



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

REVIEW

Institutional Review of Mary Immaculate College

2017



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Foreword

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is a state agency under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills. QQI was established in November 2012 and is responsible for the external quality assurance of Irish further and higher education and training. One of QQI's most important functions is to ensure that the quality assurance procedures of providers are effective. To this end, QQI conducts periodic institutional reviews of providers involving teams of independent reviewers working on its behalf.

In 2016, QQI undertook an institutional review of Mary Immaculate College (MIC) on behalf of the University of Limerick (UL). Review, in this context, refers to the formal review of the effectiveness of the institution-wide quality assurance policies and procedures established and implemented by MIC. MIC is a linked provider of the University of Limerick. This means that, based upon the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two institutions, UL is the academic accrediting body for all higher education programmes at MIC, save where other arrangements are jointly agreed by UL and MIC. As a linked provider of UL, MIC is subject to review and external quality assurance by UL or, if requested, QQI. MIC is also subject directly to QQI for the review and oversight of Access Transfer and Progression arrangements.

The institutional review was conducted by an independent Review Team in line with the Terms of Reference. This is the report of the findings of the Review Team.

The Review Team

The institutional review of Mary Immaculate College (MIC) was conducted by the following team of six reviewers selected by QQI in 2016. The Review Team was trained by QQI on 26 September 2016. The Chair and Coordinating Reviewer undertook a planning visit to MIC on 27 September. The Main Review Visit was conducted by the full team between 28 November and 2 December 2016.

Professor Anne Scott (*Chair*)

Professor Anne Scott has recently taken up appointment as Vice President for Equality and Diversity, National University of Ireland, Galway. Prior to this, she held the post of Executive Dean of the Faculty of Education, Health and Community in Liverpool John Moores University. She has worked as an academic and academic leader in the Scottish, English and Irish Higher Education Systems. She held the post of Head of the School of Nursing and Human Sciences, Dublin City University (2000-2006) where she led the development of BSc, MSc and PhD programmes in the school, in addition to founding and developing a vibrant culture of research and scholarship.

In February 2006, Prof Scott was appointed Deputy President and Registrar of DCU, a post which she held until late 2012. During this time, she led many initiatives across DCU including a review of the academic promotions process; the development of the e-learning roadmap; and the graduate attributes project for the university. She has a proven track record of transformational leadership in academic environments in both Ireland and the UK, working at senior levels, to bring balance to strategic decision making and insight into the organisational culture and concerns of colleagues.

Dr Claire Carney (*Coordinating Reviewer*)

Dr Claire Carney has recently taken up the role of Associate Vice-Principal (Education) for the University of the West of Scotland. As a member of the UWS Senior Management Team, she contributes to the strategic leadership of the University and supports the overall achievement of the Corporate Strategy with specific responsibility for the Education Enabling Plan, Learning Innovation and Quality enhancement. She has been in UWS since June 2015 where she served as Executive Strategist and worked with colleagues across the institution on a range of cross-disciplinary projects including the recent mapping of the UWS student journey. Prior to this she worked with the Quality Assurance Agency (Scotland) (2006 -2015) where she was Interim Director and, prior to that, Head of Quality Enhancement. She had particular responsibility for leading the design, development and quality of provision of the Quality Enhancement programme of activities across the Scottish Higher Education sector including sectoral topics on Research-Teaching Linkages and Graduates for the 21st Century. Dr Carney also conducts a range of HE consultancy and was most recently commissioned by QQI to carry out an analysis of institution-led quality review reports (2008 to 2015).

The Review Team

Dr Bruce L. Mallory

Dr Bruce L. Mallory was appointed Provost and Executive Vice President at the University of New Hampshire in July 2003, serving until July, 2009. Previously, he was Senior Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School at UNH (1997-2003). Dr Mallory has been a professor of education (early childhood and special education) since 1979; he chaired the UNH Department of Education from 1987 to 1993. In the fall of 2010, Dr Mallory returned to the faculty as a full professor, teaching in the areas of higher education, education and poverty, and social change. He served as interim director of the Carsey Institute at UNH (2011-2013).

Dr Mallory received the Ph.D. in Special Education and Community Psychology from George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University (1979). Earlier experience includes service as a public school teacher, VISTA volunteer, director of Head Start programs, and legislative researcher. His scholarship at UNH and associated publications have concentrated on the design of programs and social policies that support young children with disabilities and their families, cross-cultural research in developed and developing countries regarding disability and child care policy, and the role of deliberative democratic practices in community change and higher education reform. He has served as a consultant to the American Council on Education's Institute for New Chief Academic Officers. Dr. Mallory was a member of the Commission on Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges from 2008-2014 and has participated in numerous US and overseas institutional quality assurance reviews.

Dr Mallory is co-founder and chair of the board of directors of The Democracy Imperative, a national network of scholars and practitioners committed to strengthening democracy through higher education. He is currently co-director of New Hampshire Listens, a civic engagement initiative of the Carsey School of Public Policy at UNH. He is recipient of the UNH Excellence in Public Service Award (1997), the President's Excellence through Diversity Award (2007), and the Kidder Fund Staff Award (2009).

Professor David T. Croke

Professor David T. Croke, Director of Quality Enhancement, Professor of Biochemistry, RCSI. Prof Croke is a graduate of Waterford Institute of Technology (Biotechnology), of Trinity College Dublin (Biochemistry and Genetics), and is a Fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists. Following post-doctoral research appointments as an EMBO Research Fellow at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle (Paris) and as a consultant to the Biotechnology Division of the United Nations International Development Organisation (Vienna), he joined the staff of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) where he is Professor of Biochemistry. From 1990 to 2010, Prof Croke was active in research in molecular biology and human genetics publishing over fifty original research papers and supervising twenty-five higher degree candidates. Prof Croke was appointed RCSI Director of Quality Enhancement through an open competitive appointment process in 2010. In parallel, Prof. Croke serves as a consultant to a number of Irish postgraduate medical training bodies and is Chair of the Internal Quality Assurance Committee for the Intercollegiate Membership (MRCS) examinations in Surgery of the four surgical Royal Colleges of Britain and Ireland.

Martin Galevski

Martin Galevski is a DPhil student at the Department of Education, University of Oxford. He holds an MPhil degree in Education from the University of Cambridge and a MSc degree in Research and Innovation in Higher Education (MaRIHE) jointly implemented by the Danube University Krems (Austria), the University of Tampere (Finland) and the Beijing Normal University (China). His research focus is in the area of higher education studies, with specific interest in issues related to the conditions of academic work, governance of higher education institutions and quality assurance. Mr. Galevski has previously been a team member of several international quality assessments in Finland (University of Helsinki and the Lahti University of Applied Sciences), in Lithuania (Lithuanian University of Education and Vytautas Magnus University) and Ireland (Quality Assurance of Research Degree Programmes).

Mr Galevski is also an administrator and member of the editorial board of Working Papers in Higher Education Studies (WPHES). Before embarking on a research career, he was part of the Youth Education Forum - the largest youth-led NGO in Macedonia - working on regional initiatives related to student participation and corruption in higher education.

Áine Lynch

Áine Lynch is the CEO of the National Parents Council (primary). Ms. Lynch is a registered paediatric nurse and holds a BSc (Hons) in Behavioural Science, a diploma in Management, as well as a postgraduate diploma in Child Protection and Welfare. She has served as a nurse in both paediatrics and Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Ms Lynch was manager of Childline, as well as Director of Services for the ISPCC. She was appointed CEO of the National Parents Council Primary in 2007 and passionately believes all decisions in schools should be child centred, which will be best achieved by fostering positive relationships between parents and teachers, particularly between Parent's Associations and school leaders.

Section 1: Introduction and Context

1.1 Context

Mary Immaculate College (MIC) founded in 1898 is a Roman Catholic College of Education and the Liberal Arts and is the oldest third level institution in Limerick City. MIC was the first College for the professional education of national school teachers to be established outside of Dublin. The Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programme was introduced in 1974 following the advent nationally of graduate entry status for primary school teaching. This also marked the point at which the College attained the status of a university-level institution when it became a recognised college of the National University of Ireland, through its association with University College, Cork.

The total student population for MIC (Limerick) in the current year is 4823 (including recent amalgamation of St Patrick's College, Thurles (n=200)). As noted in the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) this is a very significant increase in the student population, an estimate of 70 per cent since the year 2000.

Programmes	Numbers
Undergraduate	3323
Professional Masters in Education (PME)	110
Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years	950
Taught Master of Arts	116
Postgraduate Research	124
Thurles Campus Programmes	200
Total	4823

The College has a growing community of postgraduate researchers at M.A. and PhD levels, and offers a range of specialist postgraduate programmes. During the period (2000 – 2015), the numbers graduating with postgraduate qualifications increased from 145 (in 2001) to 385 (in 2015) – an increase of 165 per cent.

The University of Limerick (UL) has been the awarding body of MIC since 1991. In keeping with the categories set out in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012, UL is the Designated Awarding Body for all higher education programmes (NFQ Levels 6-10) at MIC and, accordingly, MIC is a linked provider of UL. This arrangement is based upon the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two institutions.

As a linked provider of UL, MIC is subject to review and external quality assurance by UL or, if requested by UL, by QQI. In November 2015, the University of Limerick requested that QQI conduct an institution-level external quality assurance review of MIC. Also, in November 2015, UL wrote to MIC to advise that it had made the request to QQI and that the request had been accepted by QQI.

Introduction and Context

Instruments that underpin the basis for this review include the following:

- the Universities Act 1997
- the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, specifically Section 42
- the Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Limerick and Mary Immaculate College

During the re-configuration of the Irish higher education landscape in 2012, the College engaged in the sector-wide ‘Strategic Dialogue’, triggered by the HEA, towards a framework of proposals and recommendations as requested by the Minister for Education and Skills. Following thorough analysis of the options before it, the Governing Authority adopted the following strategic premise for its proposed position within the landscape:

“Mary Immaculate College proposes to position itself as a university-level specialist institution with a distinctive mission, that specialises in Education and the Liberal Arts, that is strategically integrated with partner HEIs on a regional level (through the Shannon Consortium, principally) and on a collegiate level, towards increased opportunities for access, participation and progression (both inter-institutionally and intra-institutionally), towards high quality learning outcomes, an excellent student experience, cross-sectoral collaboration and coordination, and which contributes demonstrably to shared social, cultural and economic objectives.

Mary Immaculate College proposes to re-brand itself to reflect its status as a university-level specialist institution. Mary Immaculate College proposes to remain academically linked with the University of Limerick.”

The College was designated part of the ‘Shannon Consortium’ of higher education institutions, including the University of Limerick and Limerick Institute of Technology, and the constituent members have adopted a global Memorandum of Understanding.

Most recently St Patrick’s College in Thurles was fully incorporated into MIC. St Patrick’s offers four concurrent degree programmes designed to prepare students to become second-level teachers. These programmes are accredited by the Teaching Council.

MIC is coming to the end of its current strategic plan (2012-2016) and is in the process of developing its successor (2017-21), the basis of which has been informed by the ISER development process.

Given the recent changes and developments, as noted above, it is recommended that MIC continue to take into account the challenges associated with an additional campus, particularly assuring equality of the student learning experience between both sites.

1.2 Governance and Regulation

While Colleges of Education are not covered by the provisions of the Universities Act (1997) it is the stated expectation of the HEA that such institutions conform to the Act insofar as it is reflected within the published Code of Governance of Irish Universities (2012). MIC adheres to this Code in its governance principles and structures and, notably, conducted an evaluation of this within its 2015 internal review schedule. The College also complies with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. Internally, the governance of the College is regulated, primarily, by two documents, the Scheme of Incorporation and the Instrument of Government, which are aligned to the provisions noted above. The **Scheme of Incorporation** sets out the role of the College Trustees, and the powers reserved to that body. It also defines the role of An tÚdarás Rialaithe (the Governing Authority), which according to the Scheme, is “the body appointed by the Trustees to govern and control all the affairs of the College, subject to [the] Scheme of Incorporation, and in accordance with the Instrument of Government approved by the Trustees”.

The **Instrument of Government** sets out the structures and procedures for the governance and regulation of the College. The Universities Act (1997) requires that all universities adopt an Instrument of Government based on its provisions and, although MIC, as a College of Education, is not subject to this statute, its instrument is based on the Universities Act model, whilst remaining in accordance with the Scheme of Incorporation. The Instrument of Government describes the role of the College President (Uachtarán), who is Chief Executive of the College. It also lists the bodies charged with governing and regulating the affairs of the College, in accordance with the Scheme of Incorporation, and details the role and membership of those bodies. These include:

- The Board of Trustees
- An tÚdarás Rialaithe (Governing Authority)
- An Chomhairle Acadúil (Academic Council)
- Executive Team
- Faculty Management Committees

The role and focus of the Board of Trustees raised some questions for the Review Team at the outset as it was felt that there was insufficient clarity around their remit in the documentation initially available. The role of the Trustees was confirmed through the various interviews as responsibility for: MIC Mission, oversight of property and appointment of the President and two reserved posts (in Theology, Philosophy and Religious Education). The remaining functions are delegated to the governing authority.

MIC established a Quality Office in 2006 whose role (according to the ISER) is to promote and facilitate continuous quality improvement across all the College’s Academic and Professional Service units. Therefore, the lack of evidence of 5-year internal cyclical reviews was noted with concern by the Review Team. The work of the Quality Office is overseen by the Quality Committee. The Quality Office is staffed by a recently appointed Director of Quality, a Quality Officer and a recently appointed Quality Review Support Officer. The Quality Office has responsibility for the establishment and implementation of processes and procedures directed at maintaining and improving quality.

Introduction and Context

Throughout the review process, MIC noted its own shortcomings in the resourcing of the Quality Office and associated governance. The leadership of the institution is in the process of ensuring adequate and sustained staffing for the Quality Office. Future plans include the confirmation of the above posts and, following this review, an enhanced model of Continuous Quality Assurance, including a proposed QA Coordination Group. This group would facilitate: a conduit between MIC and UL Quality Offices; a direct link with the MIC Quality Committee – which is a sub-Committee of An tÚdarás Rialaithe; the development of operational aspects of quality assurance (QA) including review and evaluation methodologies, data collection and devolved implementation of quality processes and procedures to senior staff in Faculties.

