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IRIU REPORT

Institutional Review of the
National University
of Ireland Maynooth

~ MARCH 2010 ~

IRIU

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW
OF IRISH UNIVERSITIES

THE IRIU OF NUI MAYNOOTH

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FOREWORD BY THE IUQB

The Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) was established in 2002 to support and promote a culture of quality in Irish Higher Education and independently evaluate the effectiveness of quality processes in Irish Universities, as required by the Universities Act, 1997.

In 2004, the IUQB and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) jointly commissioned the European Universities Association (EUA) to undertake the first cycle of institutional quality reviews of the seven Irish Universities.

In 2009, following consultation with a range of key stakeholders, IUQB finalised the process for the second cycle of institutional quality reviews. This process, which operates in line with National legislation and agreed European Standards, is termed the Institutional Review of Irish Universities (IRIU). Reports arising from institutional quality assurance reviews of and by Irish Universities, in accordance with the Universities Act, 1997, are published at: http://reviews.iuqb.net/.
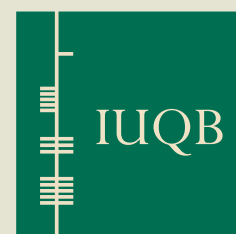
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THE REVIEW TEAM

The NUI Maynooth review was conducted by the following team of six reviewers selected by the IUQB Board from the IRIU Register of Reviewers in June 2009. The Review Team was trained by the IUQB on the requirements of the IRIU process on Thursday 26 November 2009. The Chair and Coordinating Reviewer undertook a Planning Visit to NUIM on Friday 27 November 2009. The Main Review Visit was conducted by the full Team between 7 and 10 December 2009. The IUQB Board approved the release of the NUIM reports for publication on Monday 15 March 2010.

Professor Simon van Heyningen, Honorary Fellow & Emeritus Professor, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, UK (Chair)
- » Vice Principal at the University of Edinburgh, UK, 2003-2009
- » Director of Quality Assurance at the University of Edinburgh 1998-2009
- » UK/Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Reviewer and Auditor for the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in South Africa

Dr Jacques Lanares, Vice Rector for the Development of Teaching and Quality, University of Lausanne, Switzerland
- » Responsible for Institutional Quality of Learning and Teaching at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland
- » Chair of the Quality Network for Swiss Higher Education Institutions
- » Expert - European University Association (EUA) and Assessment Agency Research and Higher Education (AERES) - France)

Professor Roger Downer, Former President, University of Limerick, Ireland
- » President of the University of Limerick (UL), 1998-2006
- » Former President of the Asian Institute of Technology and Former Vice President, University of Waterloo
- » Chair of review panels at four Canadian Universities

Dr Christiane Gaehtgens, Consultant specialising in governance and quality assurance for universities and research institutes, Germany
- » Previously Secretary General of the German Rectors' Conference and Secretary General Research Council for Lower Saxony
- » Director of Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst (DAAD) - German Academic Exchange Service, London and Head of the DAAD North America Programmes
- » Senior official in the German Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority (HKO) responsible for reviews of German Universities 2003-2008

Mr Bruno Carapinha, University of Lisbon, Doctoral programme in Political Science, Portugal
- » President of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) Executive Board and Member of the European Quality Assurance Forum Steering Committee
- » European Students Union (ESU) Executive Committee Member and Member of the ESU's Pool of Experts
- » European University Association (EUA) Expert and Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) Reviewer

Ms Tia Loukkola, Head of Unit, European University Association, Belgium *(Co-ordinating Reviewer)*
- » Manages the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP), manages the Annual European QA Forum
- » Secretary to numerous IEP evaluation teams
- » Former Quality Manager, University of Turku, Finland

REVIEW REPORT

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

THE UNIVERSITY

The National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM) was established in its present form as a Constituent University of the National University of Ireland (NUI) in 1997. Previously, from 1910, it was a Recognised College of NUI and a part of St. Patrick's College Maynooth, which was established in 1795, and with which NUI Maynooth continues to share a campus.

The mission of NUIM is to be "recognised as a leading liberal arts and science University with an international reputation for teaching and research, which promotes access and inclusiveness, fosters the intellectual and personal development of its students and staff and supports the economic, social and cultural well-being of the communities it serves".

