



RCSI

**University of
Medicine and
Health
Sciences**

Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

Quality Assurance Framework 2025-26



RCSI

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[1] Background & context

[1.1] RCSI, University of Medicine & Health Sciences

The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) was established by Royal Charter in 1784 to set and support professional standards for surgical training and practice in Ireland. RCSI has evolved considerably in the intervening years and is now both a university and a postgraduate training body in the areas of medicine and health sciences. This dual role brings many advantages to the institution, not least of which is the ability to offer education and training at all career levels. RCSI awards undergraduate and postgraduate degrees including those leading to qualifications in Medicine, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Advanced Therapeutic Technologies and Physician Associates in Dublin; Medicine and Nursing in Bahrain; Medicine in Penang (RUMC-RCSI & UCD Malaysia Campus); Pharmacy in China; and masters (taught & by research) and doctoral programmes variously in Ireland, Bahrain, China and Malaysia. RCSI became a Recognised College of the National University of Ireland (NUI) in 1978. RCSI's independent degree awarding powers were activated by ministerial order in 2010 pursuant to the terms of The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (Charters Amendment) Act 2003. The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 established RCSI as a Designated Awarding Body. In 2019 RCSI was granted university status, pursuant to the provisions of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Amendment Act 2019.

[1.2] RCSI Awarding Arrangements

[1.2.1] Degree Awards

As noted above, RCSI independent-degree awarding powers were commenced in 2010 by Ministerial Order, and the Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education & Training) Act 2012 recognised RCSI as a Designated Awarding Body (i.e. a body having independent degree awarding powers) under the Act. The granting to RCSI of independent degree-awarding powers enhanced its status as a higher education institution both nationally and internationally. However, the visibility and recognition associated with NUI degrees confers considerable reputational and historical advantage on RCSI graduates. RCSI places considerable value on its graduates being graduates of the NUI and, as a result, does not invoke its independent degree powers in most circumstances. In light of this, Schedule 3 (9) of the Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education & Training) Act 2012 introduced Section 47A to the Universities Act 1997 which provides that the degrees & qualifications of RCSI shall be degrees & qualifications of the NUI where they are approved by the NUI and while RCSI remains a Recognised College of the NUI¹. This legislative change was subsequently reflected in an amendment to the NUI Statutes. Accordingly, degrees of RCSI are awards of the NUI, with the sole exception of the degree of Doctor of Science (DSc) *honoris causa* which is solely and exclusively a degree of the RCSI University of Medicine & Health Sciences.

[1.2.2] Postgraduate/Professional Awards

The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (Charters Amendment) Act 2003, which amends previous legislation and the original Royal Charter of Incorporation of the College and supplementary Royal Charters, empowers RCSI [a] to award Licentiate, Certificate, Diploma and Degree in Surgery and related disciplines, and [b] to admit candidates to Membership and Fellowship of the College in Surgery and related disciplines.

[1.3] Quality Assurance as a key Bologna Action

The Bologna Process is a process of intergovernmental cooperation in higher education (HE) between 48 European countries making up the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Its key actions include the delineation of a three-cycle structure for HE (Bachelors – Masters – Doctorate), the facilitation of recognition

¹ This reflects the status of the degrees of the Constituent Universities of the NUI as codified in Section 47(5) of the Universities Act 1997, which states that 'The degrees and other qualifications awarded by a constituent university shall be degrees and qualifications of the National University of Ireland and shall be so designated'.

of qualifications across countries and the strengthening of quality assurance (QA) processes in HE. The original Bologna Declaration (1999) encouraged the development of comparable criteria and methods for QA leading to the adoption of the 'Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area' (known as the ESG) in 2005.

[1.4] European Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance

The ESG were developed by the 'E4 Group', comprised of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Universities Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and the European Students' Union (ESU). The ESG, which were revised in 2015, have been adopted widely as a shared reference point for QA in higher education and, currently, over 20 national QA agencies in Europe are compliant with them including Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

The ESG 2015 are based on four principles for quality assurance in the EHEA²:

- Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance.
- Quality assurance responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students.
- Quality assurance supports the development of a quality culture.
- Quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society.

The E4 Group undertook an evaluation of the continued relevance and applicability of the ESG in the light of recent changes in the European higher education landscape. Arising from this process, they issued a statement in August 2020 affirming the continued validity and relevance of the ESG³. The Tirana Ministerial Communiqué of May 2024 gave the authors of the ESG the mandate to revise the document. It is expected that the final text of the ESG 2027 should be approved in autumn 2026.

[1.5] Quality Assurance in Irish Higher Education

The Universities Act 1997⁴ set out statutory requirements for the operation of Irish universities, including the requirement for each university to establish internal quality assurance processes. The Act places the ownership of quality processes explicitly with each institution, and it mandates an approach based upon a holistic view of quality in an institution and which involves external reviewers, students and stakeholders while preserving institutional autonomy, ensuring public accountability and facilitating international benchmarking.

In addition to establishing the internal policies and procedures required by the legislation, the universities authorised the establishment of the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB), one of the predecessor bodies to Quality & Qualifications Ireland, in 2002. The IUQB, in conjunction with the Higher Education Authority (HEA), commissioned the European University Association in 2004-2005 to undertake the first cycle of external review of the seven Irish universities. In 2009 IUQB launched the Institutional Review of Irish Universities (IRIU) process, the second cycle of external reviews.

The Quality & Qualifications (Education & Training) Act 2012⁵ established Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI) as the statutory body responsible for qualifications and quality assurance in higher education and in further education & training in Ireland, combining the roles of four predecessor organisations⁶. QQI has a

² <https://www.enqa.eu/esg-standards-and-guidelines-for-quality-assurance-in-the-european-higher-education-area/>

³ https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/E4-statement_The-ESG-in-the-changing-landscape-of-higher-education_Final.pdf

⁴ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1997/act/24/enacted/en/pdf>

⁵ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2012/act/28/enacted/en/pdf>

⁶ The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, the Higher Education Training & Awards Council, the Further Education Training & Awards Council and the Irish Universities Quality Board

broad remit encompassing the domains of quality assurance in higher and further education & training, the awarding & recognition of qualifications, the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), qualifications recognition and international education. With regard to quality assurance in higher education, QQI bears statutory responsibility for the approval of the QA policies and procedures of higher education providers, and for periodic review of the effectiveness of these procedures. To that end, QQI assumed responsibility for the completion of the second (IRIU) cycle of institutional reviews of the Irish universities, which had commenced in 2009. QQI launched the third 'CINNTE' cycle of Institutional Reviews in 2017.