It is imperative that MIC enacts these changes as soon as possible and in so doing develops a MIC Quality Handbook, where all quality related policies and information are stored and accessible to all staff. The Review Team was of the opinion that the absence of such a handbook and strategic oversight of quality matters has led to inconsistencies in procedures.

1.3 The Review

There were three key objectives for this review:

Objective 1: To support institutional strategic planning, governance and ownership of quality assurance and enhancement. The main aim of which is to consider the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures in the context of planning and governance within the institution, along with the mission and strategy of the institution.

Objective 2: To support the institution in meeting its responsibility for the operation of internal quality assurance procedures for education, training, research and other services, including but not limited to internal reviews that are clear and transparent to all its stakeholders, and which provide for the continuing evaluation of all academic, research and service departments and their activities, as outlined in Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015¹ (ESG 2015). This objective also encompasses the responsibilities of the institution for quality assurance arrangements and procedures for collaborative provision and partnerships.

As this is an initial quality assurance review, the emphasis will be on evaluating compliance with quality assurance standards and guidelines, particularly ESG. However, where evidence exists of institution-led innovations and initiatives in quality enhancement, the review will provide the institution with feedback on these.

Objective 3: To evaluate the extent to which MIC planning, structure and procedures support its responsibilities as a higher education institution with qualifications in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and as an institution that engages with national, European and international guidelines and standards, particularly in accordance with the Bologna process.

1 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015, available at http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf

Commendations

The Review Team commends:

- MIC staff, who were hugely positive, and their commitment evident, in ensuring that the quality of the educational experience has been preserved despite the severe resourcing issues over recent years coupled with an increase in student numbers.

Recommendations

The Review Team recommends that:

- MIC as a matter of priority move to confirm resourcing plans outlined for the Quality Office and in so doing develop an MIC quality handbook that will be applied consistently across the institution, inclusive of the St. Patrick's Thurles campus.
- MIC continue to take into account the challenges associated with an additional campus, particularly assuring equality of student learning experience across both sites.

Section 2: Institutional Self-evaluation Report (ISER)

2.1 The Development of the ISER

On commencing the Review, MIC established a dedicated ISER Working Group, chaired by the AVPA (Associate Vice President, Administration) and a High-Level Review Group, chaired by the College President. The Working Group managed the operational aspects of the Review, and included direct participation by the faculties, ICT, HR, MISU (Mary Immaculate Students' Union) and the DSL (Director of Student Life). The High-Level Review Group oversaw the strategic aspects of the Review. The Institutional Review was a standing item on the Quality Committee's agenda, with the Director of Quality presenting regular reports.

The ISER describes an extensive and impressive range of consultation events, including: an engagement survey of second- and third- year students; benchmarking surveys with both Professional Services and Academic Faculty; a number of focus groups: 12 with undergraduate students (96 participants), 2 with international students (12 participants), 1 with postgraduates (7 participants), 3 with professional services staff (30 participants), 8 with academic staff (54 participants) 1 with alumni (9 participants); roundtables with academic departments; interviews with alumni (48 participants); surveys and consultations with external stakeholders (employers, schools, professional bodies, statutory agencies, local government, NGOs and civil society); and a workshop with Trustees, An tÚdarás Rialaithe and the Strategic Planning Group. It should be noted that the ESG 2015 for internal quality assurance were adopted for the purpose of the MIC review by QQI. The standards and guidelines do not explicitly address research. Accordingly, there was no opportunity for MIC to systematically analyse and review their quality assurance of research in the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report.

Consultation on the development of the ISER was tested as part of the planning visit schedule with staff and students from the ISER working groups and subsequent meetings as part of the Main Review visit. Positivity was noted, with particular regard to the level of openness and, most notably, the opportunity to have discussions across department/faculty and service, where hitherto such opportunities were few. The Students' Union advertised consultation events with class reps and over 90 students took part in a variety of focus groups and separate surveys. The Students' Union were also invited to review drafts of the ISER during the publication process. Whilst the production of the ISER was well into the developmental process by the time St Patrick's Thurles was incorporated, representatives from the College were invited to review drafts of the document. It was noted that the ISER development was very collegial and 'every voice was heard'. This is commendable.

The ISER development process bore benefits in itself and the working group noted a couple of 'quick wins' as a result - including an agreement for key groups around pastoral support to meet on a more regular basis and improved access to coordinated alumni data. The latter resulted in individual staff reviewing class lists (which is laudable given the effort required). It was agreed that a more formal approach to gathering such data should be developed in the future. With the development of a new student record system it is recommended, as an early administrative task, that legacy alumni data (where possible) be backfilled into the system.

The opportunity was also taken as part of the ISER process to use some of the outcomes identified to inform the development of the new institutional strategic plan (2017-2021). The process provided an opportunity for the gathering of feedback to help develop key themes, aims and objectives. The ISER states (pg2) that, consequently, the MIC Strategic Plan (2017-2021) reflects outputs and recommendations that emanate directly from the ISER. Whilst this was seen as an efficient and sensible approach, the Review Team was not convinced that relevant consultees were always aware of the dual nature of the process. This was evident through various interviews where there was little knowledge of the development process for the new strategic plan. The Review Team recognises that, due to extenuating circumstances, the process for the development of the strategic plan has slowed in recent months. It is proposed that when the process is resumed there be a further and ongoing communication plan for informing all staff and students of the status of the draft plan, its emerging themes and goals, and the process for bringing it to completion.

Overall the Review Team considered that the process of developing the ISER itself was a very consultative, beneficial, reflective exercise for MIC. However, the Review Team was convinced neither by the level of analysis of the sources of quality-related information nor by how well this information was managed. The document relied more on broad descriptions and as such the Review Team had to seek large amounts of subsequent qualifying information. This may be, in some way, due to the novelty of the exercise for some stakeholders and also a desire to keep within the word count limit and other guidance in the handbook for the review. It is hoped that subsequent ISER 'type' documentation produced by MIC will be more analytical in nature.

Commendations

The Review Team commends:

- The collegiate manner in which MIC approached the ISER process, including engagement with a wide community of stakeholders.

Recommendations

The Review Team recommends that:

- MIC Executive consider how it might further engage with its stakeholder community regarding the strategic plan (2017/21) via the production of a communications plan to ensure staff and student ownership and engagement with the plan.
- With the development of a new student record system it is recommended, as an early administrative task, that legacy alumni data (where possible) be backfilled into the system.

Section 3: Planning, Governance and Ownership of Quality Assurance

3.1 Governance structures and their relationship to quality assurance

3.1.1 Board of Trustees and the Governing Body

MIC, as a linked provider of UL, has its own governance structures and arrangements in place. These were recently (2013) reviewed at the request of the Board of Trustees by Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC). This review resulted in several key recommendations, which in turn resulted in a number of key decisions being enacted to: a) maintain separation between the Board of Trustees and the Governing Body (An tÚdarás Rialaithe) ; b) reduce the size of An tÚdarás Rialaithe to increase efficiency and assure separation of governance and management responsibilities; c) establish a senior management team (referred to as the Executive Team within MIC); and refresh the Board and An tÚdarás membership, augmented by regular induction and training opportunities.

The Review Team met with members of both the Governing Body and the board of trustees and was impressed by the level of knowledge and engagement of both groups in MIC. The Governing Body representatives in particular spoke highly of the induction training they received and the ongoing presentations at the beginning of each meeting on aspects of life in the college. These presentations were appreciated as a means of providing useful insights and continuing education for Governing Body members. Furthermore, a joint annual meeting is held with the Board of Trustees focusing on key topics, again furthering their knowledge. Both groups felt well-supported by MIC in the performance of their governance duties.

The Review Team also met with key external stakeholders of MIC and again this group were unanimously supportive of, interested in, and engaged with developments in MIC. All groups spoke of MIC being accessible and described the Executive, in particular, as being in 'listening and learning' mode. This is commendable.

The risk register and operating plan is a standing item on each agenda for the Governing Body and members confirmed that QA data are reported to the Governing Body, both in detail and in the form of summaries, allowing members to take an overview whilst also being able to 'drill down' when they need to see the fine detail. On the basis of this level of detail, the Governing Body (and Trustees) are satisfied that the internal QA policies and processes at MIC are effective. At national level, there has been a significant focus on governance issues and members are well apprised of their responsibilities. They confirmed that they felt empowered to raise any queries or concerns that might arise.

One of the most consequential changes flowing from the PWC review related to the goal of creating clear distinctions between governance and management functions. To that end, the number of Academic staff serving on An tÚdarás was reduced from six to four, the two Dean positions on An tÚdarás were removed, as was the Associate Vice President Research and the Associate Vice President Administration (the latter position was retained as Secretary to the Governing Authority). The two academic staff positions on the Executive Team were also removed, based on the principle that academic staff are not a part of the management

team. These actions led to a strong response on the part of academic staff, who have since not put forward nominees to fill the remaining four slots on An tÚdarás. Thus, the voice of mainstream academic staff is not represented on the governing authority, creating a gap in direct knowledge in the Body regarding matters of curriculum, programme development, pedagogy, faculty workload, and related matters. This is a significant challenge (and potential risk) for MIC. The Review Team recommend that the situation be resolved quickly. This may involve considering the models and approaches of other, similar institutions to matters of governance. From such considerations a solution may be formulated. Resolution of this important governance matter should be achieved in a collaborative fashion with key members of academic staff.

A recent example of effective functioning of the Board and An tÚdarás Rialaithe is that of the incorporation of St. Patrick's College at Thurles into MIC. The Board acted in its capacity to review and approve this significant action, and An tÚdarás developed the terms of management and operation for St. Patrick's as an operating unit of MIC. By all accounts, the incorporation process has proceeded smoothly with no obvious ill effects on students or staff. The mutual benefits to both institutions are apparent. The governance and management functions previously conducted within St. Patrick's have been absorbed by the appropriate MIC bodies, and students in both institutions now have expanded access to curricula, resources and placements. The Review Team commends the considered, engaged and supportive approach taken by MIC, including MICSU, to the incorporation of St Patrick's College, Thurles.

MIC is broadly represented across the main committees of UL, allowing valuable insight and knowledge of UL business and processes. A reciprocal arrangement is not in place for UL representation on MIC committees and the Governing Body. The Review Team heard that UL would welcome such reciprocity and MIC is equally supportive of this. The Review Team recommends that these arrangements be put in place. Such arrangements would provide for closer working between the institutions and important sharing of knowledge and understanding, whilst giving sufficient oversight and assurance to UL that quality processes are being implemented consistently throughout MIC.

3.1.2 Relationship of MIC to University of Limerick

The UL-MIC relationship is defined by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in 2007. The MOU is relatively brief and non-specific. There has been no formal review or amendment of the MOU since it was developed. From discussions with various groups within MIC there appears to be little appetite for development in this area. The Review Team was surprised at this response, given the changes in the higher education landscape over the past 10 years. The effects of the financial crisis, the 2012 Higher Education Act, the establishment of QQI, and the considerable growth in student enrolments and programmes at MIC suggest the need to ensure that the MOU remains a relevant and contemporary policy document. This is both a matter of effective governance and quality assurance.

MIC is a Linked Provider of University of Limerick, which acts as the Designated Awarding Body. As such, UL has a legal obligation to assure that the quality of the academic experience for MIC students mirrors its own standards. To a great extent, UL has delegated oversight for quality assurance to MIC. MIC's programme development and approval process is governed by its Academic Programme Appraisal Committee.

Planning, Governance and Ownership of Quality Assurance

Under the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding between the College and UL, An Chomhairle Acadúil (Academic Council) has been delegated authority to approve academic programmes from Level 6 up to and including Level 9. Programmes at Level 10 undergo the same internal processes as programmes at other levels, but these programmes are then submitted for approval through the University's (i.e. UL) direct approval processes. This process appears to function well and on a timely basis. However, we did not find evidence of systematic review of these governance structures with respect to their functioning and effectiveness. Given that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between UL and MIC underpins the current designation of MIC as a Linked Provider of UL, it is recommended that the MOU be reviewed as a matter of urgency and, where necessary, re-negotiated and revised to reflect the changes to the Irish HE 'landscape' since 2007, in particular: the provisions of the 2012 Act; the role of QQI; the status of MIC as a Linked Provider of UL (the cognate DAB); and the need for UL to have effective oversight of MIC internal QA processes and overall governance arrangements in place (Levels 6-10).'

3.1.3 MIC governance committees

MIC has in place an effective range of governance committees, each of which supports (or has the potential to support) quality assurance processes. However, there is no overarching quality policy framework or handbook providing oversight and guidance across MIC, as per the recommendation in chapter 1 that quality assurance be aligned across those committees, and guarantees given that data collection, analysis, and decision-making leading to programme improvement or resource allocation decisions are coordinated.

The President's Group (an *ad hoc* briefing group convened by the President for the purpose of receiving high-level reports on the current operations of the College) meets on a weekly basis. The President's Group consists of the College President, the Vice President Academic Affairs, the Vice President Administration and Finance, the Associate Vice President Administration and other attendees invited to provide relevant briefings. The Executive Team (senior management team) consists of the two deans, three Vice Presidents, President, and Associate Vice President for Research. This group meets every three weeks and is formally charged with executive powers and decision-making (granting that the President is the CEO and ultimate authority for management). Previously, two academic staff representatives also served on the Executive Team, but were removed in recent years (following the PWC report), both to emphasise the distinction between management and faculty responsibilities and, according to senior managers, to make the workings of the Executive Team more efficient and effective. While there may be legitimate rationales for both the exclusion and inclusion of academic staff from the Executive Team, the lack of staff voice and presence on the Team may exacerbate the communication challenges that were expressed to the Review Team. In addition, alignment of quality assurance principles and processes up and down the governance structures has been made more difficult. We are not recommending that academic staff serve in formal roles on the Executive Team, but we would urge MIC to find ways to strengthen communication and consultation practices between academic staff and senior managers. It is also recommended that MIC consider the role of the Deans in this process and the associated devolution of authority and empowerment to make decisions at this level. Throughout the review process it became clear that there were differences in the *modus operandi* across Faculties and within Faculties (particularly Arts) and in the

large number of Departments (of varying sizes) therein. This has led to inconsistencies in the application of policies and processes, and, as such, created many of the quality assurance issues noted in the report.