NUI Maynooth has three Faculties: Arts, Celtic Studies and Philosophy; Science and Engineering; and Social Sciences. There are 28 departments, divided among the Faculties, and these serve as the basic operational units of the University.

Evidence considered by the Team suggests that at the time of the review, NUIM was the smallest of the seven Irish universities in terms of student population (approximately 7900, October 2009). However, Higher Education Authority (HEA) data confirms that over recent years, it has expanded rapidly to become one of the fastest growing universities in Ireland. This growth is expected to continue in the future. The recent growth of the University has brought with it many challenges which will be dealt with in detail later in this report. Yet while the number of students has grown considerably, the financial resources have not increased proportionately, despite the University's efforts to secure additional funding. Consequently, there has been little increase in the number of staff, resulting in a larger student-staff ratio than is normal in the sector.

APPROACH TO QUALITY

The relatively recent expansion of the University over recent years, combined with the financial crisis which is affecting Ireland at the time of this review, has presented major challenges to the University leadership. These include: ensuring optimal deployment of existing scarce resources, maintaining the morale of the staff and students at a time when cut-backs and prioritising are part of daily life, retaining competent and accomplished staff and generally maintaining the quality of activities with existing resources.

According to the University's Policy on Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement, NUI Maynooth "has a broad approach to quality assurance and enhancement embedded in its culture of collegially driven innovation that is aimed at sustaining and enhancing an underlying commitment to excellence in all activities […].

Quality assurance and quality enhancement in NUI Maynooth will be supported through a combination of policies and procedures implemented on an ongoing basis, and periodic reviews of all units of the University.

The implementation of all quality related activities will normally involve participation by staff and students, evidence based methodologies and a combination of internal and external peer review panels."

According to NUIM's Institutional Self Assessment Report (ISAR), the University has maintained a balanced budget in the current economic climate. This is seen by the Team as a demonstration of responsible fiscal management. This is particularly relevant in the context of the present review because constrained financial resources impact seriously on the University's ability to ensure high quality in all aspects of the operation.

Despite the fiscal and managerial challenges faced by the University during the time of this review, the Team interviewed many staff and students and, on the basis of the comments received, was persuaded that NUI Maynooth forms a strong, functioning and supportive academic community. There was general satisfaction with the sense of community and collegiality that prevails in the campus and the marketing slogan of the University – "Maynooth experience" – was endorsed several times as a genuine and positive feeling.

With regard to the decision-making structures, the Team was pleased to note the excellent liaison between senior governing bodies of the University. The distribution of responsibilities and roles between the Governing Authority, President and other senior officers of the University seems to work well and the overall impression is of a shared sense of commitment to the University and a common vision on how to develop NUIM further.

The Review team concluded that the broad approach to quality assurance and quality enhancement promoted in the University's policy document reflects the reality within the University. Various University policies adopted in recent years have harmonised practices between departments and facilitated quality assurance. The statement of this approach directly in the Quality Policy document is welcomed.

EXTERNAL CONTEXT

A recurring theme in many meetings was the negative impact of funding constraints upon the pursuit of quality. The consequences are evident in large class sizes, lecturer-to-student ratios that, from the evidence considered by the Team, compare unfavourably with those in other universities in Ireland, inadequate funding for maintenance of teaching and research equipment, a low level of start-up funds for new faculty members and, at the time of the visit, crowded library facilities There is a strong sense across the institution that NUI Maynooth is disadvantaged under the present Recurrent Grant Allocation Model relative to other more established universities. Accordingly, it is strongly recommended that the President and Chair of the Governing Authority make vigorous representations to the highest levels of Government in an attempt to tackle the current funding impediments. These should endeavour to address the growing frustration over the current levels of micromanagement by Government (such as the implementation of the sector-wide Employment Control Framework) that the Team believes is eroding institutional autonomy and thwarting institutional ambition. Universities should be allowed freedom to develop independent institutional visions, and trends towards homogeneity within the Irish University system should be discouraged.

The Irish Universities Association (IUA), as champions of the University sector, is advised to continue lobbying the Government to ensure that Irish Universities receive the funds required to enable international competitiveness both in teaching and research.

Notwithstanding the importance of strong advocacy for increased State funding, NUIM must also demonstrate innovative strategies and capacity for management with limited resources. This will require creative and effective deployment of physical and human resources, possible merger or consolidation of academic and administrative units, rationalisation of all programmes/courses offered and utilisation of new technologies to achieve greater efficiencies.