Amongst a range of other provisions, the 2012 Act also simplified the degree-awarding landscape in Ireland by recognising two categories of institution:

- **Designated Awarding Bodies** (DABs) with independent degree awarding powers.
- **Linked Providers** (LPs) which enter into a formal arrangement with a DAB under which the LP delivers a programme of education & training that satisfies the prerequisites for an award of the DAB.

QQI bears responsibility for approval and for periodic review of the QA policies and procedures of the DABs⁷. In relation to LPs, the statutory responsibility for approval of their QA policies and procedures (and for periodic review of the effectiveness of these procedures) lies with the relevant DABs.

The Quality & Qualifications (Education & Training) Amendment Act 2019⁸ amends and extends the provisions of the 2012 Act in a range of areas including the designation of 'Listed Awarding Bodies', the establishment of a fund for the 'Protection of Enrolled Learners', authorisation to use the International Education Mark (IEM), Academic Integrity & Misconduct and 'University' designation.

[1.6] Statutory & Other Guidelines for Quality Assurance

[1.6.1] Statutory Guidelines

In 2016 QQI published its over-arching Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines⁹ which provides the structure and rationale for all QQI statutory guidelines addressing the higher and further education sectors. In the intervening period, QQI has published a suite of core, sector-specific and topic-specific statutory guidelines for QA including:

- I. Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for use by all Providers (Apr. 2016)
- II. Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies (Sector-specific; Jul. 2016)
- III. Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Research Degree Programmes (Topic-specific; Mar. 2017)
- IV. Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes (Topic-specific; Oct. 2023)

The 'Core' Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines document identifies the eleven core areas in which providers are expected to establish QA procedures and elaborates what is expected of provider procedures in these areas. The Core Guidelines take cognisance of, and are closely aligned with, the ESG-2015. The sector-specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies focus primarily on the statutory responsibilities of DABs for the approval of the QA policies and procedures of their Linked Providers, and for periodic review of the effectiveness of those procedures.

⁷ Therefore, the statutory responsibility for approving the quality assurance policies & procedures of RCSI lies with QQI

⁸ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2019/act/32/enacted/en/pdf>

⁹ www.qqi.ie

[1.6.2] Guidelines of the National University of Ireland

As a Recognised College of the National University of Ireland, RCSI takes cognisance also of the guidelines, policies and procedures of the NUI in relation to the validation of educational programmes leading to degree awards, and to Quality Assurance and Enhancement¹⁰, including:

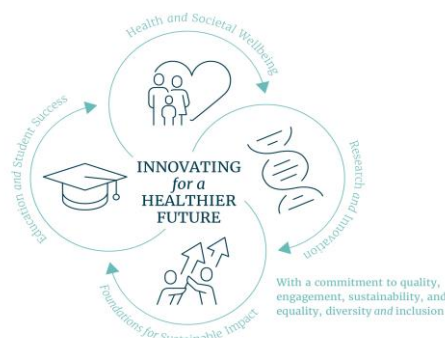
- I. NUI Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework (2023).
- II. Quality Assurance for Collaborative and Transnational Provision of Academic Programmes Leading to NUI Qualifications (2013).
- III. Regulations, Procedures and Guidelines for the Approval of New Programmes and Changes to Existing Programmes in the Recognised Colleges (2020).

¹⁰ It should be noted that RCSI, being a Designated Awarding Body, does not fall within scope of the NUI Policy/Procedures for the Approval of Quality Assurance Procedures in the Recognised Colleges (2017)

[2] Quality as a Strategic Imperative for RCSI

[2.1] Quality as a Foundation for Strategy

The RCSI Strategic Plan “Innovating for a Healthier Future”¹¹ guides the development and activities of the University in the period 2023-2027. RCSI is committed to driving research and innovation in health and healthcare, recognising the crucial role that discovery plays in advancing healthcare, improving patient outcomes and population health.



This strategy is built around four themes:

- [1] Health and Societal Impact
- [2] Education and Student Success
- [3] Research and Innovation
- [4] Foundations for Sustainable Impact

RCSI has identified Quality as one of the four foundational elements of the entire strategic plan, together with Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, Engagement and Sustainability.

[2.2] RCSI Quality Policy

[2.2.1] A culture of quality underpinning the RCSI mission

RCSI's core mission is *"to educate, nurture and discover for the benefit of human health"*. Through supporting people to manage their health, developing the current and future healthcare workforce, to creating insights and inventions that drive health improvements, and engaging directly with our community and society, we are committed to creating a healthier future. Our progress, and our plans for the future, depend crucially on an all-pervasive culture of quality in which responsibility for the quality of the learner experience, and for continuous quality enhancement, is shared by all staff.

[2.2.2] Principles

The core principles underpinning this culture of quality are as follows:

- RCSI is committed to ensuring that we deliver a quality educational experience to our learners, that we support our staff to realise their full potential and develop collective excellence within the university and that we provide an excellent standard of service to our stakeholders.
- As one of Ireland's leaders in the area of transnational education provision, RCSI is committed to ensuring that students based on our international campuses receive a learning experience which is equivalent to that of students based at RCSI-Dublin.
- The maintenance and enhancement of quality is the responsibility of every member of RCSI staff.
- RCSI is committed to robust, transparent processes and procedures for ongoing quality assurance and quality enhancement of academic programmes, Schools, Faculties and Professional Support Units both in Ireland and overseas.
- Institutional research, the gathering of quantitative and qualitative data to support evidence-based quality assurance and quality improvement processes, is central to RCSI operations. In this regard, particular value is placed upon the views of students, staff and external peers. The views of students and staff are sought through regular surveys. External views derive from the involvement of external examiners in all programmes and the inclusion of external members in all review panels.

