distinct campuses (two in Limerick city, adjacent to each other, and one in Thurles, County Tipperary). Graduate programmes in all disciplines have seen significant growth, with over 150 doctoral students enrolled and an annual graduation rate of more than 20 PhDs.

Internationalisation, public engagement, and partnerships with prestigious universities further solidify MIC's status as a university-level institution. Moreover, the College views its long-standing relationship with UL as a natural foundation for future development and strategic collaboration.

It is worth noting that during the completion of its ISER, MIC commenced a major strategic dialogue with UL to explore the potential for closer structural alignment between the two institutions. This emerged from the mutual ambition held by the College and the University to capitalise on the success of their existing partnership – a multi-faceted form of inter-institutional collaboration that they believed exceeded the scope of the statutory accreditation agreement between them. Moreover, MIC embarked on this dialogue with a claim that it exhibited the hallmark traits of an authentic university-level institution with the status of Linked Provider (as ascribed under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act, 2019) serving to detract from its identity and its potential. Indeed, both institutions perceived the potential for significant mutual benefit in bringing about a more structurally integrated relationship, anticipating significant strategic dividends for both.

At the time of writing, the two institutions had completed work on a model of closer structural alignment that was significant in terms of reconfiguring the governance dispensation that binds them together. However, despite approval in principle for this model by internal and external stakeholders, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science rejected the model, stating that it was incompatible with existing legislative provision and at variance with existing policy on institutional structures in higher education. While the excellent relationship between the two institutions remains, together with an aspiration to explore future possibilities for strategic development jointly, the dialogue concluded without a substantive outcome.

1.2 Institutional Self-Evaluation Report

At the commencement of the Institutional Review preparations, the MIC Quality Committee established an Institutional Self-Evaluation Team (ISET) to oversee the development of the Institutional Self Evaluation Report (ISER). The ISET was chaired by the Vice-President of Governance and Strategy (VPGS), and the Institutional Coordinator role was undertaken by the Director of Quality. The ISET included both academic and professional services staff and the President and Vice-President of MISU (MIC's Student Union).

The role of the ISET was to:

- 1) Set out a schedule of meetings to facilitate the timely production of the ISER.
- 2) Report quarterly to the Quality Committee on the status of the ISER.
- 3) Oversee the development of the ISER through a collaborative and participative evaluation process.
- 4) Act as a small task and finish group that is in a good position to comment on the effectiveness of the institutional approach to quality assurance and enhancement.
- 5) Select a small group (or possibly one officer) from the ISET to write the final ISER to ensure that a single voice comes through the document.
- 6) Share near-final drafts of the ISER with key stakeholders to ensure inclusivity.
- 7) Present the final draft of the ISER to Quality Committee in November 2023 to allow for review and approval of the ISER before sending to UL in December 2023.



1.3 Data Collection, Processing and Management

The ISER draws on a number of sources, including the annual quality reports (AQRs) submitted to UL in the years 2017 to 2023. These provide a history of the changes to institutional and local-level quality assurance and enhancement activity since the previous Institutional Review (2017). They are supplemented by the progress reports emanating from the 2017 Institutional Review Implementation Plan and the linked provider framework evaluation report. The ISER also draws on existing data (student data, surveys, focus groups), which are now collated and centrally available through the College's institutional dashboard e-OLAS. The report is further strengthened by feedback specifically gathered from key stakeholders for the institutional review.

The ISER provided the initial documentary evidence to support the objectives of the review process, including planned enhancements identified through feedback provided by staff and students as part of the ISER preparation.

2 The Specific Setting

Within this section, the Review Panel assessed the effectiveness of the strategic and operational relationships between UL and MIC. The Review Panel also considered how well the College's strategic development plan is recognised and implemented to achieve its key ambitions for the future. The Review Panel examined key QA targets and the extent to which the pillars and attendant goals were met. The Panel also considered the nature of the QA/QE culture at MIC and how this affects robustness and delivery of the College's structures and functions. This was accompanied by a review of the overarching salience of governance and management processes at MIC. This section concludes with some commentary on QA and QA progress made since the 2017 Institutional Review.

The review took place in turbulent times in the context of factors that clearly affect both the current situation and possibilities for MIC's future development. These include:

- the shared desire of MIC and its accrediting partner, UL, to bring about a form of closer structural alignment that could provide mutual value to both institutions, notwithstanding rejection by the Government of the model proposed for this purpose by the two institutions during a comprehensive dialogue in 2023
- the severe financial situation in which Irish higher education institutions (HEIs) find themselves, due in large measure to inadequate state funding combined with increasing pressures of accountability and stricter controls, which hamper institutional autonomy and the flexibility to be agile
- the lack of buoyancy in the student market for humanities subjects in general, and the pressures to design innovative, often multidisciplinary, programmes for non-traditional student populations
- a very competitive research environment, where quality and critical mass are crucial
- a challenging demographic environment, where second-level graduate numbers may have peaked and in the context of national drives to recruit a more diverse cohort of students (including recruiting more mature or disadvantaged students), meeting the needs of diverse learners and facing the challenges of retaining students
- the growing threats to long-term institutional sustainability in the light of the above.

All these create challenges for determining appropriate institutional trajectories and associated activities, which all have significant QA and QE agendas. The Review Panel's consideration of the above permeated our analysis, conclusions and recommendations.

2.1 Relations between UL and MIC

Built on mutual respect, maturing collaboration and camaraderie, collegial relations between UL and MIC are excellent. Throughout an array of meetings and within the provided documentation, our analysis shows that both organisations consistently recognise and value the worth derived from the association whilst respecting the rights to independence and autonomy. This arrangement appeared to work effectively in both formal and informal fora.

2.2 Strategic Development Trajectory of MIC

The Review Panel felt that the root of the prevailing trajectory lay in the Catholic origins of MIC, which infuse a caring, supportive, inclusive, ethically conscious and welcoming culture and provide a clear ethos that underpins the rest of the College's direction.

It became apparent to the Review Panel during discussions and when critiquing aspirational documentation that the recent Government decision to reject the model for closer structural alignment proposed by MIC and UL was disappointing for all stakeholders. This would have led to operating within a revised partnership model with UL and could have had tangible benefits for both organisations in terms of autonomy, enhanced reputation and portfolio diversification.

Nevertheless, whilst the political landscape in which these aspirations emerged might be slow-moving and, to some extent, uncertain, there is, however, possible value in taking a strengths-based approach in the interim period to consider whether some jointly developed initiatives could provide momentum towards these ambitions. An example of this might be the creation of a UL/MIC Institute of Education, which could forge productive alliances in collaborative research, professional development, and knowledge exchange and transfer. The Review Panel suggests that a cautious, yet confident, approach to scaling could then be used to build strategic propulsion towards recognising the College as worthy of university-level status, albeit in a proportionate way, whilst minimising risk.

The important thing is to pursue the declared priorities of strengthening research; developing internationalisation with all its ramifications; and increasing mature, lifelong learning and master's degree student numbers as building blocks to university-level status. These should therefore feature in the next iteration of the Strategic Plan, which will fall under the remit of the new President, due to be appointed in September 2024 following the retirement of the incumbent



At the moment, it does not seem that MIC has a clear idea of the quantitative aspects of the proposed academic profile in terms of student projections per programme area over a given timescale and their breakdown in terms of home/EU and international, full time and part time, and undergraduate and postgraduate. This is important in QA terms, to ensure compatibility between student numbers and resource, and much else. This should be addressed.

2.3 Targets for QA in Light of the Above

Comments made by the Review Panel relating to strategic goals and targets are entirely formative within this review, given that the shifting HE landscape has caused a more complicated strategic picture than originally envisaged. Presently, the College is in the midst of producing a revised strategy to reflect the known certainties and uncertainties within the short and medium term. Hence, comments made by the Review Panel in this report relate primarily to both current and retrospective analysis of existing strategic imperatives rather than those future-facing approaches which will inevitably emerge within the next phase of college development.

It should be noted that the priorities indicated pose different quality challenges to those of traditional students, and thus, the quality strategy of MIC should evolve and possibly differentiate as needed.

2.3.1 Pillars and Values

The overarching seven pillars and attendant goals of the MIC Strategic Plan 2023: A Flourishing Learning Community are met broadly. One growth area to consider beyond the shelf life of the period covered by the strategy concerns the imperative for developing expansion and diversification of provision. The Review Panel felt this was especially moot when tied to the development of estates. Coupled with documentation analysis, discussions with a range of staff and students highlighted the clear potential for expanding the Thurles campus to reimagine the MIC portfolio and broaden opportunity for wider student recruitment, income generation and strategic expansion..

The Review Panel noted that consideration might be given to creatively examining the ensuing limitations linked to some areas of the curriculum, such as home economics, to ensure that the fullest scoping has been undertaken to ensure a sustainable future-facing approach. Sense-checking whether all espoused barriers really are as insurmountable as implied during the review might provide a focal point within any reshaped strategic plan at MIC.

2.4 Nature of the QA/QE Culture at MIC

The Review Panel noted that there is a prevailing 'collegial' culture which predominates at MIC, aligning with the cultural terminology expected within the context and enduring traditions of higher education. At the College this manifests itself as a relatively gentle and non-threatening democratic culture, which respects the autonomy and academic freedom of the individual and tends to be non-interventionist, all of which may be defined as positive.

However, maintaining a highly collegial QA/QE culture at MIC can have certain risks. A potential downside to this approach was revealed to the Review Panel in a few of our discussions during the review, in which there were some defensive responses articulated in respect of possible initiatives such as the ability to grow entrepreneurially and develop new programmes of an innovative nature. Hence, there is a danger that complacency and staticity could occasionally creep into various collegial comfort zones when change is clearly needed, alongside a degree of atomisation in the face of needing to mobilise collective action. The existing ethos is very gentle and laudable but, nonetheless, is slightly problematic if more agility is required to seize opportunities in the uncertain landscape already outlined.

Consequently, we feel that occasionally a more structured and systematic process in certain domains may be needed to reinforce agreed strategic directions when implementing significant change. For example, consideration should be given to limited, supplemental income generation initiatives, such as through well-managed external engagement. Given the current challenges in higher education funding, such as declining public funding streams, the Review Panel feels this approach could be valuable for long-term institutional sustainability. Moreover, many faith-based institutions with a predominantly humanities base are under threat presently and facing severe problems of sustainability. The Review Panel would not wish to see MIC in this situation. While its location in relation to UL is welcome, and highly beneficial, there are some pressing elements of self-determination which need to be espoused. Taking all of this into account, the comfortable collegial culture may need to evolve to address external pressures. This could involve embracing a more entrepreneurial approach where appropriate and ensuring effective implementation of valuable policies at the operational level, particularly in human resources.

Taking such steps will ensure that there is a robust and confident approach evenly distributed across all areas of QA/QE, underpinned by appropriate self-criticality in avoidance of complacency. This will ensure that the claim towards developing an effective quality culture is being upheld comprehensively across all operating facets at MIC.

Nonetheless, observing the development of a quality culture at MIC is encouraging in light of the above. The Review Panel had little difficulty in observing significant improvements in the QA/QE processes since the last institutional review and important characteristics of a growing QE culture, including:

- A readiness to be frank and open and to admit to shortcomings evident in evaluations.
- Clear adoption of a self-critical stance.
- Transparency of process and practice.
- Data-based and relatively objective judgements in self-evaluation processes and documentation.
- Functioning feedback loop.
- Well-developed tracking mechanisms for agreed improvements.

To that effect, perhaps it would be useful to consider extending the use of the term 'enhancement' within the everyday College quality lexicon as overuse of 'assurance' tends to imply a less mature culture premised on remedying hygiene factors rather than achieving, sustaining and improving success.

Moreover, the embedding of a QE culture could be escalated by developing a data-informed contextualisation rather than being solely data-driven. This would require taking the undoubted strengths found by the Review Panel concerning the data management system and extending this ethos further by developing and embedding appropriate skills across the College staff, within the context in which they operate. This would ensure that interpretation of the excellent data resources could contribute fully to sustained enhancement of impact mechanisms and pathways, providing a clear focus on student outcomes, whilst providing staff with agency of interpretation, thus freeing up the data management and analysis provision to do more meta-evaluation and forecasting at scale. Taking this approach could make the College genuinely thought-leading in the Irish HE sector.

The manifestations of this approach to quality culture, per se, are also discussed in other sections of this report, but suggestions made in this section are ways in which some of the cultural shifts and nuances referred to above may be reinforced, and we recommend MIC builds on these notions.

2.5 Government and Management of QA at UL/MIC

During this review, it became apparent that national regulatory changes imposed concerning governance representation meant that opportunities to make important contributions within some official UL/MIC decision-making fora have been lost. However, due to the excellent interpersonal relations between MIC and the University, the latter continues to have effective review and oversight of MIC processes concerning successful formal adoption of the UL regulatory framework for student achievement.

