



Peer Review Group Report

School of Nursing and Midwifery

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1 Context or the Review

This report presents the findings of a quality review of the School of Nursing and Midwifery (SoNM) at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), which was undertaken in October 2018.

RCSI is the second oldest third-level academic institution in Ireland. RCSI is both [a] a health sciences Higher Education Institution with Schools of Leadership, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy and Postgraduate Studies, and [b] a Postgraduate Training Body in Surgery and related specialties. RCSI is one of four Royal Colleges of Surgeons in Great Britain and Ireland (Edinburgh, England, Glasgow and Ireland). RCSI School of Medicine was established in 1886, and RCSI became a Recognised College of the National University of Ireland (NUI) in 1978. In the decade from 1996 to 2006, RCSI underwent significant expansion through the establishment of additional Schools/Institutes on the Dublin campus, and of three new international campuses [Penang Medical College now RCSI UCD Malaysia Campus (RUMC), RCSI-Bahrain & RCSI-Dubai]. Following an institutional review commissioned jointly by the Higher Education Authority and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), RCSI independent degree awarding powers were activated by ministerial order in 2010. In 2011, RCSI entered into a licensing agreement with Perdana University (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) to establish the PU-RCSI School of Medicine. The Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education & Training) Act 2012 established RCSI as a Designated Awarding Body in the Republic of Ireland.

RCSI is an independent, not-for-profit health sciences institution with charitable status in the Republic of Ireland. The institution operates a primarily self-funding model, with State funding accounting for less than 20% of total income. The model is based on the education of a substantial cohort of international students alongside Irish/EU students.

1.1 Purpose of the Review

The self-assessment exercise is a process by which a Unit reflects on its mission and objectives, and analyses critically the activities it engages in to achieve these objectives. It provides for an evaluation of the Unit's performance of its functions, its services and its administration. In line with the RCSI strategic plan 'Growth and Excellence' it provides assurance to the College of the quality of the Unit's operations and facilitates a developmental process to effect improvement. The fundamental objectives of the review process are to:

- Review the quality of the student experience, and of teaching and learning opportunities.
- Review research activity, including; management of research activity, assessing the research performance with regard to: research productivity, research income, and recruiting and supporting doctoral students.
- Identify, encourage and disseminate good practice and to identify challenges and how to address these.
- Provide an opportunity for Units to test the effectiveness of their systems and procedures for monitoring and enhancing quality and standards.

- Inform RCSI's strategic planning process.
- Provide robust evidence for external accreditation bodies.
- Provide an external benchmark on practice and curriculum.
- Provide public information on the RCSI's capacity to assure the quality and standards of its awards. RCSI's implementation of its quality procedures enables it to demonstrate how it discharges its responsibilities for assuring the quality and standards of its awards, as required by the Universities Act 1997 and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

1.2 The Review Process

The key stages in the internal review process are:

1. Establishment of a Self-assessment Committee.
2. Preparation of a Self-assessment Report (SAR) and supporting documentation.
3. Site visit by a peer review group (PRG) that includes external experts both national and international.
4. Preparation of a PRG report that is made public.
5. Development of a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) for implementation of the review report's recommendations (that is made public).
6. Follow-up to appraise progress against the QIP.

1.3 Membership of the Peer Review Group

- Ms Amanda Greason, Academic Consultant (Chair).
- Professor Kader Parahoo, Ulster University.
- Professor (Emeritus) Peter Bradshaw, University of Huddersfield.
- Professor Kevin McGuigan, Royal College of Surgeons Ireland.
- Mr Mark Collins (Secretary), Technical Writer, Independent.

1.4 Terms of Reference for the Peer Review Group

The terms of reference of the PRG are to:

- Evaluate critically the SAR and the supporting documentation.
- Verify how well the aims and objectives of the Unit are being fulfilled, having regard to the available resources, and comment on the appropriateness of the Unit's mission, objectives and strategic plan.
- Comment on how well the Unit fits with the strategic plans for the College as a whole.
- Evaluate the Unit's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges as outlined in the SAR.
- Discuss any perceived strengths and weaknesses not identified in the SAR.
- Assess the suitability of the working environment(s).
- Comment on any recommendations proposed by the Unit in its SAR.
- Make appropriate recommendations for improvement, with due consideration of resource implications.

The Peer Review Group visited RCSI from 1st – 4th October 2018 and held meetings with:

- The Head of School of the School of Nursing and Midwifery.
- The Senior Management Team (SMT) of the School of Nursing and Midwifery.
- Academic staff of the School of Nursing and Midwifery.
- Heads of School from across RCSI.
- Heads of professional and support service departments across RCSI.
- Representatives from Health Service Executive, Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMDI), Department of Health (DoH).
- Senior staff from across RCSI with responsibilities for research.
- Members of RCSI Senior Management Team.
- Clinical coordinators for School of Nursing and Midwifery postgraduate programmes.

- Postgraduate research students.
- Postgraduate taught students.
- External research partners.