¹¹ <https://www.rcsi.com/-/media/feature/media/download-document/inc/publications/rcsi-strategy-2023-2027.pdf>

- RCSI is committed to working constructively with other Irish higher education institutions, and with statutory regulatory bodies in Ireland and overseas, to maintain and enhance the reputation of Ireland as an education provider.
- The RCSI quality policy supports, informs and responds to the university's institutional strategy, identifying as core values of RCSI the quality of the student experience, continuous quality enhancement in all our activities and the quality of our contribution to our stakeholders and to the communities in which we work across the world.
- The RCSI quality policy is guided by the overarching Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and by the relevant national legislation & statutory guidelines in Ireland and in the other jurisdictions within which we operate.

[2.3] The RCSI Definition of Quality

RCSI is committed to ensuring that we deliver a quality educational experience to our learners, that we support our staff to realise their full potential within the university and that we provide an excellent standard of service to our stakeholders. Our approach to quality encompasses a breadth of quality assurance and enhancement tools, while seeking to avoid unnecessary duplication. As such, we have adopted the UNESCO definition: "Quality in higher education is a multidimensional, multilevel, and dynamic concept that relates to the contextual settings of an educational model, to the institutional mission and objectives, as well as to specific standards within a given system, institution, programme, or discipline¹²".

[2.4] Quality Assurance of Transnational and Collaborative Educational Provision

RCSI is involved in a range of instances of transnational and collaborative educational provision (TN/C) across its international campuses and international programmes (see table below). The Quality Committee has overall responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement across these programmes and campuses (see Appendix 1). In addition to participating in local quality assurance and professional accreditation processes, they are subject to review by RCSI in the context of the ongoing programme of periodic internal quality assurance reviews administered by the Quality Enhancement Office (see Section 4.3.4.1).

RCSI TN/C provision of degree programmes		
Campus	Type of provision ¹	Partners
RCSI-Bahrain	TN	N/A
RCSI-UCD Malaysia Campus	TN/C	University College Dublin
International College of Pharmaceutical Innovation	TN/C	Soochow University

¹ TN = Transnational provision; TN/C = Transnational Collaborative provision

RCSI has adopted the IHEQN 'Guidelines for the Approval, Monitoring and Review of Collaborative and Transnational Provision'¹³ as a 'ready reckoner' when evaluating proposals for the development of new TN/C provision arrangements.

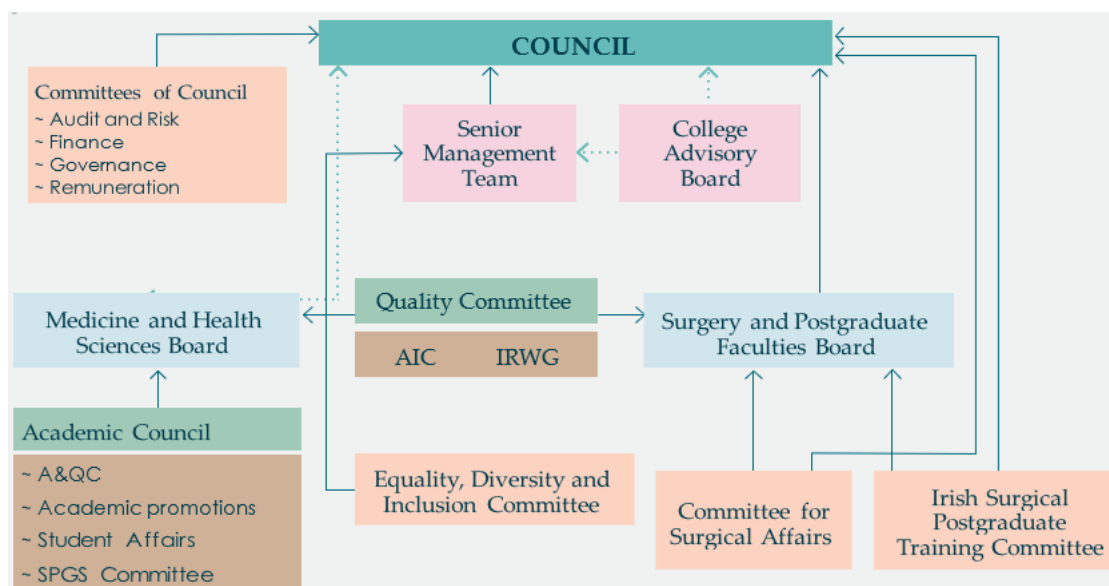
¹² UNESCO Quality Assurance and Accreditation: A Glossary of Basic Terms and Definitions. (2007)
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000134621>

¹³ Guidelines for the Approval, Monitoring and Review of Collaborative and Transnational Provision, Irish Higher Education Quality Network, 2013

[3] Quality Assurance within the governance of RCSI

[3.1] Overview of governance

RCSI's governance structure has evolved since its establishment as a surgical Royal College. This evolution reflects the development of RCSI as a HEI, the advent of independent degree awarding powers, university designation, and changes in best practice in higher education governance.



The primary governing body is Council. There are four standing committees of Council: the Audit and Risk Committee, Finance Committee, Remuneration Committee and the Governance and Nominations Committee. A further body, the College Advisory Board (CAB), provides Council and the Senior Management Team (SMT) with external expertise on critical strategic decisions.

Academic governance is separated between two bodies: The Medicine and Health Sciences Board (MHSB), responsible for university matters, and the Surgery and Postgraduate Faculties Board (SPFB), focused on professional training affairs. MHSB is the governing body for all RCSI educational programmes leading to National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) awards.

[3.2] Key entities relevant to Quality Assurance

[3.2.1] Quality Committee

The RCSI Quality Committee (QC) is responsible for the creation of policy and for the implementation of quality processes and quality assurance/quality improvement (QA/QI) activities across academic and administrative areas of all RCSI campuses. The Quality Committee (QC) reports both to MHSB and to SPFB. The QC plays a significant role in integrating QA activities on overseas campuses into the overall QA system, and in supporting these campuses in their interactions with local QA/QI structures and processes. RCSI Bahrain has a local Quality Enhancement Committee (QEC). A report on its activities is presented at each QC, and the Chair of the QEC is a member of the QC. The QC Membership & Terms of Reference are given as Appendix 1 (below).