The Review Panel noted that submission and sign-off of the MIC AQRs, within the UL infrastructure, ensures that effective scrutiny is upheld systematically within the current partnership arrangement. In 2022, this maturing relationship was cemented by agreement that MIC could develop its own customised Handbook of Academic Regulations & Procedures within the context of agreed university processes. It is testament to the maturing of this relationship that there was active support across both organisations for developing the proposal to enhance the status of MIC whilst recognising its rights to continuing autonomy. As the College reimagines its approach to achieving university-status recognition, this may require a reinterpretation of existing arrangements in the longer term.

2.6 Review of Progress since 2017 Institutional Review

By considering the findings and subsequent recommendations from the 2017 review, an array of post-2017 AQR documentation and the current ISER and by conducting meetings in the current review, the Review Panel was in a position to note progress made since the 2017 review.

Consideration in this section is given primarily to the Review Panel's judgements concerning realisation, or otherwise, of progress made against 2017 QA/QE specific suggestions. In doing so, the Review Panel found that:

- MIC has fulfilled its obligation to develop effective QA/QE resourcing, and the MIC Quality Manual is omnipresent across the institution, at both campuses.
- MIC is conscious of the need to continue to address parity of learning experience challenges across both sites, and evidence was found that this is of ongoing strategic importance.
- MIC has built upon the collegiality fostered in the initial ISER/self-evaluation process to further consider the issue of academic staff representation and engagement within the most recent ISER process and in reviewing Governing Body requirements.
- Overarching QA/QE policy development and implementation across the institution has been further implemented since the last review to assure consistency, transparency, links between assessment, policy and programme development, and resource allocation.
- The Review Panel found that some training had been put in place for staff regarding interpreting and making best use of dashboards when using the student record system, but that this could be further enhanced by assisting relevant staff to now interpret the information more comprehensively within their own operating contexts. This would provide more nuanced capacity-building to enable effective analysis of key subject and programme-specific information.
- One area which still requires attention concerns mechanisms for strengthening communication and consultation practices between academic staff and senior managers. The Review Panel noted that some elements observed within the 2017 review concerning the role of the Deans in this process, and generally wider devolution of authority and empowerment to make decisions could still be improved. This is especially moot when assessing the interface of QA/QE with other overlapping MIC operating areas such as HR policy and processes.

There were several other recommendations contained within the 2017 report concerning governance and UL/MIC reciprocal arrangements which will require review in the context of changes to governance structures within HEIs brought about by the new Higher Education Authority Act (2022) as well as the implications arising from the dialogue between MIC and UL towards closer structural alignment and the outcome of this.

To summarise findings made by the Review Panel within the area of QA/QE, the following commendations are noted:

Commendations

- There is a very caring and supportive culture for students at MIC, which is a practical expression of the College's ethos, with an undoubted staff commitment at all levels in helping achieve the best possible student outcomes, assisted by an increasingly robust QA/QE infrastructure.
- Practical expressions of the caring MIC ethos were found consistently across all aspects of QA/QE processes.
- There is a fairly pervasive and well-functioning QA/QE culture, with most of the important elements intersecting effectively with other areas of college structure and function.
- The use of evidence, garnered by investment in the e-OLAS system, to support effective QA/QE decision-making has potential to be truly thought-leading in the Irish HE sector.



Recommendations

- The Review Panel identified areas where the culture could be strengthened through more systematic processes. These improvements would foster a more streamlined and efficient institutional environment and include:
 - improving communication and collaboration between different departments within MIC.
 - ensuring consistent application of clear and standardised procedures across all units.
- Further strengthening of a QE culture in terms of greater systematisation of overlapping College processes and increased usage of an 'enhancement' lexicon.
- More connectivity between various parts of the institution so that overarching quality culture is upheld across all operating domains.
- Greater attention given to the consistent application of simple and standardised processes across units as indicated within various areas of this review.
- Redefinition of the role and scope of middle-level leadership and/or heads of units, particularly in the HR area, to ensure that positive implementation of QE can be upheld and sustained across the College.
- More attention should be given to possible adoption and adaptation of entrepreneurial elements as part of the growing QE cultural ethos at MIC.
- More local capacity-building should be provided regarding use of e-OLAS and evidencing effectiveness in training subject/programme-level delivery staff, which would free up the excellent specialist evaluation expertise within MIC to turn attention to wider horizon-scoping and future-facing trajectory analysis.
- The College should ensure that the loop between review and subsequent action is strengthened.
- MIC should ensure that student number projections reflect the desired academic profile over the next planning period.
- A study should be undertaken of the longer-term sustainability of all programmes in terms of quality of the programme and department across a range of college-defined criteria, such as trends in market demand for courses, level of student entry, progression, retention and completion, graduate destinations, adequacy of personnel profile, cost structure of programmes and also the market buoyancy of the programmes in the future. This should be fed into periodic programme and profiling activities.
- Sustainability in the staffing base is part of the above in terms of attention to the age profile, use of visiting staff, and a continuation and extension of the excellent staff development offering to meet new challenges.

3 Programmes and Education

3.1 Overall QA Policy and Processes

In line with a key recommendation from the 2017 external review, MIC has prioritised the development and resourcing of its Quality Office and the establishment of a quality framework, enshrined in policy and a quality manual. This framework covers all the requirements of European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and QQI statutory core QA guidelines and lists all necessary mechanisms including regular review of QA/QE processes. Linked to the policy document is the MIC Quality Manual, a comprehensive document describing MIC's processes' and procedures in more detail.

3.2 Educational Programmes and QA Implications

The design and approval of programmes follows a rigorous, documented procedure with clear responsibilities for all steps and decisions, described in detail in the MIC Quality Manual.

3.2.1 Design and Approval of New Programmes

A new fit-for-purpose operating procedure for programme development and design, integrating best practice in teaching and learning, constructive alignment, and principles of blended learning design, has been approved by the relevant College bodies. This is the first step to remedy a crucial recommendation (# 11) from the 2017 review on these matters. A driving factor here was the formation of the Learning Enhancement and Academic Development Centre (LEAD), with a reconceptualised mission regarding leadership in academic practice and development. All new programmes must now align with the UL and MIC strategic plans, with justification included in approval documentation. According to An Chomhairle Acadúil, reference to sustainability is now a requirement, although this is not mentioned in any of the relevant documents. In the document *New Programme Approval*, the process of developing a new programme is described in detail and as a twin process. Alongside the academic development of a programme, the proposer must evaluate the business case, including market research, and present evidence of demand before further development of the programme from an academic perspective.

The clearly defined and effective programme development processes ensure the quality, relevance and sustainability of new College proposals. By embedding thorough quality assurance measures, these processes guarantee programmes meet high academic standards. Furthermore, a focus on industry needs and student interests ensures programme relevance in the current landscape. Finally, the emphasis on long-term viability fosters programmes with enduring value and a stable College portfolio. The Quality Committee confirmed that these well-structured processes are well-known by academic staff, and since their launch, five new academic programmes have been successfully developed.

3.2.2 Review of Ongoing Programmes and Modules

According to the Quality Policy, there should be annual and periodic reviews of all taught programmes. In 2018, UL revised its Academic Programme Review policy, which was also adopted by MIC in January 2019. Some programmes (teacher education and psychology) are also subject to discipline-based external accreditation processes.

Since 2021, it is the Assistant Deans of each faculty who are responsible for these annual programme reviews. The Director of Quality and the Assistant Deans meet formally biannually to discuss quality assurance mechanisms. To guarantee that recommendations from these annual reviews are implemented, MIC has developed a feedback loop, so that an Action Plan from one year is used as a strategic planning tool to inform the priority tasks for the next year, which in turn will be reported on as part of the following year's annual review. Turning the results from a quality review into a quality planning tool saves time for all involved and can act as a motivational factor for QA.

In addition to annual programme reviews, periodic programme reviews are also conducted, normally as part of Academic Departmental Quality Reviews. Programmes that undergo robust external accreditation will normally be exempt. A periodic programme review may also be initiated by the Faculty Board or Academic Programme Appraisal Committee (APAC) in cases where recurring issues have previously been identified and remain unresolved. The Academic Departmental Quality Reviews started in January 2019. They are conducted in a traditional manner with a self-assessment phase, a peer review phase and, finally, a quality improvement plan. There are relevant templates for all phases. The College might consider referring to the periodic programme reviews within the Academic Departmental Quality Review self-assessment guidelines.

The schedule for the current academic quality review cycle runs on an eight-year cycle from academic year 2018/19 until 2026/27. This is presented in a transparent manner on the MIC website, as recommended from the 2017 review.

In addition to the above reviews of programmes, there are also External Examiner processes. Several recommendations were made in the 2017 review concerning these processes and hence, the Quality Office did a review in 2018. The results are clearly described in a report addressing three areas: Course/module information, External Examiner process, and External Examiner reporting, where the previously noted areas of improvement have been taken care of. As a final step in the process, the External Examiner reports form part of the Annual Programme Review Process, which ultimately will feed into departmental quality reviews. Again, we see that MIC works with integrating its QA/QE processes into a coherent whole, which also makes the processes more efficient; this is commendable. Apart from what is said in this report, separate reviews of modules delivered are discussed only in terms of student feedback in the ISER. The Review Panel feels that it would be beneficial to include module reviews in the programme reviews. These should preferably have a clear focus on the steps involved in aligned teaching planning, clearly written learning outcomes, activating teaching and learning methods, and fit-for-purpose assessment methods.



3.3 Teaching and Learning

3.3.1 Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes

MIC provides multiple entry mechanisms and related information to its prospective undergraduate and taught postgraduate students, reflecting its status as a truly open HEI. The College Admissions Office coordinates applications for both undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. Prospective students can explore all programme details in a variety of ways: on the MIC website's "Study at MIC" section, the Central Applications Office website (for Level 8 undergraduate programmes), Open Days, outreach and in the official undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses. Further enhancing its openness, MIC leverages Recognition of Prior Learning. The Postgraduate Prospectus links the undergraduate to taught postgraduate programmes by clearly identifying the academic attainment requirements to progress from undergraduate to taught postgraduate programmes. It is notable that of the programmes approved in the 5-year period 2018–2023, the numbers of new undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes are almost identical, underscoring the demand from students for academic progression opportunities in the College.

The 2017 Institutional Review Recommendation #11 pointed out that staff needed training in the principles of curriculum design and alignment of curricula with the NFQ. This has been done according to the 2017 Review Implementation summary. The alignment of curricula with the NFQ is a central matter for any programme development and this is clearly required in the *APAC - New Programme Full Submission Form*. As an aid in this work there is an excellent document originally from UL: *Tips for writing programme and module learning outcomes*. In all, from a teaching and learning aspect, the documents and processes for developing new programmes are excellent and reflect the student-centred approach as compared to the previous teacher-driven approach, which the Bologna process originally introduced. Amongst other things, this should mean that teaching is done in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating their own learning process. As a consequence, this will give individuals, including students with disabilities, equal opportunities to learn. The team, when meeting the Quality Committee and An Chomhairle Acadúil, was assured that CPD for lecturers, in relation to the above, was provided and LEAD was mentioned as the primary driver.



However, in meeting different student groups, the Review Panel got the impression that the quality in teaching varies between the programmes. Some gave examples of active learning and self-chosen learning methods together with transferable skills training (working in teams, creating podcasts, discussing, and choosing assessment methods, etc.), whereas others did not experience much choice in relation to the teaching and assessment methods that were used in their programmes. This indicates that the CPD, which concerns teaching and learning, is not fully implemented by all MIC academic staff.

This variability in the quality of the teaching was mirrored in the quality of assessment and grading, according to the students' experiences. MIC has a first-rate *Assessment and feedback policy*, but this was generally unknown to the students and the Review Panel heard of quite varied experiences from the student groups. Some were very satisfied with assessment methods, rubrics, grading, feedback and related information while others indicated they never received any feedback unless they specifically requested it. What stuck out especially was dissatisfaction with the support, assessment practices and grading of placements in schools. Students felt they received inadequate guidance throughout their placements and experienced little-to-no communication between their school placement tutors, who did the assessment and grading, and the class teacher at the schools. This was, however, contradicted by lecturers the Review Panel met. This disconnect between theory and practice in placements, along with concerns about assessment, needs to be addressed. At the very least, there should be greater consistency of communications to the students.

On a positive note, students from all groups expressed very high satisfaction with MIC. All students thought their learning experience to date corresponded with their expectations, if not more. Lecturers are perceived as very friendly, knowing students' names and easy to communicate with. The general student support at MIC – academic, personal, social and financial – was also rated highly in all student groups, all in line with MIC's own strategy and mission.