2 Introduction and Context of the Unit

The School of Nursing and Midwifery (SoNM) has its origins in the long-standing Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery. The School aims to develop caring, reflective nursing practitioners who have the ability to seek out and use research-based knowledge for the purpose of improving patient care. A wide range of nursing education programmes such as BSc, Postgraduate Diploma, MSc, and PhD are offered at the School. The emphasis is almost exclusively on nursing although the School does deliver some neonatal paediatrics. Educational partnerships have been established with a number of large hospitals and health service agencies for the development and delivery of modules of clinical education. All awards are mapped to the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and accredited by RCSI, the National University of Ireland (NUI) and the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI). There is a nursing and midwifery school in RCSI's Bahrain campus, with which the SoNM in RCSI Dublin is not actively working. Bahrain focuses mainly on undergraduate nursing and Dublin focuses solely on postgraduate nursing.

In 2014, a review of governance structures within RCSI resulted in an expansion and clearer delineation of nursing and midwifery education and training functions. The School, under the auspices of the RCSI Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, has responsibility for all NFQ award programmes while the Faculty retains responsibility for continuing professional development activities. The symbiotic relationship between School and Faculty enables the provision of education and training which meets the needs of modern nursing and midwifery practitioners in Ireland and beyond. This configuration also brings nursing and midwifery into line with other disciplines within RCSI and ensures that good governance and quality assurance of programmes is maintained.

To facilitate the realignment of the School, a new management structure was implemented in 2014. The School, for the first time, has a Director of Academic Affairs/Deputy to the Head of the School, a Director of Nursing and Midwifery Research and an Operations Manager. These personnel, along with the Head of the School, form the Schools Senior Management Team and are focused on implementing the RCSI Strategy Transforming Healthcare Education Research and Service (2018-2022) at all levels within the organisation. There has also been a significant investment in staff recruitment for the School by RCSI, whereby the staff complement has almost doubled. This has been in response to the successful achievement of a Health Service Executive tender for the delivery of a national Graduate Nurse and Midwife Education Programme, in addition to the increased focus on research and innovation. This increased capacity enables the School to pursue its strategic goals with competitive advantage.

In order to ensure a clear vision for the future, it was necessary to develop a strategy for the School. This was the first Strategic Plan for the School and this was made possible due to the collective input of all members of the School team in addition to the support and guidance of the RCSI SMT. In developing this Strategy, the School closely aligned itself with RCSI institutional strategy. The current School strategy will be reviewed in 2018 in line with the new RCSI strategy (2018–2022). The SAR for this internal review provided an opportunity for an examination of this first strategy's goals, implementation progress, challenges and achievements with the view to providing recommendations for a new strategic plan.

Educating future leaders in healthcare delivery and related research is at the core of the mission of the SoNM. The School is committed to providing students with outcome-focused curricula shaped by innovative teaching and learning practices. The School aspires to become a recognised leader in the provision of health sciences education both nationally and internationally.

The School's key goal is to empower nurses and midwives to be able to demonstrate the difference that they make to practice, and in doing so, to be able to respond accordingly to the leadership and professional challenges that they face every day.

In keeping with the RCSI Strategy Growth and Excellence (2013-2017), the School's vision for 2013–2017 was to grow its reputation as a centre of excellence in nursing and midwifery education. The School's aim was to achieve this through greater engagement in research, both clinical and educational, whereupon the School would be enabled to lead best practice through the incorporation and evaluation of latest technologies and methods in the education of students. Furthermore, the School aims to work closely with key stakeholders to ensure that the programmes delivered are responsive to the ever-changing demands within the healthcare arena. The success of the School in this short period is remarkable. However, the School needs to continue to grow if it is to sustain the excellence it has established in the past five years.

3. Organisation and Management

SoNM is one of six health sciences schools within the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences to which it reports. The School Management Team comprises the Head of School, a director of Academic Affairs and a Director of Nursing and Midwifery Research and Operations. This team is most effective in leading and managing the academic and operations functions of the School but also provides a most effective steer and lead with regard to research. New and original recent income streams have also been secured and there has thus been a corresponding strong growth in research productivity. In particular, the School has been successful in its aim of providing academic provision which has positively impacted upon the professional development of nurses. The day-to-day functions of the School are effectively supported by a well-embedded culture of minuted meetings which contribute to good communications across the School. Communication is effected with other schools across the college and whilst there are meetings between heads of schools these tend to be infrequent. Communication with students is seen as a priority, particularly given that most are in work and studying part-time, and clear communication channels have been established for this purpose.

The School Management Team and staff across the School are well supported by a small but highly effective administrative team which, because of the nature of the School's provision, provide a comprehensive service without the need to call on the full range of central services of RCSI. Its contribution to student support, recruitment and examinations is exemplary and staff and students were highly complimentary about the work of this team which provides a most effective resource for the School.

The School engages effectively with its own business planning process which includes the practice of holding an annual day-long staff meeting specifically devoted to reviewing the past year's activities against previously agreed strategic goals and developing strategic goals for the forthcoming year. Key to the process is a keen awareness of the need to ensure that the School's strategy reflects the overall strategy of RCSI. The annual work plan which is one outcome of the business planning process ensures that staff across the School are clearly aware of the strategic goals and their role in helping to achieve these. This approach to business planning is a key strength of the School.