The QC has two standing sub-committees reporting to it, the Academic Integrity Committee (AIC) and the Institutional Review Working Group (IRWG). The AIC is a formal structure to allow RCSI to monitor and respond to initiatives launched by the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) and by QQI in the area of Academic Integrity. The IRWG is responsible for the management of Institutional Reviews conducted by QQI. It was last reconvened from 2022-24 to support the 2023 Institutional Review.

[3.2.2] Quality Enhancement Office

The QEO is the executive function of the RCSI Quality Committee (QC) and of its sub-committees, and reports to the Vice Chancellor & CEO/Registrar of RCSI. The role of the QEO is to support the implementation of the RCSI QA/QI strategy by coordinating all relevant activities and by collecting the data needed to allow the QC to quality assure all aspects of programme delivery. The QEO is comprised of five members of staff: Head of Quality Enhancement Office, Director of Psychometrics, Quality Reviews Manager, Quality Assurance Data Analyst and Operations Administrator. The Head of Quality Enhancement Office reports to the Chair of the Quality Committee, the Vice Chancellor & CEO/Registrar of RCSI.

[3.2.3] Awards & Qualifications Committee

The RCSI Awards & Qualifications Committee (A&QC) has responsibility, with authority delegated by MHSB to evaluate and consider educational programmes which fall under the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) for approval and accreditation, and for periodic Programmatic Reviews. The A&QC policies and procedures for the accreditation of new degree programmes are designed to satisfy the requirements of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and those of the National University of Ireland.

[3.3] Input to Institutional Strategic Planning

The QC and QEO contribute to institutional strategic planning by routinely providing key data to RCSI governance structures and Senior Management Team, including primarily (i) student and staff satisfaction and engagement data derived from ongoing survey activity, (and (ii) the insights and recommendations arising from internal QA reviews.

[4] The RCSI Quality Framework

[4.1] Aim

The RCSI Quality Policy emphasises the paramount importance of delivering a high quality educational and professional development experience to our students and professional trainees. The aim of the RCSI Quality Framework is to encompass the array of tools necessary to assure and enhance the quality of our educational and training provision, and to demonstrate this quality to our internal and external stakeholders.

[4.2] Objectives

The objectives of the Quality Framework are:

- To provide a comprehensive body of data which facilitates the timely monitoring of the performance of all RCSI educational and professional programmes in Ireland and overseas.
- To enable Schools, Faculties, Professional Support Units and overseas Branch Campuses/programmes to assess the effectiveness of their internal quality assurance policies and procedures through the process of periodic internal quality assurance review.
- To ensure external validation of quality processes through the involvement of independent, external peers as external examiners and as members of review panels.
- To engage students and professional trainees meaningfully as partners in quality assurance and enhancement.
- To demonstrate compliance with national and international standards.
- To develop the culture of quality within RCSI in which all staff share the vision and responsibility for ensuring high quality educational and professional training provision.
- To support the attainment of the RCSI strategic goals in furtherance of the university's mission and vision.

[4.3] Elements of the Framework

[4.3.1] External

[4.3.1.1] Periodic Institutional Review

RCSI, as a Designated Awarding Body, is subject to periodic Institutional Review by Quality & Qualifications Ireland, which bears statutory responsibility for the approval of RCSI's QA policies and procedures and for periodic review of their effectiveness. The most recent review took place in 2023 as part of the QQI CINTE Cycle of Institutional Reviews. From the Report of the Review *"the review team found RCSI to be an institution where quality assurance procedures are well embedded and clearly understood with a strong culture of quality enhancement and a positive balance of education, practice and research. RCSI is strategically driven with an ethos of collaboration, ownership, and accessible leadership that places value on its staff expertise. It is characterised by a strong student and customer focus across all teams and a culture of delivering on its promises. The team saw evidence of RCSI's agility and responsiveness to the internal and external environment and to the needs of the healthcare economy."*

Previously, RCSI underwent two Institutional Reviews:

- An Institutional Review was conducted in 2009 by an international Review Panel convened jointly by the Higher Education Authority and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland as part of the process which led to the activation of degree-awarding powers in 2010.
- RCSI was subject to Institutional Review in 2013-2014 by an international Review Panel as part of the Institutional Review of Irish Universities (IRIU) Cycle administered by the Irish Universities Quality Board & QQI (2009-2015).

RCSI overseas campuses and partner institutions are subject to Institutional Review by local cognate bodies including the Bahrain Education & Training Quality Authority and Higher Education Council (RCSI-Bahrain), the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (RCSI-UCD Malaysia Campus) and the China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Centre (Soochow University).

[4.3.1.2] Annual Reporting to Quality & Qualifications Ireland

QQI has continued the practice of annual reporting instituted by the Irish Universities Quality Board. In consultation with the Designated Awarding Bodies, QQI revised the scheme and developed the current submission format, which is the Annual Quality Report (AQR)¹⁴. The AQR covers a reporting period which runs from September to August of the preceding year and is divided into three parts:

- Part 1 provides an overview of QA governance, policies and procedures within the institution.
- Part 2 provides information relating to institution-led QA during the reporting period.
- Case Studies showcase examples of quality enhancement activity.

The AQR informs discussions between each Designated Awarding Body and QQI in the form of Quality Dialogue Meetings, and the annual submissions form a useful record of the evolution of institutional QA policies and procedures between periodic Institutional Reviews. QQI publishes the AQR submissions and produces an annual summary report covering the submissions made for each successive reporting period.

[4.3.1.3] Professional Regulatory Accreditation Processes

As a health sciences university and postgraduate/professional training body, many of RCSI educational and training programmes are subject to accreditation by the relevant Postgraduate Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). The five relevant PSRBs in the Republic of Ireland and the programmes which they accredit are listed below.