In all, there are some shortcomings in the quality of both teaching and learning and assessment and grading in some areas of MIC's educational offerings. This could be due to limitations in lecturers' CPD. On the other hand, MIC has all the prerequisites to remedy this without starting from scratch. All documents provided are first-rate, and LEAD is in place with both the right competencies and the right approach. What is needed is time set aside for all lecturers who have not yet had training in modern student-centred teaching and learning, assessment, and grading practices which are informed by best known practice, international research, and innovative methodologies.

One suggestion is that a timetable is drawn up together with a registration/documentation system for this to become comprehensive and reach all lecturer groups. Quality in teaching and learning happens in the interaction between academic staff and students, and the best way to promote quality is to train the academic staff.

3.4 Student Support

MIC is strongly based in its Catholic ethos and its mission statement mentions that it seeks to foster the whole individual – their intellectual, spiritual, personal, and professional development together with a spirit of compassion and service to others and a respect for cultural diversity. This was clearly articulated during many meetings and evidenced by the students' positive statements. The students are also provided with a comprehensive student handbook with information concerning their whole academic experience. This also includes information about who to contact in case they need more information, help or assistance.

Students expressed satisfaction with particular aspects of student support, such as induction, and with the support systems outside of education in general. They also valued the quiet spaces to study and expressed surprise at how connected the College is to students, with student-staff relationships being open and equitable, which was valued for personal development and suggested their wellbeing was valued. This satisfaction was also expressed by postgraduate students in their supervision in terms of completing their research and thesis production.

International students recognised support MIC offered, for example, with the Department of Foreign Affairs and with sourcing accommodation, and welcomed the induction, including cultural supports from the outset. They would welcome more connection opportunities with Irish students, especially where the international students may take diverse classes. In this regard, the Irish buddy programme is a good idea but in need of expansion. Finally, the students commended the MIC International Office communications and overall support.

3.5 International Policy and International Learners

3.5.1 International Policy

The ISER does not address internationalisation in relation to education beyond MIC's intention to apply to QQI to be authorised to use the International Education Mark Higher Education (IEM HE) in 2024. The IEM is a new statutory quality mark and part of a suite of legislative measures designed to protect international learners. The decision was made at the Quality Committee in October 2023 that MIC would apply for the IEM in the first round of applications in 2024. In order to apply MIC must complete a self-assessment report based on the criteria set out in the IEM code. This work has already started within the College and the first draft of the IEM SAR was submitted to the Quality Committee for review and feedback in December 2023. This is quite an extensive process but will likely benefit MIC in terms of attracting more international students and offering these students high-quality education.

When meeting with internationalisation staff, we found them to be very positive about international students and the idea of global citizenship for the benefit of all – students as well as staff. The Review Panel discussion evolved to developing a new international strategy, which should emphasise clear criteria for strategic partnerships, and formalised processes around when to keep and when to let go of a partnership. Other aspects were to focus more on inter-culturalism, encouraging Irish students to go to countries other than Spain, France and Germany, creating more short-term programmes in partnership and making more use of Erasmus funding.

MIC does have international partnerships but none of them could be considered to be fully strategic. An international partnership that was mentioned specifically was with the Lynch School of Education at Boston College, which selected MIC as its main partner in the 'City Connects' programme. City Connects is an evidence-based intervention that helps teachers and schools provide support to students and families in socioeconomic disadvantaged areas. This is a partnership that fits well with MIC's identity and Catholic ethos.

3.5.2 International Students

MIC has the ambition to make significant strides in internationalisation by prioritising student and staff mobility as a core aspect of its academic offering and future development. This requires a dedicated international strategy and operational framework to capitalise on MIC's appeal to international learners. The College boasts one of the highest participation rates in the Erasmus+ programme within Ireland's higher education system, demonstrating its successful implementation. The Review Panel considers that clear structures, policies and procedures are in place and implemented. A 2017 HEA review of Erasmus+ in Ireland further confirmed the quality of MIC's participation. This commitment is reflected in the College's vision for the future: a vibrant international profile where students and staff have ample opportunities for global exchange, and the campus flourishes with a diverse international student body.

The College captures this ambition in its own strategy document, to "seek out other institutions active in similar forms of intervention and research." However, it is not clear to the Review Panel how staff are guided to achieve this ambition.

The Review Panel would like to see the international strategy recommended in the previous section produced and clearly highlighting MIC's ambitions in relation to mobility, student numbers and participation criteria. The College could take note of student suggestions for more opportunities for international and Irish students to meet, furthering the College's integration and internationalisation agendas.



3.6 Access, Transfer and Progression: Principles and Implementation

Several key developments to do with areas of access and progression have taken place since the 2017 review. Amongst other things, an Access and Participation Manager was appointed as well as a Head of Counselling. Furthermore, the Counselling service was expanded to increase the staff to student ratio, and a Careers service was established. In addition, all student supports were established at the Thurles campus.

Policies and procedures for access and transfer are clear and disseminated widely. MIC has an Admissions Office, which receives student applications and manages their progression from application through to offer of places, and enrolment on the College's undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes of study.

MIC's policies and procedures for student enrolment, registration, assessment, grading, performance standards, progression and academic awards are all outlined in the MIC Handbook of Academic Regulations and Procedures, a comprehensive and reader-friendly document aimed at students, academic staff and administrators. This handbook covers all NFQ levels, including professional doctorates, and is approved by the UL Academic Council. The Vice-President of Academic Affairs is responsible for these regulations being implemented, and MIC provides induction programmes for both students and staff.

Students were very positive about MIC's comprehensive first-year orientation programme in early September which they feel equips new students for a successful start. From informative college talks and support resources to interactive campus tours and social events, this programme was deemed to enhance the transition to college life.

MIC prioritises inclusiveness and diversity in its student-targeting and enrolment objectives. This can be seen in several projects the College is taking part in, for example the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR), the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE), and the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH). All these programmes are aimed at increasing participation by under-represented groups in higher education.

Regarding mature students, MIC runs several access courses to facilitate entry to undergraduate programmes. Particularly impressive is the Pre-University Programme (PUP), a 40-hour certificate programme aimed at adult learners from marginalised communities with limited educational attainment or progress. PUP aims to create a progressive access pathway into university-level education, which can act as a stepping stone into further studies and, in the long run, possibly lead to studies on first-, second- and third-cycle levels.

Commendations

- The programme development process involves stages, each comprising several distinct steps. The business case for programme development must be approved by the Business Approval Committee (BAC) on behalf of the Executive Team. The academic development of a new programme must finally be approved by Academic Programme Appraisal Committee (APAC) on behalf of An Chomhairle Acadúil.
- MIC has made commendable strides in supporting students. The appointment of an Access and Participation Manager and a Head of Counselling, with an expansion in the counselling service, demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity and well-being. Additionally, the Review Panel welcomes the establishment of a dedicated careers service. These initiatives, along with extending all student support services to the Thurles campus, reflect a comprehensive and well-rounded approach to student success.
- MIC offers several pathways for mature students to access undergraduate programmes. The Pre-University Programme (PUP) is particularly noteworthy. PUP provides a progressive pathway into university-level education, acting as a stepping stone for further studies. This programme demonstrates MIC's commitment to widening access to higher education for all.
- MIC is commended for consistently meeting students' expectations regarding the quality of their learning experiences. Students from all groups at the site visit expressed very high satisfaction with MIC. All students thought their learning experience to date corresponded with their expectations if not more. Lecturers are perceived as very friendly, knowing their names and easy to communicate with. The general student support at MIC – academic, personal, social and financial – was also rated highly in all student groups, all in line with MIC's own strategy and mission.
- The Review Panel highly commends MIC's approach of using quality review results to inform quality planning. This not only saves valuable time for everyone involved but can also serve as a powerful motivator for continual quality improvement efforts within the institution.
- The cohesive cycle created by External Examiner reports feeding the Annual Programme Reviews, which feed Departmental Quality Reviews, is an integrated approach that not only ensures thorough quality assessment but also streamlines the process, saving valuable time. The Review Panel commends MIC for this efficient system.
- The initial work on the IEM SAR and review by the Quality Committee is commendable. While this process is extensive, it demonstrates MIC's commitment to providing high-quality education for international students. This focus on academic excellence is likely to be attractive to students from around the world, potentially increasing international enrolment.

- The international partnership with the Lynch School of Education at Boston College is commendable specifically due to its 'City Connects' programme. This evidence-based initiative empowers teachers and schools to support students and families facing socioeconomic challenges and aligns perfectly with MIC's identity and Catholic ethos, and emphasis on social responsibility and helping those in need. The Review Panel commends MIC for establishing this impactful partnership.

Recommendations

- New programme design should consider articulating and integrating Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) principles within the learning outcomes, curriculum content, teaching and learning strategies, and assessment practices. This would ensure a holistic approach where sustainability is not just an add-on but a core element of the programme.
- One area for improvement identified in the programme reviews is the lack of a dedicated section linking the periodic programme review and academic department quality assurance review. The College might consider referring to the programme reviews within the Academic Departmental Quality Review self-assessment guidelines, and, where relevant, for example thematically or strategically, linking back to Departmental Quality Review in the programme review templates.
- Module reviews should be included in the programme reviews, with a clear focus on aligned teaching planning, clearly written learning outcomes, activating teaching and learning methods, and fit-for-purpose assessment methods.



- It is recommended that training be offered to staff members in relation to the data gathered on modules and programmes to ensure staff are proficient in accessing, interpreting and utilising such data effectively.
- The Review Panel was concerned about the potential for the quality of teaching and of assessment and grading to vary between programmes. MIC has an excellent advocate for best practice in LEAD but realises that this may not be fully utilised by all staff. MIC should consider all means to promote participation in CPD related to these essential components of education. It is recommended that a system of documentation be created so that MIC can ensure that lecturers' participation in these activities is guaranteed.
- During conversations with staff and students, it was commented that assignment feedback loops are highly variable. Some, but not all, lecturers provide feedback. Staff are unclear as to any formal process in place, which would ensure similarity across the College, and students conveyed that they are not guaranteed to receive quality feedback to improve their practice. It is recommended that all lecturers be made aware of and work in line with MIC's Assessment and Feedback policy..
- The Faculty of Education should perform a holistic review of their placement policy, processes and communication methods. Placement is fundamental to student development and students clearly feel this requires improvement.
- It is commendable that the College is so open to diverse groups and fully in line with MIC's identity, but it is important to monitor how students from these groups progress and graduate. The Review Panel recognises the additional responsibility that comes with being open and recommends that MIC monitor and routinely report on progression rates from diverse groups. This may also inform the efficacy and need for particular support services.
- Overall, the current international strategy seems unclear. The College should focus its efforts to produce a new international strategy. The strategy should include ambitions in relation to internationalisation at home and goals for its diffuse implementation.
- Related to the international strategy development, the College should be clear on the QA/QE issues related to internationalisation and how these should be approached by collaborating partners.

4 Research and Scholarship

4.1 Research Positioning of MIC: Policy and QA Implications

MIC is a relative newcomer in the research field, which is already populated in Ireland by mature and successful players, who generally have a much broader multidisciplinary profile than MIC. MIC recognises the competitive landscape, where established institutions often boast a wider range of disciplines, deeper expertise in specific areas, and a focus on interdisciplinary themes. These well-established players have a proven track record of securing research funding, fostering successful partnerships, and benefitting from a robust research support infrastructure. This competitive environment presents a significant challenge for a newcomer like MIC, which is still establishing its research presence.

Against this, MIC has creditable aspirations to be established as a respected university-level institution within the Irish system, and although recent recognition attempts have been rebuffed by the Government, it is determined to pursue this goal in cooperation with UL, which has been most supportive in nourishing the College's ambitions and providing facilitative support. Though its future official status is still not clear, the ambition remains strong, and the development of a strong, quality research profile is clearly critical, even though it may be relatively small and niche.

4.2 Research Health

The College has a Research Strategy, but it was unclear to the Review Panel how well-supported it is or, indeed, the resources and determination invested in its successful operation. The Review Panel was informed that MIC has taken the view that pursuing a detailed research strategy has not been appropriate, given the environmental uncertainties and instability. It has instead relied on a broad vision for research. However, the last strategic plan (2019) does contain a considerable amount of detail on research. Designated as Pillar 3 Research Culture, this section includes 3 high-level goals, 4 principal objectives and 16 enabling activities. While these elements seem well-suited for an institution in MIC's position, the lack of specific priorities and target dates renders the overall impact of this pillar unclear. In simpler terms, the detailed plan lacks a defined direction and timeframe, making it difficult to assess its effectiveness in achieving MIC's research goals.