The excellent relationship which the School has with the RCSI Finance Department ensures that budgeting is undertaken efficiently although the School wishes to further develop this relationship so that in future costing models could be produced at programme level. This, the School feels, would benefit its business planning process.

The PRG discussed with the School the matter of its title and wondered if it was a misnomer given the fact that currently its provision focusses almost exclusively on nursing although some neonatal work is undertaken. Whilst understanding that the School, and RCSI generally, may have sound reasons for retaining a reference to 'Midwifery' in the title of the School, it may wish to keep the title under consideration to ensure that it properly reflects the work of the School.

2.1 Commendations:

- The role of the SoNM School Management Team in engaging with the business planning process and in aligning itself effectually with the RCSI Strategic Plan.
- The part played by the SoNM administrative team in the proactive and comprehensive support they provide for staff and students and their role they play in managing students.

2.2 Recommendations:

- Consider the appropriateness of the inclusion of the word Midwifery in the SoNM title.

3 Staff and Facilities

The School has 11 academic and three administrative and professional support staff who work together to deliver a large number of courses and undertake a range of research activities. Similar to other Schools of Nursing in universities in Ireland and the UK, there are more women (n=9) than men among academic staff. However, apart from the Head of School, women tend to cluster at the lower echelon of academic jobs. The academic profile shows a healthy mix of ethnic diversity.

Currently there are five staff with PhDs or Education Doctorates (EdDs). Two more are undertaking EdDs and one is studying for a PhD. Staff seem to avail of the opportunities in the RSCI to further their academic development.

There is a good balance of junior and senior staff (one professor, two senior lecturers, five lecturers and three tutors). It seems that no-one has applied or was promoted in the last five years. There is a perception, among some staff, that academic promotion is not 'a level playing field'. The example given is that nursing journals do not tend to have high impact factors compared to medical journals and therefore nursing academics are at a disadvantage in the promotion process. There is also no clear pathway and criteria for nurse tutors to be promoted to lecturers.

As described in the SAR, teaching and research are facilitated by a range of equipment including projectors, speakers, microphones, video-conferencing facilities and computers. The School is well supported internally by three professional staff. IT support is provided centrally to staff and students. Clinical coordinators, as affiliated staff to the RCSI, are accorded access to library resources and online systems although would appreciate more awareness of some of the specific the IT services (Quercus, VLE) and other resources which they can access.

In terms of physical space, there seems to be adequate office space for staff and doctoral students on the St Stephen's Green campus, where space is at a premium. The School has access to centrally allocated teaching space (rooms, lecture theatres, laboratories etc.). The new RSCI building is purpose built to provide a pleasant, comfortable and modern environment conducive to teaching and learning.

3.1 Commendations

- The commitment and high morale of staff (academic and professional support staff) in SoNM.
- The ethnic diversity within SoNM.
- The commitment to and support in SoNM for staff development, in particular for those undertaking PhD studies.
- The valuable contribution of clinical facilitators towards enhancing specialist training for nurses.
- The support provided by staff from the School of Postgraduate Studies, IT staff centrally, and lecturers from other schools which enhances SoNM's provision.

- The quality of academic and supervisory support and pastoral care provided by SoNM staff which is greatly appreciated by students.

3.2 Recommendations

- RCSI should establish pathways and criteria for the promotion of staff from nurse tutor to lecturer.
- SoNM should support and encourage staff to apply for promotion, as appropriate, and to address misconceptions regarding eligibility and likelihood of success.
- Ensure clinical coordinators are fully aware of the IT services (Quercus, VLE) and other resources which they can access.

4 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

SoNM provides a wide range of anchor, core and specialist modules which can lead to postgraduate certificate, diploma or MSc qualifications. Students are provided with a balanced mix of face-to-face and online learning experiences. The modules employ a series of assessment modalities which are consistent with best-practice in clinical education.

SoNM employs an appropriate range of teaching learning and assessment modalities. The majority of students enrolled on the School's courses are employed full-time in hospitals located across Ireland. Consequently, the School ensures that its courses are delivered in a flexible manner to facilitate both the personal circumstances and of its student body.

Face-to-face teaching is responsive to the needs of the students by only requiring them to be on site in RCSI for one day every other week. During this time the students receive a combination of didactic lectures, small group teaching, group work and tutorials. The anchor, core and specialist modules enable students to learn at their own pace by breaking the subject matter into smaller manageable portions. This design is especially appreciated by students who are returning to education after extended absences and who otherwise might feel overwhelmed by the prospect of digesting a programme organised in a less flexible structure. Whilst the PRG was impressed by the approach taken to learning and teaching in the School, one way of encouraging and sustaining a continued high standard of teaching would be to consider introducing an annual teaching award. Teaching awards are made in other RCSI schools to recognize innovation in education and assist staff in quantifying teaching metrics for promotion purposes.

A direct consequence of only having students periodically on site in RCSI is that there is a subsequently strong emphasis on self-directed learning. Students engage with a range of online content which is uploaded and available on the college virtual learning environment (VLE). Some PowerPoint or Camtasia enhanced lectures are provided and are expected to be covered by the students in advance of the RCSI sessions. Tutors can monitor progress of student engagement with the content on Moodle and this is sometimes used as a first line of detection of students struggling with the course. Project work, minor-dissertation and self-reflective practice also form a significant portion of the required course work. The PRG heard of the School's plans for the further development and use of technology enhanced learning and its concern to ensure that this approach to learning is not didactically unengaging. It recommends that the School consults with Health Professions Education Centre (HPEC) in its furthering of its teaching enhanced learning (TEL) developments and aspirations.

