

The Quality Assurance Relationship between the
National University of Ireland and the
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland –
University of Medicine and Health Sciences

January 2020



Ollscoil na hÉireann
National University of Ireland



RCSI

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1. Purpose of this document

This document sets out the nature and scope of the Quality Assurance (QA) relationship between NUI and RCSI – University of Medicine and Health Sciences, (hereinafter referred to in this document as RCSI) which has been a Recognised College of NUI since 1977.¹

The NUI-RCSI QA relationship has its basis in the Statutes of the National University of Ireland (1908, as amended)² which govern NUI's relationships with its Recognised Colleges. Interpreting QA in its broadest sense, the relationship aims to ensure 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 of a high academic standard that is comparable to that provided by the constituent universities of NUI. This is an important QA relationship which assures not only NUI but also students and the wider public of the quality of RCSI programmes of study leading to NUI degrees and qualifications.

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. In summary, 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 RCSI's institutional QA system once every seven years.

1 On 10th December 2019, the Minister for Education and Skills, Mr Joe McHugh TD, granted authorisation to RCSI to use the title "university" in Ireland, under the terms of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Amendment Act 2019.

2 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 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 in those institutions. The nomenclature used by NUI as in the 1997 Act is that of 'NUI Recognised College'.

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 Higher Education Institution with Schools of Leadership, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy and Graduate Studies, and a Postgraduate Training Body in Surgery and related specialties. RCSI is one of four Royal Colleges of Surgeons in Great Britain and Ireland (Edinburgh, Glasgow, England and Ireland), which espouse standards of excellence in surgery as their guiding principle. The RCSI School of Medicine was established in 1886 and RCSI became a Recognised College of NUI in 1977. RCSI gained independent degree-awarding powers in 2010 and became a Designated Awarding Body in 2012. In 2019, RCSI was authorised to use the title "university" in Ireland, having been authorised to do so overseas since 2015.

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 the University 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 the University in the area of Quality Assurance. NUI became obliged to establish quality assurance arrangements in respect of 'Linked Provider' institutions that deliver educational programmes leading to awards of the University. Linked Provider institutions were defined in the 2012 Act as those without degree-awarding powers themselves but which enter into an arrangement with a DAB in order to provide accredited programmes of education and training. In 2019, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) published '*Statutory Guidelines for NUI for the Review of its Linked Providers*'³.

3.2 RCSI

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 also defined RCSI as a 'Designated Awarding Body'. 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 QQI Statutory Guidelines for the Review of Linked Providers by the National University of Ireland, March 2019/ QP21 (accessible at: www.qqi.ie and at http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/Statutory_Guidelines_for_the_Review_of_Linked_Providers_by_the_NUI.pdf)

3.3 The NUI-RCSI Quality Assurance relationship

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

In relation to responsibilities for Quality Assurance however, 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. It is therefore the case that, although an 'NUI Recognised College', RCSI is not a Linked Provider of NUI and therefore does not fall within scope of the 2019 Statutory Guidelines for NUI review of Linked Providers. Instead, because RCSI is a Designated Awarding Body, QQI bears statutory responsibility for approval of RCSI's QA policies and procedures and for periodic review of the effectiveness of these procedures (institution-wide).

It is therefore clear that, further to the 2012 Act, 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, for as long as RCSI remains a Recognised College.

NUI's own *Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement*⁴ sets out a series of objectives that arise from NUI's broad definition of quality assurance. This emphasises the importance of a high standard of academic programmes and of procedures relating to the approval, monitoring and review of all such programmes leading to NUI qualifications in the Recognised Colleges. This policy remains relevant to RCSI and is implemented on a regular and ongoing basis during each and every academic cycle.

4 NUI Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement. November 2017, accessible at http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/NUI_Quality_Assurance_Policy_2018.pdf

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 and Health Sciences Board. The Chief Executive Officer 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.

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

NUI	RCSI
Registrar Head of Registry and Academic Services Manager of Academic Affairs (or nominee).	Dean/Chief Academic Officer Associate Director for Academic Affairs Manager of Registry Services Chair, Awards and Qualifications Committee Director of Quality Enhancement

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 qualifications;
- ▶ Any other points relating to the RCSI Programme Portfolio leading to NUI Qualifications;
- ▶ Quality Assurance Provision and arrangements;
- ▶ RCSI Collaborative and/or Transnational Provision;
- ▶ External Examiners (appointment by NUI in line with approved NUI Policy);
- ▶ Conferings 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 and Health Sciences Board (MHSB) and the Surgery and Postgraduate Faculties Board (SPFB). The MHSB is the governing body for all RCSI educational programmes leading to degree awards aligned to the Irish National Framework of Qualifications, while SPFB is the cognate body governing RCSI postgraduate/professional training and certification in Surgery and related specialties.

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 the periodic review and re-validation of existing programmes, reporting to Academic Council and thence to 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 (AQC) 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 by Schools within the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences. For new programmes, 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 AQC Business Case Review Panel and feedback is given to the proposer. If/when the final Business Case has been approved by AQC, a recommendation is made to the RCSI Senior Management Team which, if approved, will permit the proposer to progress to the second stage. The Academic Proposal is subject initially to internal review by the AQC Academic Case Review Panel in an iterative process that leads ultimately to external, independent review of the programme proposal by separate RCSI and NUI-appointed assessors. On successful completion of this external review process, the programme is recommended for approval to MHSB and ultimately, to NUI Senate.

Major changes to existing programmes are subject to a process similar to the Academic Proposal review for new programmes, while minor changes are subject to a less extensive review, with final approval in both cases by MHSB and NUI Senate.

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:

- i. Student feedback surveys (semester-based or, exceptionally, more frequent)
- ii. In-course examination results (semester- or academic year-based)
- iii. Exit (i.e. final end of programme) examination results
- iv. External examiners' reports
- v. Accreditation reports issued by the relevant Postgraduate Regulatory Statutory Bodies
- vi. 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, and they are involved in aspects of the examinations process and in Examination Board meetings. In addition, the NUI Registrar and RCSI Dean/Chief Academic officer co-chair Examination Board meetings in RCSI.

6.3 Periodic, external review of existing programmes

The RCSI Awards and Qualifications Committee 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 degrees of the National University of Ireland 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 NUI and RCSI 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 head of academic unit completes a self-evaluation report on the programme which forms the basis for a site-visit by a peer-review panel consisting of a chairperson and two external peer reviewers, one appointed by NUI and one by RCSI. The final report summary is submitted to MHSB for noting, following which it is circulated to NUI to support NUI Senate re-validation of the relevant academic programme for the subsequent cycle.

7. Involvement in Institutional Review by Quality and Qualifications Ireland

RCSI was subject to Institutional Review by Quality and Qualifications Ireland in 2013-2014 as part of the last Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB)/QQI Review Cycle. While NUI was not itself reviewed by IUQB/ QQI in that Cycle, NUI was a key stakeholder for the RCSI Institutional Review and, as such, had an opportunity to meet with the Review Panel which conducted the RCSI Institutional Review. QQI commenced the current 'CINNTE' Cycle of Institutional Reviews in 2017, with NUI scheduled for review in 2022-2023 and RCSI also in 2022-2023. It is anticipated that RCSI will be involved as a key stakeholder in the Institutional Review of NUI, and that NUI will be involved similarly in the Institutional Review of RCSI.





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