Further complicating matters, the Review Panel found wide variation in staff understanding of the research vision itself, which can be expected in a collegial culture. Ideally, a clear vision would inform staff behaviour and practice, but this

doesn't seem to be the case at MIC. Discussions focused on the need for a "Vision plus" approach – a clear vision combined with concrete building blocks like funding support, staff development in research, a strong doctoral programme, and the creation of some small research centres. These elements were indeed included in the 2019 Strategic Plan, but the Review Panel found evidence that some initiatives have not been implemented effectively or at all.

Relating to the above points, the Review Panel then considered some important areas for the evolution of research at MIC. To evolve the College's research profile, the Review Panel identified several key areas for improvement. First, having a clear picture of research activity across staff and units is crucial. Currently, data on publications, staff doctorates, grant and other research income, supervisions, research impact evidence, etc. appear to be incomplete or not fully utilised to enhance research quality or develop new initiatives.

Second, understanding the research engagement level of individual staff members is vital. Are they inactive but uninterested, inactive but interested, moderately active, or highly active researchers? This categorisation is essential for developing career paths, building research competencies, and providing targeted support mechanisms to make MIC genuinely research-active by conventional standards.

Finally, the Review Panel acknowledged that in a small education and liberal arts-based institution with a strong collegial culture, researchers often pursue their own lines of inquiry, perhaps in concert with colleagues in other HEIs. Given the position of MIC, there is a case for considering the development of overarching research themes, around which colleagues may cluster into collaborative support groups, which would facilitate group research, act as a focus for attracting doctoral candidates, and make the College more attractive to research funders and potential research partners. There are small research groups at the moment, which could be the embryos for larger clusters. Interdisciplinary research and accessing other institutions in related themes would also be assisted.

All the above is important in creating unit research profiles, unit research plans, and the basis therefore of the institutional profile. The Review Panel did not see much evidence of the above. In fact, there was considerable lack of clarity on the notion of personal research plans and to what use they were put, which again raises questions about middle-level leadership in this regard.

Progress on reward and recognition for research seems uneven, certainly in the perception of various respondents. Whilst ostensibly merit-based promotion opportunities have been created, and linked to promotion, this is not known by many respondents. Similarly, progress has been slow on the WAM, which is of considerable concern (see Section 6.3 of this report).



4.3 Development of MIC Research

The Review Panel was impressed by the comprehensiveness and variety of the research related training offered, both to staff and students, by LEAD, the Research and Graduate School and externally. Staff spoke favourably of assistance given when applying for external grants. This makes the points made in the previous section all the more regrettable.

Small HEIs can normally benefit from inter-institutional partnerships at different levels: individual, unit and institutional. There was considerable enthusiasm for these, as they can yield good dividends when properly identified and managed.

Thus, the Review Panel feels that MIC would benefit from:

- a carefully articulated policy and guidelines for such partnerships, including criteria for selection.
- clarity on resource commitments.
- clarity on expected benefits: joint doctoral programmes, projects, publications.
- how they would be managed, monitored and evaluated, and, if necessary, curtailed.

The Review Panel has referred elsewhere to the desirability of generating additional income, not only from grants, but from R&D engagements and knowledge exchange, to reinvest in desirable support mechanisms for research (see Section 5.2).

4.4 Scholarship and Its Role in Research Development

Research students are a vital element in sustaining a research community, and MIC is commended for the excellent comments provided by doctoral and masters' students. These positive experiences encompass admission practices, induction processes, supervision, training, preparation for vivas, publication assistance, ongoing monitoring, and career advice. This strong foundation in student support bodes well for MIC's future research endeavours.

The Review Panel endorsed MIC's priority of expanding its research student body. The Panel suggested that including international and mature part-time students would achieve a well-rounded expansion strategy, further strengthening MIC's research community. However, expansion should be systematic and considered, not ad hoc, as this is likely to stretch capacity to breaking point and cause procedural overload.

Furthermore, the Review Panel strongly recommends that MIC consider setting specific targets for student number growth, with these targets phased over a defined timeframe. These targets should be categorised by student type (national/international, full-time/part-time) and programme structure (structured/conventional). This level of detail would provide a clearer roadmap for achieving MIC's research student recruitment goals.

This would also require

- expansion of supervisory capacity to support/define the expansion.
- clarity on possible thematic areas to attract students.
- certainty about accommodation and student services to support students.
- scholarships.

This approach will clearly have QA and strategic implications: it should be at the forefront of planning and action to maintain stakeholder confidence in MIC and optimise the use of resources.

Finally, the Review Panel recognises the difference between research and scholarship. Most of the preceding sections on research are directed to the former, the creation of new knowledge, or its reformulation in fresh configurations. Scholarship is about ensuring that staff are fully abreast of developments in their field, both intellectual and professional. All staff should do both, of course, but the Review Panel is encouraged by the provision of an excellent CPD programme, which certainly enhances scholarship.

Commendations

- There has been a coherent effort to address MIC's aspirations for university-level status through the advancement of research, which is not easy in a humanities-based institution of MIC's scale.
- Though there is a detailed set of elements in a research strategy, MIC has wisely focused on a smaller number of enabling instruments to make progress.
- The CPD programme to underpin staff research advancement and scholarship is comprehensive, impressive and effective (though not tied as closely as it might be to other aspects of HR and unit management).
- The processes for managing and caring for research students seem very fit-for-purpose and appreciated and welcomed by students.
- The differentiation of doctoral programme models is sensible and could be further exploited.
- The movement towards research partnerships is welcomed, subject to greater clarity of purpose.
- The pockets of research clustering to date seem well conceived and have potential both as a general principle and in individual cases.
- The Review Panel commends MIC for the excellent experiences reported by doctoral and masters' students.

Recommendations

- If a Research Vision is considered to be more effective than a detailed strategic plan, then its characteristics and content need to be more coherently disseminated and asserted to sink into the institutional consciousness and belief systems.
- The assessment of research performance of individuals and units needs to be sharpened, systematised, and connected with unit planning and staff support and advancement, bearing in mind the different categories/degrees of staff research activeness.
- MIC should consider the formulation of overarching research themes for the reasons quoted in 4.3.
- As for other areas of organisational development and succession planning, the various HR aspects of research advancement should be systematised and better connected, such as staff recruitment policies, research, career development, CPD and the promotion processes for research activity, research performance recognition and assessment, staff development, support for new early researchers, etc., all of which could be improved.
- Management of research at middle leadership levels should be clarified, especially in terms of HR and unit research plans and profiles.
- The expansion of research students is welcomed, but the various QA aspects identified should be carefully safeguarded in relation to the scale and directions of expansion, and remedial action taken in advance of expansion.

5 External Engagement

5.1 External Engagement

MIC's mission statement has been characterised by a strong social justice ethos since the College's establishment in 1898. While MIC's ethos stems from a religious foundation, it has evolved throughout the years to reflect a secular model that maintains a duty to make positive contributions to society. MIC places a considerable emphasis on external engagement, seeking to foster strong and sustainable partnerships with the local community in Limerick and beyond. MIC has contributed to Limerick City's 'Limerick 2030: An Economic & Spatial Plan for Limerick' (MIC ISER p. 25).

External engagement initiatives at MIC encompass various activities and partnerships devised to promote collaboration, outreach, and social responsibility, often led by staff and students. They are engaging on many levels, from staff sitting on boards of management in community settings to working on school-based collaborations with an educational focus. The effort and time it takes to engage with stakeholders and partake in curriculum development and delivery of programmes should be commended, as there is no monetary reward involved; this engagement is not-for-profit.

5.2 Enterprise and Community Engagement

Enterprise and Community Engagement facilitates and connects MIC with the wider communities and the business world through innovative partnerships. The MIC Office of Enterprise and Community Engagement was established in 2014 to strengthen partnerships and increase MIC's influence on the community by connecting staff and students with community members (MIC ISER, p. 25). MIC's partnerships have considerable value by providing outreach educational programmes and events, which are often delivered by MIC's staff and students.

MIC works closely with Paul Partnership in Limerick, whose key mission is to promote social inclusion and engage with local communities to improve the quality of life for the people of Limerick. External stakeholders also include local schools, with whom MIC partners to address immediate needs within the educational community. For example, MIC has supported local primary schools in implementing positive behaviour strategies with students, delivering the Incredible Years Programme and the Transforming Education Through Dialogue Programme.

In discussions with local principals, it was identified that these initiatives positively influenced the school and impacted students. The support provided by MIC to local schools in this way promotes long-term and short-term educational and social impacts within the community.

Partnering with the Lynch School of Education at Boston College, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Tusla, and the Northeast Inner-City Initiative, MIC is playing a crucial role in introducing the City Connects Project to Ireland. The project supports students academically, socially, emotionally, and physically by connecting them to a tailored set of prevention, intervention and enrichment services in their school and local community. The programme is currently being piloted in 10 DEIS schools in Dublin's Northeast Inner City and may be followed by delivery of the programme in Limerick City.

5.3 Service to Schools

As a provider of initial teacher education, MIC is committed to promoting STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) within the primary and second-level curricula, which extends to local schools, teachers, parents and children through a comprehensive range of outreach activities and events. In March 2023, the CRAFT (Creative Arts / Future Technologies) Maker Space was established on MIC's campus, which aims to engage students and the public with STEAM through various events (MIC ISER p. 26). Additional prominent activities that should be commended are their long-standing outreach with Scoil Mháthair Dé, fostering positive dispositions towards the benefits of STEAM by developing the relevant skill set needed to navigate the world of technology and STEAM moving forward. Although MIC is not unique in recognising the need for students to engage in initiatives relating to STEAM, it also recognises the need to support those they partner with in providing adequate programmes for students. In response to this need, MIC has supported partners with integrating pedagogical approaches into the STEAM activities and programmes they provide. As a result, MIC provides an invaluable service to its partners, who can provide engaging and effective programmes to students at the primary and secondary levels.

MIC continues to engage with the community each year by co-hosting Limerick Science Week, during which the College provides interactive STEAM activities for adults and students on campus and in local primary schools. The event is sponsored through grant funding provided by Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) and through the dedication of its staff and student teachers to organise the event. The grant through SFI provides a dedicated space for MIC to engage the public with STEAM, indicating a long-term commitment of MIC to continue this initiative.

5.4 Businesses in the Community

MIC has developed partnerships with numerous other businesses in the community, such as Dell and Jaguar Land Rover. In partnering with Dell, MIC provides primary and post-primary students the opportunity to engage in STEAM competitions, such as the Dell VEX Robotics competition geared toward primary-level students. In partnering with Dell, MIC engages students in other areas besides those directly related to STEAM, such as law, marketing, finance, and HR. Similarly, MIC works alongside Jaguar to host workshops in which students from the community learn about 21st-century technology and future careers as software engineers. These partnerships indicate MIC's commitment to engaging with local businesses to ensure students receive engaging and meaningful opportunities to learn about careers and topics relating to STEAM.

Through its work with local industries, it is clear that MIC is committed to engaging students, specifically those in the STEAM fields, at an early age. MIC's ethos relies on a strong belief in giving back to the community through partnerships without financial gains for the College itself. However, it is recommended that MIC reflect on whether businesses it partners with can identify areas of potential increased funding, which can be funnelled back into the community programmes that MIC supports.

Throughout discussions with MIC and external community partners, it was evident that meaningful work was being produced, which positively impacted the community. However, it was unclear how MIC develops and tracks the goals of these partnerships, both in terms of broad long-term goals and short-term milestones. In addition, as referenced, it is advised that MIC integrate funding goals within these partnerships, which can aid in supporting and further enhancing initiatives that give back to the community.



Commendations

- The College is to be commended for the variety and depth of collaboration, outreach, and social responsibility activities and partnerships.
- The role of the Office of Enterprise and Community Engagement is essential in supporting and strategically promoting partnerships that improve MIC's external engagement impact.
- MIC has an impressive array of STEAM activities, with the 2023 launch of the CRAFT Maker Space being a new and considered initiative to improve STEAM engagement through various events.

Recommendations

- MIC should review its stakeholder collaboration and programme content and delivery. Considering the quality assurance aspect, the College should investigate Community Action Research (CARN: <http://www.eari.ie/>) as a base to enhance its quality with stakeholder engagement.
- While MIC offers a range of programmes for children and young adults, a more strategic approach to lifelong learning is recommended. MIC can position itself as an access college from cradle to grave, ensuring its social justice ethos encompasses all walks of life. With the expansion of programmes comes funding opportunities to support the Enterprise and Community Engagement Office in becoming sustainable and expanding as needed.
- It is recommended that MIC continue to grow sustainable partnerships within business communities, offering real-world job prospects and training to children and young adults in the local community and county.
- MIC maintains numerous partnerships that benefit the local community and businesses. However, international partnerships are less prevalent. Most of MIC's work with international entities is centred on academic programmes. It is recommended that MIC broaden its strategic partnerships to include international links.
- The creation of a diverse, buoyant and reliable income profile, including from community engagement, is recommended to sustain ongoing development, including quality improvement..
- MIC should design policy and associated instruments to realise this diverse and reliable income profile.
- The Review Panel recommends an evolution of institutional culture to incentivise this, consistent with the MIC ethos and a service philosophy.