Postgraduate Regulatory Statutory Body	Programme(s)
Irish Medical Council	[A] MB, BCh, BAO (Medicine) degrees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduate & Direct Entry • Ireland, Bahrain & Malaysia [B] Postgraduate / Professional Training Programmes in Surgery, Emergency Medicine, Dentistry, Radiology, Sports & Exercise Medicine
Nursing & Midwifery Board of Ireland	All Nursing degrees, educational & professional awards
Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland	[A] Integrated Masters degree in Pharmacy (MPharm) & BSc degree in Pharmacy [B] Continuing Professional Development programmes
CORU [The Health & Social Care Professions Regulator]	BSc degree in Physiotherapy
The Dental Council	Bachelor's Degree in Dental Surgery. Accreditation endorsement received April 2024 with further status reports and inspections planned.

RCSI TN/C medical degree programmes in Malaysia are also subject to accreditation by the Malaysian Medical Council.

[4.3.1.4] StudentSurvey.ie

¹⁴ Formerly the 'Annual Institutional Quality Report (AIQR)'

RCSI participates in StudentSurvey.ie (formerly the Irish Survey of Student Engagement; ISSE). This is a national initiative co-sponsored by the HEA, the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA) and the Union of Students in Ireland (USI). StudentSurvey.ie commenced in 2013, surveying first year undergraduate, final year undergraduate and taught postgraduate students. The QEO's Quality Assurance Data Analyst is a member of the StudentSurvey.ie Communication Advisory Group. The QEO facilitates RCSI participation by liaising with the StudentSurvey.ie Project Manager and the commercial provider that administers the surveys online. It determines an appropriate period during which the survey is open to RCSI students and, in collaboration with the Students' Unions, manages survey promotion campaign on RCSI campuses. In addition to reporting the data annually at national level, StudentSurvey.ie provides the raw survey data to the participating institutions, including RCSI. The QEO disseminates key data within RCSI in the context of national and sectoral benchmarks and conducts bespoke analysis of selected topics or specific student cohort, as appropriate, to support quality projects.

[4.3.2] Annual

[4.3.2.1] External examining

External examiners play an important role in the ongoing quality assurance of degree programmes at RCSI. The Medicine & Health Sciences Board approves external examiners and informs the NUI Senate, which approves and appoints them. These examiners report directly to NUI and thence to RCSI. For undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, they have access to examination results and to examples of students' assessed work, and they are involved in aspects of the examinations process and in Examination Board meetings. For research degree programmes, they are involved in the examination of the thesis and, for Level 10 awards (MD & PhD), in the *viva voce* examination of the candidate.

[4.3.2.2] Annual Programme Monitoring

Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) is a concise mechanism which gathers data on the operation of educational programmes building on the previous year's achievements, addressing issues raised in external examiner reports & student feedback and presenting plans for the coming academic year. When implemented consistently, APM builds an evidence base documenting programme performance in the interval between initial programme validation and periodic programmatic review. The Quality Committee mandated the Quality Enhancement Office (QEO) to develop a system of APM which was launched initially in 2016 for the medical degree programmes in Malaysia. In parallel, the RCSI-Bahrain Quality Office implemented Annual Programme Analysis (and Annual Module Analysis) across all programmes. All RCSI taught undergraduate and postgraduate TN/C programmes¹⁵ fall within scope of APM. The APM process is governed by the Medicine & Health Sciences Board (MHSB) through the RCSI Quality Committee, with operational responsibility for the process assigned to the QEO.

[4.3.3] Recurrent

[4.3.3.1] Programme validation & approval

The RCSI Awards & Qualifications Committee (A&QC) is responsible for the approval and validation of new educational programmes leading to RCSI degree awards aligned with the National Framework of Qualifications. It is responsible also for the revalidation of existing programmes to which Minor or Major Changes are proposed by Schools within the University of Medicine & Health Sciences. For new programmes leading to degree awards, the process involves two stages: [1] establishment of a Business Case and [2] development of an Academic Proposal. Once a Business Case for a new programme has been submitted, it is reviewed internally by the A&QC Business Case Review Panel and feedback is given to the proposer. If/when the final Business Case has been approved by A&QC, a recommendation is made to the RCSI Senior Management Team which, if approved, will permit the proposer to progress to the second stage. At this stage

¹⁵ i.e. Programmes delivered at RCSI-Bahrain, RUMC and Soochow University.

the Academic Proposal undergoes an internal review by the A&QC Academic Case Review Panel. When the programme is approved by the internal reviewers, the programme is then subject to external assessment by an academic from outside the jurisdiction with expertise in the subject area. This is an iterative process and when both internal and external assessors approve the application, and any changes made during the process, the application is recommended to the Academic Council for approval by Medicine & Health Sciences Board (MHSB). The programme proposal may also be subject to external review by a NUI appointed external assessor, depending on the type of award. All programmes leading to major awards in the NFQ will be reviewed by at least two External Assessors, but a jointly appointed External Assessor may be sufficient for programmes leading to minor, special purpose or supplemental awards. Following a similar review process, where applicable, the application is presented for NUI approval to NUI Senate. Major changes to existing programmes are subject to a process similar to the Academic Proposal review for new programmes, with final approval by Academic Council, MHSB and NUI Senate. Minor changes are subject to a less extensive review.

[4.3.3.2] Student satisfaction & engagement surveys

Survey data collection in RCSI (both in Ireland and overseas) is centralised and managed by the Quality Enhancement Office. Feedback from undergraduate students is collected at the end of each Semester/Rotation, as appropriate. Postgraduate students are surveyed either once a year or, in a selection of taught postgraduate programmes, on a modular basis. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of results are reported to Year or Programme Directors who disseminate the findings to their staff and are also responsible for closing the feedback loop with students. Quantitative analyses of survey data are made available routinely to students via the Moodle virtual learning environment. Annually, the QEO conducts over 300 surveys. In addition to surveys of students in degree-awarding programmes, the QEO manages feedback processes for professional trainees & practitioners under the auspices of the National Surgical Training Programme and the Irish Institute of Pharmacy and for pharmacy experiential learning through the Affiliation for Pharmacy Practice Experiential Learning (APPEL).