Lastly, we found no evidence of policies or processes to regularly assess the effectiveness of the various governance structures at MIC. This reflects the current status of quality assurance, in that there are a number of diffuse efforts underway, aimed at assessing the student experience and some aspects of operations, but no coherent and coordinated framework or quality handbook for overall quality assurance. This is partly a resource issue. The implementation of a fully-staffed quality office in the near term, with dedicated staff resources, combined with a new student information management system and the increasing capacity of ICT, should help to address this deficit.

3.1.4 Quality assurance mechanisms and processes

There are a range of quality assurance mechanisms and processes in place to achieve ESG Standard 1.7 - “Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.” Evidence relevant to this standard was reviewed with respect to student-focused mechanisms, programme monitoring and review, the role of external examiners, staff performance, and strategic planning.

Student experience

There are a wide range of processes used to assess student experience and achievement of learning outcomes, applied somewhat irregularly in practice. These include:

- Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET)
- Module satisfaction surveys
- Exit interviews
- Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE)
- Placement evaluations
- Annual exit survey undertaken among all graduating students.
- PhD progression panels
- Student demonstrations of learning (oral examinations, essays, collaborative projects, etc.), many of which include participation by external examiners

As noted elsewhere in this report, there is uneven utilisation of these processes across modules, departments, and faculties, as reported both by students and staff. On the one hand, concerns have been expressed about a flood of surveys aimed at students. On the other hand, the varying usage of the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET; reported in next chapter), its voluntary nature, and varying reliance on external examiners represent challenges to the validity and reliability of the overall process and the data produced. Students seem unaware of the results of the input they are invited to submit, and how that input is used for programme improvement. Data collection with graduates in respect of employment / career trajectories is less systematic and more challenging, but is addressed through a number of channels. From a governance perspective, there does not appear to be a central

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repository for data related to the student experience, nor a systematic process for analysing that data and using it for decision-making and resource allocation purposes. In other words, the loop remains open regarding most aspects of student-focused quality assurance. The necessary elements for data collection are in place, but a framework for translating data into decisions and actions is lacking. The Review Team was made aware of the current tendering process for a new student record system and the development of an associated dashboard system. The latter will certainly allow monitoring and evaluation of data, but it is important and recommended that associated training in the use of such dashboards be provided to all staff, in addition to targeted reporting from the dashboard which allows easy access to focussed key information.

Commendations

The Review Team commends:

- The engagement and expertise of members of An tÚdarás Rialaithe and the associated induction, annual orientation and ongoing information sharing for members.
- The considered, engaging and supportive approach taken by MIC, including MICSU, to the incorporation of St Patrick's College, Thurles.

Recommendations

The Review Team recommends that:

- MIC build upon the collegiality fostered in the ISER / self-evaluation process to address and resolve the issue of academic staff representation on the Governing Body, and, as part of due process, consider examples of governance models from other institutions.
- MIC find ways to strengthen communication and consultation practices between academic staff and senior managers. It is also recommended that MIC consider the role of the Deans in this process and the associated devolution of authority and empowerment to make decisions at this level.
- Reciprocal arrangements be put in place to give Presidents of both institutions (UL and MIC) a seat on the Governing Body of the partner institution (UL and MIC). Such reciprocal arrangements should be mirrored for all institutional governance, leadership and management committees throughout UL and MIC.
- Given that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between UL and MIC underpins the current designation of MIC as a Linked Provider of UL, it is recommended that the MOU should be reviewed as a matter of urgency and, where necessary, be re-negotiated and revised, to reflect the changes to the Irish HE 'landscape' since 2007, in particular: the provisions of the 2012 Act; the role of QQI; the status of MIC as a Linked Provider of UL (the cognate DAB); and the need for UL to have effective oversight of MIC internal QA processes and overall governance arrangements in place (level 6-10).

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- Overarching QA policy development and implementation across the institution be required to assure consistency, transparency, and the link between assessment, policy and programme development, and resource allocation.
- Training be put in place for all staff regarding interpreting and making best use of dashboards in the new student record system and that targeted reporting from the dashboard allow easy sight of focussed key information.

Section 4: Quality Assurance and Enhancement [incorporating the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)]

4.1 Awareness and use of the NFQ and assurance of appropriate standard of degree programmes

In the course of the Review, the Review Team saw evidence of the provision of detailed information to students on courses and modules, primarily through the publication of a variety of course handbooks. These handbooks contain comprehensive accounts of module learning outcomes and details of assessments. Overall, the Review Team was impressed by the degree to which MIC programmes conform to the requirements of ESG (2015) Standard 1.2, in particular the provision of placements for all students. However, the Review Team did not see any overarching curriculum documents, and the degree to which MIC uses the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) as a key external reference for programme standards, was initially unclear. For each MIC degree programme, the highest level learning outcomes (programme outcomes) should map 'upwards' to the relevant NFQ Level Descriptors, thus demonstrating the overall level or standard of the programme. It became evident to the Review Team that awareness and application of the NFQ across MIC faculties and departments is variable. Awareness of the NFQ is stronger within the Faculty of Education. MIC, in general, appears to rely to a considerable degree on the inputs and reports of their External Examiners to provide assurance that degree programmes are at appropriate levels. In addition, the College has regard to Teaching Council registration requirements as well as those of the Psychology Association of Ireland, and has received accreditation from these bodies.

A closely related issue is the degree to which MIC develops and maintains comprehensive curriculum databases / maps for its programmes. Just as programme outcomes should map to the relevant NFQ Level Descriptors, the linkages between the lower level outcomes should be demonstrated. Equally, the linkages between learning outcomes and assessments should be documented more explicitly through the development of [a] matrices to demonstrate the choice of appropriate assessment methods by linking them to the knowledge, skills and attitudes/behaviours that need to be assessed for each module, and [b] assessment blueprints which document in detail the constructive alignment between module learning outcomes and assessment methods. Much of this information is extant and is made available to the students in the various handbooks (e.g. module descriptors and details of assessments), but curriculum maps and assessment blueprints would offer a more coherent overview. It was clear to the Review Team that MIC uses a wide variety of assessment types, from group project work through to oral examinations. Though MIC documents student performance in assessments and tracks student progression across their programmes, the Review Team did not see any evidence that MIC monitors the performance of the assessment methods through the routine application of psychometric measures of assessment quality.

The Review Team was concerned by issues raised by undergraduate students in relation to oral examinations, particularly those to assess competence in the Irish language. There was extensive concern expressed, by different groups of students with whom we met, regarding oral Irish examinations and their weight and impact on module assessment. Therefore, the Review Team suggest that greater engagement and communication with students is required

on this matter – including ascertaining feedback from the student body on their experience and concerns on this matter. The Students Union could play an important role here in acting as a vehicle to gather and communicate student concern to course / programme / module teams.

The students that the Review Team met agreed that the assessment requirements are consistently followed during the delivery of the module. Assessment criteria are made explicit and easily available to each student before the beginning of each module, either in hard copy or electronically. However, students reported varying experiences of assessment and feedback. They reported that the form of assessment feedback is inconsistent and often is lecturer-dependent regarding level of depth and detail. Some students reported only receiving grades and that if they wanted feedback they had to contact the tutor directly. MIC also noted this variability of student experience in the ISER. The Review Team heard very positive reports from MIC St Patrick's (Thurles) students where each student appeared to receive a grade and a standardised feedback sheet with each assignment. This was appreciated by the students as it helped them to identify areas of development and improvement. A standardised feedback form for all MIC students should be developed for all modules and implemented systematically. Scheduled feedback dates are published as a standard part of the College academic (incl. assessment) calendar in tandem with the publication of semester examination results dates. Scheduled feedback dates provide dedicated times where students can approach the relevant lecturer, review their scripts and receive feedback. While commendable, there appear to be deficits in students' awareness of these, thus pointing to a need for greater awareness-raising, so as to promote greater uptake. The ISER also noted the need for academic staff to have more time to mark assignments, so as to ensure that the comments they write on scripts are more informative and helpful to students. This should be encouraged and facilitated. The Review Team welcome the steps taken by the Teaching and Learning Directorate to progress an institutional policy on assessment and feedback, and recommend that MIC progress their plans to implement this institutional policy on assessment and feedback as a matter of urgency.

4.2 Design and approval of new MIC programmes and of new MIC-UL collaborative programmes

MIC has well-developed procedures for the design and approval of new degree programmes, which follow established UL protocols. A case-study on the development of the 4-Year B.Ed. programme was provided to the Review Team. The approval of new programmes from NFQ Level 6 to Level 9 has been delegated to MIC by UL, such that the process is effectively internal to MIC. In conformity with UL protocols, input is not sought routinely from external peer-reviewers on new programme proposals (though external members are mandatory for Cyclical Programmatic Reviews held on a 5-year cycle). The formalisation of the status of MIC as a Linked Provider of UL (the cognate DAB), and the required oversight by the DAB of programme approval processes, would suggest that UL might play a greater role in the process of approving new Level 6-9 programmes.

Similarly, it was the view of the Review Team that good practice would suggest that UL should be accorded greater oversight of the administrative 'processing' of PhD degrees at MIC, including involvement in decisions regarding the transfer of candidates from the Masters (Level 9) to the PhD (Level 10) register and the appointment of thesis External Examiners. Therefore, while it is acknowledged that MIC is conforming in full with current regulation, UL may wish to revisit their regulation on this matter.

For level 10 programmes, proposals for new programmes or programme modifications follow the same review track as undergraduate programmes and, furthermore, must proceed through the Academic Programme Review Committee, Academic Regulations Committee, and Academic Council, of the University of Limerick. This process seems to work well although we did not find evidence of systematic processes for periodic review to assure quality in the programme development process – i.e. MIC did not provide evidence of periodic review of level 10 programmes. If this is not a current requirement of UL, UL may wish to review their regulations on this. However international good practice indicates that periodic review of level 10 programmes and programme development processes should be standard practice for providers of level 10 programmes. For example, we were informed that level 9 students who had successfully completed programme requirements and moved up to level 10 did so without UL oversight or engagement. The consequences of this for students, and the two institutions, cannot be understood without a regular process for review. Moreover, UL plays no role in the selection or monitoring of external examiners for PhD students. While this is not inherently a problem, and is in accordance with UL academic regulations and procedures, without regular review of this practice, the strengths and weaknesses of this approach cannot be understood or acted upon. The recently established annual quality dialogues between UL and MIC are a good first step, but there may still be a need to formalise the process, based on clear Terms of Reference and grounded in systematic data collection and analysis. The Review Team recommends greater UL involvement in overseeing the PhD progression and examination processes used by MIC – in line with their more “hands-on” approach to validation of level 10 programmes.

The emerging initiative to create the Federated Limerick Graduate School, a collaboration of MIC, UL, and the Limerick Institute of Technology, can facilitate this through interdisciplinary collaboration, innovative programme development, and implementation of best practices in doctoral education. The first programme being proposed, in ‘Built Environment and Society’, aims to achieve these ends. On the basis of discussion with the UL team, the Review Team suggests that work remains to be done to fully articulate and detail the implications of the UL policies and regulations regarding admissions, degree requirements, use of external examiners, supervision, evidence-based periodic programme review and related matters. These measures should be put in place prior to the full establishment and extension of relative autonomy to the Federated Limerick Graduate School.

For professional degree programmes within the Faculty of Education, the requirements of statutory accreditation by the Teaching Council of Ireland are a major factor in guiding the design of new programmes. However, MIC should recognise that professional accreditation is narrower in scope than academic appraisal/approval processes, and should not rely on statutory accreditation (while of great importance) as the primary index of programme quality. In relation to collaborative programmes between MIC and UL, the Review Team had the opportunity to examine the development of the new Joint BA (Liberal Arts) programme and was impressed by the collaborative approach taken by the partner institutions.

4.3 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

MIC is in the early stages of developing systematic programme review processes. Programmes subject to discipline-based external accreditation processes (teacher education and psychology for example) are responsive to professional standards and must show evidence of achieving those standards, but those processes may or may not serve the needs of MIC

to assess programmes relative to strategic goals and programme enhancement. Thematic reviews have occurred, but department-level reviews, based on quality review cycles, have yet to be fully implemented. These inconsistencies are characteristic of an institution that is in the early stages of creating quality assurance processes.

The Review Team was unclear as to the distinction in MIC usage between the terms 'Programme Monitoring / Reporting' and 'Programmatic Review'. Evidence was presented of document templates and data-gathering processes to assess programmes on an annual basis – the Review Team understood this to comprise annual programme monitoring by MIC. Repeated references were made to cyclic programmatic review (e.g. coincident with a change in External Examiners and/or statutory accreditation processes), but the Review Team did not gain any clarity on the schedule of such reviews within MIC Faculties, nor did it see published reports deriving from programmatic reviews. The Review Team recommends that MIC act to regularise this situation as a matter of urgency and recommends that the Quality Office should, as a priority, publish its schedule of internal reviews on a 5-year rolling basis.

As stated throughout this report, many of the elements of programme monitoring and review are in place (or being planned), but they do not yet form a coherent whole. These conditions will make it a challenge to both implement and monitor the next strategic plan. Key performance indicators, and an accompanying dashboard, are now being designed, however it is not yet clear how these indicators will be continuously monitored, how mid-course adjustments will be made when needed, and where the authority lies for overseeing the process and for decision-making relative to continuous programme improvement.

MIC follows UL policy on External Examining and UL appoints the External Examiners (EE). EE reports do not come in the first instance to MIC but to UL and are not simultaneously sent to MIC. The VPA&R's Office in UL normally forwards EE reports to the faculty administrator in MIC who in turn circulates them to the relevant Heads of Department and to both Deans. The Deans, in addition to the Heads of Department, therefore have access to the EE Reports. As highlighted in the ISER, it was evident from the meetings with academic staff that the way in which EEs were engaged across faculties and departments was inconsistent. Academic staff also highlighted awareness of discussions in UL about the role of the EE. The Review Team was assured that EE reports were responded to and followed the logical pathway of communication. The Review Team recommends that this be adhered to across MIC, and that EE reports be made available to all relevant stakeholders including students.

