



INTERNAL QUALITY REVIEW QUALITY ENHANCEMENT OFFICE 2015

RCSI DEVELOPING HEALTHCARE LEADERS WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE WORLDWIDE

Quality Enhancement Office Peer Review Group Report

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Review of the Quality Enhancement Office (QEO) at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction and context of the Unit

This report covers the Peer Review Group's (PRG's) review of the Quality Enhancement Office (QEO), at the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland (RCSI). It included a site visit by a five person review team from 13-15, April 2015.

The PRG is grateful for the assistance which it received throughout the visit at RCSI and for the way in which senior management and colleagues made themselves available, at short notice, to answer questions and to provide background commentaries.

The PRG Team would also like to commend, in particular, the QEO itself, for the concise, analytical and honest Self-Assessment Report (SAR), which was valuable in providing background information and material, and which helped the PRG to reach its conclusions.

Commendations

- The QEO is to be commended for undergoing a quality review within RCSI's review cycle; the second only review of a Quality Unit in a Higher Education Institution in Ireland.
- The QEO is to be commended for providing a clear, readable, concise, and genuinely evaluative SAR with supporting evidence base, the reality of which was confirmed during meetings with clients and stakeholders.

1.2. Physical facilities

The QEO occupies a suite of rooms, including two private offices, an open-plan office with desk space for two people with a small meeting table and storage units. The physical facilities are of an adequate standard to meet the needs of the QEO.

1.3. Unit staff

The QEO/Unit is small, comprising of:

- 1 Director
- 1 Associate Director
- 1 Executive Administrator
- 1 QA/QI Analyst [newly appointed]

The QEO Director currently reports to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The CEO also acts as Chair of the Quality Committee (QC). The QEO operates as the executive function for the RCSI QC and of its sub-committees.

2. THE REVIEW

2.1. Membership of the Peer Review Group

- Professor Airi Rovio-Johansson, Professor in Educational Sciences, Gothenburg Research Institute, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden (PRG Chairperson)
- Professor Alan Davidson, Dean for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Assessment, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, UK
- Ms Caitriona O’Driscoll, a member of the European Students’ Union and formerly a student in University College Cork Ireland
- Professor Celine Marmion, Associate Professor of Chemistry in RCSI and experienced in the procedures and policies within RCSI, Ireland
- Ms Fiona Crozier, Director, Quality Promotion Unit, University College Cork Ireland

2.2. Terms of Reference of the Review Group

The purpose of the review was to evaluate the QEO in terms of the following:

1. The effectiveness of the RCSI internal QA/QI review processes administered by the QEO (in the broader context of the Irish legislative framework and the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education).
2. The effectiveness of the processes established by the QEO to monitor the development of collaborative and transnational provision of higher education by RCSI.
3. The effectiveness of the governance structures in place within RCSI to ensure appropriate oversight of QA/QI policies and processes.
4. The appropriateness of the QEO mission, strategic and operational plans within the overall context of the mission and strategic plan of RCSI.

As an administrative unit within RCSI, the QEO falls within the scope of the RCSI cycle of rolling reviews of Administrative and Support Units. Given that all internal reviews are administered and facilitated by the QEO, particular measures and safeguards were put in place to ensure additional institutional oversight of the process, lest the QEO be perceived as reviewing itself.

Ms Miriam Kennedy, Project Manager, Office of the CEO, RCSI and Dr. Norma Ryan, external member on the RCSI Quality Committee, both independent of the QEO, facilitated and provided the necessary administrative support for this review. The PRG would like to acknowledge their invaluable support throughout the review process.

The PRG was asked if it had any comment to make on the process as a whole. It was of the view that the review operated extremely smoothly and had only one recommendation to make (see below).

Recommendation

- The PRG recommends that the number of and staff representation at stakeholder meetings in future quality reviews be reduced, thus freeing up more time to discuss and explore key issues.