6 Support Functions

6.1 Support Services and Academic Quality

Although the main focus of attention for the Review Panel has been the academic directions and quality of the programmes at MIC, it is inevitable that the support services of the institution will potentially impinge on the effectiveness of the academic operations, both positively and negatively. Often, these are not aligned with the overarching institutional objectives and the needs of core activities. It is therefore important to flag up for the attention of MIC any issues we see in this domain, especially here in relation to HR and personnel, finance and resources, marketing and communication, and data management. Matters relating to the services in the academic domain, internationalisation and research are addressed in the preceding sections of this report. Support services thus constitute a transverse theme going across the report chapters.

6.2 Quality Review of Support Services

The Review Panel was pleased to see serious efforts to review the quality of operations of support services. There appears to be a coherent cycle of annual reviews of services, which are well documented, and a series of appropriate criteria deriving from the perspective of the communities that use these services. These user communities would be students, individual staff, academic faculties, and academic departments and centres. On the whole, the orientation seems to be outward looking to user needs rather than bureaucratic and inward looking. The common criteria appear to include the visibility of service providers to the user; a 'Just in Time' and flexible response mode; quality professional advice, including online; adequate dissemination; and the effectiveness of tracking processes.

These are highly appropriate criteria to be used, and the Review Panel commends MIC in this regard.

However, the Review Panel would recommend putting in place some form of contract between academic units and central services, which would be regularly reviewed to ensure changing needs are being met without becoming overly bureaucratic.

6.3 Staff Development and Performance Management

Several common themes emerged across the other sections of the report, and the Review Panel will attempt to bring these perspectives together here.

According to discussions in the HR and staff sessions, induction and the development of part-time staff does not yet exist. This could potentially negatively affect part-time staff's understanding of MIC's culture of quality and their assimilation into the College and its ethos. This was also brought up by the full-time lecturers who devote time to inducting and training part-time lecturers.

Reviewing the performance of staff seems to be not very explicit or effective, and there were wide discrepancies across MIC as to what the processes actually are and whether, in fact, they are needed at all. There is unease at the terminology to be used ('appraisal', 'assessment', 'review' and 'advising' were all cited, and they are, of course, different in purpose and impact).

Uncertainty surrounds who conducts these reviews (heads of unit) and how they are used (development, promotion, discipline). This seems especially ineffective in terms of college staff (refer to Section 4). There appears to be significant room for improvement in this area.

Limited promotion opportunities were a major source of staff frustration. Respondents reported a lack of opportunities for promotions, unclear criteria, and a general feeling of frustration. While low staff turnover might suggest a positive work environment, it could also indicate a lack of external opportunities. Generating more non-government income could potentially fund additional promotions.

Staff training initiatives were commended, particularly those offered by LEAD, the Research and Graduate School Office, and HR. However, the report recommends that training be better aligned with a refined and explicit personal development review panel and that part-time faculty have access to relevant opportunities. Leadership succession training is also highlighted as an important area as it was implicit at best.

The Review Panel was disturbed to note that no significant progress seems to have been made on the implementation of the workload model since the last review in 2017. This was explained by the failure to reach agreement in a highly collegial culture, which may prioritise consensus over progress and which reinforces the points made in Section 2.4 on the need to evolve that culture to a more purposive place. Failure to move is likely to be a distinct inhibitor to MIC's ability to move into new academic priorities in relation to international programmes, research, R&D, and part-time mature students and lifelong learning (addressed in Section 3), all of which necessitate very flexible workload arrangements and, perhaps, contracts.

The report proposes a workload model that considers time spent on teaching (undergraduate and postgraduate), research degree supervision, personal research and scholarship, R&D and community engagement projects, administrative duties, and professional development. This model would be flexible and adaptable to individual needs across units and years.

To address workload inconsistencies, the report suggests a single contract with internal variations. This contract would account for the aforementioned variations in workload expectations across staff members. The report cites other HEIs as examples of achieving fairness and equivalence within such a model. Implementing a workload model and revised contracts are seen as urgent priorities to support MIC's evolving strategic direction.

In conclusion, a more systematic and purposeful approach to staff development and performance management is needed to improve organisational succession planning, staff well-being and professional outcomes. This transition requires moving from an organic collegial culture to a more structured system, with implications for the changing role of heads of unit. Addressing these issues may require adjustments to promotion, development, and reward systems, always acknowledging that there are external constraints on the freedom of movement the College enjoys.



6.4 Finance and Resources

Finance and resources were not central to this review, and the evidence collected was quite restricted as a consequence. The following are offered for consideration in the context of sustaining the declared priorities.

The Review Panel was made aware of the overall financial position of MIC, which has apparently been well stewarded, with a tradition of surpluses, and a healthy reserve, managed by the Senior Management Team with the oversight of the Governing Authority. Nonetheless MIC faces significant financial challenges. These challenges include ongoing government funding constraints, a limited domestic student market for humanities and related subjects, and fierce competition for those students across regional, national, and international institutions. As noted previously, faith-based universities appear particularly vulnerable in this global landscape, raising concerns about MIC's long-term sustainability. Securing stable financial resources is therefore essential to achieving MIC's future academic goals.

In light of these challenges, the Review Panel strongly recommends that MIC prioritise developing a diversified, durable, and buoyant income profile. There is a wealth of available resources outlining practical methods to achieve this. Key elements include fostering an entrepreneurial culture that incentivises staff and units to identify new revenue opportunities, engaging creatively with potential customers and users, developing flexible HR and financial tools to support these initiatives, and adhering to sound ethical principles throughout the process.

There is evidence of very good projects of community organisation engagement, which have a significant social impact and are evidently appreciated. They capitalise on excellent academic foundations and are an expression of knowledge exchange, but they are not designed either to cover costs or to make a surplus. Whilst the Review Panel fully understands and applauds the motive of providing service to the local community, not covering costs is a drain on other parts of the institution, adds an element to workload for which staff do not receive compensation in hours allocated or remuneration, and forgoes the opportunity of generating fresh income, reputational enhancement and positioning as a HE leader.



Therefore, the Review Panel strongly recommends that a policy of income generation from the commercialisation of the academic and intellectual assets of MIC be developed and that possibilities for generating income from academic sources, the estate and other facilities be investigated. This might include:

- Lifelong learning
- R&D and consultancy
- Off-campus learning
- Contract education and training for external public and private sector organisations
- Hiring out accommodation
- Summer schools for overseas students and partner US colleges

Implementing a sensitive costing and pricing policy is crucial. This policy should consider MIC's ethos, workload recognition for staff involved, and the need for incentives and support mechanisms. The additional income generated could then be strategically allocated to various quality improvement initiatives. These might include funding more promotion positions, staff development opportunities (including sabbaticals), hiring part-time and adjunct faculty, supporting research partnerships, and enhancing IT resources for student learning. The Review Panel emphasises that a more entrepreneurial approach does not necessarily contradict academic quality, community engagement, or MIC's core values of service.

Though the Review Panel did not investigate this in any depth, it is apparent that the academic priorities of having more mature students, more international students, more research, etc. are likely to need more physical space, whether at Limerick or Thurles. If this is not provided, the plans need some recalibration or reconceptualisation. The Review Panel is aware that the Governing Authority and trustees are cognisant of this but, given the lack of detail and other concerns, this is something on which the Review Panel cannot really advise further.

6.5 Data Management in QA

The College's dedication to data-informed practices is evident in the establishment of a data support service and the appointment within the Quality Office of a Data Analytics Manager with expertise in data visualisation and projection. This focus on data empowers effective programme evaluation and improvement. Programme reviews increasingly leverage valuable information from the MIC Quality Office, including programme specifics, student survey data, enrolment and retention data. The high quality of these data is seen as a significant strength, enabling more comprehensive and insightful quality systems. The active engagement of An Chomhairle Acadúil in oversight and data utilisation further underscores MIC's commitment to a culture of continual quality improvement.

6.6 Marketing and User Communication

The focus of MIC's Strategic Communications & Marketing (SCM) Office revolves around cultivating and enhancing the College's reputation among various stakeholder groups. Its core responsibility lies in effectively promoting and clearly communicating the strategic objectives of MIC while developing a strong and recognisable brand identity for the College through consistent communication strategies.

6.6.1 Media Relations

The hub of the media relations is the MIC website, which provides the user with information on courses, student supports, research, up-and-coming news and events. The website is updated regularly. In interviews with the Review Panel, students and staff indicated that the website is their main go-to place for information regarding MIC and that it has everything they need as a resource for college and work life. MIC's brand identity is strong and is used on all promotional materials. The College's brand guidelines communicate the values and identity of the MIC brand. This ensures a quality aspect to media and marketing content, which influences any stakeholder that encounters MIC. This quality permeates across the College's prospectus, marketing infographics and other printed resources.

All information is consistent with key messages and brand identity. A special acknowledgement should be given to the SCM Office on its first quality review. This is a significant step in reviewing the excellent practices already in place and ensuring quality enhancement and improvement.

6.6.2 Digital Marketing

Staff in the SMC Office are proficient in using digital marketing to enhance the marketing value of MIC, utilising social and digital media, web design, video and photography for MIC. Through their various media campaigns, they convey key strategic messages by promoting the College through its students and alumni, giving a very real account of college life from the people that live it. They produce high quality content and often run campaigns to receive feedback from students. These testimonials are passionate and an affordable way to advertise the College in an honest light. In discussions with staff and students there was a clear sense that MIC marketing campaigns were positive and encompassed the students' experiences while giving comprehensive messaging of the unique attributes the College offers. This tactic should be commended as it gives clear, concise and accurate information for stakeholders, potential students and the wider social network community.

6.6.3 Schools Outreach

SCM Office staff run a comprehensive school's outreach campaign to inform students who may enrol at the College. They develop multi-layer campaigns using an array of marketing tools, such as marketing analytics, recruitment events, digital platforms and print, and radio and outdoor advertising. The office has organised visits to over 100 schools, participated in career fairs across Ireland and welcomed thousands of potential students to the campus on open days. The success of the marketing team's strategies needs to be complimented; the planning and implementation needed to present MIC in such a positive light – one that reflects the overarching brand and image – is an enormous piece of work that should be celebrated.



Commendations

- The Strategic Communications & Marketing (SCM) Office is well organised and fit-for-purpose. The Office has a clear strategy, which is operated effectively.
- The inclusion of the SCM Office in the MIC Review Cycle integrates the office into the MIC firmament and guarantees a cycle of improvement.
- The College possesses a very comprehensive and well-regarded portfolio of activities in respect of training and staff development.
- MIC maintains a reasonably stable financial position, with good levels of reserves in the Trust.
- MIC has shown good financial stewardship to date.
- The adoption of data-informed practices is notable, and the embracing of data visualisation techniques enables College decision-makers to confidently arrive at the heart of each challenge.

Recommendation

- The need to reconsider the role, effectiveness and processes of the following and to design revised mechanisms appropriate for MIC for the next planning period, including:
 - review of staff performance and offering of advice or suggestions in relation to performance
 - a single but flexible workload model
 - connecting training with career development
 - promotion resources, processes and criteria.

7 Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 General Findings

7.1.1 Good Practice

The Review Panel found many areas of laudable performance during the review and would like to highlight these here. The Review Panel found a pervasive and well-functioning QA/QE culture, actively supported by a caring and committed staff. This commitment is evident in practical ways across all aspects of QA/QE processes, creating a supportive environment that fosters optimal student outcomes. The College also demonstrates a highly commendable focus on student success. Furthermore, MIC's investment in the e-OLAS system positions the College as potential thought-leaders in the Irish HE sector by utilising data-driven decision-making to continually improve the quality of the student experience. The College also maintains a sound financial position with strong reserves and a history of responsible financial stewardship. Finally, the adoption of data-driven practices, including data visualisation techniques, empowers decision-makers to effectively address challenges.

7.1.2 Organisational Approach

The Review Panel identified areas where MIC's institutional culture could benefit from more systematic processes. These improvements would streamline operations and enhance the overall quality environment. Key recommendations include fostering improved communication and collaboration between departments and ensuring consistent application of clear and standardised procedures across all units. Redefining the role and scope of middle-level leadership, particularly in HR, is crucial for effective quality improvement implementation. Additionally, the Review Panel suggests finding ways to integrate entrepreneurial elements while maintaining the College's core cultural identity.