4.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Based upon the ISER, the extensive supporting documentation and discussions during the Main Review Visit, the Review Team is satisfied that MIC is compliant with ESG (2015) Standard 1.4. The detailed Handbooks (at Course and Module level) issued to students provide them with a comprehensive picture of the structure of degree programmes, assessment points and other useful information; this information is reflected also on the MIC website and Moodle Virtual Learning Environment. There was some concern that the 'onus' of responsibility to find all the relevant information, to flag bunching of assignment deadlines (and negotiate new deadlines) and negotiate undergraduate dissertation supervision, lay primarily with the student. The Review Team, whilst commending the depth and range of information provided, were concerned that students were not supported sufficiently through the navigation of

information and final year dissertation supervisory support in ways that really facilitate awareness of, and forward planning for, assignments and dissertation supervision (MIC colleagues pointed out on a number of occasions that the latter is “student-led”). Achieving access to the required dissertation supervision seemed to be a more significant issue in the Faculty of Arts. However, this view was confirmed in a number of meetings with a variety of MIC students. This onus on the student is likely a “big ask” for them, especially at undergraduate level. MIC does currently offer assistance to students in planning their preparation for assignments and the need to co-ordinate assessment deadlines (the innovative first year modules “Becoming a Student Teacher” (B.Ed.) and Foundation Studies (B.A.) are significant in this respect), but there is an ongoing need to provide support to students on this matter. The onus to prevent bunching of assignment deadlines must rest with course / programme teams and module co-ordinators. Perhaps MIC would reconsider the effectiveness of the supports available to students, and in addition to offering more or different assistance to students in planning their preparation for assignments, place significantly more responsibility on course teams and module co-ordinators to co-ordinate assessment deadlines and ensure there is no bunching of these deadlines. This is a perennial problem in modularised, semesterised programmes and it may be helpful to examine practice elsewhere, including in the UK, where the results of the National Student Survey have helped drive positive change in this area.

Policies and procedures for access and transfer are clear and disseminated widely. The Faculty Administrative Office is responsible for the processing of examination results, and evidence was presented that analysis of such data has begun to monitor student progression longitudinally and to provide an evidence-base for decisions regarding the provision of additional student learning supports. The proportion of mature students at MIC reflects the degree to which MIC has well developed protocols for the recognition of prior learning, and the recognised standard of the College’s degrees (including statutory accreditation in some cases) ensures wide recognition of MIC qualifications. The Review Team was impressed by the extent to which MIC equips students/graduates to secure international recognition of their degrees, particularly in its early adoption of “Digitary”, an on-line platform for verification and sharing of student credentials. Graduating students have lifetime access to electronic copies of their degree parchments, Diploma Supplements (as mandated by the Bologna process) and transcripts.

The Student Records Management System plays a central role in documenting the ‘student journey’ through a degree programme. The Review Team noted that processes are currently underway, in parallel at MIC and UL, to procure new systems and that, due to the requirements of public-sector procurement, these processes may result in the institutions selecting different systems. In an ‘ideal world’, both MIC and UL would adopt the same system, however, at this point, and with two separate procurement processes in place, the minimum that should be achieved (and this is of critical importance) is to ensure that the MIC system adheres to UL data standards and formats, and that transfer of data between the systems (where required and subject to best practice in data governance) is facilitated.

4.5 Student-centred learning

The Review Team noted that the SET process, whereby individual lecturers volunteer to receive feedback from students on their teaching, is a very positive contribution to ensuring that this institution listens to the students’ views of their teaching and learning experience. The process itself is intensive and heavily subscribed and therefore clearly popular. The

danger, of course, is that it is directed at those who are, in the main, reflective practitioners and active participants in developing their own practice, and that those teachers who may benefit or need some form of intervention may be least likely to volunteer.

The consensus from staff was that they found their participation in SET to be highly motivational, driving them to improve their practice on the basis of the evidence, and often with the advice of senior colleagues. Many of these individuals also repeated the SET the following year to assess the impact of the changes that they had made. The voluntary nature of the process means however that some staff may be less inclined to expose their practice to scrutiny and simply choose not to participate. The SET in itself if modified (streamlined) and used as part of internal quality reviews could be a very powerful developmental tool for all staff and serve to promote and enhance learning and teaching in a systematic manner across MIC. It is recommended that SET be adapted for comprehensive and sustainable coverage across MIC.

4.6 Workload allocation model and performance review

4.6.1 Staff performance assessment

As with student and programme review, assessment of staff performance is varied across the institution and is in the early stages of development. There do not appear to be formal mechanisms for annual professional development reviews and therefore there are neither systematic professional development resources nor plans linked to staff performance. The absence of promotion opportunities for staff also creates a disincentive for performance review and goal-setting. The absence of a Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) is on the Director of HR's agenda but has not moved forward due to resource constraints. Again it is imperative that this is promoted in order to assist managers to manage and assure performance and set clear objectives to achieve the strategic plan. The introduction of Personal Research Plans for academic staff occurred during the period of the previous institutional Strategic Plan (2012-2016). Integrating these with departmental plans and staff objectives in respect of teaching and services will ensure enhanced complementarity and delivery.

A further pressure identified by academic staff and largely presented in the ISER is the significant increase in student numbers. MIC has introduced measures to try to overcome issues through 'tweaking' the timetable by using the lecture/tutorial split to support students, employing postgraduate research students as teaching assistants and adapting teaching methods (e.g. flipped classrooms) and assessment methods. Colleagues indicated that they were not swamped 'but nearly so'. One key consequence of the increase in student numbers was the pressure placed on the time available for other activities, effectively limiting time to engage in these activities. The Education Faculty has come to rely heavily on part-time staff and as such have put in place a commendable support system for them. Academic staff provide the part-time staff members with lecture material and teaching resources in order to keep some oversight over basic module material and try to ensure that student learning is protected whilst enabling some degree of autonomy for the part-time staff members. Departments also try to provide some mentoring support for part-time colleagues and this is to be commended.

The overriding issue, as expressed by many staff, is the lack of a Workload Allocation Model against which effort and goal achievement can be assessed. Increased demands on staff, related to austerity measures and rapidly expanded enrolment, accompanied by new programme development, all create strains that cannot be systematically addressed in the absence of clear workload guidelines.

It is understood that MIC is currently investigating the development of a Workload Allocation Model (WAM) and an external consultancy company is reviewing data to support the development of a model. It is recommended that a WAM be introduced in order to support fairness, equity, transparency and respect for diversity of contribution. However, it must be noted that the model itself will not necessarily lead to the creation of new posts, thus there is an important task of expectation management to be done in tandem with the WAM work and it is recommended that a communication strategy be developed to sit alongside the delivery of the model.

The Review Team had a detailed account from HR of the recruitment process, staff development and induction opportunities for staff. HR colleagues described the induction process in MIC as consisting of four half days and an associated formal probationary process (the latter is only in place for the past two years) over a nine-month period involving three interview points (at 3, 6, and 9 months). Staff development needs can be identified through this process. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) has a number of strands, only some of which are managed by HR. HR provides a schedule of general training and staff are alerted to this via email. There is also fee remission or reimbursement for colleagues who wish to do a PhD and this is now an appointment requirement, but this was not the case in the past. MIC has an impressive percentage of staff (90%) who have PhDs or are studying for their PhD, and a large number of staff are supervising PhD students.

All MIC policies and procedures, including HR policies and procedures, are available on the staff portal. Most policies have a five-year review period and changes are driven largely by changes in employment legislation. Policies and procedures are benchmarked against codes of practice and cognate documents in comparable institutions.

4.6.2 Student placement

Vocational placement is a core element of all undergraduate programmes and the Professional Masters in Education. Placement officers outlined detailed processes and procedures for students on placement including expectations around contact, evaluation completions, and learning agreements tied to module selection process. However, some disparity was apparent in respect of the structures and supports which staff in the Placement Office described (and the policies in place) and student experiences relayed to the Review Team during its on-site visit.

Students on the BA programme reported a range of differing experiences, with some commenting on the variety and the relevance of placement and particularly the lack of contact during placement. On the BEd programme placement appears to be more structured, consistent and well supported. The assignment of placement, matching supply with demand, is causing stress for some students and, from expressed student perspectives, this is often concurrent with assessment pressures. It would be helpful to clarify the proactive responsibility of tutors to maintain contact with placement students throughout their

placement. Contact records should be maintained and shared with the Placement Office at designated intervals.

The most worrying issue regarding placements was the apparent lack of an up-to-date crisis response protocol (there is one on the MIC website but dated 2006 – however none of the MIC colleagues asked about this seemed to be aware of the existence of a protocol) which provides procedures for dealing with students in times of crisis (personal or otherwise) whilst on placement. It is recommended that MIC develop such a protocol and an associated risk register as a matter of urgency. It is then vital that all staff responsible for supporting students on placement familiarise themselves with this protocol and that the tutor's role in proactively maintaining contact with students is clarified.

4.7 Learning resources and student support

4.7.1 Learning resources

Interviews with professional services staff confirmed evidence that in recent years there has been an increase in the demand for resources and student support mechanisms at MIC, due to a significant increase in student numbers and an increasing diversity of needs. While there are multiple and varied learning resources and student support services in place at MIC, not all of them are well advertised, resulting in a lack of awareness and ultimately a lack of use by students. During the site visit it appeared that students did not fully utilise the resources and support because they did not always know that they were available. In the future, MIC could benefit from a more proactive promotion of its learning resources and student support services, by highlighting their availability, ways to access them and associated benefits.

It is a well-established fact that the library infrastructure no longer serves the needs of MIC as per the ISER, discussions with staff and students and the Review Team site visit. The current library was built when MIC had 750 students and as indicated above the current student population of MIC is well beyond that number. The library now has 210 study desks, which is actually fewer than when it was initially opened. Library staff members continue with a strategy of rolling out as many electronic services as possible but these cannot make up for the insufficient infrastructure. Whilst students can avail of UL library resources it was clear that many students did not – because of accessibility and a lack of confidence in navigating the library. The Review Team was told of capital investment and the planned building of a new library contained in the draft strategic plan. The VPAA confirmed that this was in phase two of the Campus Development Plan which is at the planning stage and that funding is being sought for this project. It is acknowledged that a new library is badly needed. Intermediary steps by MIC include continuing to source temporary, additional study spaces in MIC and to run targeted 'UL library orientation tours' for MIC students to support their confidence in accessing and using the UL library, when it is logistically possible for MIC students to do so.

Staff and students report high levels of satisfaction with the general IT infrastructure and support. It was widely expressed that blended learning has been a positive enhancement of the learning experience of students and the teaching experience of staff. The role of the Blended Learning Unit (BLU) itself was commended by academic staff in that it challenges and supports staff to develop their practice using technology in the classroom. However,

it was commented that staff use of technology enhanced learning is being hampered due to limited availability of basic IT infrastructure. This was most evident in teaching areas in the Foundation Building which are considered to be very restrictive. The new buildings however have added enormously to the campus and some of those teaching rooms are very well equipped. Finally, the Academic Learning Centre appears to be providing a valuable support to students, particularly those students that are having difficulty in achieving the Irish requirement of the B.Ed.

4.7.2 Student support

On the whole, students gave a very positive response about feeling supported in their studies and being part of a caring community at MIC, particularly if they experienced personal issues. At undergraduate level, the Students' Union is well established, with a clear structure of class representation embedded within it. In discussions with students there is evidence that the Students' Union is approachable and is used readily as a point of contact for students experiencing difficulties or challenges. The Education Faculty also has a student-staff forum which allows the sharing of information between staff and class reps and was viewed favourably by both groups, however this arrangement is not available in the Arts Faculty. Staff and students were jointly of the opinion that because of the size of the college there were plenty of opportunities for informal communication between staff and students. As the student body is growing and ever-increasing demands are placed on staff time, it is recommended that more formal arrangements be put in place across MIC for closer student-staff liaison, for instance widening the involvement of student representatives on programme boards. At St. Patrick's College an admirable level of development of infrastructure has been introduced in relation to the Students' Union which had heretofore been embryonic. This has resulted in the development and embedding of a class representative structure and the recruitment of a part-time sabbatical position for the St Patrick's campus. It is noted that this has been developed within a very short timeframe and is to be commended and encouraged as an important means of connection within the MIC Students' Union structure.

Post-graduate research students reported to the Review Team that their 'voice' does not feature strongly within MIC and that they felt disconnected, disempowered and undervalued. It is clearly important that MIC, via the Research and Graduate School, engage with this student group as a matter of urgency, to investigate this matter and ameliorate the experience of this student group where required. Postgraduate research students reported often awkward and inconsistent practices in relation to admissions and registration processes, requiring lots of paperwork to be completed. MIC acknowledges that the Student Information System requires an upgrade and there is a process under way to address this, as reported above. MIC confirmed that every effort is being made to support postgraduate students in this regard in the interim. Other problems noted centred on getting contracts issued and associated delays in getting an e-mail account set up (approx. 3 weeks). Students are informed that all postgraduate policies and procedures are on the MIC website. While postgraduates have reported to the Review Team that little guidance is provided in navigating through this, it must also be acknowledged that the Research and Graduate School is open to postgraduate students from 8.30 am to 5.30 pm daily to provide full guidance and support to students. Provision of postgraduate programmes places increased demands on an institution and creating a culture conducive to postgraduate study, supported by procedures and processes, is an imperative in delivering a student learning experience that recognises postgraduate student expectations and demands. MIC has graduated over 125 PhD students since 2002

and has been managing postgraduate work for more than 20 years. However, as student numbers and the variety of programmes increase, so do the expectations and demands on the institution. Given MIC's ambitions in the area of postgraduate recruitment, it is recommended that policies and procedures around postgraduate admission and recruitment and ongoing support continue to be developed and applied consistently across the College.

The Review Team met with a range of representatives from student support services. Since 2015, these services and the Academic Learning Centre come within the portfolio of the Director of Student Life, and all support service providers participate in a collective forum – the Student Well-Being Committee. The College Medical Centre provides valuable support to students experiencing physical and emotional health concerns. At particularly busy periods, the demands on the Medical Centre services do not match the ability to supply, resulting in students who are unwell spending a long time waiting to access the service without any guarantee of an appointment, in the College, although they are guaranteed an appointment in a nearby medical centre for a reduced fee. The system by which each student attends the nurse before seeing the doctor aims to reduce the duration of wait to see a doctor, irrespective of need. MIC provides an on-campus Counselling Service available to all students free of charge. While this support service is available to all students, not all students appear to be aware of its existence. The Director of Student Life post was created in 2014 as part of the College's commitment to a high quality and holistic student experience and the growing need to add resourcing to this key strategic objective. It is noted that the Director of Student Life has, since appointment, developed a comprehensive strategy for all support services, including how best to increase the visibility and overall level of use of support services amongst students and it is recommended that MIC continue to ensure delivery of this strategy and in particular to ensure its visibility and that of the support services offered.