3. MISSION, PLANNING, ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

3.1. Establishment of the QEO

RCSI received Degree Awarding Status (DAS) in 2010. The QEO was subsequently established in Q3-4 of 2010 to formalise RCSI QA measures and to operationalise same partly in preparation for a further Institutional Review by the DAS panel within 2 years of being awarded DAS. The QEO, upon its establishment in 2010, generated a 'start-up' strategic/operational plan with short, medium and long term goals, the details of which are articulated very clearly and comprehensively in the SAR. The QEO's success to date in delivering on their short to medium term strategic objectives was validated by the Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Institutional review of RCSI in 2014 when the panel commended RCSI on 'the proactive role of the Dublin QEO in driving forward quality initiatives and putting into operation a formal Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement structure' in their report (Institutional Review of Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, April 2014, page 40).

3.2 Planning, Organisation and Management

The planning, organisation and management structure, by the Unit's own admission, is essentially 'flat' given the small number of staff within the Unit. Staff meetings are held monthly although discussions and decision-making appear to proceed relatively informally on a day to day basis. Of note is the Unit's annual day long strategic planning meeting off site where the Unit reflects on their current activities as well as develop strategic targets and actions for the coming year. The QEO Director also meets monthly with his line manager, the RCSI CEO as well as issue-specific meetings as and when required. Both the Director and Associate Director of the QEO are members of Academic Council. The Director also reports regularly to the RCSI Quality Committee, the Senior Management Team, the Medicine & Health Sciences Board (MHSB), the Surgery & Postgraduate Faculties Board (SPFB) and College Council. This ensures that the QEO's work and focus are closely aligned with wider Institutional objectives and Institutional strategy.

The PRG was very satisfied that, in general, the planning, organisation and management structure were, as far as the PRG could assess, both appropriate and effective. It is the opinion of the PRG that the role and position of the QEO and the Quality Committee however and where this Committee sits within the overall governance structure needs to be addressed (See also Section 4.2).

3.21 Institutional reviews

The QEO has instigated a cycle of internal reviews which are viewed positively by staff and Units; a potential challenge for the QEO given the number of external reviews conducted regularly by various regulatory bodies such as the Irish Medical Council, the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland, QQI and so on. One could see how a risk of 'quality fatigue' might ensue but this was not evidenced as part of this review. This is a testament to the positive and helpful approach taken by the QEO in handling Unit reviews. The RCSI Senior Management Team is also to be commended for their proactive and supportive role in taking action on Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) generated by Units following Unit Reviews. By their nature, quality-related activities and reports may be sensitive and, as such, an Institutional strategy around dissemination both internally and externally should be reviewed.

3.2.2 Dissemination of quality policies and promotion of quality culture

There is no doubt that the QEO has an essential role to play in disseminating quality policy and in promoting a culture of quality across the Institution (both locally and across international campuses). It was very evident to the PRG that a culture of quality is embedded within RCSI at all levels; academic and non-academic. The QEO is also viewed as having an important role to play in channelling 'the student voice' through their management of student feedback surveys and analysis and dissemination of feedback thereafter.

3.2.3 International activities

The QEO also works closely with its counterparts in RCSI-Bahrain, Penang Medical College (PMC) and the Perdana University-RCSI School of Medicine (PU-RCSI). Feedback from the Quality Offices in these Institutions regarding their working relationship and lines of communication with the Dublin QEO was in general extremely positive with one Office giving the QEO 'a five star rating from us'. Also Institutional reviews of campuses abroad and facilitated by the Dublin QEO were deemed to be 'a very positive experience'.

Commendations

- The QEO's understanding of RCSI's mission, vision and strategic context and its capability to work with the grain of the organization.
- The professionalism of the QEO staff as evidenced through widespread positive feedback from stakeholders:
 - Esteem & credibility
 - Approachability
 - Relevance of activities and services
 - Swiftiness of response
- On recognising the need to take time out to reflect and plan ahead on not only the operational end of the QEO but to incorporate areas for personal and professional development i.e. via their day-long strategic planning away day.
- The role of the QEO in promoting an Institutional-wide understanding of quality culture, quality assurance and quality enhancement.
- For the management of and non-judgemental and outcomes-focussed approach to internal reviews (both academic and support Units) fostering an open, self-reflective and holistic approach to quality and reviews in RCSI.
- The RCSI Senior Management Team is also to be commended for their proactive and supportive role in taking action on QIPs generated by Units following Unit Reviews.
- The fact that the QEO staff were viewed as being 'alerters' to potential quality issues coming downstream – a key resource around 'environmental scanning'.