Specialist modules often require the student to develop a range of specific clinical skills in the hospital environment under appropriate supervision. In the first instance SoNM specialist tutors visit each hospital which employs the students to determine which procedures can be developed within their place of employment and who might be responsible for supervision and monitoring the learning portfolio. In addition, these visits also allow the clinical tutors to determine which skills will require a period of placement for the student within the clinical tutor hospital in order to allow satisfactory completion of skills required in the student portfolio for each module. The School makes use of specialist lecturers from outside of the School but within RCSI to contribute to the delivery of some modules and this works well. Some of these staff were, however, unaware of whether or how their content is assessed and were also uncertain of the procedures for revising content and contributions. It is recommended that the School addresses these omissions.

SoNM uses a wide variety of modalities to effectively assess skills, knowledge and understanding across the 27 anchor, core and specialist modules. These include the use of Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs), Tutor/teacher Observed Student Bedside Examinations TOSBEs and student portfolios. Student assignments, projects, dissertations and essays are used to interrogate knowledge and understanding in addition to the classic written examinations incorporating essay questions, short note questions and multiple-choice questions.

While the PRG were assured by academic staff that all examinations were blueprinted to module learning outcomes, SoNM could not furnish any examples of this practice. The PRG also noted that the sample multiple choice question (MCQ) papers provided were not consistent with the NMBE/WFME guidelines on MCQ format adopted in the other RCSI schools. Furthermore, no MCQ exam item analysis could be furnished to indicate if any post-exam evaluation of the suitability of the questions takes place. This service is provided for all MCQ exams by the Student, Academic and Regulatory Affairs (SARA) Office to the Schools of Medicine, Pharmacy and Physiotherapy so it was not clear if this omission originates within SARA or SoNM or as a result of the lack of involvement of SARA in postgraduate assessments. It is clear, however, from the end of semester student surveys that in general the students feel that the assessments are fair, appropriate and fit for purpose and external examiners confirm their confidence in the entire assessment process.

The PRG welcomes the engagement that SoNM has started with the ERASMUS mobility program but notes activity could be increased.

4.1 Commendations

- The quality of academic and supervisory support and pastoral care provided by SoNM staff which is greatly appreciated by students.
- The model of postgraduate education for students who, in some circumstances, are returning to education after extended absences.

4.2 Recommendations

- SoNM should exploit the expertise provided by Health Professional Education Centre (HPEC) in the furtherance of the School's TEL developments.
- Review the arrangements through which teachers and assessors of modules delivered by staff external to SoNM are able to revise content and be involved in assessment.
- Ensure consistent implementation of the RCSI's policies and procedures with regard to the quality assurance of the assessment process (exam blueprints, moderation reports, MCQ formats and analyses).
- Consider the introduction of a teaching award to recognise innovation and teaching excellence in line with similar practice in other schools.
- Explore the potential for greater engagement with ERASMUS to the benefit of staff and students.

5 Curriculum Development and Review

The School's approach to curriculum review and revalidation has ensured that its provision enables students to develop their skills in a range of clinical practice areas as well as advancing skills in leadership and management. Reference to relevant knowledge and competencies is key and curricula is regularly reviewed to ensure that it reflects the changing environment in healthcare and higher education and thus programme content remains current. 2020 will see the revalidation of its provision and this will represent a major undertaking for the School.

The provision is delivered neatly and efficiently and focusses effectively on practice and/or leadership. This provision operates through a series of generic anchor modules that are well-established and are precursors to the specialised clinical options. These modules provide a relevant foundation that articulates well with the widely varied clinical pathways conducted subsequently in various health service locations. The clinical elements of the provision are delivered through a sophisticated system of clinical learning, teaching and assessment processes, all effectively administered by coordinators and clinical subject specialists in the partner institutions. The clinical coordinators in particular play a key and effective role.

Research is well-embedded within the School and is a key strength. This focusses mainly on clinical practice and whilst there is no overt sense that it informs the curriculum, there is no doubt that the quality of the research being undertaken does benefit students. Research into learning and teaching is less well-developed although TEL has become an essential element of the School's delivery strategies and there are plans to develop this further. This has already been discussed in some detail in Section 3. The professional experience and expertise of School academic and clinical staff benefits both the curriculum and the students who follow it.

5.1 Commendations

- A well-balanced and structured curriculum which effectively provides students with clinical content that is supported by core and specialist modules that are delivered in a seamless fashion.
- The effective input of the clinical coordinators that enhances the delivery of the curriculum and adds value to students' learning experiences.

6 Research Activity

There is evidence of research achievements, in terms of output, external research income and postgraduate research training. The volume and quality of output are comparable, if not better than, schools of nursing of a similar size. The School has been successful in attracting external research income to undertake projects and support PhD training from a number of sources, including industry. The number of doctoral students has increased and there is some evidence of the start of a vibrant research culture.

