



Ollscoil na hÉireann  
National University of Ireland



RCSI

UNIVERSITY  
OF MEDICINE  
AND HEALTH  
SCIENCES

# The Quality Assurance Relationship between the National University of Ireland and RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences





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Front cover inset image from NUI's murals (c.1820).  
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## 1 Purpose of this Document

This document sets out the nature and scope of the quality assurance (QA) relationship between the National University of Ireland (NUI) and RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences, (hereinafter referred to as RCSI).

The NUI-RCSI QA relationship has its basis in the Statutes of the National University of Ireland (1908, as amended),<sup>1</sup> which govern NUI's relationships with its recognised colleges. RCSI has been a recognised college of NUI since 1977. Interpreting QA in its broadest sense, the relationship aims to confirm that the education and research programmes offered and awarded by RCSI, which lead to degrees and other qualifications of the National University of Ireland, are comparable to those provided by the constituent universities of NUI.

While the overarching QA relationship as provided for in NUI Statutes endures, the scope of the NUI-RCSI QA relationship altered when RCSI gained independent awarding powers in 2010, followed by designated awarding body (DAB) status as provided for in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012. Since 2012, RCSI's quality assurance policies and procedures are subject to approval by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the state agency, which carries out the statutory requirement to externally review all HEIs' institutional QA systems, including RCSI's, once every seven years.

The NUI-RCSI QA relationship assures NUI, within its own statutory obligations, of the continuing quality of RCSI programmes of study leading to NUI-RCSI degrees and qualifications.

1. Statutory Provisions Governing the Recognised Colleges of the National University of Ireland (NUI Statute 86, Chapter LIX: 'Recognised Colleges' and as amended by Statute 268).

## 2 Background and Context

The **National University of Ireland (NUI)** is a federal university established by law under the Irish Universities Act 1908 and restructured under the 1997 Universities Act. NUI comprises, in law, four autonomous constituent universities. Separately from these, NUI is empowered under its charter and by statute, to recognise other higher education institutions and to award degrees and other qualifications of the National University of Ireland in those institutions. The nomenclature used by NUI as in the 1997 Act is 'NUI recognised college' though NUI will often refer to 'member institutions' to encompass the full collective of recognised colleges, constituent universities and their associated colleges.

The **Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI)** is the second oldest third-level academic institution in Ireland. Established in 1784, RCSI is both a health sciences university and a postgraduate training body in medicine and health sciences. RCSI hosts schools of Medicine, Nursing & Midwifery, Pharmacy & Biomolecular Sciences, Physiotherapy, Postgraduate Studies, Population Health, Dentistry, and a Graduate School of Healthcare Management. and was granted university status in 2019.

## 3 Impact of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012

### 3.1 NUI

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 defined NUI as a 'designated awarding body' (DAB). In large part, this designation carries on NUI's long-standing statutory degree-awarding role, however the 2012 Act placed additional requirements on NUI in the area of quality assurance.

### 3.2 RCSI

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 also defined RCSI as a DAB. Further to this, Schedule 3 (9) of the 2012 Act amended the Universities Act 1997 to introduce Section 47A, which provides that the degrees and qualifications of RCSI shall be degrees and qualifications of the National University of Ireland where they are approved by NUI, and while RCSI remains a recognised college of NUI. This legislative change was subsequently reflected in an amendment to NUI Statutes, namely, the insertion of Statute 268, which states:

*Where a Recognised College is granted the power to award its own degrees, but wishes to remain a Recognised College of the University, and where it is the opinion of the Senate that the College should continue to be recognised, then the degrees and other qualifications awarded by the Recognised College, where these are also approved by the Senate, shall continue to be degrees and other qualifications of the National University of Ireland.*

### 3.3 The NUI-RCSI Quality Assurance Relationship

The above-noted legislative changes and statutory amendments re-affirmed the centrality of the NUI-RCSI relationship in terms of the degrees and other qualifications offered to students.