Recommendations

- That Quality Committee business be added as a standing agenda item (biannually) of Academic Council, MHSB and the SPFB and of the College Board annually.
- That RCSI develops a comprehensive policy on dissemination of quality-related documentation (publication of reports and other documents) to enhance visibility of areas of excellence and to improve transparency.
- That the QEO develop a protocol to clearly communicate their remit and services to all key stakeholders.

- That reviewed Units in partnership with the QEO are given the opportunity at an Institutional level (e.g. at a Town Hall meeting) to share experience and learning and any outcomes.
- To scope the possible benefits to benchmarking in an RCSI context and whether this falls within the remit of the QEO and, if deemed of benefit, to investigate optimal/potential approaches.
- That RCSI work with the Students' Union and student representation to enhance and optimise their participation in College governance structures.
- RCSI HR to consider career development and advancement of administrative staff - in particular, in the context of highly skilled, knowledge staff who add value to academic work.

4. FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCESSES AND COMMUNICATION

4.1. Support and management of QA/QI governance and reporting structures across the RCSI campus network

Overall, the PRG was impressed by the strong relationship between the QEO and the institution which makes for good communication and understanding of policy and process and provides an excellent basis for the “all pervasive culture of quality” which the QEO stated in its SAR to be essential to the delivery of the Institution’s mission and vision. The PRG saw evidence of that culture of quality through its interviews with various members of staff from both the academic and professional services side of the College (see also Section 3.2.2).

4.2. Quality governance and leadership within RCSI

The SAR described the current governance structure in relation to quality and made two recommendations in this area:

- i) that the Quality Committee review and update its terms of Reference during 2015 and
- ii) that the structure and remit of the EWG be reviewed to place it on a formal footing.

The PRG endorses both of those recommendations but would also make the following comments:

Having spoken to members of the Quality Committee and also considered the role of the SPFB, the PRG heard recognition of the acknowledged weaknesses associated with the function and operation of SPFB and its linkage to the Quality Committee. It suggests, therefore, that there is an opportunity to explore the governance structures, committees and Boards and linkages, including the future location and specific role of the Quality Committee more broadly and recommends that any review of the Quality Committee should be wider than just its Terms of Reference. Such a review could also inform the future focusing and development of QEO’s role as “the executive function of the committee”. Actions might include exploration of alternative governance structures, rather than necessarily trying to make the current ones work more effectively.

The SAR identified a proposal (10) to develop mechanisms to gather the views of members of the Quality Committee on governance structures as they impact on the functioning of the QEO, including one-to-one meetings with members of the Quality Committee; and a survey of members of MHSB and SPFB. The PRG would endorse the general objective of developing dialogues and better understanding of the operation of the Quality Committee and Boards. However such action could usefully include explorations of potentially better structures for governance of quality, and the organisation and roles of committees and Boards, rather than assuming the current governance configuration is fixed (see also Section 7).

In relation to the EWG, the PRG endorses QEO recommendation 6 that its structure and remit (and terms of reference) be reviewed to place it on a more formal footing. Given the role of the EWG in designing and implementing evaluation surveys, the PRG also recommends that the QEO collaborate with its respective counterparts on international campuses to review whether the generic student feedback survey instruments are fit for purpose for their context.

Recommendations

- That RCSI reviews the effectiveness of the QC and the SPFB and its role within the overall governance structure.
- That RCSI review the terms of reference of the Evaluation Working Group.