The Student Parent Support Service offers a dedicated service to students who are parents and/or expectant parents. The service, which began in October 2007, is funded by the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme and Mary Immaculate Students' Union. The aim of the service is to ensure that students experiencing crisis pregnancy, expectant parents and student parents, are aware of the supports available to them, both within the College and from external agencies. MIC is the only Irish third-level college with a specifically dedicated service for expectant/student parents. Over 260 students have engaged with the service to date. The Review Team commends MIC on the establishment of the Student Parent Support Service and the work done by the Student Parent Support Officer in supporting this important but vulnerable group of students. It is suggested that should current external funding support be withdrawn, MIC should find a way to ensure continuity of funding for the Student Parent Support Service.

4.8 MIC Research and Research Development

There has been significant increase in the number of students completing post graduate qualifications over the last 15 years, increasing from 145 (in 2001) to 385 (in 2015). The college has set up a number of supporting structures to scaffold and develop this emerging research culture, and the eagerly anticipated John Henry Newman Campus with dedicated facilities for postgraduate students is due to open end of 2016 and will provide a welcome 'home' for postgraduate students.

The Research and Graduate School (RGS) provides a range of services including legal, logistical, grant-writing support, research ethics committee, digital repositories plus funding for conference attendance. Research staff view the RGS as a bridge for integration across Education and Arts faculties and all associated RGS events are college-wide and enhance interdisciplinary focus. MIC has also established three **research institutes** over the last three years focusing on multidisciplinary areas of work including the Institute for Irish Studies, Institute for Catholic Studies and PRISEM – Policy Research Institute for Social and Education Matters. There are also a number of Research Centres which were described as having emerged or grown ‘bottom-up’ from areas of research interest. The centres were noted as being very productive, producing a number of publications and hosting events and conferences. It was noted that each of the centres has at least one co-ordinator (in one case there were four) whose role initially is to establish the centre and thereafter to coordinate the centre’s activities and to see to it that staff take on this role on a voluntary basis. Staff were very appreciative of the support available for research, including the seed funding scheme for staff, which is very competitive and has been depleted very quickly. There is a total ‘pot’ of around €60K pa with small grants of €1500 – €3000K. Further seedcorn funding is available to develop opportunities to ultimately gain external research funding. There is also conference travel support which is capped at €1500 per person per annum, in addition to a personal research fund of €600. This is highly valued by staff and they are keen for this to be continued. Staff noted that despite the valued support for research, MIC could do more to celebrate the research outputs and successes of its staff and postgraduate students. Funding for postgraduate students is also available in the form of conference grants. However, it was noted during interviews with students that because the level of funding is low, it is insufficient to support full conference attendance costs and as such many students do not take advantage of the available funding, and funds are not banked or carried forward. It is recommended that MIC consider different ways to offer funding to postgraduate students to allow more substantial support for attending conferences, for example by offering a limited number of competitive grants and attaching sufficient funding to them.

The Research Committee (RC) is the main consulting board for the development of the research plan and structures, and it meets twice per semester. Based on some of our meetings with staff, there is a view that this committee is not working as effectively as it might. During discussion with the Review Team some MIC colleagues indicated that they are unhappy with the current format and would like the role and remit of the committee to be reconsidered.

Regular supervisory training for academic staff is provided. However, in conversations with PhD students it became clear that experiences of postgraduate research supervision are variable. It was also reported that supervision tracking mechanisms are in place, with targets, milestones, feedback and response protocols, but it is clear that the implementation of these mechanisms is inconsistent. A recent innovation is the instigation of panels to review student progress in PhD studies. These have served to increase completion rates and support students who are ‘at risk’. Whilst the Review Team considered the use of such review/progression panels to be good practice, it is recommended that as they are there to support the supervisory process and student progression and in order to work most effectively, supervisory protocols must be applied consistently. Where required, other mechanisms should continue to be used to ensure consistently high standards of postgraduate supervision.

MIC is keen to develop a suite of options for postgraduate programmes. There are currently postgraduate research students pursuing traditional PhD, Structured PhD, Professional Doctorate and PhD by publication degree programmes. However, it was clear from discussion with some academic colleagues in MIC, that there are some tensions around the provision of the structured PhD programmes/professional doctorates and traditional PhD programmes, the former requiring more resources and support. The Structured PhD Programme (SPhDP) was identified by some MIC colleagues as playing very much to the strengths of MIC as a teaching HEI with research. SPhDPs facilitate collaborative delivery with UL and LIT and the first such joint SPhDP in the area of 'the built environment and society' has just been launched. However, MIC is keen to emphasise the fact that the traditional PhD model will continue at MIC in parallel with SPhDPs. It is important for MIC to be mindful of the significant resource implications of increased numbers of SPhDPs, particularly on already stretched staff resources. MIC may find ways of improving their approach and of being more efficient with the staff resource, such as the development of a PhD framework with a common core.

Commendations

The Review Team commends:

- The development of the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) process, which is a very positive contribution to hearing the student voice in their teaching and learning experience.
- The swift and effective action by the MIC SU to integrate students of St. Patrick's (Thurles) into the MIC student body and student advocacy system.
- The creation of the Student Parent Support Service and the work done by the Student Parent Support Officer in supporting this important but vulnerable group of students; furthermore MIC is encouraged to find a way to ensure continuity of funding for the Student Parent Support Service.
- Departmental mentoring and support for part-time colleagues in Faculty of Education.
- Research support provided to staff by way of seed funding, sabbatical leave and the Research Centres and Institutes as places for staff/student collaboration.

Recommendations

The Review Team recommends that:

- MIC should leverage the expertise available within MIC and in cognate functions at UL to augment the current staff-training provision by including training for all academic staff in: (a) principles of curriculum design and of alignment of curricula with the NFQ, (b) the constructive alignment of curricula and assessments and (c) best practice in the design and monitoring of assessment systems to ensure validity, reliability and fairness.

- MIC progress plans to develop an institutional policy on assessment and feedback as a matter of urgency; this will help minimise issues with inconsistencies in quality and timing of feedback on assessment to students. In addition, MIC should monitor the performance of assessments in all programmes and modules (in addition to monitoring the performance of the students) and should include these in annual programme monitoring and in periodic programmatic review. Finally, MIC should review policy and procedures regarding oral examinations in line with international best practice.
- While MIC is fully compliant with current UL academic regulations, UL should have greater oversight of the administrative 'processing' of PhD degrees at MIC, and in overseeing PhD progression and examination processes; including involvement in decisions regarding the transfer of candidates from the Masters (Level 9) to the PhD (Level 10).
- MIC, as a matter of urgency, publish its schedule of internal cyclical reviews (similar to the UL model), on a 5-year rolling basis, encompassing the review of programmes, departments, faculties and related services.
- MIC formally recognise the impact of increasing the number of SPhDPs on the staff resource and confirm that this is factored into staff workloads in an equitable manner.
- There is greater clarity and transparency on access to and dissemination of External Examiner (EE) reports to staff and course teams and a clear sight of when and how the reports are responded to - including who the responsible actors are at department, faculty and institutional levels. EE reports should also be available to relevant stakeholders including students.
- Whilst MIC is to be commended for the availability of student handbooks, it is recommended that in the Faculty of Arts a further mechanism be developed to support students to independent learning for longer and more directly provide targeted, focused and timely information. This may include negotiated supervision contact time with lecturers, minimum standards for dissertation supervisor contact at UG and PGT levels and preparing for assessment.
- The new MIC Student Records Management System adhere to UL data standards and formats, and that transfer of data between MIC and UL systems be facilitated.
- A review and adaptation of the Student Evaluation of Teaching be undertaken with the aim of developing comprehensive and sustainable coverage across MIC.
- An annual performance management and development system be introduced, tailored to MIC requirements (which could incorporate personal research plans).
- A Workload Allocation Model be introduced in order to support fairness, equity, transparency and respect for diversity of contribution and it is recommended that a communication strategy be developed to sit alongside the delivery of the model.

- Placement risk management and crisis response protocols be developed as a matter of urgency, and that staff and students be oriented to them. In addition, the development of placement protocols is required to assure more consistent practices including: contact between advisors/tutors and students. It is then vital that all staff responsible for supporting students on placement familiarise themselves with the placement protocol and that the tutor's role in proactively maintaining contact with students is clarified.
- More formal and consistent arrangements be put in place across MIC for closer student-staff liaison including wider involvement of students' representatives on programme boards.
- Policies and procedures around postgraduate research student admission and recruitment and ongoing support be developed and consistently applied across the College.
- MIC continue to implement the new strategy for all support services in order to increase the visibility and overall level of use of support services amongst students.

Key Findings and Conclusions

Section 5: Key Findings and Conclusions

Based on the Review Team's evaluation of the Institutional Self Evaluation Report, supporting documentation and meetings conducted during the Main Review Visit, the Team found sufficient evidence to confirm:

Category	Key Reviewer findings
Planning, governance and ownership of quality	The Review Team found that the institutional strategic planning, governance and ownership of quality assurance and enhancement is consistent with the institution's role as a higher education institution in the European Higher Education Area.
ESG and other guidelines	The Review Team found the institution's internal and collaborative quality assurance arrangements to be consistent with Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area (ESG) [2015] and national, European and international guidelines in accordance with the Bologna process.
Higher Education Institution in the NFAQ	The institution's planning, structure and systems support its responsibilities as a linked provider of UL with qualifications recognised by the National Framework of Qualifications (NFAQ).

Commendations

The Team found sufficient evidence to commend the following examples of good practice for further promotion internally, nationally and internationally:

1	MIC staff, who were hugely positive, and their commitment evident, in ensuring that the quality of the educational experience has been preserved despite the severe resourcing issues over recent years coupled with an increase in student numbers.
2	The collegiate manner in which MIC approached the ISER process, including engagement with a wide community of stakeholders.
3	The engagement and expertise of members of An tÚdarás Rialaithe and the associated induction, annual orientation and ongoing information sharing for members.
4	The considered, engaging and supportive approach taken by MIC, including MICSU, to the incorporation to St Patrick's College, Thurles.
5	The development of the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) process, which is a very positive contribution to hearing the student voice in their teaching and learning experience.
6	The swift and effective action by the MIC SU to integrate students of St. Patrick's (Thurles) into the MIC student body and student advocacy system.
7	The creation of the Student Parent Support Service and the work done by the Student Parent Support Officer in supporting this important but vulnerable group of students; furthermore, MIC is encouraged to find a way to ensure continuity of funding for the Student Parent Support Service.
8	Departmental mentoring and support for part-time colleagues in the Faculty of Education.
9	Research support provided to staff by way of seed funding, sabbatical leave and the research centres and institutes as places for staff / student collaboration.

Recommendations

The Team found sufficient evidence to recommend the following activities to the institution for attention and development:

1	That MIC as a matter of priority move to confirm resourcing plans outlined for the Quality Office and in so doing develop an MIC quality handbook that will be applied consistently across the institution, inclusive of the St. Patrick's Thurles campus.
2	That MIC continue to take into account the challenges associated with an additional campus, particularly assuring equality of student learning experience across both sites.
3	That MIC Executive consider how it might further engage with its stakeholder community regarding the strategic plan (2017/21) via the production of a communications plan to ensure staff and student ownership and engagement with the plan.
4	With the development of a new student record system it is recommended, as an early administrative task, that legacy alumni data (where possible) is backfilled into the system.
5	That MIC build upon the collegiality fostered in the ISER / Self-evaluation process to address and resolve the issue of academic staff representation on the Governing Body, and, as part of due process, consider examples of governance models from other institutions.
6	That MIC find ways to strengthen communication and consultation practices between academic staff and senior managers. It is also recommended that MIC consider the role of the Deans in this process and the associated devolution of authority and empowerment to make decisions at this level.
7	That reciprocal arrangements be put in place to give Presidents of both institutions (UL and MIC) a seat on the Governing Body of the partner institution (UL and MIC). Such reciprocal arrangements should be mirrored for all institutional governance, leadership and management committees throughout UL and MIC.
8	Given that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between UL and MIC underpins the current designation of MIC as a Linked Provider of UL, it is recommended that the MOU should be reviewed as a matter of urgency and, where necessary, be re-negotiated and revised, to reflect the changes to the Irish HE 'landscape' since 2007, in particular: the provisions of the 2012 Act; the role of QQI; the status of MIC as a Linked Provider of UL (the cognate DAB); and the need for UL to have effective oversight of MIC internal QA processes and overall governance arrangements in place (Levels 6-10).
9	That overarching QA policy development and implementation across the institution be required to assure consistency, transparency, and the link between assessment, policy and programme development, and resource allocation.
10	That training be put in place for all staff on interpreting and making best use of dashboards in the new student record system and that targeted reporting from the dashboard allow easy sight of focussed key information.
11	That MIC leverage the expertise available within MIC and in cognate functions at UL to augment the current staff training provision by including training for all academic staff in: (a) principles of curriculum design and alignment of curricula with the NFQ, (b) the constructive alignment of curricula and assessments and (c) best practice in the design and monitoring of assessment systems to ensure validity, reliability and fairness.
12	That MIC progress plans to develop an institutional policy on assessment and feedback as a matter of urgency; this will help minimise issues with inconsistencies in quality and timing of feedback on assessment to students. In addition, MIC should monitor the performance of assessments in all programmes and modules (in addition to monitoring the performance of the students) and should include these in annual programme monitoring and in periodic programmatic review. Finally, MIC should review policy and procedures regarding oral examinations in line with international best practice.
13	While MIC is fully compliant with current UL academic regulations, UL should have greater oversight of the administrative 'processing' of PhD degrees at MIC, and in overseeing PhD progression and examination processes; including involvement in decisions regarding the transfer of candidates from the Masters (Level 9) to the PhD (Level 10).