As RCSI is not a linked provider of NUI, it falls outside the scope of the *Statutory Guidelines for NUI Review of Linked Providers*. Instead, because RCSI is a DAB, QQI bears statutory responsibility for approval of RCSI's QA policies and procedures and for periodic review of the effectiveness of these procedures at institutional level.

NUI does not have statutory responsibility for the approval of RCSI's QA policies and procedures. Leading on from this, NUI is not responsible for carrying out external institutional review of the effectiveness of RCSI's QA policies and procedures. These statutory responsibilities rest with QQI.

It is nonetheless also evident that the relationship between both institutions is one that is concerned with academic provision for students and has quality assurance at its core, given the statutory provision that RCSI degrees and qualifications are degrees and qualifications of NUI and where these are approved by NUI Senate, for as long as RCSI remains a recognised college.

NUI's *Framework for Quality Assurance and Enhancement*<sup>2</sup> and the *National University of Ireland Quality Policy*<sup>3</sup> set out the responsibilities of NUI and its member institutions, including RCSI, with regard to maintaining the high standard of educational programmes. The *NUI Quality Policy*, in particular, outlines the applicable associated policies.

## 4 Governance and Management of the NUI-RCSI Relationship

The overall governance of the NUI-RCSI relationship is the responsibility of the Senate (governing body) of the National University of Ireland and the RCSI Medicine & Health Sciences Board. The Vice Chancellor of RCSI is, by tradition, co-opted as a member of NUI Senate.

In terms of ongoing management of the business relationship between NUI and RCSI, the principal mechanism is the 'NUI-RCSI Working Group Executive (WGE)', which meets quarterly. WGE meetings are usually scheduled to coincide with RCSI examination board meetings and the meetings of NUI Senate, and the location of the WGE meeting alternates between NUI and RCSI, with some meetings taking place virtually.

The membership of the WGE normally consists of the following post-holders, noting that the WGE reserves the right to co-opt additional members where necessary for the benefit of gaining relevant expertise in defined areas:

NUI	RCSI
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Registrar</li> <li>Head of Academic Services and Registry</li> <li>Manager of Academic Affairs (or nominee).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs</li> <li>Associate Director for Academic Affairs</li> <li>Head of Registry Services</li> <li>Chair, Awards &amp; Qualifications Committee</li> <li>Head of Quality Enhancement</li> </ul>

2. NUI (2023) *Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework*. Available at: [https://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce\\_docs/NUI\\_QAE\\_Framework\\_2023.pdf](https://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/NUI_QAE_Framework_2023.pdf).

3. NUI (2024) *National University of Ireland Quality Policy*. Available at: <https://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/policy/NUIQualityPolicy.pdf>.

Standing agenda items at WGE meetings include:

- Approval by Senate of new RCSI academic programmes and of major and minor changes to existing programmes that lead to NUI-RCSI qualifications
- Any other points relating to the RCSI programme portfolio leading to NUI-RCSI qualifications
- Quality assurance provision and arrangements
- RCSI collaborative and/or transnational provision
- External examiners (appointment by NUI in line with approved NUI Policy)
- Conferrings and related operational matters
- Any other business, including legislative or sectoral policy developments relevant to RCSI and/or NUI and strategic developments within RCSI or NUI.

## 5 RCSI Internal Governance Structures relevant to Degree Awards

Following the granting of independent degree-awarding powers in 2010, RCSI established the Medicine & Health Sciences Board (MHSB). The MHSB is the governing body for all RCSI educational programmes leading to degree awards aligned to the Irish National Framework of Qualifications.

In relation to the exercise of RCSI's degree-awarding powers, MHSB is the ultimate decision-making body in RCSI. The RCSI Awards and Qualifications Committee manages processes relating to the validation and approval of new programmes, and to the periodic review and re-validation of existing programmes, reporting through Academic Council and thence to the MHSB. In the context of RCSI awards with NUI accreditation, the MHSB and NUI Senate relationship is described below.