4.3. Development and implementation of QA/QI policies

Overall, the PRG believes that the QEO is to be commended for its professional approach in the design and management of the internal review process and for its effective support of participants. Staff who met the PRG from across the institution spoke highly of the support they received in relation to quality enhancement and assurance.

The Handbook and other materials provided by the QEO for the support of its activities that the PRG saw were clear and helpful. The QEO requested input from the PRG in relation to the formalisation of processes for developing and updating QA policies and procedures. Given the QEO's relationship with and knowledge of the requirements of external bodies such as QQI, the PRG did not have strong views on whether or not a more formal approach was necessary. Students were aware of the work on feedback and surveys that the QEO carries out and view the office as an independent, trustworthy entity in relation to that work. However, given that the students who met with the PRG were unaware of the remit of the office in general and were not formally involved in its work, the PRG recommends that the QEO enhance and embed the involvement of students in the unit review process (PRGs) and follow up and consider involving students more in the work of the Unit in general.

Commendation

- The QEO is to be commended for its professional approach in the design and management of the internal review process and for its effective support of participants.

Recommendation

- To enhance and embed the involvement of students in the Unit review process and follow up.

4.4. Ongoing interaction with Quality and Qualifications Ireland

See Sections 4.7 and 6.

4.5. Internal quality assurance reviews of Schools and Administrative/support units

The PRG can confirm that the RCSI processes for internal quality assurance and enhancement adhere to national and international best practice and are in line with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (2014). The QEO is aware of the significant role of professional and regulatory bodies on its work and takes this into account in its policies and procedures.

The documentation that the PRG viewed in relation to quality reviews was clear and helpful and members of staff attested to the fact that the information and support they received from the QEO before, during and after review was helpful. The PRG would have benefitted however had a rapporteur been assigned to the Group for the duration of the review.

The QEO's approach to optimising the review process year on year in response to feedback is an example of the kind of annual monitoring that clearly leads to change on the basis of reflection on evidence.

The thematic analysis of quality review reports and their recommendations provides useful transversal information for the institution and also further evidence on which to base revisions to the process and guidance to review teams. The PRG endorses the QEO's intention to seek more PRG members from mainland Europe; it encourages the QEO to reflect on the kind of briefing/guidance that might be given to panel members who come from different national contexts whilst also considering how best to benefit from the different external perspective that they will bring to the review process.

One area of the process that appeared to be less well understood by staff that the PRG spoke to is that of follow-up. Quality improvement plans are produced following the receipt of PRG reports; however, there appears to be no regular follow-up procedure to consider progress of the plans and to ensure that actions are being completed. The PRG recommends therefore that the QEO initiates a regular follow-up process in relation to QIPs and that QIPs, as is the case in one School, become standing agenda items at Unit Committee meetings.

In discussion with members of staff, the PRG heard one example of how the appointment of a person with responsibility for quality in the School had enhanced further the understanding and implementation of processes in relation to quality assurance and enhancement. The PRG recommends that RCSI considers the possibility of having a designated staff member within all Schools with responsibility for coordinating and supporting the Schools' quality processes and procedures (including assisting in the preparation of accreditation applications and internal self-assessment reports) and to liaise closely with the QEO as part of their brief (see also Recommendation in Section 5).

Recommendations

- That there be a designated staff member identified within all Schools with responsibility for coordinating and supporting the Schools' quality processes and procedures (including assisting in the preparation of accreditation applications and internal self-assessment reports) and to liaise closely with the QEO as part of their brief.
- That the QEO include a rapporteur in the membership of future PRGs.
- Post internal quality reviews, that the QEO initiates a regular follow-up process for QIPs.
- That the QIPs generated post internal quality reviews be standing agenda items at Unit Committee meetings.

4.6. Internal quality assurance of international schools and campuses

The PRG spoke with representatives from all of RCSI's overseas provision. The PRG was also able to speak to a representative from University College Dublin (UCD) about the joint partnership involving Penang Medical School. It was clear to the PRG that the institution takes its role of the assurance and enhancement of all provision, whether at home or abroad, very seriously.