Key Findings and Conclusions

14	That MIC as a matter of urgency publish its schedule of internal cyclical reviews (similar to the UL model), on a 5-year rolling basis, encompassing the review of programmes, departments, faculties and related services.
15	That MIC formally recognise the impact of increasing the number of SPhDPs on the staff resource and confirm that this is factored into staff workloads in an equitable manner.
16	Greater clarity and transparency on access to and dissemination of External Examiner (EE) reports to staff and course teams and a clear sight of when and how the reports are responded to - including who the responsible actors are at department, faculty and institutional levels. EE reports should also be available to relevant stakeholders including students.
17	Whilst MIC is to be commended for the availability of student handbooks it is recommended that in the Faculty of Arts a further mechanism be developed to support students to independent learning for longer and more directly provide targeted, focused and timely information. This may include negotiated supervision contact time with lecturers, minimum standards for dissertation supervisor contact at UG and PGT levels and preparing for assessment.
18	That the new MIC Student Records Management System adhere to UL data standards and formats, and that transfer of data between MIC and UL systems be facilitated.
19	That a review and adaptation of the Student Evaluation of Teaching be undertaken with the aim of developing comprehensive and sustainable coverage across MIC.
20	That an annual performance management and development system be introduced, tailored to MIC requirements (which could incorporate personal research plans).
21	That a Workload Allocation Model be introduced in order to support fairness, equity, transparency and respect for diversity of contribution and it is recommended that a communication strategy be developed to sit alongside the delivery of the model.
22	That placement risk management and crisis response protocols be developed as a matter of urgency, and that staff and students be oriented to them. In addition, the development of placement protocols is required to assure more consistent practices including: contact between advisors/tutors and students. It is then vital that all staff responsible for supporting students on placement familiarise themselves with the placement protocol and that the tutor's role in proactively maintaining contact with students is clarified.
23	That more formal and consistent arrangements be put in place across MIC for closer student-staff liaison including wider involvement of students' representatives on programme boards
24	That policies and procedures around postgraduate research student admission and recruitment and ongoing support be developed and consistently applied across the College.
25	That MIC continue to implement the new strategy developed for all support services in order to increase the visibility and overall level of use of support services amongst students.

Appendix 1: Terms of Reference

Section 1 Background and Context for the Review

1.1 Context and Legislative Underpinning

In 2016, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) will undertake an institutional review of Mary Immaculate College (MIC) on behalf of the University of Limerick (UL).

Founded in 1898, MIC is a Catholic College of Education and the Liberal Arts. The College offers a wide range of programmes in education and the liberal arts at both undergraduate and postgraduate level and over 3,000 students are engaged in studies at the institution. MIC is a linked provider of the University of Limerick. This means that, based upon the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two institutions, UL is the academic accrediting body for all higher education programmes at MIC, save where other arrangements are jointly agreed by UL and MIC.

As a linked provider of UL, MIC is subject to review and external quality assurance by UL or, if requested, QQI. MIC is also subject directly to QQI for the review and oversight of Access Transfer and Progression arrangements.

In November 2015, the University of Limerick wrote to QQI and requested that QQI conduct an institution-level external quality assurance review of MIC. Also, in November 2015, UL wrote to MIC to advise that it had made the request to QQI and that the request had been accepted by QQI.

Instruments that underpin the basis for this review include the following:

- the Universities Act 1997
- the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, specifically Section 42
- the Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Limerick and Mary Immaculate College

Review, in this context, refers to the formal review of the effectiveness of the institution-wide quality assurance policies and procedures established and implemented by MIC. This is a review in accordance with the Terms of Reference set out in this document.

1.2 Purposes

The purposes of this review process are:

1. To provide an external evaluation of institution-wide quality, the impact of mission, strategy, governance and management on quality, and the overall effectiveness of quality assurance at the institution by:
 - encompassing the comprehensive, institution-wide procedures for teaching, learning, services and research at MIC;
 - emphasising the responsibility for quality and quality assurance at the level of the institution;
 - promoting the improvement of quality assurance procedures.
2. To encourage a Quality Assurance (QA) culture and the enhancement of the student learning environment and experience by:
 - emphasising the student and the student learning experience in the review;

- providing a source of evidence of areas for improvement and areas for revision of policy and change within the institution;
 - exploring the area of quality enhancement, innovative and effective practices and procedures.
3. To improve public confidence in the quality of institutions by promoting transparency and public awareness by:
 - consulting on and publishing Terms of Reference for the review;
 - publishing the reports and outcomes of the review;
 - publishing a brief, institutional quality profile at the end of the process;
 - assessing the transparency and accessibility of reporting on quality and quality assurance by the institution.
 4. To support systems-level improvement of the quality of higher education by:
 - ensuring that there is consistency in the approach to the review in comparison with similar institutions.
 5. To encourage quality by using evidence-based, objective methods and advice by:
 - using the expertise of international, national and student peer reviewers who are independent of the institution;
 - ensuring that findings are based on evidence;
 - facilitating the institution to identify its own metrics and benchmarks for quality, relevant to its own mission and context;
 - identifying examples of good practice and innovation for further dissemination.

Section 2 Objectives and Criteria

2.1 Review Objectives

Objective 1

To support institutional strategic planning, governance and ownership of quality assurance and enhancement. The main aim of this objective is to consider the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures in the context of planning and governance within the institution along with the mission and strategy of the institution.

Objective 2

To support the institution in meeting its responsibility for the operation of internal quality assurance procedures for education, training, research and other services, including but not limited to internal reviews that are clear and transparent to all its stakeholders, and which provide for the continuing evaluation of all academic, research and service departments and their activities, as outlined in Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015 (ESG 2015). This objective also encompasses the responsibilities of the institution for quality assurance arrangements and procedures for collaborative provision and partnerships. Examples of these arrangements are the forthcoming incorporation of St. Patrick's College, Thurles and the joint programmes and partnerships with, for instance, the Institute of Technology, Tralee, and the University of Groningen.

As this is an initial quality assurance review, the emphasis will be on evaluating compliance with quality assurance standards and guidelines, particularly ESG. However, where evidence exists of institution-led innovations and initiative in quality enhancement, the review will provide the institution with feedback on these.

Objective 3

To evaluate the extent to which MIC planning, structure and procedures support its responsibilities as a higher education institution with qualifications in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and as an institution that engages with national, European and international guidelines and standards (guidelines listed below), particularly in accordance with the Bologna process.

2.2 Review Criteria

In line with practice in the Irish higher education sector generally, and Ireland's commitment to the Bologna Process, the key criterion is compliance with the standards from Part 1 of the ESG 2015. Though very recent, the 2015 standards build incrementally on the 2009 standards. Accordingly, QCI will provide the review team with a gap analysis between the ESG 2009 and the 2015 revised set. Any standards pertaining solely to ESG 2015 will be used exclusively to guide this institution towards the development of future quality assurance policies and procedures, rather than as criteria for evaluating compliance.

This criterion should be considered in conjunction with the accompanying guidelines as set out in **Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015)**. These guidelines provide additional information about good practice and in some cases explain in more detail the meaning and relevance of the standards.

The criterion for MIC as a higher education institution in the NFQ is intended to assist the examination of MIC's role, acting as a linked provider of UL, in implementing QQI (NFQ) policies and procedures for access, transfer and progression, including UL-derived procedures. This criterion derives from *Access Transfer and Progression - QQI Policy Restatement 2015*.

2.3 Augmentation of criteria

The criteria above will be augmented by the Team with guidelines derived from the following:

1. QQI:
 - Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016
2. Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB):
 - Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education (2009);
 - National Guidelines of Good Practice for the Approval, Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes (2012)
3. Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC):
 - Policy for Collaborative programmes, Transnational programmes and Joint Awards (Revised 2012)
4. Irish Higher Education Quality Network:
 - Principles of Good Practice in Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement for Higher Education and Training (2005);
 - Principles for Reviewing the Effectiveness of Quality Assurance Procedures in Irish Higher Education and Training (2007);
 - Provision of Education to International Students: Code of Practice and Guidelines for Irish Higher Education Institutions (2009);
 - Draft Guidelines for Transnational and Collaborative Provision; Consultation Document 2012 (v. 8/10/12)
5. European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA):
 - Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area – 3rd Edition (2009)
 - Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (2015)

Section 3 Objectives and Criteria

3.1 Review Process

The primary basis for the review process is the bespoke handbook developed for the review.

In line with best national and international practice, the review process will consist of the following elements:

- agreement of Terms of Reference for the review between the QQI executive and UL, following consultation with MIC and public consultation;
- an institutional self-evaluation review process resulting in an Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (referred to as ISER henceforth) to be prepared by MIC addressing the agreed objectives, criteria and Terms of Reference;
- the appointment of a review team by QQI, in agreement with UL and following the removal of conflict of interest through consultation with MIC, comprising national and international representation to conduct the review process;
- completion of an ISER by MIC;
- a review of the MIC ISER by the review team and consideration by the team of any other information they might consider relevant;
- a planning and site visit to MIC by the review team;
- preparation of a review report by the team for submission to QQI and UL, which will include findings and recommendations in relation to the objectives as set out in this Terms of Reference;
- preparation of an institutional response by MIC, including a plan with timeframe for implementation of changes, if appropriate;
- consideration of the review report by UL together with the institutional response and the plan for implementation of changes, if appropriate;
- publication and dissemination by MIC, UL and QQI of the review report and MIC response; MIC may choose to publish the ISER;
- a published one-year follow-up report by MIC for consideration by UL;
- if the review team identifies in its review report what it considers to be significant causes of concern, a timeframe for addressing issues will be agreed with MIC.

3.2 Review Team Profile

A review team will be appointed by QQI, using the profile set out below. QQI will be the point of contact between the review team, UL and MIC.

The review team will be appointed in keeping with the following profile:

- a review Chair – an international reviewer who is a (serving or former) senior third level institution leader - usually a President/Rector or Deputy President/Rector;
- an international reviewer who is a senior third level institution leader from an institution similar to MIC;

- a coordinating reviewer (acting as a full member of the team) with experience of institutional, national and/or European quality assurance processes;
- a student representative (current or former – less than 2 years) with direct experience of institutional and/or national quality assurance processes within or outside of Ireland;
- a representative of external stakeholders (national and international) who could be an employer, an employer representative or someone from the broader community of interest to MIC;
- one Irish reviewer (with recent or former experience – within the last five years) at a senior level with experience of quality assurance processes at an Irish third level institution;

3.3 Timeline

Timeline	Action or milestone in the process	Actor/s
<i>9-10 months before team visit</i>	Agreed timeframe for Institutional Review process	QQI, UL, MIC
<i>9-10 months before team visit</i>	Publication of Draft Terms of Reference (TOR) for consultation Draft TOR to UL Academic Council for noting Draft TOR to MIC for consultation TOR published on QQI website for public consultation	QQI, UL, MIC
<i>Approx. 6-9 months before team visit</i>	Terms of Reference established and published by QQI and UL, following consultation	QQI, UL
<i>Approx. 6-9 months before team visit</i>	Publication of the Review Handbook	QQI
<i>Approx. 6-9 months before team visit</i>	Confirmation of appointment of review team members by QQI, in agreement with UL, following assurance of removal of conflict of interest with MIC	QQI, UL and MIC
<i>3 to 6 months before team visit</i>	Completion of the ISER	MIC
August 2016	Submission of the ISER and other supporting documentation to QQI for distribution, to the review team, and to UL for noting	MIC
<i>Approx. 8 weeks before Main Review Visit</i>	Training of review team members for institutional review	QQI, UL
<i>Approx. 7 weeks before Main Review Visit</i>	Feedback by review team members on initial impressions of the ISER	Review Team, QQI
<i>Approx. 7 weeks before Main Review Visit</i>	Pre-visit planning visit between review team representatives, QQI and MIC	Review Team/ QQI/MIC
End November 2016	Site visit to MIC by review team (Main Review Visit) (4-5 days approximately) Preliminary (oral) feedback on findings by the review team	Review Team/ QQI/MIC
February 2017	Draft report on findings of the review team sent by QQI to MIC for factual accuracy	QQI
<i>3 Weeks following receipt of draft report</i>	MIC response to QQI with any factual corrections required	MIC

<i>2-4 Weeks following receipt of factual accuracy response</i>	Final report on findings of review team sent by QQI to MIC and UL	QQI
<i>6-8 weeks following receipt of report</i>	Response by MIC to QQI including plan with timeframe for implementation of changes, if appropriate	MIC
<i>Next available UL Academic Council meeting</i>	Consideration of report and MIC response by UL Academic Council Consideration of report and MIC response by UL Governance Authority Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance Subcommittee Publication of report and response on website once approved for publication by UL Executive Committee	QQI, UL, MIC
<i>12 months after adoption</i>	Follow up report by MIC to UL Publication of the follow-up report and UL response on website once adopted	MIC, UL

3.4 Role of QQI in Review

In accordance with the functions set out in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012, sections 35 and 84, QQI will:

1. Publish draft TOR for the review of MIC for consultation
2. Agree and publish final TOR for the review of MIC
3. Contact, confirm and appoint review team members
4. Facilitate the review process with UL and MIC
5. Provide UL and MIC with advice on process and criteria
6. Support the review activities of the review team and advise the team on criteria and policy
7. Act as a point of contact between the review team, MIC and UL
8. Organise visits in cooperation with the review team and MIC
9. Provide training to the review team
10. Edit reports for approval and publication
11. Advise UL on the findings set out in the review report and the response of the institution
12. Publish the review report and the response of the institution

3.5 Review Costs

In keeping with standard practice, the costs of the review will be paid by the institution (MIC). UL and MIC will discuss arrangements for the disbursement of costs. As an agent acting on behalf of UL, QQI will bill UL directly for expenses incurred (including fees paid to reviewers). QQI overheads for the review will be covered by the current UL relationship fee paid by UL to QQI.