7.1.3 QE Culture

To further strengthen the QE culture, the Review Panel recommends systematising overlapping processes and emphasising an "enhancement" focus. Greater attention should also be paid to ensuring consistent application of simple, standardised processes across units. The Review Panel also suggests building local capacity for using the e-OLAS system and evidencing effectiveness in training. This would free up specialised evaluation expertise within MIC to focus on broader horizon-scoping and future-oriented trajectory analysis. Finally, strengthening connections between various parts of the institution is vital for upholding a consistent quality culture across all operating domains.

7.1.4 Student Support and the Student Voice

MIC demonstrates a strong commitment to student support through a comprehensive and well-rounded approach. The establishment of dedicated Access and Participation Manager and Head of Counselling roles and the expanded counselling services signify a focus on inclusivity and well-being. Furthermore, the creation of a careers service benefits students in their professional development. For mature students, MIC offers accessible pathways through programmes such as the Pre-University Programme, reflecting the College's dedication to widening participation in higher education.

Students repeatedly conveyed to the Review Panel that MIC delivers on student expectations. In summary, students across all groups reported high satisfaction with their learning experiences, praising friendly and approachable lecturers. Additionally, MIC delivers exceptional support services, encompassing academic, personal, social, and financial aspects – all aligning with the College's mission.

Beyond student support, MIC fosters a culture of continual improvement. The College commendably utilises quality review results to inform future planning, saving time and driving ongoing efforts towards excellence. The College has also implemented an efficient quality assurance cycle, integrating reports from external examiners, annual programme reviews, and departmental reviews.



7.1.5 Global Engagement

MIC's commitment extends to its international students. The College's focus on providing high-quality education is evident in the in-depth preparation process for the International Education Mark. Furthermore, the College's international partnership with the Lynch School of Education at Boston College, particularly the "City Connects" programme, aligns perfectly with its emphasis on social responsibility and supporting those in need. This impactful partnership empowers teachers and schools to assist students who face socioeconomic challenges. The Review Panel commends MIC for these admirable initiatives, which contribute to a thriving student-centred environment.

7.1.6 Programme Delivery and Assessment

For programme reviews, the Review Panel recommends explicitly referencing quality assurance templates and including reviews of individual modules. These module reviews should focus on ensuring aligned teaching plans, clear learning outcomes, engaging teaching methods, and appropriate assessment practices. Additionally, training staff on data analysis related to modules and programmes would improve its utilisation and potentially increase student confidence in the value of these surveys.

A key concern was the potential variation in teaching quality and assessment practices across programmes. While LEAD offers valuable best practices, the Review Panel suggests that CPD in teaching and assessment be promoted more. A documentation system to ensure all staff participate in these activities is also recommended.

Feedback on assignments emerged as another area needing improvement. The Review Panel recommends ensuring all faculty are aware of and follow MIC's Assessment and Feedback policy to promote consistent, high-quality feedback that benefits student learning.

A holistic review of the Faculty of Education's placement offerings is warranted based on student feedback.

7.1.7 Research

Despite being a humanities-based institution of MIC's scale, the College has made a commendable and well-coordinated effort to advance its research endeavours in pursuit of university-level status. Notably, the College has focused on impactful initiatives, such as a comprehensive and successful CPD programme to support staff for teaching and research. MIC demonstrates this commitment to staff development through a comprehensive training portfolio. Additionally, postgraduate students felt that the College offers well-regarded support services for research students, particularly with a differentiated doctoral programme model. While research partnerships hold promise, further clarity on their purpose is recommended. Existing research clusters demonstrate potential for growth.

7.1.8 Future Developments

Looking towards the future, the Review Panel recommends developing a new internationalisation strategy with clear goals for both internationalisation at home and its broader implementation. This strategy should also address QA/QE considerations related to international partnerships. Finally, the Review Panel commends MIC's commitment to diversity but recommends monitoring and routinely reporting on progression rates for students from diverse groups. These data can inform the effectiveness of existing support services and identify the need for additional resources.

A review of staff performance and related advice processes is recommended, alongside the development of a single, flexible workload model. Additionally, connecting training opportunities with career development plans and establishing clear promotion resources, processes, and criteria would benefit staff.

The Review Panel suggests exploring Community Action Research as a means to involve stakeholders in programme review and quality assurance efforts. Furthermore, the Panel recommends developing a more strategic approach to lifelong learning with a view to positioning MIC as an "access college from cradle to grave" to fulfil its social justice mission. Expanding programme offerings attracts funding opportunities, potentially allowing the Enterprise and Community Engagement Office to become more sustainable.

The Review Panel encourages MIC to continue developing partnerships with local businesses and organisations to offer real-world training and job prospects. Additionally, the Panel recommends broadening the College's strategic partnerships to include international collaborations beyond academic programmes.

Finally, to support continual quality improvement, MIC should develop a plan to diversify its income profile and create a more reliable funding stream. This may involve policy changes and the creation of new instruments while remaining consistent with the College's existing ethos and service philosophy.

7.2 Commendations

Chapter 2 Commendations

- There is a very caring and supportive culture for students at MIC, which is a practical expression of the College's ethos, with an undoubted staff commitment at all levels in helping achieve the best possible student outcomes, assisted by an increasingly robust QA/QE infrastructure.
- Practical expressions of the caring MIC ethos were found consistently across all aspects of QA/QE processes.
- There is a fairly pervasive and well-functioning QA/QE culture, with most of the important elements intersecting effectively with other areas of college structure and function.
- The use of evidence, garnered by investment in the e-OLAS system, to support effective QA/QE decision-making has potential to be truly thought-leading in the Irish HE sector.



Chapter 3 Commendations

- The programme development process involves stages, each comprising several distinct steps. The business case for programme development must be approved by the Business Approval Committee (BAC) on behalf of the Executive Team. The academic development of a new programme must finally be approved by Academic Programme Appraisal Committee (APAC) on behalf of An Chomhairle Acadúil.
- MIC has made commendable strides in supporting students. The appointment of an Access and Participation Manager and a Head of Counselling, with an expansion in the counselling service, demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity and well-being. Additionally, the Review Panel welcomes the establishment of a dedicated careers service. These initiatives, along with extending all student support services to the Thurles campus, reflect a comprehensive and well-rounded approach to student success.
- MIC offers several pathways for mature students to access undergraduate programmes. The Pre-University Programme (PUP) is particularly noteworthy. PUP provides a progressive pathway into university-level education, acting as a stepping stone for further studies. This programme demonstrates MIC's commitment to widening access to higher education for all.
- MIC is commended for consistently meeting students' expectations regarding the quality of their learning experiences. Students from all groups at the site visit expressed very high satisfaction with MIC. All students thought their learning experience to date corresponded with their expectations if not more. Lecturers are perceived as very friendly, knowing their names and easy to communicate with. The general student support at MIC – academic, personal, social and financial – was also rated highly in all student groups, all in line with MIC's own strategy and mission.
- The Review Panel highly commends MIC's approach of using quality review results to inform quality planning. This not only saves valuable time for everyone involved but can also serve as a powerful motivator for continual quality improvement efforts within the institution.
- The cohesive cycle created by External Examiner reports feeding the Annual Programme Reviews, which feed Departmental Quality Reviews, is an integrated approach that not only ensures thorough quality assessment but also streamlines the process, saving valuable time. The Review Panel commends MIC for this efficient system.
- The initial work on the IEM SAR and review by the Quality Committee is commendable. While this process is extensive, it demonstrates MIC's commitment to providing high-quality education for international students. This focus on academic excellence is likely to be attractive to students from around the world, potentially increasing international enrolment.

- The international partnership with the Lynch School of Education at Boston College is commendable specifically due to its 'City Connects' programme. This evidence-based initiative empowers teachers and schools to support students and families facing socioeconomic challenges and aligns perfectly with MIC's identity and Catholic ethos, and emphasis on social responsibility and helping those in need. The Review Panel commends MIC for establishing this impactful partnership.

Chapter 4 Commendations

- There has been a coherent effort to address MIC's aspirations for university-level status through the advancement of research, which is not easy in a humanities-based institution of MIC's scale.
- Though there is a detailed set of elements in a research strategy, MIC has wisely focused on a smaller number of enabling instruments to make progress.
- The CPD programme to underpin staff research advancement and scholarship is comprehensive, impressive and effective (though not tied as closely as it might be to other aspects of HR and unit management).
- The processes for managing and caring for research students seem very fit-for-purpose and appreciated and welcomed by students.
- The differentiation of doctoral programme models is sensible and could be further exploited.
- The movement towards research partnerships is welcomed, subject to greater clarity of purpose.
- The pockets of research clustering to date seem well conceived and have potential both as a general principle and in individual cases.
- The Review Panel commends MIC for the excellent experiences reported by doctoral and masters' students.

Chapter 5 Commendations

- The College is to be commended for the variety and depth of collaboration, outreach, and social responsibility activities and partnerships.
- The role of the Office of Enterprise and Community Engagement is essential in supporting and strategically promoting partnerships that improve MIC's external engagement impact.
- MIC has an impressive array of STEAM activities, with the 2023 launch of the CRAFT Maker Space being a new and considered initiative to improve STEAM engagement through various events.

Chapter 6 Commendations

- The Strategic Communications & Marketing (SCM) Office is well organised and fit-for-purpose. The Office has a clear strategy, which is operated effectively.
- The inclusion of the SCM Office in the MIC Review Cycle integrates the office into the MIC firmament and guarantees a cycle of improvement.
- The College possesses a very comprehensive and well-regarded portfolio of activities in respect of training and staff development.
- MIC maintains a reasonably stable financial position, with good levels of reserves in the Trust.
- MIC has shown good financial stewardship to date.
- The adoption of data-informed practices is notable, and the embracing of data visualisation techniques enables College decision-makers to confidently arrive at the heart of each challenge.

7.3 Recommendations

Chapter 2 Recommendations

- The Review Panel identified areas where the culture could be strengthened through more systematic processes. These improvements would foster a more streamlined and efficient institutional environment and include:
 - improving communication and collaboration between different departments within MIC.
 - ensuring consistent application of clear and standardised procedures across all units.
- Further strengthening of a QE culture in terms of greater systematisation of overlapping College processes and increased usage of an 'enhancement' lexicon.
- More connectivity between various parts of the institution so that overarching quality culture is upheld across all operating domains.
- Greater attention given to the consistent application of simple and standardised processes across units as indicated within various areas of this review.
- Redefinition of the role and scope of middle-level leadership and/or heads of units, particularly in the HR area, to ensure that positive implementation of QE can be upheld and sustained across the College.
- More attention should be given to possible adoption of entrepreneurial elements as part of the growing QE cultural ethos at MIC.



- More local capacity-building should be provided regarding use of e-OLAS and evidencing effectiveness in training subject/programme-level delivery staff, which would free up the excellent specialist evaluation expertise within MIC to turn attention to wider horizon-scoping and future-facing trajectory analysis.
- The College should ensure that the loop between review and subsequent action is strengthened.
- MIC should ensure that student number projections reflect the desired academic profile over the next planning period.
- A study should be undertaken of the longer-term sustainability of all programmes in terms of quality of the programme and department across a range of college-defined criteria, such as trends in market demand for courses, level of student entry, progression, retention and completion, graduate destinations, adequacy of personnel profile, cost structure of programmes and also the market buoyancy of the programmes in the future. This should be fed into periodic programme and profiling activities.
- Sustainability in the staffing base is part of the above in terms of attention to the age profile, use of visiting staff, and a continuation and extension of the excellent staff development offering to meet new challenges.

Chapter 3 Recommendations

- New programme design should consider articulating and integrating Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) principles within the learning outcomes, curriculum content, teaching and learning strategies, and assessment practices. This would ensure a holistic approach where sustainability is not just an add-on but a core element of the programme.
- One area for improvement identified in the programme reviews is the lack of a dedicated section referencing the quality assurance templates. It would be beneficial to explicitly mention these templates within the programme reviews to ensure consistency and facilitate their effective use.
- Module reviews should be included in the programme reviews, with a clear focus on aligned teaching planning, clearly written learning outcomes, activating teaching and learning methods, and fit-for-purpose assessment methods.
- It is recommended that training be offered to staff members in relation to the data gathered on modules and programmes to ensure staff are proficient in accessing, interpreting and utilising such data effectively.
- The Review Panel was concerned about the potential for the quality of teaching and of assessment and grading to vary between programmes. MIC has an excellent advocate for best practice in LEAD but realises that this may not be fully utilised by all staff. MIC should consider all means to promote participation in CPD related to these essential components of education. It is recommended that a system of documentation be created so that MIC can ensure that lecturers' participation in these activities is guaranteed.
- During conversations with staff and students, it was commented that assignment feedback loops are highly variable. Some, but not all, lecturers provide feedback. Staff are unclear as to any formal process in place, which would ensure similarity across the College, and students conveyed that they are not guaranteed to receive quality feedback to improve their practice. It is recommended that all lecturers be made aware of and work in line with MIC's Assessment and Feedback policy..
- The Faculty of Education should perform a holistic review of their placement policy, processes and communication methods. Placement is fundamental to student development and students clearly feel this requires improvement.
- It is commendable that the College is so open to diverse groups and fully in line with MIC's identity, but it is important to monitor how students from these groups progress and graduate. The Review Panel recognises the additional responsibility that comes with being open and recommends that MIC monitor and routinely report on progression rates from diverse groups. This may also inform the efficacy and need for particular support services.
- Overall, the current international strategy seems unclear. The College should focus its efforts to produce a new international strategy. The strategy should include ambitions in relation to internationalisation at home and goals for its diffuse implementation.
- Related to the international strategy development, the College should be clear

on the QA/QE issues related to internationalisation and how these should be approached by collaborating partners.