The processes for review and for quality assurance and enhancement of overseas provision in general, mirror those for home provision; differences in approach relate to whether the

provision is an international Institution (essentially a franchise at Perdana), an international campus (Penang) or a branch campus (RCSI-Bahrain).

In discussion with representatives from the various overseas partnerships, the PRG was assured of the integrity of the QEO's approach to quality enhancement and assurance. All partners felt that communication was good, that they received good support from the QEO and felt that the reviews that they undertook allowed them opportunity for reflection. The Bahrain campus feels that it works as a team with the RCSI QEO in relation to quality assurance and enhancement.

However, some suggestions were also made and the PRG would recommend that the QEO consider the following:

(a) The PRG are aware that the medical curriculum being delivered in RCSI-Dublin, RCSI-Bahrain and PU-RCSI is identical and as such core questions in student surveys assessing the curriculum are common to all three sites. That said, there are differences across sites as one would expect in terms of facilities and support services. The QEO should continue to actively engage with colleagues in RCSI-Bahrain and PU-RCSI seeking their input to add or delete questions as relevant to their Institutions (whilst not over-burdening the students) to ensure student surveys at each site are fit for purpose.

(b) The need to ensure follow-up of recommendations made in all reviews of overseas provision

(c) In the case of PU-RCSI, the PRG encourages the QEO to consider whether it is appropriate to make any revisions to the annual review process, to make it more beneficial to both PU-RCSI and RCSI, before moving to the normal periodic review process in due course.

Recommendations

- That the QEO liaise with its counterparts in RCSI-Bahrain, PMC and PU-RCSI to scope out the benefits of having an annual cross-Institutional QEO Forum to facilitate strategic planning, sharing of knowledge and best practices and potential research collaborative opportunities – potentially to coincide with the annual International Education Forum.
- That the QEO collaborate with its respective counterparts in international campuses to review whether the generic student feedback survey instruments are fit for purpose for their context.

4.7. RCSI participation in QQI institutional reviews

All the evidence seen by the PRG suggests that the QEO and RCSI approached the QQI institutional review in a detailed and methodical manner and that it took the outcomes of that review seriously. An action plan has been produced in relation to the recommendations in the report and this has been submitted to the QQI Board. The PRG encourages RCSI to regularly review this action plan to ensure that it remains a living document at institutional level in order to obtain maximum benefit from the review.

The PRG met with a member of QQI staff who pointed out the benefits for QQI of reviewing an institution such as RCSI; she explained that, given the unique nature of the institution, the review process allowed QQI to consider its own processes for external review in the light of their suitability for different kinds of higher education institutions.

4.8. Involvement in statutory professional accreditation processes

Given the nature of RCSI's provision, it is necessary for the QEO to have a good relationship with the relevant authorities, including the Irish Medical Council. The QEO has assisted academic Schools in various ways in relation to their involvement in accreditation processes. This was acknowledged by members of staff that the PRG spoke to with Schools feeling that the QEO had a significant role to play in helping Schools prepare for and go through accreditation.

The QEO, for its part, believes that this work benefits the office in helping it to establish and deepen relationships with undergraduate Schools and to develop relationships with the professional and statutory bodies.

4.9. Coordination and reporting of survey activity within RCSI

The SAR states that, "The QEO prioritises data-driven decision making and endeavours to maximise its capture of all relevant stakeholders on its own performance and that of RCSI more broadly."

The office is responsible for a significant amount of survey activity, particularly in relation to student surveys and is praised for its work in this field by both staff and students. The examples of surveys seen by the PRG provided evidence of a professional and thorough approach to the task. The QEO requested the PRG's views on current best practice in handling free-text comments. The PRG endorses qualitative analysis and summary reporting of free-text comments. Specialist software tools could be used, but their efficiency would depend on the volume of responses. The PRG also suggests that the QEO should negotiate an explicit protocol regarding identification of individual staff in survey reports. This should aim to promote enhancement through identification of good practice and opportunities for improvement, and minimise risks of destructively negative comments.