It was mentioned several times during the interviews that the small size of NUI Maynooth is one of its strengths; it facilitates informal communication, allows a personal touch, and supports the quality assurance processes. As a member of staff indicated, "in a university this small it is not possible to hide". As the University has grown considerably in recent years and is likely to continue to do so, there is a risk of losing some of the benefits that derive from its current small size. For example, in a small community, informal channels of communication are highly effective but, as the University grows, more formal structures will be required. Continuing growth will result also in increasing tension due to demand for constrained resources.

INTERNAL EFFECTIVENESS

NUIM should address as a matter of urgency the lack of adequate administrative support for Deans and Heads of academic Departments. The Team learnt that currently Heads of Departments and Deans, who play a crucial role in the implementation and communication of the University's strategic plans and overall management, have what appeared to be grossly inadequate support in their work. The Heads of academic Departments, who are usually actively teaching and doing research, are doing all the administrative work related to their work by themselves, which the Team feels does not reflect an appropriate use of resources. As the ISAR of NUIM (p. 66) puts it: "Three-quarters of Heads feel that they spend too much time on administration at the expense of academic matters". This was confirmed during the interviews, when the Team heard reports that, indeed, several Deans and Heads of Departments felt that their time spent in committee meetings is too high.

In particular, considering the amount of responsibilities a Head of Department has, it seems that it would be more cost effective to focus these management responsibilities among fewer people and larger departments might facilitate co-operation between disciplines. Although the Review Team recognises what the representatives of the staff brought up, on several occasions, that small departments are one strength of the University, it tends to agree with the EUA review from 2005 which noted that "[m]any Departments are too small, in terms of student and staff numbers as well as in breadth of discipline, to be successful in addressing the challenges which the University will now face". For a relatively small University, there are indeed quite a significant number of departments and a large variety of committees in NUIM. Furthermore, the Team feels that moving to larger units should enable better use of resources and thus improved administrative help. Thus, the University is encouraged to think fundamentally about its organisational and committee structures.

COMMENDATIONS:

1.1   The distribution of responsibilities and roles between the Governing Authority, President and other senior officers of the University seems to work well;

1.2   The overall impression is of a shared sense of commitment to the University and a common vision on how to develop NUIM further;

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1.3   The President and Chair of the Governing Authority should make vigorous representations to the highest levels of Government in an attempt to tackle the current funding impediments;

1.4   The Irish Universities Association (IUA) is advised to lobby the Government to ensure the Irish Universities receive the funds required to enable international competitiveness both in teaching and research;

1.5   NUIM must demonstrate innovative strategies and the capacity for management with limited resources;

1.6   NUIM should address as a matter of urgency the lack of adequate administrative support for Deans and Heads of Academic Departments;

1.7   NUIM is encouraged to think fundamentally about its organisational and committee structures with an aim to prioritise and focus.

INSTITUTIONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT (ISAR)

ENGAGEMENT WITH IRIU

The IRIU process was launched by the IUQB in March 2009. In June 2009, NUI Maynooth volunteered to be the first Irish University to undergo the new external quality assurance process and accepted the task at extremely short notice. In September 2009, the University set up the ISAR Working Group which consisted of members of the Quality Promotion Sub-Committee, together with the Director of Student Services, a representative from the International Office and another student representative. The Group which was chaired by the Deputy President consisted of Vice Presidents, Deans, some senior administrative managers, key people involved in quality assurance processes at institutional level as well as a student representative.

The ISAR group met on four occasions to consider drafts with each member of the group responsible for writing various parts of the report. Meetings were held with the three Faculties and a workshop with all Heads of Departments in order to gather further views on the drafts which were also shared with the entire University community via the web. Furthermore, a late draft of the report was discussed by the Planning, Development and Finance Committee of the Governing Authority and the Teaching and Learning Committee of the Academic Council. All Heads of Departments and the student leaders were invited to comment on the penultimate draft which was also posted on the web for feedback. The Report, which was mostly compiled and edited by the Deputy President, was approved by the Governing Authority in early November 2009 and sent to the Review Team immediately afterwards, via IUQB.

INSTITUTIONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT (ISAR)

The Review Team was genuinely impressed by the amount of work and commitment invested in the self-assessment process in such a short period. The University managed to engage a remarkably large part of the University community in the exercise and produced a report which provides a comprehensive and candid picture of the University's activities. The Team commends NUIM for having the courage to be the first University to undergo the IRIU process.

The Review Team feels that the review process has enabled the University to boost its commitment to quality and, although the period for preparing the ISAR was extremely short, already there have been positive outcomes: for the first time, all policy documents related to quality assurance and enhancement were collected together and the University formulated and adopted a policy document on quality assurance and enhancement which expresses the philosophy underpinning all QA activities. Furthermore, what the team heard during the interviews assured it that the process has raised awareness within the community of quality assurance.

While the Team was impressed by the completion of the self-assessment process at such short notice, it found the self-assessment report to be too long. The Team recognises that this is partly due to the fact that the time available to compile the report was limited and, as members of the ISAR group indicated, the report probably would have been shortened if more time had been available. Nevertheless, the Team would have appreciated a more concise and less descriptive report with more emphasis on self-analysis.

The Review Team encourages the University to continue the work that has been done in quality assurance and enhancement to date and hopes that NUIM take advantage of the momentum created by the review. The University's response to the self-assessment process demonstrates an institutional capability to address real or potential problems and the Team encourages NUIM to continue the development of a quality culture.

COMMENDATIONS:

2.1   The University managed to engage a remarkably large part of the University community in the exercise and produced a report which provides a comprehensive and candid picture of the University's activities;

2.2   The Team also commends NUIM for having the courage to be the first University to undergo the IRIU process;

RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.3   The University's response to the self-assessment process demonstrates an institutional capability to address real or potential problems and the Team encourages NUIM to continue the development of a quality culture.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

INTERNAL REVIEW PROCESS

The previous external review of NUIM, where IUQB and the HEA jointly commissioned the EUA to undertake the first cycle of institutional quality reviews, made several recommendations for the University. The Team was reassured to note that most of those recommendations have been at least partly implemented. Those which have not been acted upon have clearly been considered and rejected for strategic reasons.

A key recommendation of the EUA review was that the link between quality assurance processes and strategic planning of the University should be strengthened. The Review Team was very pleased to take note that the University has taken this recommendation on board and has streamlined procedures so as to ensure that there is a clear feed-back loop between these processes (for example, by changing the cycle of departmental reviews to five years corresponding to the strategic planning cycle).

The Review Team heard much evidence of how internal quality reviews have contributed to strategic development at departmental level and was provided with departmental review reports and action plans endorsing this. Furthermore, the minutes of the Quality Promotion Sub-Committee (QPSC) indicate scrupulous commitment to carrying out the reviews.

All activities of each unit are reviewed as part of the internal quality reviews. In addition, all new study courses in the University must be approved by the Academic Programme Sub-Committee, which seeks the views of external referees (called external assessors) and the relevant Faculties during the decision making process. Existing programmes are subject to yearly inspections by external examiners.

Although the University has started to integrate the strategic planning and quality assurance processes there is scope for more work, and the Review Team encourages the University to continue to consolidate this integration further. The Team feels that this is indispensable in order to ensure the sustainability of the quality processes. This could be done by designing and agreeing an action plan (or several for the different areas) for quality improvement within the context of the institutional strategic plan and monitoring progress (milestones and obstacles).

FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES

The review team perceived inconsistency in the effectiveness with which the results of quality reviews are promulgated within the campus community, with the onus for disseminating information residing with the unit under review. To improve the internal quality review process further, it is recommended that the University establishes effective institution-wide communication and follow-up procedures to be implemented after each round of quality reviews. Currently, the University provides guidelines, a small lump sum grant for

the execution of the review, nominates the external reviewers and checks the review report to ensure that an action plan is prepared. The third and final phase of the current cycle of Reviews concludes with the preparation of a quality implementation plan that is agreed between the Head of Department and the President. However, as the Review Team encountered some dissatisfaction with the feedback and response arrangements to departments it recommends that this concern is addressed through more timely and effective communications, as a lack of adequate feedback is not beneficial for the sustainability of the quality assurance processes.