Results are regularly reported to the Senior Management Team, year leads, teaching staff and professional departments. The Quality Committee and QEO continually emphasise the importance of closing the feedback loop with students following surveys, so that students can be assured that their opinions are valued and responded to. The collection and reporting of quality improvement actions is now captured in a Quality Enhancement Repository. Schools and professional departments that receive Student Pulse survey reports provide examples of good practice and actions undertaken in response to student feedback and select one example for communication to students. Thematic analysis of the actions is conducted by the QEO, submitted to the Quality Committee and Senior Management and presented to the wider RCSI community at an annual International Education Forum. The content is used to develop institutional “You said, we listened” campaigns that complement closing the feedback loop processes at programme and school level. The “You said, we listened” campaign typically uses a variety of channels to communicate enhancements in response to student feedback, including a Moodle page, student newsletter and social media.

In addition to routine end of semester feedback surveys, the QEO collects survey data for research purposes (in consultation with the RCSI Research Ethics Committee) and to support internal development initiatives, for example:

- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) surveys of staff and students as part of RCSI’s ongoing engagement with the Athena-SWAN Charter & awards process
- The PILLAR Study: Professionalism, Leadership and Resilience -administered to medical students
- Student Engagement and Partnership (StEP) projects which empower staff and students to work with and learn from each other, leading to tangible quality enhancement.

The QEO also supports RCSI’s engagement with other national and European surveys.

[4.3.3.3] Staff surveys

In parallel with its administration of student surveys, the QEO is responsible also for running and providing an analysis of quarterly staff surveys (Staff Pulse) in conjunction with the Human Resources Department and/or the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Unit. The QEO serves as a gatekeeper and data custodian for equality, diversity and inclusion data, ensuring that sensitive information shared by staff is adequately protected. A separate survey of new joiners is administered after each induction session.

[4.3.4] Periodic

[4.3.4.1] Internal Quality Reviews

As a Designated Awarding Body, RCSI is subject to statutory requirements to review the effectiveness of its internal QA policies and procedures through cyclical review of schools, faculties and professional support units, including international programmes and branch campuses. In conformity with the requirements of the relevant legislation and standards, these QA reviews are characterised by [a] the degree to which self-assessment drives the review process and [b] the overall focus on quality enhancement.

The IQR process follows a calendar of ‘rolling’ reviews approved by the RCSI Quality Committee in the context of its operational and strategic plans. Where feasible, the calendar will align with reviews being undertaken by PSRBs. These reviews occur in four parallel cycles:

- Reviews of Schools within the University of Medicine & Health Sciences
- Reviews of Postgraduate / Professional Faculties
- Reviews of Professional Support Units
- Reviews of Overseas Branch Campuses & Programmes

Scope of Reviews

In 2025, the QEO undertook a review of its Internal Quality Review (IQR) process. In line with QQI’s “Principles for Professional Engagements with Education Providers, including Programme Validation, Professional Accreditation and Approval”, it aimed to harmonise processes, avoid unnecessary duplication and overlap, and reduce the administrative burden. As a result, the following amendments to the IQR process can now be implemented, at the discretion of the QEO:

- In recognition of the maturity in the approach to quality within units, units that have completed two full Internal Quality Reviews may be offered the opportunity to undertake a thematic review.
- A thematic review may also be offered to overseas campuses that have completed one QEO Internal Quality Review in addition to an institutional review undertaken by a national quality agency.
- To avoid unnecessary duplication, the process can be amended to recognise other processes undertaken by the unit such as audits and accreditations.
- To reduce the administrative burden, units with less than 5 staff members may be offered an abridged process.

This flexibility also aligns with QQI’s Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016) which advocates for “a balanced, organisation-wide approach to the implementation of quality assurance procedures to ensure that:

- The burden of procedures does not obscure the purpose of establishing a quality culture
- A standardised approach does not obscure the ownership and primary focus on quality improvement”

Process

The Internal Quality Assurance Review process involves three distinct phases encompassing an approximately six-month time period.

Phase I – Self-assessment [2-3 months]

The unit under review undertakes a period of self-assessment focusing on four key questions:

- What do we do?
- How do we do it?
- How do we know it works?
- How might we do it better?

Typically a unit will take 2-3 months to complete its self-assessment, the main output of which is a Self-Assessment Report (SAR). SAR documents are usually brief (40 pages max.) and accompanied by supporting documents as required. The SAR is a confidential document seen only by the unit which produces it, the QEO & Quality Committee and the Peer Review Group involved in Phase II of the review (see below). The confidentiality of the SAR in this type of review is a guarantor of a 'safe space' in which the unit undergoing review can engage openly with the process.

Phase II – External Validation [4-6 weeks]

In parallel with developing the SAR, the unit works with the QEO to appoint a Peer Review Group (PRG) who act as critical friends to the Unit, carrying out a site-visit (of 2.5-3.0 days duration) and meeting with the unit's stakeholders. The PRG consists usually of five members [1 x QA specialist (Chair); 1 x student reviewer; 1 x internal RCSI nominee; 2 x external experts], but may vary depending on the needs of the unit under review. The primary role of the PRG is to validate the content of the SAR and to make recommendations for the future trajectory of the unit. The PRG will deliver an exit presentation at the end of the site visit and then will issue a Peer Review Group Report detailing their findings, commendations and recommendations. For smaller/thematic reviews, an online site visit may be offered.

Phase III – Quality Improvement Planning [4-6 weeks]

On receipt of the Peer Review Group Report, the unit develops a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) in response to the PRG recommendations. This takes a simple tabular format listing the actions planned in response to the recommendations of the PRG, with assignment of responsibility, timelines & budgetary implications. The final QIP is approved by relevant members of RCSI SMT. The QIP and the Peer Review Group Report are presented to the Quality Committee.

On completion of the review process, the Peer Review Group Report and QIP are published on the RCSI website as required by the legislation. However, due to its confidential nature, the SAR is never made public. As a means to ensure continuity between reviews, implementation of the QIP arising from the previous review is assessed mid-Cycle (i.e. after approx. 3-4 years) by MHSB or SPFB as appropriate.