However, both the QEO itself and students that the PRG met mentioned survey fatigue. Given this fact and comments earlier in this report about finding ways to involve students more in the work of the QEO, the PRG recommends that the office consider other, more qualitative approaches to capturing the views of various stakeholders, particularly those of students.

In terms of closing the feedback loop, students gave mixed responses as to whether or not they felt that their feedback was acted upon. Most felt that changes did happen but said that they were happy to receive formal feedback, even if this was to tell them that an action could not be taken and an explanation for this

Recommendations

- That RCSI, through the QEO, have a consistent and transparent approach across all Schools regarding student feedback and 'closing the loop'.
- That the QEO explore approaches in addition to existing student feedback surveys to capture and engage qualitative student feedback.

4.10. QEO interactions with RCSI postgraduate/professional faculties

See Section 4.1.

4.11. Involvement in quality assurance of the intercollegiate membership examinations in Surgery

See Section 6.

4.12. Involvement in institutional research

See Section 3.

4.13. Involvement in staff training and external consultancy

Although not typical of the role of a Quality Office in higher education, the PRG was impressed by the amount of work that the QEO undertakes in the field of training and consultancy, thus raising its profile both within and without RCSI (See also Section 6).

5. MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES

There is a range of models of quality units across the higher education sector. Factors shaping size and focus of staff complement include: the size of the institution, including numbers of students, staff, academic units and programmes; the extent of collaborative activity; external demands in terms of review, and accreditation reporting. RCSI is a relatively small, but complex organisation, and likely to become more complex through increasing international activities.

QEO is a compact unit. Configurations and deployment appear appropriate, including the recent addition of a QA/QI Analyst. Collectively the QEO staff members are highly skilled, with specialist knowledge, and they currently play a wide role across RCSI, including aspects of quality improvement and support for development of aspects of teaching and assessment. QEO staff have demonstrated the ability to develop their own capability and services to support users, and to respond to emerging opportunities e.g. support for surgical fields and intercollegiate examinations.

The PRG recommendation below recognises that institutional resources for staff are somewhat constrained. RCSI should consider opportunities to leverage best use of the specific skills and capabilities of QEO. This could include: focusing the role of QEO; minimising duplication, and maximising synergies between QEO and other units associated with quality, in particular: HPEC – relating to support for training and development to improve quality; and Institutional Research & Planning (IRP) relating to performance metrics.

RCSI should also consider opportunities to involve a wide range of staff, including from academic units within the work of the QEO. This could include part-time, fixed-term secondments to QEO, or collaborative projects to mutual benefit (see also Comments and Recommendations; “designated staff members in Schools” in Section 4.5).

Commendations

- The QEO Director is commended for his foresight and planning for not only succession but also personal and professional development of his team members.
- The QEO is commended for effectiveness and efficiency in deployment of resources to make a positive impact and add real value to RCSI, and contributing to the development of a real quality culture.

The PRG met with an extensive range of staff, who without exception, commented on the effectiveness, efficiency and timeliness of services provided by QEO staff.

Recommendation

- Explore whether others within RCSI could play a deeper role in some of the key QEO activities, both to facilitate sharing of knowledge and expertise, and to spread the load.

6. EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The PRG spoke with external colleagues from QQI, from other universities and from the Royal Colleges in the UK. The value and impact that RCSI, through the QEO, brings as a member of national working groups, to immediate external colleagues in other institutions, to the national quality assurance agency and internationally through membership of various committees cannot be underestimated.

All external colleagues spoke of the QEO in the highest possible terms and the PRG commends the QEO for its contribution at a national and international level on external quality-related committees and working groups.

Such work promotes synergy between the internal and external work of the institution and adds significantly to the national and international reputation of RCSI; the PRG commends the QEO's understanding of RCSI's position within the national and international higher education context.

The PRG encourages the QEO to continue to be mindful of the pressures of various Units in relation to accreditation visits and, through its working relations with such external bodies, to explore potential synergies with external and professional body review processes and the internal review and follow up procedures.