## 6 The Role of NUI in Quality Assurance of RCSI Degree Awards

### 6.1 Validation and Approval of New Programmes

The RCSI Awards and Qualifications Committee (A&QC) is responsible for the approval and validation of new educational programmes leading to RCSI degree awards aligned with Ireland's National Framework of Qualifications. It is responsible also for the revalidation of existing programmes to which minor or major changes are proposed within RCSI.

For new programmes, an academic proposal is developed following approval of a business case by the RCSI Senior Management Team.

The academic proposal is reviewed by the A&QC initially, and then undergoes an external and independent review by RCSI- and NUI-appointed assessors.

On successful completion of this review process, the programme is recommended for approval to MHSB and NUI Senate. Major changes to existing programmes are subject to a similar process as for new programmes.

Minor changes (when deemed to be within this definition) are subject to a less extensive review and are noted by MHSB and NUI Senate.

In relation to the approval of new programmes and major/minor changes to existing programmes, RCSI's quality processes align with NUI's *Regulations, NUI (2020) Guidelines and Procedures for the Approval of New Programmes and Changes to Existing Programmes in the Recognised Colleges*. Available at: [https://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce\\_docs/Programme\\_Approval\\_Regs.pdf](https://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/Programme_Approval_Regs.pdf)

### 6.2 Ongoing Quality Assurance of Existing Programmes

The quality assurance of existing programmes is managed on an ongoing basis by the RCSI's academic schools, internal governance committees, examination boards and registry functions, through the monitoring and analysis of multiple data-streams:

- Student feedback surveys (semester-based or more frequent)
- In-course examination results (semester- or academic year-based)
- Exit (i.e. final end of programme) examination results
- External examiners' reports
- Accreditation reports issued by the relevant professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)
- Programmatic Review reports.

NUI has a direct involvement in this primarily through its statutory role to approve and appoint external examiners for all RCSI degree programmes. These examiners report directly to NUI (and thence to RCSI) and have access to examination results and to examples of students' assessed work. They are involved in aspects of the examinations process and in examination board meetings. In addition, the NUI Registrar and RCSI Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs co-chair examination award board meetings in RCSI.

### 6.3 Periodic, External Review of Existing Programmes

The RCSI A&QC administers a rolling cycle of periodic programmatic reviews. The aim is to ensure that existing programmes can be re-validated and re-accredited as RCSI degrees, which are NUI degrees as per schedule 47A of the (amended) Universities Act. Reviews focus on the quality assurance arrangements for existing programmes in a particular discipline or subject area. The reviews are carried out in line with relevant quality assurance guidelines and use specific indicators benchmarked to international best practice. The reports arising from the periodic reviews will make judgments about whether programmes continue to meet minimum standards as well as recommending improvements.

For programmes undergoing review, the relevant school completes a self-evaluation report on the programme which forms the basis for a site-visit by a peer-review group consisting of a chairperson and a number of external reviewers with programme-relevant expertise. The final report summary is submitted to MHSB for noting, and subsequently shared with the WGE. NUI uses this summary report to support NUI Senate re-validation of the relevant academic programme for the subsequent cycle.

## 7 Involvement in Institutional Review by Quality & Qualifications Ireland

Both NUI and RCSI are subject to external institutional review by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). NUI is a key stakeholder in the RCSI institutional reviews and RCSI is a key stakeholder in the NUI institutional reviews.<sup>4</sup>

4. The most recent cycle of reviews (CINNTE) took place for both institutions in 2022-23. Reports are available on the QQI website: <https://www.qqi.ie/what-we-do/quality-assurance-education-training/reviews>



**Ollscoil na hÉireann**  
National University of Ireland

49 Merrion Square, Dublin 2, D02 V583  
Tel: +353 1 439 2424  
info@nui.ie  
www.nui.ie