Chapter 4 Recommendations

- If a Research Vision is considered to be more effective than a detailed strategic plan, then its characteristics and content need to be more coherently disseminated and asserted to sink into the institutional consciousness and belief systems.
- The assessment of research performance of individuals and units needs to be sharpened, systematised, and connected with unit planning and staff support and advancement, bearing in mind the different categories/degrees of staff research activeness.
- MIC should consider the formulation of overarching research themes for the reasons quoted in 4.3.
- As for other areas of organisational development and succession planning, the various HR aspects of research advancement should be systematised and better connected, such as staff recruitment policies, research, career development, CPD and the promotion processes for research activity, research performance recognition and assessment, staff development, support for new early researchers, etc., all of which could be improved.
- Management of research at middle leadership levels should be clarified, especially in terms of HR and unit research plans and profiles.
- The expansion of research students is welcomed, but the various QA aspects identified should be carefully safeguarded in relation to the scale and directions of expansion, and remedial action taken in advance of expansion.



Chapter 5 Recommendations

- MIC should review its stakeholder collaboration and programme content and delivery. Considering the quality assurance aspect, the College should investigate Community Action Research (CARN: <http://www.eari.ie/>) as a base to enhance its quality with stakeholder engagement.
- While MIC offers a range of programmes for children and young adults, a more strategic approach to lifelong learning is recommended. MIC can position itself as an access college from cradle to grave, ensuring its social justice ethos encompasses all walks of life. With the expansion of programmes comes funding opportunities to support the Enterprise and Community Engagement Office in becoming sustainable and expanding as needed.
- It is recommended that MIC continue to grow sustainable partnerships within business communities, offering real-world job prospects and training to children and young adults in the local community and county.
- MIC maintains numerous partnerships that benefit the local community and businesses. However, international partnerships are less prevalent. Most of MIC's work with international entities is centred on academic programmes. It is recommended that MIC broaden its strategic partnerships to include international links.
- The creation of a diverse, buoyant and reliable income profile, including from community engagement, is recommended to sustain ongoing development, including quality improvement.
- MIC should design policy and associated instruments to realise this diverse and reliable income profile.
- The Review Panel recommends an evolution of institutional culture to incentivise this, consistent with the MIC ethos and a service philosophy.

Chapter 6 Recommendation

- The need to reconsider the role, effectiveness and processes of the following and to design revised mechanisms appropriate for MIC for the next planning period, including:
 - review of staff performance and offering of advice or suggestions in relation to performance
 - a single but flexible workload model
 - connecting training with career development
 - promotion resources, processes and criteria.

8 Institutional Response by Mary Immaculate College to the 2024 Institutional Review Report

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Mary Immaculate College (MIC) is committed to ensuring the very highest standards of excellence in its teaching, learning, research and support activities. The college community has a collective responsibility for quality assurance and quality enhancement, and this is enshrined in the MIC Mission Statement.

MIC embraced the opportunity to engage with the external Institutional Review Panel to *evaluate the adequacy of our Quality Assurance procedures and the extent to which we are implementing the procedures correctly*. The review came at an opportune time in the College's development as it coincided with the end of Strategic Plan 2023 - *A Flourishing Learning Community* and the beginning of the development of our new strategic plan. The review also coincided with the 125th anniversary of the laying of the original foundation stone of the College in 1898.

We welcome the Panel's observation that there is a very caring and supportive culture for students at MIC, which is a practical expression of the College's ethos, with an undoubted staff commitment at all levels in helping achieve the best possible student outcomes, assisted by an increasingly robust QA/QE infrastructure. We will continue to develop and enhance our QA and QE processes guided by the Panel's recommendations.

We are heartened that the Panel commended the very caring and supportive culture for students and that all student groups expressed very high satisfaction with MIC in their discussions with the Panel. We will continue to enhance the experience for all cohorts of students at MIC through the implementation of the Panel's recommendations.

MIC has enhanced its data-informed practices in recent years through the establishment of a Data Analytics function within the MIC Quality Office and the development of e-OLAS, an institutional dashboard which supports QA/QE decision making. We welcome the Panel's recognition of the potential for MIC to be thought-leading in the Irish higher education sector and their recommendations on how to reach this potential.

MIC embraces and supports academic research at the highest level in its core fields of Education and Humanities. The Research and Graduate School assists staff and students to conduct original research, to engage in scholarship and creative innovation, and to publish the results of their work in writing and through academic conference presentations worldwide. We welcome the Panel's recognition of MIC's efforts to advance research and their commendations of the CPD programme to underpin staff research advancement and scholarship and the supports provided to research postgraduate students. We also welcome the Panel's recommendations in relation to the further development of research at MIC.

MIC's Mission Statement has been characterised by a strong social justice ethos since the College's establishment in 1898. MIC places a considerable emphasis on external engagement, seeking to foster strong and sustainable partnerships with the local community in Limerick and beyond. We welcome in particular the Panel's recognition of the importance and impact of this external engagement, particularly in relation to MIC's partnership with Boston College to introduce the City Connects Project to Ireland. We welcome the Panel's recommendations regarding further development of external engagement and ensuring its sustainability.

We thank the Institutional Review Panel, led by Emeritus Professor John L. Davies, for the constructive dialogue with staff, students and stakeholders during the site visit and for producing a report that is both constructive and supportive. The College will reflect on the Panel's recommendations over the coming months and will develop an Institutional Review Implementation Plan for these recommendations which will align with the new strategic plan.

We also thank the UL Director of Quality and the staff of the UL Quality Support Unit for their support and management of the Institutional Review. Finally, we thank the members of the Institutional Self-Evaluation Team and the MIC staff, students and external stakeholders for their engagement with the Institutional Self-Evaluation process and for meeting with the Institutional Review Panel during their visit to MIC.

9 Appendix 1: Terms of Reference

Section 1: Background and Context for the Review

Context and Legislative Underpinning

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 as amended establishes the concepts of a designated awarding body and a linked provider and defines each as follows:

Designated awarding body (DAB): “a previously established university, the National University of Ireland, an educational institution established as a university under section 9 of the Act of 1997, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland”

Linked provider: “a provider that is not a designated awarding body but enters into an arrangement with a designated awarding body under which arrangement the provider provides a programme of education and training that satisfies all or part of the prerequisites for an award of the designated awarding body”

UL falls under the definition of a DAB. As such, UL recognises its statutory responsibilities in respect of linked providers and commits to meeting those responsibilities. The Act places an obligation on DABs to approve, monitor and review its linked providers’ quality assurance (QA) procedures. The provisions of the Act are supported by Sector-specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies, published by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

The relationship between UL and its linked providers is largely framed by inter-institutional Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) or Memorandums of Agreement (MoA) and the quality assurance and enhancement (QAE) oversight arrangements articulated in the University Linked Provider Framework. Further details of the University’s linked provider relationships are available on the UL Website.

Monitoring and review of the linked provider relationship involved two distinct procedural elements:

- Annual monitoring and review of the already-established QA procedures of the linked provider.
- Periodic review of the adequacy and effectiveness of the implementation of the QA procedures by the linked provider.

Annual monitoring takes the form of an AQR, which is submitted by the Linked Provider to the University, followed by an Annual Dialogue Meeting (ADM). At least once every seven years, the University schedules a periodic review to be conducted of both the adequacy of the linked provider's QA procedures and the extent to which the provider is implementing the procedures effectively. This document outlines the Terms of Reference for the periodic review of Mary Immaculate College (MIC).

Purposes

The purposes for the Institutional Review of Mary Immaculate College are outlined below.

Purpose	Achieved and measured through:
To encourage a QA culture and the enhancement of the student learning environment and experience within MIC	- emphasising the student and the student learning experience in reviews - providing a source of evidence of areas for improvement and areas for revision of policy and change and basing follow-up upon them - exploring innovative and effective practices and procedures - exploring quality as well as quality assurance within MIC
To provide feedback to MIC about institution-wide quality and the impact of mission, strategy, governance and management on quality and the overall effectiveness of their quality assurance.	- emphasising the ownership of quality and quality assurance at the level of MIC - pitching the review at a comprehensive institution-wide level - evaluating compliance with legislation, policy and standards - evaluating how MIC has identified and measured itself against its own benchmarks and metrics to support quality assurance governance and procedures - emphasising the improvement of quality assurance procedures
To contribute to public confidence in the quality of MIC by promoting transparency and public awareness.	- adhering to purposes, criteria and outcomes that are clear and transparent - publishing the reports and outcomes of reviews in accessible locations and formats for different audiences - evaluating, as part of the review, institutional reporting on quality and quality assurance, to ensure that it is transparent and accessible
To encourage quality by using evidence-based, objective methods and advice	- using the expertise of international, national and student peer reviewers who are independent of MIC - ensuring that findings are based on stated evidence - facilitating institutions to identify measurement, comparison and analytic techniques, based on quantitative data relevant to their own mission and context, to support quality assurance - promoting the identification and dissemination of examples of good practice and innovation

Section 2 Objectives and Criteria

2.1 Review Objectives

Objective 1

To review the effectiveness and implementation of the QA procedures of MIC through consideration of the procedures set out, primarily, in the Annual Quality Report (AQR).

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

The scope of this objective also extends to the overarching procedures of MIC for assuring itself and University of Limerick of the quality of its taught and research degree programmes. It also extends to a review of the quality assurance of its research activities.

This objective also encompasses the effectiveness of the procedures established by MIC for the assurance of the quality of collaborations, partnerships and overseas provision, joint provision and other collaborative arrangements.

Objective 2

To review the enhancement of quality by MIC through governance, policy, and procedures. To review the congruency of QA procedures and enhancements with MIC's own mission and goals or targets for quality.

To identify innovative and effective practices for quality enhancement.

Objective 3

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

These terms of reference assume that MIC will apply to QQI to be authorised to use the International Education Mark in 2023. On being authorised to do so, MIC is deemed to comply with the Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes to International Learners¹.

1 As the implementation of the International Education Mark had not commenced prior to the review, the Review Panel considered MIC's compliance with the Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes for International Learners (2015).



Review Criteria

Criteria for Objective 1

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

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

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

- European Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area (ESG)
- QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (Core)
- *QQI Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Research Degree Programmes*
- Section 28 of the 2012 Act as amended
- MIC's own objectives and goals for quality assurance
- An evaluation of the progress made since the last review
- Where appropriate and actioned by MIC, additional QQI topical Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines will be incorporated.

Criteria for Objective 2

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

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

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

- MIC's own mission and vision
- The goals or targets for quality identified by MIC
- Additional sources of reference identified by MIC

Criteria for Objective 3

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

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

The criterion to be used by the Team in reaching conclusions for this objective are MIC policy and procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression.

Key questions to be addressed by the review for each objective

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

Section 3 The Review Process

3.1 Process

The primary purpose for this review is outlined in this document.

3.2 Review Team Profile

UL, in consultation with MIC, will appoint the Review Team to conduct the institutional review of MIC. Review Teams are composed of peer reviewers who are students and senior institutional leaders and staff from comparable institutions as well as external representatives. The size of the Team and the duration of their visit will depend on the size and complexity of MIC but in general the Review Team will consist of 5-6 persons. The Review Team includes a Chairperson and Coordinating Reviewer, and may be supported by a rapporteur, who is not a member of the Team, to take and collate notes of meetings.

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

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



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

1. A Review Chairperson

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

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

2. A Coordinating Reviewer

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

3. A Student Reviewer

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

4. An External Representative

The role of the external representative is to bring a ‘third mission’ perspective to the Review Team.

In addition to the specific roles above, the full Team complement will include a range of experts with the following knowledge and experience:

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

3. 3 Procedure and Timelines

The outline set out below will be elaborated further and timelines will be set out to accompany it, through discussion and consultation.

The Main Review Visit will take place in Q1 2024.