[4.3.4.2] Programmatic Reviews

Programmatic Reviews at RCSI commenced in 2014 and are managed by the Awards and Qualification Committee (A&QC). A similar process is utilised for external programmatic reviews in Bahrain. All RCSI programmes which lead to qualifications or awards on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and which fall under the governance of the Medicine and Health Science Board and, ultimately, the National University of Ireland, are subject to this process.

In 2025, responsibility for administration of programmatic reviews moved from Registry to the QEO. In line with QQI's "Principles for Professional Engagements with Education Providers, including Programme Validation, Professional Accreditation and Approval" a new programme review process was developed to harmonise processes, avoid unnecessary duplication and overlap, and reduce the administrative burden. This process:

- Aligns Programmatic Reviews with Internal Quality Reviews. Although the Peer Review Group will oversee both processes concurrently, two reports will be produced – an IQR report, for Quality Committee (Dublin)/Quality Enhancement Committee (Bahrain), and PPR report(s), for A&QC.
- Recognises the results of Professional Body accreditation processes and recent A&QC processes (e.g. major changes) through implementation of a streamlined process for these programmes.

- Implements joint programmatic reviews for groups of cognate programmes.

The process involves the preparation of a Self-evaluation Report by the relevant programme director, an in-person/online site-visit, submission of a review report, and presentation of the report to A&QC, MHSB and to the NUI Senate. The possible outcomes of the Programmatic Review process are:

1. Full Confidence and revalidation
2. Limited Confidence - conditional approval subject to the fulfilment of certain conditions
3. Limited Confidence - the programme be subject to a process of re-validation through the A&QC
4. No Confidence. Recommend a programme be denied approval and the programme be withdrawn.

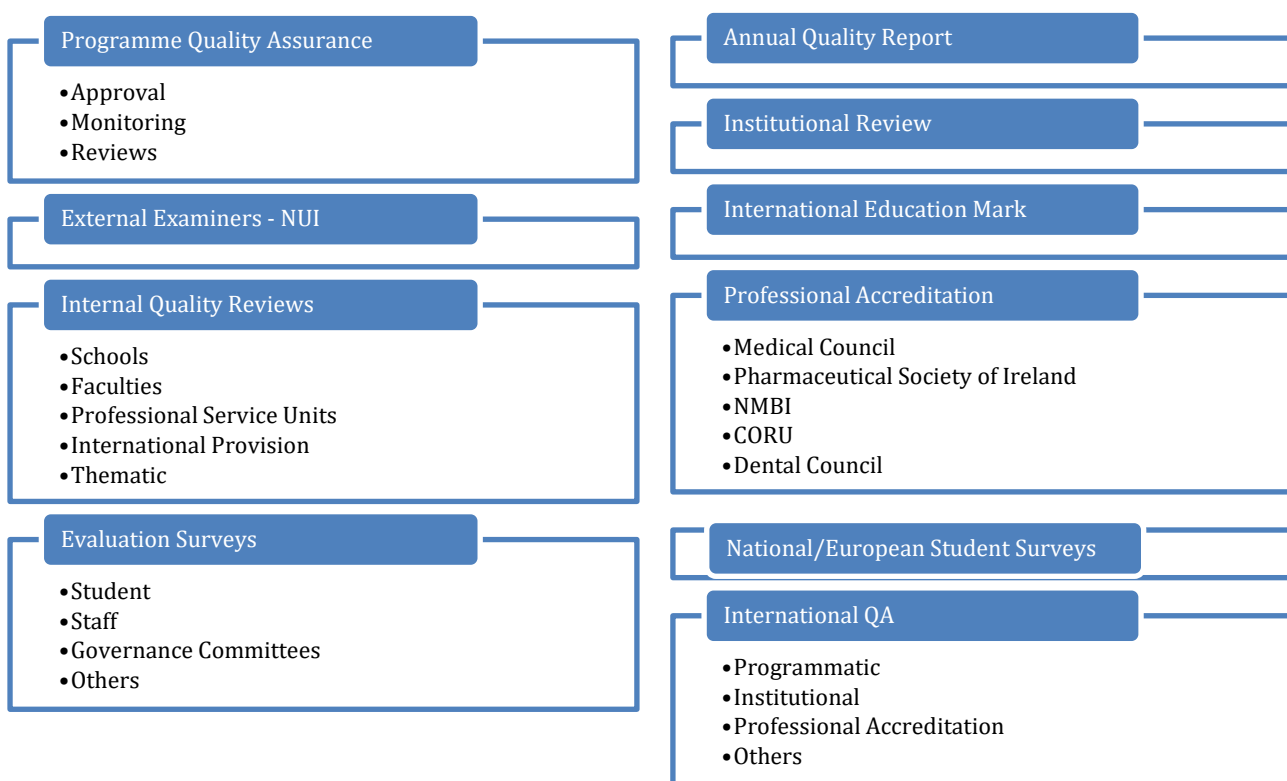
[4.3.4.3] Thematic & Bespoke Reviews

The QEO administers thematic and bespoke reviews on an occasional basis as directed by RCSI Senior Management, by MHSB or by SPFB.

[4.4] The NUI-RCSI Quality Assurance Relationship

As described above (Section 1.1), RCSI is both a Designated Awarding Body and a Recognised College of the National University of Ireland. Since the provisions of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 preclude one Designated Awarding Body from being deemed a Linked Provider of another Designated Awarding Body, RCSI is not a Linked Provider of NUI and therefore does not fall within scope of the Statutory Guidelines for NUI review of Linked Providers. Instead, as a Designated Awarding Body, QQI bears statutory responsibility for approval of RCSI QA policies and procedures and for periodic review of the effectiveness of these procedures. Nonetheless, an important QA relationship remains active between NUI and RCSI. The NUI Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework sets out NUI's approach to quality with specific reference to mechanisms for assuring and enhancing the quality of procedures regarding recognised colleges that are also linked providers of the University. A document has also been developed by the two institutions to describe the scope and nature of the NUI-RCSI Quality Assurance Relationship. This is published on both the [RCSI](#) and NUI websites.