The bulk of research activities seem, however, to be undertaken by the three most senior staff, who also have other administrative duties in the School. Investing in research officers' posts to support these researchers is likely to pay dividends and create a critical mass of researchers necessary for sustainable research activities. Involving and including other staff in research projects should also be a priority. It should also consider ensuring that its strategic plan for research is clear on targets and timescales.

All of the research postgraduate students interviewed, stated that typically research publications are prepared after the PhD viva takes place. Research papers submitted before thesis submission are a valuable resource for students to utilise during thesis preparation and provide external validation of the research in advance of the PhD viva. The possibility of changes to family or student employment circumstances after graduation creates the real possibility of extended delays in publication and loss of college metrics for ranking purposes.

6.1 Commendations

- The commitment to and achievements in research activities that is resulting in significant output and the calibre of doctoral students.
- The effective support for PhD students from both SoNM and RCSI and in particular the high standards of supervision.
- The creation of a Skin, Wounds and Trauma Research Centre which has the potential to attract additional external funding.
- The impressive and extensive partnership with industry and the high regard in which the research in pressure ulcer and wound healing is held by industry partners.
- The significant amount of funding raised to support research projects and develop research capacity.
- RCSI's reputation and its pragmatic approach to Intellectual Property (IP) which is a key factor in attracting industry partners.

6.2 Recommendations

- Ensure that the strategic plan for research activities is more specific regarding targets to be achieved and time scales.
- Continue to support junior staff and those new to research in order that they may develop their research profiles.
- Consider ways in which senior staff are more proactive in familiarizing junior research staff with existing funding programs (for example, StAR PhD).
- Identify and support research development in one or two other areas (for example, neonatal or infection related research) while maximising the potential of wound care research.
- Consider the potential for current and future research to more directly impact the taught curriculum.
- Explore the potential for interdisciplinary research, in particular with other researchers across RCSI.
- Explore the potential benefits of requiring postgraduate research students to prepare and submit research publications before thesis submission.

7 Management of Quality Enhancement

The School recognises quality management as an integral component of its programme planning, organisation and its efforts in this regard ensures that it effectively reflects the institutional RCSI commitment to a culture of quality. It successfully ensures that academic standards are maintained and the quality of the student experience is enhanced. Its relationships with its clinical partners and professional bodies are sound and ensures that it responds as required to the needs of clinical practice.

The School's management of quality is spearheaded by three key activities. First of these is the Nursing and Midwifery Steering Group which comprises School academic staff, representatives from the College's central quality office and SARA, a representative from patient advocacy, representatives from relevant clinical partners and students. This group is effective in enabling an oversight of the maintenance of academic standards and external statutory and regulatory requirements. Of equal importance is the Steering Group's role in ensuring that programmes remain responsive to changing clinical needs. The production of annual programme reports is overseen by this Steering Group. The second activity concerns the School's contribution to the College's cycle of programmatic reviews through which the College benchmarks programmes to international best practice. In addition to this, the School provides the required annual reports to NUI and NMBI. The third activity concerns programme evaluation through which the views of students and other stakeholders are sought. This evaluation is effected through a College-devised evaluation questionnaire which is administered centrally and the results provided back to the School for discussion at programme team meetings where necessary action is agreed upon and subsequently monitored. Whilst staff, clinical coordinators and students are clearly aware of the questionnaire, students and clinical coordinators informed the PRG that they were not formally advised of the outcomes of their feedback and it is recommended that the School addresses this omission.

Whilst the School's approach to the gathering and consideration of student feedback is systematic and students feel that there is ample opportunity for their views to be made, the PRG was unclear about the extent to which students attend the School's committees of which they are members. Also, students who met the PRG did not appear to be aware of the class representative system. The School will wish to address this omission.

The School's approach to quality management and enhancement are resulting in good outcomes in terms of student progression and achievement as evidenced by external examiner reports. Students are highly complimentary about their experience and value the skills they develop and the education they undergo. The PRG found, however, that the School's approach to annual monitoring and the production of its quality improvement plan (QIP) is not wholly systematic and entirely transparent and the School is recommended to address this shortcoming in its quality management system.

Clinical placements form an integral and important element of the School's provision. There are well-embedded processes to ensure that the quality of the placements ensures that students are able to meet the relevant learning outcomes as well as experiencing an effective clinical learning experience. To this end the School uses an audit tool through which it audits placements prior to their commencement and also seeks feedback during and post-placement to ensure that good practice can be disseminated and any required actions are addressed.

This periodic review provided the School with an excellent opportunity for it to review its progress and to consider its future. It did this in a most systematic and effective way and fully exploited the opportunities provided to it.

7.1 Commendations

- The comprehensive preparation process for the internal quality review which was truly inclusive in enabling the input from a wide range of stakeholders, which was well-researched and documented and which resulted in an effective SAR.
- The valuable contributions made by staff, students and external stakeholders to the review meetings.