Appendix 2: Main Review Visit Timetable

Day 1: Monday 28 November 2016

Time	Meeting With	Name	Purpose
09.00 – 10.00	Director of Quality	Dr Brendan O’Keeffe	Review Team arrives at MIC. Meeting with Institutional Coordinator
10.00 – 10.30	Representatives of MIC Senior Management	Prof Gary O’Brien Prof Eugene Wall	Private discussion with MIC Senior Management
10.30 – 11.00	Private Review Team meeting		
11.00 – 11.45	Registrar	Prof Eugene Wall	Meeting with Senior Management Team and Teaching & Learning: To discuss institutional mission, goals, strategic aims, direction and recent proposed developments in quality management and its link to strategic planning; the roles and responsibilities for QA and management between the Centre (for T&L), faculties and departments
	Director of Teaching & Learning	Dr Gwen Moore (current)	
	Director of Teaching & Learning	Dr Anne O’Keeffe (former)	
	Dean of Education	Prof Teresa O’Doherty	
	Dean of Arts	Prof Michael Breen	
11.45 – 12.15	Private Review Team meeting		
12.15 – 13.00	Chair of An tÚdarás Rialaithe and Board of Trustees	Bishop Brendan Leahy	Meeting with Governing Authority representatives to discuss the mechanisms employed by the governing authority for monitoring quality assurance and enhancement within the College in line with the Universities Act requirements and how it ensures the effectiveness of the procedures used
	External members of An tÚdarás Rialaithe	Ms Catherine Kelly Dr Áine Lawlor	
	Administrator to An tÚdarás Rialaithe	Ms Orla Banks	
	Internal member of An tÚdarás Rialaithe	Ms. Caitríona Breathnach	
13.00 – 14.00	Private Review Team meeting and lunch		
14.00 – 14.45	Student Representatives	Five student representatives recruited by the MISU (Students’ Union)	Discussions with a range of undergraduate students representing both Arts and Education
14.45 – 15.15	Private Review Team meeting		
15.15 – 16.15	MISU President	Mr James Deegan	Meeting with Students Union Sabbatical Officers to discuss student engagement in the College, particularly the role of students in quality assurance, strategic planning and decision making processes
	MISU Vice President	Mr Lee Dillon	
	MISU General Manager	Ms Deirdre Kennelly	
16.15 – 17.00	Private Review Team meeting		
17.00 – 18.00	Director of Quality	Dr Brendan O’Keeffe	Tour of MIC Campus

Day 2: Tuesday 29 November 2016

Time	Meeting With	Name	Purpose
09.00 – 09.30	Director of Quality	Dr Brendan O’Keeffe	Meeting with Institutional Coordinator to clarify issues from Day 1 that might impact on Day 2
09.30 – 10.15	QC Chair	Mr Eamon Stack	Meeting with Quality Committee and ISER Working Group representatives: To discuss how the College 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
	Assistant Dean of Arts	Ms Máire Ní Neachtain	
	Assistant Dean of Education	Dr Angela Canny	
	AVPA	Prof Gary O’Brien	
	Quality Officer	Ms Emma Barry	
	Data Analyst	Ms Caitríona McGrath	
	Director of Quality	Dr Brendan O’Keeffe	
10.15 – 10.45	Private Review Team meeting		
10.45 – 11.30	VPAA	Prof Eugene Wall	Meeting with Academic Council and APAC; and UL APRC: To discuss how the College monitors the effectiveness of its quality management processes and structures and how it ensures the outcomes of QA processes are enacted in an appropriate, consistent and timely manner
	Assistant Registrar	Dr Patrick Connolly	
	Academic Systems Administrator	Ms Aisling Kelly	
	Members of Academic Council	Dr Elaine Murtagh Ms Máire Ní Neachtain	
	<u>UL APRC</u> Associate Registrar	Dr Pat Phelan	
11.30 – 12.00	Private Review Team meeting		
12.00 – 13.00	Heads of Departments of Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Education	<u>Faculty of Arts</u> Dr Christiane Schönfeld Prof Eamonn Conway Dr Niall Keane	To discuss the use of effectiveness of embedding quality management processes within decision making, management and planning processes. Discuss the ways operational activities are informed by national and international benchmarks and practices including the role of key stakeholders in teaching, learning and research innovations
		<u>Faculty of Education</u> Dr Emer Ring Dr Carol O’Sullivan Seán de Brún, Uasal	
13.00 – 14.00	Placement Office Manager	Ms Maeve Sullivan	Review Team Lunch and meeting to verify and review systems of Quality Assurance as operated by the Placement Office, particularly in respect of the Off-Campus Placement Programme
	Placement Officer	Ms Patricia Casserly	
	Academic Representative: Department of French Studies	Dr Loïc Guyon	
	Employer (who takes students on placement)	Ms Michelle Costello	

APPENDICES

14.00 – 14.45	Director of Student Life	Dr Geraldine Brosnan	Meetings with directors of a range of student support services to discuss involvement in academic and non-academic quality assurance and enhancement processes – including student feedback mechanisms
	Student Academic Administration Officer	Ms Carrie Ryan	
	Arts Faculty Office	Ms Rachael Godfrey	
	Education Faculty Office	Mr Fintan Breen (previous) Ms Meg Roche (current)	
	Director of Enterprise and Community Engagement	Dr Maeve Liston	
	Director of Corporate Communications	Ms Ciara Ní Shúilleabháin	
14.45 – 15.15	Private Review Team meeting		
15.15 – 16.00	Faculty of Arts	Dr Catherine Dalton Dr Catherine Swift Dr Darach Sanfey	Meeting with academic staff representatives from Arts and Education
	Faculty of Education	Dr Eilís O’Sullivan Dr Richard Bowles Dr T.J. Ó Ceallaigh	
16.00 – 16.15	Private Review Team meeting		
16.15 – 17.00	Director of Student Life	Dr Geraldine Brosnan	Meeting with staff from Professional Service units that provide services to students
	Access Office	Ms Maura Moore	
	Library	Ms Gerardine Moloney	
	Blended-Learning Unit	Mr David Moloney	
	Director of ICT	Mr Kieran Pearse	
	Student Parent Support Service	Ms Nicola Hurley	
17.00 – 17.15	Private Review Team meeting		
17.15 – 18.00	Ms Catherine Duffy, Northern Trust Ms Tracie Tobin, St. Michael’s Infant School and The Teaching Council Ms Anne Horan, INTO (Irish National Teachers’ Organisation) Mr Colm O’Brien, Lime Tree Theatre Mr Timmy O’Dwyer, DELL Ireland Mr Dave Griffin, DELL Ireland Dr Pat Daly, Limerick City and County Council Mr John Tuohy, St. Paul’s NS		Meeting with External Stakeholders

Day 3: Wednesday 30 November 2016

Time	Meeting With	Name	Purpose
08.30 – 09.00	Director of Quality	Dr Brendan O’Keeffe	Private meeting with Institutional Coordinator to clarify issues from Day 2 that might impact on Day 3
09.00 – 9.45	Students from St. Patrick’s Campus, Thurles		Discussions with a range of UG Thurles students to consider their experiences: To discuss arrangements by the College for ensuring engagement with the quality of provision for staff and students located at St. Patrick’s Campus
09.45 – 10.00	Private Review Team meeting		
10.00 – 10.45	Associate Vice President for Research	Prof Michael Healy	Meeting with Research Directors: To discuss the development of research in the College, research centres, recent centre reviews and support for research active staff and the postgraduate research experience and discussion of postgraduate entry and progression
	Head of Graduate School	Prof Jim Deegan	
	New Programmes Co-Ordinator and Postgraduate Research Sub-Committee	Dr Gerard Downes	
	Co-Ordinator of Doctoral Programmes	Dr Julianne Stack	
10.45 – 11.15	Private Review Team meeting		
11.15 – 12.00	Research Committee Members	Dr Marek McGann Dr Michael Murphy	Meeting with Academic Staff- Research: To discuss - staff experiences of research management and supervision within the College, - the relationship between teaching, research and innovation, and - the effectiveness of quality management processes for ensuring the quality of the Post Graduate and Post Doc experience
	Committee Member and Research Centre Coordinator	Dr Sabine Egger	
	Curriculum Development Unit	Dr Ann Higgins	
	Research Institute Coordinators	Dr Aisling Leavy Dr Eugene O’Brien Dr Rik Van Nieuwenhove	
12.00 – 12.30	Private Review Team meeting		
12.30 – 13.15	Students		Review Team lunch with undergraduate and postgraduate students
13.15 – 13.45	Postgraduate Representatives (Postgraduate researchers and students)	Mr Cillian McHugh (chair) and representatives of the Postgraduate Forum	Discussions with a range of Postgraduate R&T students including those that engaged with recent internal reviews, management and feedback processes on the consistency and quality of their experiences within the College

APPENDICES

13.45 – 14.15	Private Review Team meeting		
14.15 – 15.00	Director of Human Resources	Mr Frank White	Meeting with Human Resources and Finance to discuss staffing issues, including national frameworks and constraints, alongside policies and procedures for staff promotion, diversity, recruitment and appraisal.
	Assistant Director of Human Resources	Ms Helen Cashell	
	VPAF (current)	Mr John Coady	
	VPAF (incoming)	Mr Michael Keane	
15.00 – 15.15	Private Review Team meeting		
15.15 – 16.00	Senior Academic Administrator	Ms Paula Hourigan	Meeting with staff from St. Patrick's Campus, Thurles
	Senior Campus Administrator	Mr Rob O'Halloran	
	Head of School of Education	Dr Finn Ó Murchú	
16.00 – 16.30	Private Review Team meeting		
16.30 – 17.15	Director of Quality	Prof Gary Walsh	Meeting with University of Limerick (UL) Senior Management: To discuss the arrangements between the College and the University of Limerick for monitoring quality assurance and enhancement
	Vice President Academic & Registrar	Prof Paul McCutcheon	
	Associate Registrar	Dr Pat Phelan	
	Dean, Graduate Studies	Dr Huw Lewis	

Day 4: Thursday 1 December 2016

Time	Meeting With	Name	Purpose
09.00 – 11.00	Private Review Team meeting		
11.00 – 11.30 (Optional)	Representatives of MIC Senior Management	Prof Gary O'Brien Prof Eugene Wall	Private meeting between Review Team and Senior Management
11.30 – 13.00 (Parallel)	Private meeting of Review Team to prepare for Exit Presentation/Oral Report		
11.30 – 13.00 (Parallel)	QQI Head of Cyclical Reviews	Ms Orla Lynch	Parallel meeting to enable the institution to give feedback to QQI on the conduct of the review team and feedback on their experience of the process. Clarification on the post-visit process will be provided
	Director of Quality	Dr Brendan O'Keeffe	
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch		
14.00 – 15.30	QQI Head of Cyclical Reviews	Ms Orla Lynch	Private Review Team Meeting with QQI Head of Cyclical Reviews to enable the Chair and the team to prepare the PowerPoint presentation and confirm the key findings and the experiences of the team with QQI Head of Cyclical Reviews

15.30 – 16.00	QQI Head of Cyclical Reviews	Ms Orla Lynch	Oral Report - Chair gives an oral presentation of the key findings and recommendations of the review team and confirm actions and timescales associated with the finalising and publication of the reports and any follow-up actions
	Executive Team	Prof Eugene Wall Mr Michael Keane Prof Gary O'Brien Prof Michael Healy Prof Teresa O'Doherty Prof Michael Breen	
	Director of Quality	Dr Brendan O'Keeffe	
16.00 – 17.00	UL Senior Management	Mr Cillian McHugh (chair) and representatives of the Postgraduate Forum	To facilitate communication of the team's main findings to UL senior management and to facilitate a follow-on dialogue regarding the findings and recommendations

Day 5: Friday 2 December 2016

Time	Purpose
09.00 – 13.00	Private meeting of Review Team: Initial drafting of final report
13.00-13.45	Lunch
13.45-16.00	Private meeting of Review Team: Initial drafting of final report
16.15	Review Team depart

Appendix 3: Overview of the Review Process

Introduction

MIC is a linked provider of the University of Limerick (UL). Based upon the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two institutions, UL is the academic accrediting body for all higher education programmes at MIC, save where other arrangements are jointly agreed by UL and MIC. In November 2015, the University of Limerick (UL) requested that QQI conduct an institution-level external quality assurance review of MIC. As a linked provider of UL, MIC is subject to review and external quality assurance by UL or, if requested, QQI. MIC is also subject directly to QQI for the review and oversight of Access, Transfer and Progression arrangements.

Instruments that underpin the basis for this review include the following:

- the Universities Act 1997
- the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, specifically Section 42
- the Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Limerick and Mary Immaculate College

Review, in this context, refers to the formal review of the effectiveness of the institution-wide quality assurance policies and procedures established and implemented by MIC. This is a review in accordance with the Terms of Reference set out in Appendix 1.

The Review Process

In line with best national and international practice, the review process includes the following elements:

- agreement of Terms of Reference for the review between the QQI executive and UL, following consultation with MIC and public consultation;
- an institutional self-evaluation review process resulting in an Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) to be prepared by MIC addressing the agreed objectives, criteria and Terms of Reference;
- the appointment of a review team by QQI, in agreement with UL and following the removal of conflict of interest through consultation with MIC, comprising national and international representation, to conduct the review process;
- completion of an ISER by MIC;
- a review of the MIC ISER by the review team and consideration by the team of any other information they might consider relevant;
- a planning visit and site visit (Main Review Visit) to MIC by the review team;
- preparation of a review report by the team for submission to QQI and UL, which will include findings and recommendations in relation to the objectives as set out in this Terms of Reference;
- preparation of an institutional response by MIC, including a plan with timeframe for implementation of changes, if appropriate;

- consideration of the review report by UL together with the institutional response and the plan for implementation of changes, if appropriate;
- publication and dissemination by MIC, UL and QQI of the review report and MIC response; MIC may choose to publish the ISER;
- a published one-year follow-up report by MIC for consideration by UL;
- if the review team identifies in its review report what it considers to be significant causes of concern, a timeframe for addressing issues to be agreed with MIC.

The objectives of the Institutional Review of MIC are set out in the Terms of Reference (Appendix 1).