Overview of the RCSI Quality Framework



Appendix 1: Membership & Terms of Reference of the RCSI Quality Committee (Rev 8 Final)

[1] Remit

The RCSI Quality Committee (QC) is responsible for the creation of policy and for the implementation of quality processes and quality assurance/quality improvement (QA/QI) activities across academic and administrative areas of all RCSI campuses.

[2] Membership

Composition	Name	Mode of selection
Vice Chancellor & CEO/Registrar, RCSI (Chair)	Prof Cathal Kelly	Ex Officio
President RCSI Bahrain	Prof Sameer Otoom	Ex Officio
Head of Quality Enhancement Office	Ms Aisling Reast	Ex Officio
Director of Quality and Academic Development, RCSI Bahrain	Dr Nichola McLarnon	Ex Officio
Representative, Medicine & Health Sciences Board (MHSB) nominated by MHSB ^a	Prof Fidelma Fitzpatrick <i>Appointed July 2022</i>	Nominated
Representative, Surgery & Postgraduate Faculties Board (SPFB) nominated by SPFB ^a	Ms Mary Godfrey <i>Appointed March 2025</i>	Nominated
External 'person of esteem' nominated by the Chief Executive Officer ^{a b}	Prof Brian Bowe <i>Appointed October 2021</i>	Nominated
External 'person of esteem' nominated by the Chief Executive Officer ^{a b}	Mr Tom Boland <i>Appointed April 2024</i>	Nominated
President of RCSI Students' Union	Postholder	Ex Officio
President of RCSI Postgraduate Students' Union	Postholder	Ex Officio
Convenor, Academic Integrity Committee	Dr Matthew Lynch <i>January 2021</i>	Ex Officio
Deputy Dean, International College of Pharmaceutical Innovation	Prof Brian Kirby <i>February 2024</i>	Ex Officio
Director of Psychometrics and Associate Professor	Prof Richard Arnett	In attendance
Quality Reviews Manager	Ms Anne Weadick	In attendance
Quality Assurance Data Analyst	Ms Tania Alonso	In attendance
Quality Assurance Administrator	Mr Daniel Casey	In attendance
Quality Enhancement Manager, RCSI Bahrain	Ms Mona Jawad	In attendance

^a All appointments are for three years or term of the office holder if different.

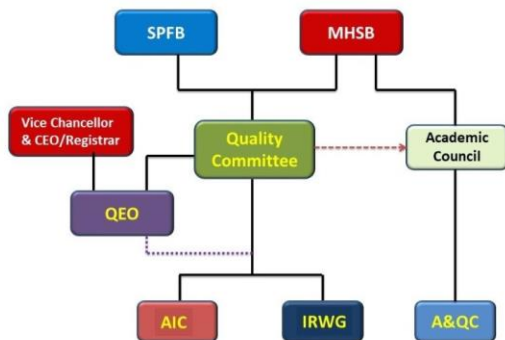
^b The period of office can be renewed for a further period of three years, up to a maximum of six years.

The Committee should aim to have gender representation not exceeding 60% of one gender and diverse representation, in so far as possible.

NB: Representatives of additional international RCSI programmes / campuses can be added to the QC as required.

[3] Reporting structure

The QC reporting structure is depicted schematically below:



The QC will report both to the Medicine & Health Sciences Board (MHSB) and the Surgery & Postgraduate Faculties Board (SPFB). The Quality Enhancement Office (QEO) will act as the 'executive arm' of the QC and will report to the Vice Chancellor & CEO/Registrar of RCSI. The QC will have two sub-committees reporting to it, the Academic Integrity Committee (AIC) and the Institutional Review Working Group (IRWG). The AIC is a formal structure to allow RCSI to monitor and respond to initiatives launched by the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) and by Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI) in the area of Academic Integrity. The IRWG is responsible for the management of Institutional Reviews conducted by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) under the terms of the Universities Act 1997, the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Amendment Act 2019. The QEO will coordinate and support the work of the AIC and the IRWG.

The Awards & Qualifications Committee (A&QC) reports to the Academic Council (AC). Because of the key role played by the AC as a forum for heads of academic departments and of administrative functions, the QC also will have a reporting relationship to AC to ensure that its members are apprised of QA/QI issues and activities; specifically this will mean that reports & documents issued by the QC through the QEO will be communicated to the AC for information on a discretionary basis.

[4] QC terms of reference

- to develop and maintain a quality focus in all RCSI activities
- to monitor quality issues and to advise MHSB, SFPB, AC, College Board & RCSI Council as required
- to oversee all QA/QI activities and to support units (Schools and professional service units) undertaking external and internal reviews across RCSI campuses (see Appendix 1)
- to monitor and review internal QA/QI policies and procedures
- to promote and support quality practices in assessment
- to monitor the implementation of Quality Improvement Plans developed by RCSI units following reviews
- to commission appropriate QA/QI activities in response to internal and external requirements
- to monitor and develop the RCSI QA/QI strategy in line with institutional requirements, local legislative requirements and international best practice
- to oversee an internal programme of 'rolling reviews' of academic units (at the level of Schools), of professional service units, of Postgraduate Faculties within RCSI and of RCSI international campuses

[5] Frequency of meetings

The QC will meet quarterly.

Annex A: The management of QA/QI processes on RCSI international campuses

In addition to the development and implementation of RCSI QA/QI policies and procedures across all campuses, the Quality Committee (QC) will play a significant role in supporting the international campuses in their interactions with local QA/QI structures and processes.

[a] Each international campus will constitute a local Quality Assurance/Enhancement Committee (QAC/QEC) which will report to the QC, through an appropriate mechanism; for example, the Chair of the RCSI-Bahrain QEC will be the Bahrain representative on the RCSI QC, the Head of the QEO sits on RUMC's Quality Committee

[b] Each international campus will appoint a part- or full-time member of administrative staff to act as Quality Officer to facilitate the work of the QAC/QEC and to manage local QA/QI activities & liaison with the QEO (Dublin) on a day-to-day basis.

[c] Schools and Professional Service Units located on international campuses will participate in Institutional Reviews of RCSI (under the aegis of QQI) and in internal reviews run by the QEO.

[d] The QEO will support and assist QAC/QECs on international campuses in QA/QI processes mandated by local institutions and/or legislation.