7.2 Recommendations

- Formalise the mechanisms through which students and clinical coordinators are informed of the outcomes of student surveys so that the loop is effectively closed.
- Ensure the systematic production, publication and monitoring of the annual Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

8 Support Services

It is apparent from the SAR that SoNM interpreted this brief solely in terms of support services provided for students enrolled on their courses and in particular for students in crisis or in need of additional support. In this respect, the School is extremely responsive to the needs of their students and provides an appropriate range of support for any student who might find themselves struggling to meet their learning objectives for any one of the typical reasons to be expected within an adult student cohort in a higher education institution. All of the students who spoke to the PRG were full of praise for the support provided by all staff (academic and administrative).

However, the PRG was surprised that the Support Services section of the SAR did not include those services within the College which enables the School to function properly and effectively in its delivery of a quality student learning experience. There is an expectation that each school within RCSI engages with internal support service departments but no mention is made in this section of the SAR of interaction and reliance upon the office of Admissions, Alumni, Estates, Human Resources, Health Professions Education Centre (HPEC), IT Services, Media Services, SARA, etc. Since these were not addressed in the SAR the PRG investigated these interactions directly during the site visit. The interviews that took place during the site visit established that in general SoNM interfaced with most of the support service departments in a manner similar to the other RCSI schools within the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences.

Certain issues, however, were identified in respect of IT Services, SARA and the Alumni Office. In terms of IT Services, the School may wish to ensure that appropriate infrastructure is in place to support future TEL plans. For example, SoNM will need to ensure that its future requirements are communicated to IT well in advance. For SARA, the absence of operations and examination support for SoNM has the potential to lead to vulnerabilities in the preparation and compilation of examination results. Care must be taken to sustain the integrity of examination results and preserve institutional reputation, while ensuring the highly efficient operational environment within SoNM office staff is not destabilized. SARA provides services to students in all schools for the purposes of registry and student support (COMPPAS). However, SARA does not provide support to SoNM in the areas of operations and examinations, whilst it does so for the School of Medicine. The distinction seems to be made on the basis of whether the school engages in undergraduate or postgraduate education and the consequential challenges of using the Quercus system for the School's type provision. Finally, the School may wish to increase engagement with Alumni Office to promote school activities with the graduate cohort. The alumni cohort represents a ready-made forum for enhanced marketing opportunities.

8.1 Recommendations

- Ensure that SARA liaises with the Quercus vendor to ensure the applicability of the system to the SoNM provision.
- Ensure that SARA provides relevant support to the current efficient administrative function within SoNM to sustain the integrity of the examinations functions.

9 External Relations

The NMBI is the professional accreditation authority within the Republic of Ireland for all nursing qualifications. All SoNM programmes are accredited by the NMBI and any new proposed postgraduate courses must be submitted to them for approval. The SAR states that: *“Another challenge faced by programme coordinators in the clinical setting is in achieving clinical hours for students due to staff shortages and lack of preceptors. It may be that to overcome this issue the NMBI will need to provide greater guidance on the number of clinical hours required to complete a specialist PG Diploma programme as currently this is not available.”* This challenge was confirmed by the hospital-based clinical coordinators for the specialist modules. However, the NMBI representatives who met with the PRG did not see this as an issue. Clarity is clearly required on this point.

The NMBI representatives who spoke with the PRG expressed the view that specialist modules were not always supported by staff with relevant contemporary practice. However, it was clear from the PRG meeting with hospital-based clinical coordinators that this is not the case. Consequently, better levels of communication are required to update the NMBI on the full spectrum of clinical contributions in each module.

A delicate symbiotic relationship exists between the HSE and the SoNM. The School relies upon HSE goodwill to facilitate teaching of their staff on placement in their hospitals while the HSE recognises that in return the School provides more highly skilled graduates who contribute greatly to a more positive patient outcome and experience. This symbiosis is evidenced by the fact that sometimes new courses are initiated in response to requests from the HSE while sometimes the initial proposal originates within SoNM.

Both the HSE and the NMBI were very complimentary in their discussions of the educational programmes provided by SoNM. The NMBI were particularly appreciative of the standard of documentation provided by the School in relation to accreditation of modules.

The absence of any interaction between the RCSI Dublin SoNM with the Bahrain SoNM was surprising and unexpected and the PRG feel that this omission means that the School may not be exploiting a potentially valuable and mutually beneficial relationship.

9.1 Recommendations

- Liaise with Medical University of Bahrain SoNM to explore postgraduate education opportunities in the Gulf states.
- Liaise with NMBI regarding the number of specified hours for facilitated learning in clinical nursing modules.
- Liaise with the NMBI to demonstrate that contemporary practise in specialist modules is provided by hospital-based clinical coordinators.

10 Summary of Commendations and Recommendations

10.1 Commendations

- 10.1.1 The role of the SoNM School Management Team in engaging with the business planning process and in aligning itself effectually with the RCSI Strategic Plan 2018-2022.
- 10.1.2 The part played by the SoNM administrative team in the proactive and comprehensive support they provide for staff and students and their role they play in managing student support, recruitment and examinations.
- 10.1.3 The commitment and high morale of staff (academic and professional support staff) in SoNM.
- 10.1.4 The ethnic diversity within SoNM.
- 10.1.5 The commitment to and support in SoNM for staff development, in particular for those undertaking PhD studies.
- 10.1.6 The valuable contribution of clinical facilitators towards enhancing specialist training for nurses.
- 10.1.7 The support provided by staff from the SPGS, IT staff centrally, and lecturers from other schools which enhances the SoNM provision.
- 10.1.8 The quality of academic and supervisory support and pastoral care provided by SoNM staff which is greatly appreciated by students.
- 10.1.9 The quality of academic and supervisory support and pastoral care provided by SoNM staff which is greatly appreciated by students.
- 10.1.10 The model of postgraduate education for students who, in some circumstances, are returning to education after extended absences.
- 10.1.11 The curriculum which is well-balanced and structured curriculum and effectively provides students with clinical content that is supported by core and specialist modules that are delivered in a seamless fashion.

