

12. A Thematic Analysis of Quality Reviews

Self Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

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Introduction

As a Designated Awarding Body, RCSI is required to review the effectiveness of its internal QA policies and procedures through cyclical review of schools, postgraduate faculties, and professional support units, including international programmes and branch campuses. The Quality Enhancement Office (QEO) operates a system of rolling reviews and by the time notification of the CINNTE Institutional Review was received 29 reviews had been completed. As part of RCSI's self-reflection, it was determined that a thematic review of the Internal Quality Review (IQR) Peer Review Group (PRG) Reports would support identification of cross-institutional areas for potential enhancement whilst also providing insight on the impact on a key quality enhancement activity.

Initiative

A Senior Project Specialist from the Deputy Vice Channelor for Academic Affairs Office (an independent party to the QEO) was tasked with undertaking this desk-based review. To provide context for the project, the project specialist met with members of the QEO team who outlined the IQR process. This process has three distinct phases; self-assessment, external validation, and quality improvement planning. On completion of each review, the PRG Report and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) are published on the RCSI website. It was considered that the 29 published PRG reports, and specifically the commendations and recommendations (the findings) made by the PRGs, would provide the source of analysis.

To identify appropriate themes for consideration the Project Specialist reviewed the Quality and Qualifications Ireland Core Statutory QA Guidelines and the PRG reports. As each report was reviewed and patterns emerged, themes were identified, sometimes evolving in consideration of additional findings. 14 themes were eventually identified, as shown in the figure 1.

With the themes in place, the findings from all 29 IQRs were inputted into a database. Each finding was read and considered and one or more of the 14 themes was allocated to each finding. Findings were further categorised as commendations or recommendations, and as being applicable at institutional and/or departmental level.

The data was then explored and the themes filtered to identify patterns. Patterns identified include where two themes were highly connected, or themes emerging as more dominant within professional support unit, rather than school reviews. Throughout this process the Project Specialist liaised with the QEO Team for information to support the review process, while still ensuring objectivity. A final report was presented to the Quality Committee who noted the value of the report. It was then presented to the Institutional Review Working Group and Drafting Group. Section Leads within the Drafting Group were provided with access to all findings, identified as relevant to their section, to support institutional self-evaluation.



Figure 1. Number of findings with theme, per theme

Outcome

In addition to identifying themes for consideration in preparation for Institutional Review, the Thematic Analysis provided beneficial insights into the IQR process. It was also considered as part of the preparations for RCSI's next strategy. The variation in the number of findings between different reviews was notable and will be considered by the QEO as guidelines for the IQR PRGs are reviewed. Guidance in relation to distinguishing between institutional level and departmental findings will also be considered.

A total of 1164 findings were analysed in total across 14 selected themes. 58% of all findings were recommendations, whilst 42% were commendations. 64% of all findings were considered applicable at departmental level, 13% at institutional level whilst the remaining 23% were deemed applicable to both. These themes were considered by section leads in the self-evaluations undertaken as part of preparing the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report. Examples of some of the specific outcomes from the report are below:

- The largest number of commendations (258) related to the theme of service quality; staff across RCSI were recognised consistently for their positive, professional attitude toward the review process, their dedication to their roles and the calibre of their work.
- The largest number of recommendations were categorised to the themes of process, procedure, and governance (388) and quality assurance (217). Recommendations in both areas had a strong focus on the documentation of practices.

The outcome of this analysis was hugely insightful and there is potential for further analyses to provide further insight e.g., comparison of initial and repeat IQR's or further classification of sub-themes. The QEO team now plan to continually update the repository of findings to support ongoing analysis, and identification of trends to support institutional quality enhancement.