Commendations

- QEO's understanding of RCSI position within the national and international higher education context.
- The QEO's contribution at a national and international level on external quality-related committees and working groups.
- The QEO's excellent working relationships with their counterparts in the RCSI branch campuses.

7. SERVICE USERS AND FEEDBACK

Comments on QEO proposals

The QEO identified a proposal (11) to develop a small number of specific QEO-related questions to be added to the end of semester student surveys. The PRG understands and acknowledges that QEO sees students as key stakeholders. However the PRG would advocate caution about adding questions to questionnaires - in general recognising questionnaire fatigue, and specifically regarding QEO activities. QEO is currently a "back-office" Unit as far as most students are concerned - and there is nothing wrong with this. Student concerns are likely to be around: trusting integrity of survey analysis and reporting; and that comments made in surveys will be considered seriously, and can lead to improvement actions. The PRG advises that any efforts by QEO to increase engagement with students should be with the aim of maximising impact of QEO services, in particular surveys, on quality improvement actions. This could include promoting feedback to students on what they said, and on what has, will or will not change in response to their comments in surveys. This would likely involve a partnership between QEO, academic units, and student representatives.

Commendations

- Widespread positive feedback from representatives of service users who met with the PRG.
- Effectiveness and relevance of survey and evaluation services
- Effectiveness of support for surgical fields and intercollegiate examinations, raising the external reputation of RCSI

8. CONCLUSIONS, QEO SWOT ANALYSIS AND SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 QEO SWOT analysis and recommendations, requests and proposals

The SAR concluded with a SWOT analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and a summary of the QEO's recommendations, requests and proposals.

The PRG considered the SWOT analysis to be comprehensive, genuinely reflective and very helpful in focussing the review. The PRG broadly agreed with the SWOT analysis, including all of the strengths. The PRG considered that some of the weaknesses could be turned into opportunities. The PRG agrees that there are opportunities to increase QEO role and activities; but these would require increased resources and / or reduction in other current activities. The PRG would advise caution to avoid overload, dilution, or duplication of QEO working with HPEC and IRP (See comments in report Section 5). Comments on specific matters identified in the SWOT are included in the body of this PRG report.

The PRG considered the QEO's summary of recommendations, requests and proposals to be very clear and helpful and demonstrated a proactive capability to identify future improvement actions. The PRG broadly endorses these, and comments on specific matters identified by the QEO are included in the body of this PRG report.

8.2 Conclusions

It is the opinion of the PRG however that the role and position of the QEO and the Quality Committee and where this Committee sits within the overall governance structure needs to be addressed (see Section 3.2 and 4.2). This would enable both the QEO and Quality Committee to have a greater impact across all activities.

The PRG concludes that the QEO is a very effective and efficient unit that is delivering excellent and highly valued services to RCSI (see Section 8.3 Commendations, 8.4 Recommendations).

8.3 Summary of PRG commendations

- The QEO is to be commended for undergoing a quality review within RCSI's review cycle; the second only review of a Quality Unit in Ireland.
- Clear, readable, concise, and genuinely evaluative SAR with supporting evidence base. Reality of which was confirmed during meetings with clients and stakeholders.
- The skills and complimentary expertise and professionalism of the QEO staff.
- On the volume and quality of work conducted within the short timeframe since the establishment of the QEO.
- For being strong advocates of quality across the Institution and through the extensive work on student reviews also the "students' voice" in the organisation.
- For encouraging and facilitating personal development among the staff.
- The QEO's understanding of RCSI's mission, vision and strategic context and its capability to work with the grain of the organization.
- The professionalism of the QEO staff as evidenced through widespread positive feedback from stakeholders:
 - Esteem & credibility
 - Approachability
 - Relevance of activities and services
 - Swiftiness of response