- 10.1.12 The effective input of the clinical coordinators that enhances the delivery of the curriculum and adds value to students' learning experiences.
- 10.1.13 The commitment to and achievements in research activities that is resulting in significant output and the calibre of doctoral students.
- 10.1.14 The effective support for PhD students from both SoNM and RCSI and in particular the high standards of supervision.
- 10.1.15 The creation of a skin wound and trauma centre which has the potential to attract additional external funding.
- 10.1.16 The impressive and extensive partnership with industry and the high regard in which the research in pressure ulcer and wound healing is held by industry partners.
- 10.1.17 The significant amount of funding raised to support research projects and develop research capacity.
- 10.1.18 RCSI's reputation and its pragmatic approach to IP which is a key factor in attracting industry partners.
- 10.1.19 The comprehensive preparation process for the internal quality review which was truly inclusive in enabling the input from a wide range of stakeholders, which was well-researched and documented and which resulted in an effective SAR.
- 10.1.20 The valuable contributions made by staff, students and external stakeholders to the review meetings.

10.2 Recommendations

- 10.2.1 Consider the appropriateness of the inclusion of the word Midwifery in the SoNM title.
- 10.2.2 Establish pathways and criteria for the promotion of staff from nurse tutor to lecturer.
- 10.2.3 Support and encourage staff to apply for promotion, as appropriate, and to address misconceptions regarding eligibility and likelihood of success.

- 10.2.4 Ensure clinical coordinators are fully aware of the IT services (Quercus, VLE) and other resources which they can access.
- 10.2.5 Exploit the expertise provided by Health Professional Education Centre (HPEC) in the furtherance of the School's TEL developments.
- 10.2.6 Explore the potential benefits of requiring postgraduate research students to prepare and submit research publications before thesis submission.
- 10.2.7 Review the arrangements through which teachers and assessors of modules delivered by staff external to SoNM are able to revise content and be involved in assessment.
- 10.2.8 Ensure consistent implementation of the RCSI's policies and procedures with regard to the quality assurance of the assessment process (examination blueprints, moderation reports, MCQ formats and analyses).
- 10.2.9 Consider the introduction of a teaching award to recognise innovation and teaching excellence in line with similar practice in other schools.
- 10.2.10 Explore the potential for greater engagement with ERASMUS to the benefit of staff and students.
- 10.2.11 Ensure that the Strategic Plan for research activities is more specific regarding targets to be achieved and time scales.
- 10.2.12 Continue to support junior staff and those new to research in order that they may develop their research profiles.
- 10.2.13 Consider ways in which Senior staff are more proactive in familiarizing junior research staff with existing funding programs (for example, StAR PhD).
- 10.2.14 Identify and support research development in one or two other areas (for example, neonatal or infection related research) while maximising the potential of wound care research.
- 10.2.15 Consider the potential for current and future research to more directly impact the taught curriculum.

- 10.2.16 Explore the potential for interdisciplinary research, in particular with other researchers across RCSI.
- 10.2.17 Formalise the mechanisms through which students and clinical coordinators are informed of the outcomes of schoolchild surveys so that the loop is effectively closed.
- 10.2.18 Ensure the systematic production and publication of the annual Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).
- 10.2.19 Ensure that SARA liaises with the Quercus vendor to ensure the applicability of the system to the SoNM provision.
- 10.2.20 Ensure that SARA provides relevant support to the current efficient administrative function within SoNM to sustain the integrity of the examinations functions.
- 10.2.21 Liaise with Medical University of Bahrain SoNM to explore postgraduate education opportunities in the Persian Gulf states.
- 10.2.22 Liaise with NMBI regarding the number of specified hours for facilitated learning in clinical nursing modules.
- 10.2.23 Liaise with the NMBI to demonstrate that contemporary practise in specialist modules is provided by hospital-based clinical coordinators.