Step	Action	Dates	Outcome
Terms of Reference (ToR)	Confirmation of ToR with MIC	To be agreed at ADM Dec 22	Published Terms of Reference
	Completion of an institutional information profile	3 months before the Main Review Visit (MRV)	
Preparation	Appointment of an expert Review Team	Q3 2023	Review Team appointed
	Consultation with MIC on any possible conflicts of interest		
Self-evaluation	Forwarding to UL of MIC Self-Evaluation Report (ISER)	15th December 2023	Published ISER (optional)
Desk Review	Desk review of the ISER by the Review Team	Before the initial meeting	ISER initial response provided
Initial Meeting	An initial meeting of the Review Team, including reviewer training and briefing	w/c 10th February 2024	Team training and briefing is complete.
			Team identifies key themes and additional documents required
Planning Visit	A visit to MIC by the Chair and Coordinating Reviewer to receive information about the ISER process, discuss the schedule for the Main Review Visit and discuss additional documentation requests	w/c 19th February 2024	An agreed note of the Planning Visit
Main Review Visit	To receive and consider evidence on the ways in which MIC has performed in respect of the objectives and criteria set out in the Terms of Reference	8th-11th April 2024	A short preliminary oral report to MIC
Report	Preparation of a draft report by the Team	6-8 weeks after the MRV	
	Draft report sent to MIC for a check of factual accuracy	12 weeks after the MRV	
	MIC responds with any factual accuracy corrections	2 weeks after receipt of draft report	
	Preparation of a final report	2 weeks after factual accuracy response	UL Review Report
	Preparation of an MIC response	2 weeks after final report	Institutional response

Step	Action	Dates	Outcome
Outcomes	Consideration of the Review Report and findings by UL together with MIC response and the plan for implementation	Next available meeting of UL Academic Council	Formal decision about the effectiveness of QA procedures <i>In some cases, directions to MIC and a schedule for their implementation</i>
Follow-up	<i>The form of follow-up will be determined by whether 'directions' are issued to MIC. In general, where directions are issued the follow-up period will be sooner and more specific actions may be required as part of the direction</i>		
	Preparation of an MIC implementation plan	1 month after publication of review report	Publication of the implementation plan by MIC
	One-year follow-up report to UL for noting. This and subsequent follow-up may be integrated into annual reports to UL	1 year after publication of review report	Publication of the follow-up report by UL and MIC
	Continuous reporting and dialogue on follow-up through the annual institutional reporting and dialogue process	Continuous	Annual Institutional Quality Report Dialogue Meeting notes
Note: The total period from start to finish is approximately 15 months but will depend on UL and MIC committee meeting dates.			

3.4 Role of University of Limerick in the Review

In accordance with its role as a Degree Awarding Body under Section 28(5b) of the 2012 Act as amended 2019, UL will

- Publish draft TOR for the review of MIC for consultation
- Agree and publish final TOR for the review of MIC
- Contact, confirm and appoint review team members
- Facilitate the review process with MIC
- Provide MIC with advice on process and criteria
- Support the review activities of the review team and advise the team on criteria and policy
- Act as a point of contact between the review team and MIC
- Organise visits in cooperation with the review team and MIC
- Provide training to the review team
- Edit reports for approval and publication
- Publish the review report and the response of the institution

10 Appendix 2: Visit Schedule

Day 1: Monday 8th April 2024

Time	Group	Purpose
9.00-9.30	Institutional Coordinator	Meeting with Institutional Coordinator
09.30-10.00	Private Review Team Meeting	Plan for upcoming sessions
10.00-10.15	1. President	Private Meeting with President
10.15-11.00	2. Senior Management Team	Discuss institutional mission, strategic plan. Roles and responsibilities for QA and Enhancement.
11.00-11.15	Private Review Team Meeting	Key findings from last sessions/Plan for upcoming sessions
11.15-11.30	BREAK	
11.30-12.15	3. Institutional Self-Evaluation Team Blended Meeting	Discuss review methodology, engagement and outcomes of the self evaluation.
12.15-1:00	4. UL	Discuss UL/MIC relationship and QA mechanisms.
1:00-2:00	LUNCH	
2:00-2.45	5. Deans/Assistant Deans Academic Affairs	Discussions on strategic management and quality assurance structures, including the roles and responsibilities for quality assurance and management between the college, faculties and schools/departments.
2.45-3:00	Panel Review Team Meeting	Key findings from last sessions/Plan for upcoming sessions
3.00-3.45	6. Student Union Sabbatical Representatives	
3:45-4:00	BREAK	
4.00-4.45	7. An t-Údarás Rialaithe (Governing Authority) Blended Meeting	Discuss the mechanisms employed by the governing body for monitoring QA and Enhancement and how it ensures effectiveness
4.45-5.15	Private Review Team Meeting	Wrap up the day, key findings, any additional information ?

Day 2: Tuesday 9th April 2024

Time	Group	Purpose
9.00-9.15	Institutional Coordinator	Meeting with Institutional Coordinator
9.15-10.00	8. Quality Committee Blended Meeting	Discuss how the institution monitors the effectiveness of its quality management processes and structures and it ensures the outcomes of QA processes are enacted in an appropriate, consistent and timely manner.
10-10.15	Short break/turnaround	
10.15 - 11.00	9. An Comharile Acadúil (Academic Council) Blended Meeting	Discuss how the institution monitors the effectiveness of its quality management processes and structures and it ensures the outcomes of QA processes are enacted in an appropriate, consistent and timely manner.
11.00 - 11.30	BREAK	
11.30-12.15	10. Heads of Departments	Discuss Quality Management Processes at the Academic Department Level, implementation and how their effectiveness is ensured.
12.15-12.30	Private Review Team Meeting	Key findings from last sessions/Plan for upcoming sessions
12.30-1.30	LUNCH	
1.30-2.15	11a. Academic Staff - Early Career	Discuss QA as experienced by Academic Staff
1.30-2.15	11b. Academic Staff - Senior	Discuss QA as experienced by Academic Staff
2.15-2.45	Private Review Team Meeting	Key findings from last sessions/Plan for upcoming sessions
2.45-3.30	12. Internationalisation Staff	Discuss involvement in QA and enhancement in International Education.
3.30-3.45	BREAK	
3.45-4.15	Parallel sessions with 2 student groups: 13a. Undergraduate Students, Faculty of Education, Limerick 13b. Undergraduate Students, Faculty of Arts, Limerick	
4.15-4.30	Private Review Team Meeting	Key findings from last sessions/Plan for upcoming sessions
4.30-5.00	Parallel sessions with 2 student groups: 14a. Postgraduate Research Students 14b. Taught Postgraduate Students	
5.00-6.00	Private Review Team Meeting	Wrap up of the day, key findings, any extra information?

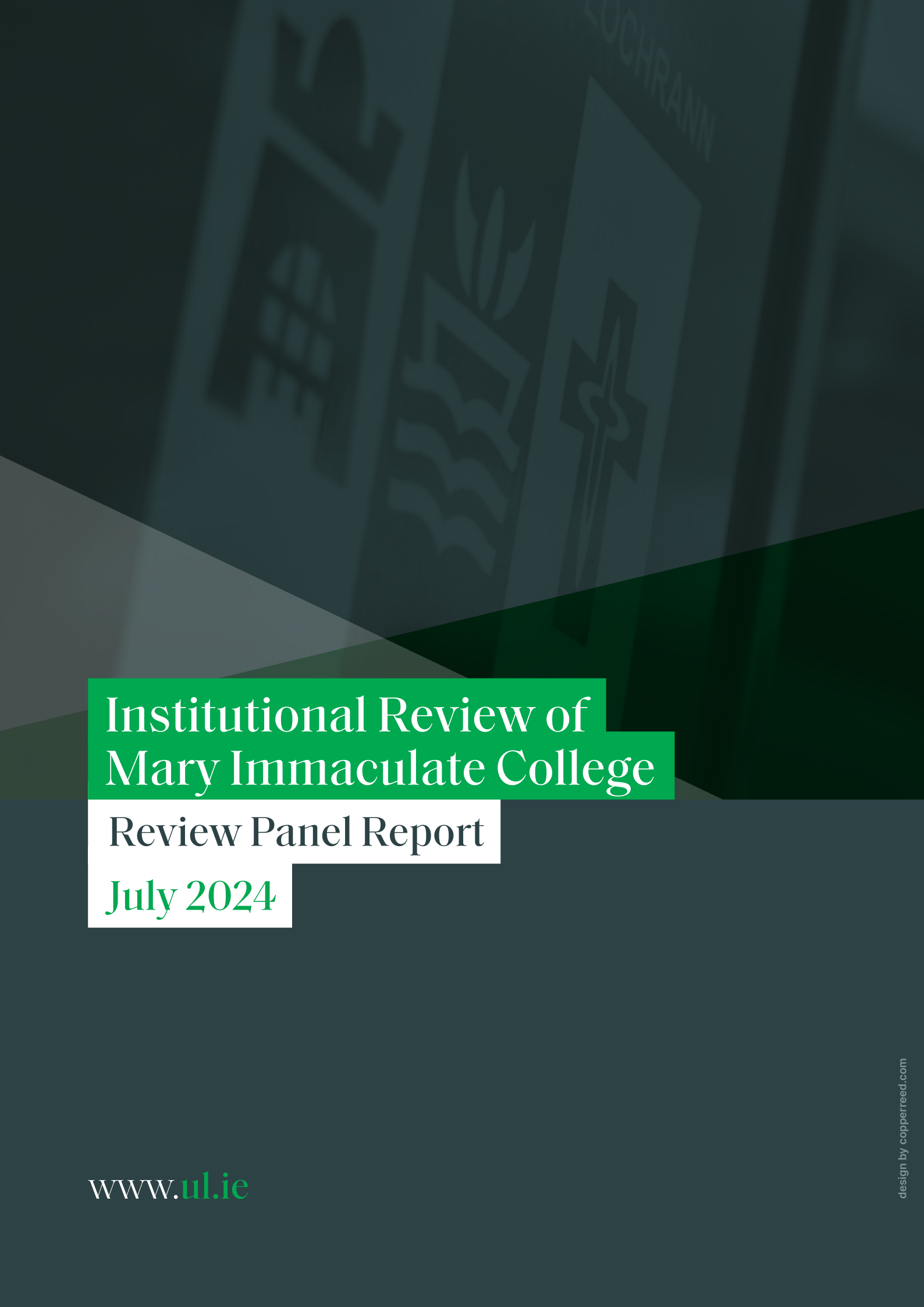
Day 3: Wednesday 10th April 2024

Time	Group	Purpose
9.00-9.15	Institutional Coordinator	Meeting with Institutional Coordinator
9.15-9.45	Private Review Team Meeting	Plan for upcoming sessions
9.45-10.15	15a. Vice-President for Research	Discuss the development of Research and Innovation in MIC.
10.15-10.45	15b. Research Directors & Heads of Research Groups	Discuss the development of Research and Innovation in MIC.
10.45-11.30	16a. Academic Staff – Research - Early Career	Staff experience of research management and supervision, the relationship between teaching, research and innovation, QA and enhancements and the impacts on the research student experience.
10.45-11.30	16b. Academic Staff – Research - Senior	Staff experience of research management and supervision, the relationship between teaching, research and innovation, QA and enhancements and the impacts on the research student experience.
11.30-11.45	BREAK	
11.45-12.00	Panel Review Team Meeting	Key findings from last sessions/Plan for upcoming sessions
12.00-12.30	Parallel sessions with 2 student groups: 17a. International Students 17b. Undergraduate Students, Thurles	
12.30-1.00	Private Review Team Meeting	Key findings from last sessions/Plan for upcoming sessions
1.00-2.00	LUNCH	
2.00-3.00	18. Collaborations, Professional Education, Community Engagement, Employer Engagement	
3.00-3.45	19. HR and Staff Development/EDII	Discuss staffing issues and constraints; and policies and procedures for staff promotion, diversity, recruitment and appraisal, enhancement of teaching & learning
3.45-4.00	BREAK	
4.00-4.45	20a. Student Support Services Staff	Discuss involvement in QA and enhancement
4.00-4.45	20b. Student Support Services Staff	Discuss involvement in QA and enhancement
4.45-5.15	Private Review Team Meeting	Wrap up of the day, key findings, any extra information?

Day 4: Thursday 11th April 2024

Time	Group	Purpose
9:00-10:00	Private Review Team Meeting	
10:00-10:30	21. Optional meeting with President if required	
10:30-11:00	22. UL and Institutional Coordinator	Gather feedback on the review process
11:00-11:30	23. Review Team and UL	Discuss the review team's main findings and alignment TOR
11:30-11:45	BREAK	
11:45-12:45	24. Oral Report	Oral Report of main findings





Institutional Review of Mary Immaculate College

Review Panel Report

July 2024