- On recognising the need to take time out to reflect and plan ahead on not only the operational end of the QEO but to incorporate areas for personal and professional development i.e. via their day-long strategic planning away day.
- The role of the QEO in promoting an Institutional-wide understanding of quality culture, quality assurance and quality enhancement.
- For the management of and non-judgemental and outcomes-focussed approach to internal reviews (both academic and support Units) fostering an open, self-reflective and holistic approach to quality and reviews in RCSI.
- The RCSI Senior Management Team is also to be commended for their proactive and supportive role in taking action on QIPs generated by Units following Unit Reviews.
- The fact that the QEO staff were viewed as being 'alerters' to potential quality issues coming downstream – a key resource around 'environmental scanning'.
- RCSI is to be commended for having a culture of quality which is truly embedded within the Institution across all levels.
- The QEO is to be commended for its professional approach in the design and management of the internal review process and for its effective support of participants.
- The QEO Director is commended for his foresight and planning for not only succession but also personal and professional development of his team members.
- The QEO is commended for effectiveness and efficiency in deployment of resources to make a positive impact and add real value to RCSI, and contributing to the development of a real quality culture.
- QEO's understanding of RCSI position within the national and international higher education context.
- The QEO's contribution at a national and international level on external quality-related committees and working groups.
- The QEO's excellent working relationships with their counterparts in the RCSI branch campuses.

8.4 Summary of PRG recommendations

- The PRG recommends the number and size of stakeholder meetings in future quality reviews to be reduced to allow more time with smaller groups.
- That Quality Committee business be added as a standing agenda item (biannually) of Academic Council, MHSB and the SPFB and of the College Board annually.
- That RCSI develops a comprehensive policy on dissemination of quality-related documentation (publication of reports and other documents) to enhance visibility of areas of excellence and to improve transparency.
- That the QEO develop a protocol to clearly communicate their remit and services to all key stakeholders.
- That reviewed Units in partnership with the QEO are given the opportunity at an Institutional level (e.g. at a Town Hall meeting) to share experience and learning and any outcomes.
- To scope the possible benefits to benchmarking in an RCSI context and whether this falls within the remit of the QEO and if deemed of benefit, to investigate optimal/potential approaches.
- That RCSI work with the Students' Union and student representatives to enhance and optimise their participation in College governance structures.
- RCSI HR to consider career development and advancement of administrative staff. In particular, in the context of highly skilled, knowledge staff who add value to academic work.

- The SAR identified three proposals (7, 8, 9) associated with retention and dissemination of documents and information within RCSI. All appear appropriate, and are endorsed by the PRG.
- That RCSI reviews the effectiveness of the SPFB and its role within the overall governance structure.
- That RCSI review the terms of reference of the Evaluation Working Group.
- To enhance and embed the involvement of students in the Unit review process (PRGs) and follow up.
- That there be a designated staff member identified within all Schools with responsibility for coordinating and supporting the Schools' quality processes and procedures (including assisting in the preparation of accreditation applications and internal self-assessment reports) and to liaise closely with the QEO as part of their brief.
- That the QEO include a rapporteur in the membership of future PRGs.
- Post internal quality reviews, that the QEO initiates a regular follow-up process for QIPs.
- That QIPs generated post internal quality reviews be standing agenda items at Unit Committee meetings.
- That the QEO liaise with their counterparts in RCSI-Bahrain, PMC and PU-RCSI to scope out the benefits of having an annual cross-Institutional QEO Forum to facilitate strategic planning, sharing of knowledge and best practices and potential research collaborative opportunities – potentially to coincide with the annual International Education Forum
- That the QEO collaborate with their respective counterparts in international campuses to review whether the generic student feedback survey instruments are fit for purpose for their context.
- That RCSI, through the QEO, have a consistent and transparent approach across all Schools regarding student feedback and 'closing the loop'.
- That the QEO explore approaches in addition to existing student feedback surveys to capture and engage qualitative student feedback.
- That the QEO review how feedback from graduates and employers is captured across Schools and international campuses and to establish a consistent approach.
- Explore whether others within RCSI could play a deeper role in some of the key QEO activities, both to facilitate sharing knowledge and expertise, and to spread the load.

References

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