11 Appendix 1: Site Visit Schedule 1st – 4th October 2018

Evening prior to site visit: Monday October 1st 2018

Dur. mins	Time	Meeting Theme	Attendees	Venue
15	17.00 – 17.15	Welcome Director of Quality and Quality Reviews Manager Tea/coffee	PRG QEO	Robert Smith Room
120	17.15 – 19.15	Private planning meeting for members of the Peer Review Group	PRG	Robert Smith Room
	19.30 – 21.30	Dinner	PRG QEO	

Day 1: Tuesday 2nd October 2018

Dur.	Time	Meeting Theme	Attendees	Venue
	0845	Tea/coffee. Review of preparatory work	PRG	Robert Smith Room
40	09.15 – 09.45	M1: Meeting with Head of School	PRG	Robert Smith Room
45	09.55 – 10.40	M2: Meeting with School of Nursing and Midwifery Management Team. Theme: Focus on strategic planning and development of the School Suggested SAR Sections - All	See list of attendees	Robert Smith Room
30	10.45 – 11.15	Tea / coffee. M3: Meeting with School of Nursing and Midwifery Professional Support Staff Suggested SAR Sections All	PRG	Robert Smith Room
15	11.15 – 11.30	Private meeting time for PRG	PRG	Robert Smith Room
45	11.35 – 12.20	M4: Meeting with SoNM Academic Staff - Excellence in education, Research and Service	PRG See list of attendees	Robert Smith Room

		Suggested SAR Sections All		
40	12.30 – 13.10	M5: Tour of facilities: SoNM, teaching rooms, student areas, No. 26	PRG	
45	13.15 – 14.00	Lunch & private meeting time for PRG	PRG	President's Meeting Room
45	14.10 – 14.55	M6: Meeting with Heads of Schools: Theme: Focus on strategic planning and development for schools to meet RCSI's Strategic objectives Suggested SAR Sections 1, 4, 5, 6, 7	PRG See list of attendees	Robert Smith Room
45	15.05 – 15.55	M7: Meeting with Heads or Senior Representatives of professional support & service departments. Theme: Overview of centralised professional services in RCSI and opportunities for synergies with the SoNM. Suggested SAR Sections All	PRG See list of attendees	Robert Smith Room
20	15.55 – 16.15	Tea/coffee Private meeting time for PRG	PRG	Robert Smith Room
45	16.15 – 17.00	M8: Meetings with key external stakeholders from HSE, NMBI & DoH. Theme: Nursing & Midwifery Governance: the vision to develop/enable education needs of post-graduate nurses and midwives nationally Suggested SAR Sections 1, 2, 3,4, 5, 9	PRG See list of attendees	Robert Smith Room
50	17.00 – 18.00	Review of afternoon's meetings and planning for next day	PRG	Robert Smith Room

Day 2: Wednesday October 3rd 2018

Dur. mins	Time	Meeting Theme	Attendees	Venue
25	08.45	Tea/coffee. Private meeting time for PRG	PRG	Robert Smith Room
45	09.15 – 10.00	M9: Meeting with key stakeholders in research. Theme: Focus on research, including the supporting infrastructure and development of research in SoNM and across RCSI. Suggested SAR Sections 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	PRG See list of attendees	Robert Smith Room
50	10.10 – 11.00	M10: Meeting with Research partners and Industry partners – Research Impact, Collaborations and Future developments	PRG See list of attendees	Robert Smith Room

		Suggested SAR Sections 6, 9		
25	11.00 – 11.25	Tea / coffee. Private meeting time for PRG.	PRG	Robert Smith Room
40	11.30 – 12.10	M11: Meeting with Postgraduate Research Students Suggested SAR Sections 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	PRG See list of attendees	Robert Smith Room
40	12.20 – 13.00	M12: Meeting with postgraduate student representatives Suggested SAR Sections 4, 5, 8	PRG See list of attendees	Robert Smith Room
50	13.10 – 14.00	Lunch & private meeting time for PRG	PRG	President's Meeting Room
40	14.00 – 14.40	M13: Meeting with members of SMT Theme: RCSI Strategy and plans for the future Suggested SAR Sections All	PRG See list of attendees	Robert Smith Room
45	15.00– 15.45	M14: Meeting with Clinical Course Co-ordinators of postgraduate programmes – with a focus on teaching, learning and assessment processes Suggested SAR Sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9	PRG See list of attendees	Robert Smith Room
45	16.00 – 16.45	M15: Meeting with RCSI academic staff, with a focus on teaching, learning & curriculum development Suggested SAR Sections All	PRG See list of attendees	Robert Smith Room
70	16.50 – 18.00	Tea/coffee. Private meeting time for PRG members for review of afternoon's meeting and draft commendations and recommendations	PRG	Robert Smith Room
20	18.00 – 18.20	M16: Teleconference with research partners	PRG	Robert Smith Room

Day 3: Thursday October 4th 2018

	Time	Meeting Theme	Attendees	Venue
195	08.45 – 12.00	Private meeting time for PRG – discussion and finalisation of Commendations and Recommendations for all sections.	PRG	Robert Smith Room
	10.30	Tea / coffee.	PRG	Robert Smith Room
	08.45 – 12.00	Private meeting time for PRG – discussion and finalisation of Commendations and Recommendations for all sections.	PRG	Robert Smith Room
20	12.00 – 12.20	M17: Private meeting with QEO	PRG; QEO	Robert Smith Room
15	12.30 – 12.45	M18: Meeting with Head of Unit & QEO	PRG; QEO, Head of Unit	Robert Smith Room
20	12.45 – 13.00	M19: Exit presentation to all School of Nursing and Midwifery Staff	PRG; QEO; All Unit Staff	President's Meeting Room
60	13.00 – 14.00	Lunch and Private meeting with QEO	PRG; QEO	Robert Smith Room
	14.00	Review ends		