The Review Team

QQI appointed an independent Review Team to conduct the Institutional Review of MIC. Review Team members were asked to declare any potential conflicts of interest prior to appointment. The institution was also asked to declare any potential conflicts of interest prior to the appointment of the members of the Review Team. The Institutional Review of MIC was conducted by a six-person team operating under the leadership of the Review Chairperson and consisted of carefully selected and trained/briefed reviewers who have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their tasks. The Review Team included:

- a Chairperson
- an international reviewer
- an Irish reviewer
- a student representative
- a representative of external stakeholders
- a Coordinating Reviewer

Reviewer Training and Deployment

The Review Team received institutionally-specific training in advance of deployment, which included briefings about the sector. The focus of the training session was to ensure that all reviewers:

- understood the social, cultural, economic and legal environment that the institution is operating within;
- understood relevant statutory requirements placed on Irish institutions in relation to quality, as outlined in the ESG;
- understood the aims and objectives of the review process as well as the key elements of the method; and
- understood their own roles and tasks and the importance of team coherence and delivering a robust, evidence-based report in a timely manner.

Reporting

Two review reports were produced: a brief non-technical summary report and a full review report for specialist audiences. Both reports were prepared by the Co-ordinating Reviewer and signed off by the Chair following consultation with all review team members. The institution is allowed time in which to comment on factual accuracy and, if it so wishes, to provide a 1-2 page institutional response to be published as an appendix to the review report. The institutional review process is complete when the Review Team reports have been formally considered and responded to by the UL Academic Council when it is satisfied that the review process was completed in accordance with published criteria.

Follow-up

One year after the Main Review Visit the institution will be asked to produce a follow-up report (incorporating the institutional action plan) for submission to UL. Within the report, the institution should provide a commentary on how the review findings and recommendations have been discussed and disseminated throughout the Institution's committee structure and academic units, and comment on how effectively the institution is addressing the review outcomes. The report should identify the range of strategic and logistical developments and decisions that have occurred within the institution since the review reports' publication. Institutions will continue to have flexibility in the length and style of the follow-up report but should address each of the key findings and recommendations that the reviewers presented. The follow-up report will be published. UL may choose to publish a response to the follow-up report.

If the Review Team identifies in its review report what it considers to be significant causes of concern, particularly in relation to the Institution's fulfilment of relevant statutory requirements, UL will consult with the institution to agree an immediate action plan to address the issue(s) of Review Team concern, including the time frame in which the issue(s) will be addressed. The institution will report to UL every six months for the duration of the plan on progress against the action plan. Where UL considers that progress in implementing the action plan is inadequate, UL may, in consultation with the institution, intervene to secure a revision or acceleration of the plan, or to arrange a further review visit, ideally involving most, or all, of the original Review Team. This process is not expected to be utilised and would only be used in exceptional circumstances where significant failures to meet statutory requirements were found by the Team.

Appendix 4: Response of Mary Immaculate College



Mary Immaculate College welcomes the conclusions contained in the QQI's *Institutional Review of Mary Immaculate College* (2017) that this institution is in full compliance with the requisite standards in respect of quality assurance as prescribed in national and European frameworks. This outcome is consistent with the long-standing and excellent academic reputation of MIC as an autonomous university-level College of Education & the Liberal Arts and it reflects our progressive commitment to our quality assurance culture and framework. This commitment to quality assurance is amply evidenced not only by our exceptional 25-year relationship with our academic accrediting partner, the University of Limerick, but also by our constructive and positive engagement with national accrediting agencies that include the Teaching Council and the Psychological Society of Ireland, as well as with the Higher Education Authority (HEA) which has assigned "Category 1" status to the College in successive performance evaluations.

This quality assurance review was undertaken under the cyclical institutional review process set out by the *Quality & Qualifications Act* (2012). It was conducted by QQI at the request of the University of Limerick, which is the "Designated Awarding Body" (DAB) to MIC as a "Linked Provider" (LP) under the terms of the Act. MIC was the first Irish higher education institution to be reviewed under the ambit of the revised *European Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (2015). The College found the process underpinning the development of the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) to be a stimulating, inclusive and productive exercise in critical self-analysis for all stakeholders. Indeed, this exercise informed and enlightened the development of the College's new Strategic Plan 2017-2021 – *A Flourishing Learning Community*. Very positive feedback was received from all stakeholders, including QQI, following submission of the ISER in August 2016. The visit of the Review Panel followed in November, and its report was forwarded to the College on 21 March 2017. Mary Immaculate College welcomes the commendations and recommendations of the Review Panel and these will be fully and comprehensively actioned through the 2017-2021 Strategic Plan, along with several other quality initiatives already under way within the College.

In the context of the report narrative, it is important to recognise that Mary Immaculate College is substantially different in size, scale and functions to other non-accrediting "Linked Provider" institutions by several orders of magnitude. It is an institution with almost 5,000 students, offering nine Level 8 programmes and a multiplicity of postgraduate programmes, up to and including Level 10. For example, MIC has had 125 doctoral awards conferred to date, along with hundreds of awards at Masters level, a fact which in itself confirms the university-level functions of this College. By any measure, the institution commands a significant presence in the higher education system and the "Linked Provider" designation, applied to far smaller institutions in all other instances, creates a difficulty in profiling the College appropriately. While it is understandable that the Review Panel was obliged to delimit its approach according to the "Linked Provider" designation, the

emphasis in the report on micro-management of routine administration of academic approval by the DAB is misplaced due to the maturity of our academic relationship with the University of Limerick. This relationship, now formalised through the HEA in joint membership of the Mid West Cluster / Shannon Consortium, is characterised by mutual respect and parity of esteem. Unfortunately, the Review Panel did not seize the opportunity to comment discerningly on this. Instead, the preponderance of process-related narrative in the External Review Report, as well as the recommendations in respect of oversight, have resulted from a determinedly literal interpretation of the systematic features of our relationship with the University as a DAB, solely, rather than from a thorough consideration of context and MIC's achievements and potential. The demarcation of the College within the confines of the DAB-LP paradigm has not presented a problem for us heretofore but we will now examine the strategic implications of the Review Panel's report for our locus within the broader higher education system.

MIC maintains that there is abundant evidence that the 2007 *Memorandum of Understanding* between the College and the University proved extremely productive in regulating the complex and finely balanced relationship between the two institutions, whilst striking a judicious balance between MIC's autonomy and the University's obligation to ensure the quality of the academic awards bestowed by the University. The College accepts that the *Memorandum of Understanding* should be the subject of review but, equally, we regard it as essential that this exercise be undertaken in a spirit of partnership and should not unfairly curtail or diminish the level of autonomy which the College's demonstrated competence in managing its academic affairs has justifiably earned. The College's current designation as a Linked Provider cannot, on its own, be the determinant of the UL-MIC relationship, given the scale and scope of our status, in real terms.

We wish to acknowledge the QQI/ Review Panel members, our partners at the University of Limerick and all other stakeholders for their contributions to the review. We are ready to offer detailed feedback on the process from our vantage point and we will do so at a later date. In general, we would suggest that the methodology used to conduct institutional reviews should be examined carefully by all system stakeholders, especially in the light of the revised *European Standards and Guidelines*. In our ISER, the ESG headings governed the focus of analysis and the structuring of narrative. This should be standard practice, but a disjunction emerged in the approach taken by the External Review Panel in terms of the ESGs, the headings of which did not determine the subject of its various on-site meetings nor were they utilised to structure the Panel's report. Despite the centrality of the ESGs to contemporary evaluation of HEIs within the Bologna Framework, there is only one reference to these in the Panel's report, thus inhibiting comparability with the MIC ISER, as well as with evaluations of other HEIs in Ireland or among other EU Member States.

We also feel that the manner of engagement between Panel members and institutions that are the subject of review should provide for more instances of open-ended and constructive dialogue in order to better foster mutual understanding, as well as range and depth of context. Current research and theoretical thinking on institutional quality enhancement distinguish between an audit-based accountability paradigm and an improvement-focused paradigm. The first paradigm embodies a bureaucratic, control-oriented approach. This is anachronistic and has largely been superseded by an approach that prioritises enlightened professional self-improvement. In the College's experience, the external review process was vitiated by its reliance on the first paradigm.

Finally, we would like to see a better process of coordination between the Panel, the QQI and institutions that are the subject of review in the development of the draft report. While it is obviously not in order for any institution to have an opportunity to impose itself on the substantive dimensions of a Review Panel's draft, in our case an unexpectedly large volume of work fell to us in correcting factual inaccuracies. Our submission in respect of factual inaccuracies in the Draft Report ran to 32 pages, exceeding the length of the actual report itself. We would expect that the QQI, in its coordinating function, should act to prevent such imbalances in the drafting process occurring in future.

Mary Immaculate College

April 21, 2017

Appendix 5: Response of University of Limerick



Mary Immaculate College (MIC) is a linked provider of the University of Limerick (UL). In the context of this relationship, the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 places a statutory obligation on UL to undertake a periodic review of the quality assurance procedures of MIC. This is done through the mechanism of an institutional review.

This report is the result of the institutional review of MIC, and UL welcomes its publication. We note and welcome the reviewers' key findings: (i) that the college's infrastructure is consistent with its role as a higher education institution; (ii) that the college's quality assurance arrangements are consistent with Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines; and (iii) that the college discharges its responsibilities as a linked provider of UL with qualifications recognised by the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

UL wishes to congratulate MIC in respect of these findings and on the commendations made by the reviewers. We wish to acknowledge the effort and professionalism that was evident during MIC's preparation for the review, and we record with sadness the illness and untimely death of MIC President Professor Michael Hayes over the duration of the review process.

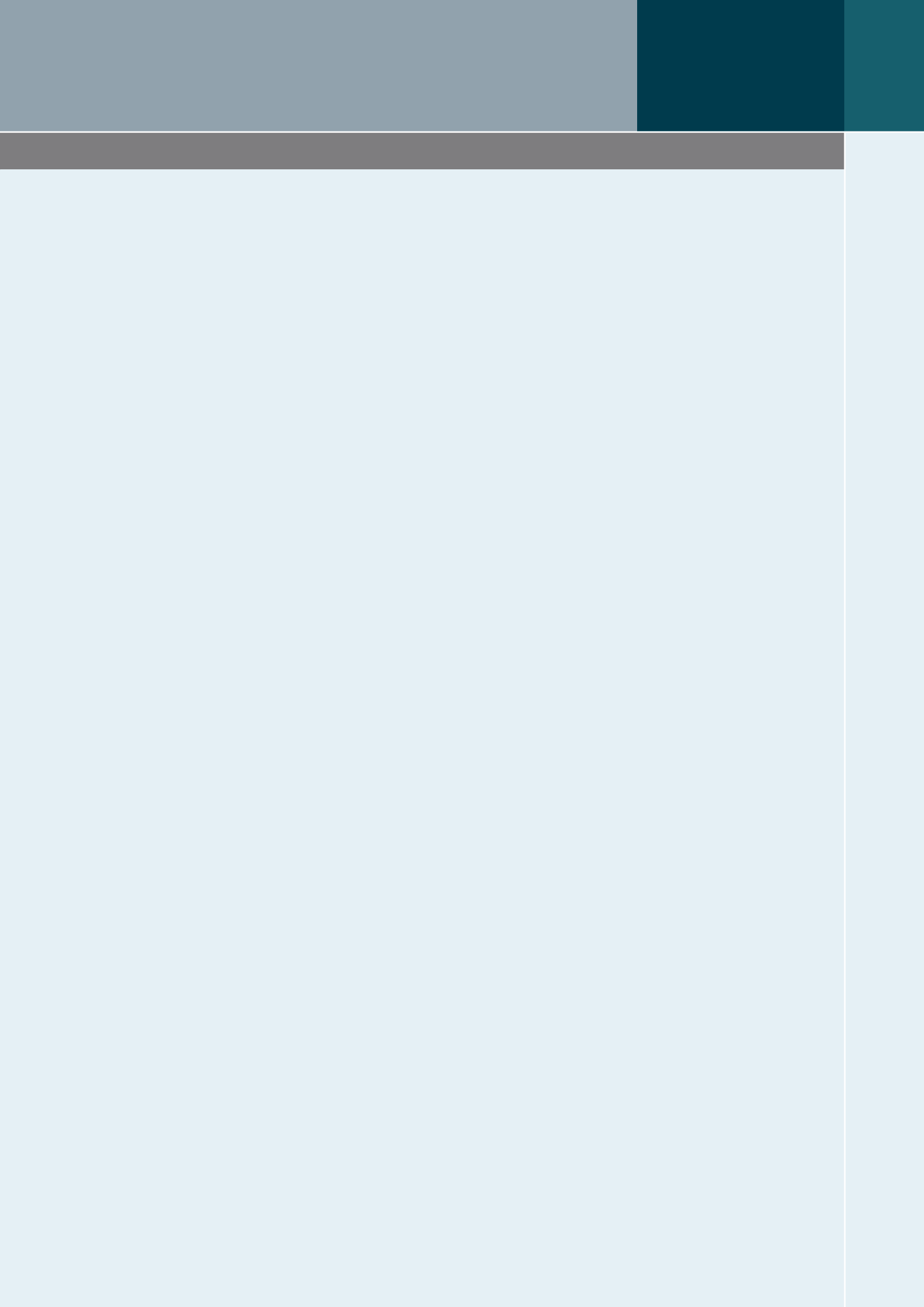
As with any review, the report records a number of recommendations that reflect opportunities for quality enhancement as identified by the review team. Like MIC, we welcome these recommendations. We also wish to acknowledge the extremely proactive stance taken by MIC in its development of a quality improvement plan designed to implement the recommendations. The fact that significant progress has already been made with respect to several of the recommendations highlights MIC's commitment to fostering a culture of continual quality enhancement. We note that the panel has identified an urgent need to revisit the MOU in light of legislative changes and that a number of other recommendations will also require action by UL. We commit to collaboratively pursuing these actions with MIC.

We also wish to acknowledge and thank Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) for coordinating and managing the review on our behalf. The development of the review's terms of reference and handbook was appropriately collaborative, as was the identification and appointment of an independent external review team. QQI maintained excellent communication with the university throughout the process and was responsive to UL input and queries at all times. The operationalisation of the review process itself was rigorous, professional and in full accordance with the terms of reference and handbook.

Finally, we wish to thank the members of the quality review team for their time and effort and for bringing their expertise to bear on the process. The report's key findings and commendations provide assurance that MIC meets key national and international quality requirements and benchmarks. In addition, the recommendations identify a number of actions that will further enhance the college's quality infrastructure and strengthen the academic links between our two institutions.

University of Limerick

June 19, 2017





QQI

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