Although the quality reviews clearly contribute to quality enhancement at departmental level, as discussed earlier in the report, the Review Team did not find evidence of systematic sharing of good practices and outcomes from such reviews within NUI Maynooth or with other universities. This might be due to the overall reliance on informal communication within the University and it is acknowledged that some sharing may happen through these informal means; however, there is need for a formal mechanism to address this concern. Collecting, analysing and disseminating identified good practices through seminars, faculty meetings or university policy documents should be part of standard follow-up practices of the internal quality reviews.

Another measure to strengthen further the quality enhancement dimension of the internal quality reviews may be to adjust the aims and scope of the reviews to address only those issues that can realistically be achieved. Although feedback on the reviews was generally positive, there were indications of unrealistic expectations which then lead to disappointment when recommendations cannot be implemented. Typically such unrealistic expectations would require investment of limited resources; it might be more prudent to focus on improvements that can be achieved within current budgets. The Team felt that the University has probably not paid quite enough attention to this aspect of the reviews. A key success factor in any quality assurance process is the motivation factor, thus the issue of reviews failing to meet pre-conceived expectations is particularly relevant. The motivation factor was one of the key recommendations of the EUA's *Quality Culture* project which examined the preconditions of a successful institutional quality culture.

Another priority should be to adopt a consistent approach to collecting feedback from students on teaching and learning and to report on appropriate follow-up actions. This does not mean that all departments within the University should ask exactly the same questions from the students nor that students should be overwhelmed by questionnaires, but there should be common principles regarding the frequency with which questionnaires are administered, how anonymity is ensured and how the results are to be dealt with. The Review Team was informed that a university-wide policy in this regard is currently under preparation and it strongly encourages the University to proceed with these plans. Currently, the practices are too dependent on the individual lecturer and seem to vary considerably from one department to another.

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

Since the last external review, NUIM has improved noticeably its management information systems. Indeed, only a few years ago, the University would not have been able to deliver all the statistical information at University level which it was able to provide to the Team, within a short time period. The University has engaged an Institutional Research Officer and invested in an IT-system and, as a result, the quality of data

provided has been improved. A demonstrable outcome of this work is that the University has developed effective procedures for compiling and analysing data related to academic performance and processes for public recognition of excellence, whether in research or teaching.

The University is encouraged also to develop processes for systematic tracking of graduates. According to the Review Team's observations, there is no systematic tracking in place at present. Information on graduate employment and profile, combined with graduate feedback on the programmes, would be useful for curriculum design and in ensuring the employability of the future graduates.

COMMENDATIONS:

3.1   The University has streamlined procedures so to ensure that there is a clear feed-back loop between quality assurance processes;

3.2   NUIM has improved noticeably its management information systems;

3.3   The University has developed effective procedures for compiling and analysing data related to academic performance and processes for public recognition of excellence, whether in research or teaching;

RECOMMENDATIONS:

3.4   Although the University has started to integrate the strategic planning and quality assurance processes, more work is required and the Review Team encourages the University to continue to consolidate this integration further;

3.5   The University should establish effective institution-wide communication and follow-up procedures to be implemented after each quality review;

3.6   The University should consider revising the Guidelines for Department Reviews so that expectations and recommendations are better aligned with the resources available to the University;

3.7   The University should adopt a consistent approach to collecting feedback from students on teaching and learning and to report on appropriate follow-up actions;

3.8   The University is encouraged to develop further processes for systematic tracking of graduates.

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

The Review Team found that NUI Maynooth is making excellent progress towards an ethos of academic excellence and quality and that the developments, already appraised by the EUA Team in 2005, had been continued.

The University has three centralised offices which are intimately involved in the process of quality promotion. These are The Quality Promotion Office, The Staff Development Office and, The Centre for Teaching and Learning (CLT). CLT offers well developed, structured programme support for integration of technology in teaching; individual counselling and mentoring appear to be limited although there are plans to offer training for tutors.

In addition, the University has adopted several institutional policies in recent years which aim to contribute to the enhancement of quality in teaching. Of particular interest is the newly developed promotion policy, which was adopted in 2009 and gives more weight to teaching ability in the criteria to be considered for decisions on promotion. It is intended to stimulate staff to develop teaching competencies along with research.

The 2005 EUA review team noted in their Sectoral Report on *Quality Assurance in Irish Universities* the absence of a system for performance appraisal of individual staff members. In the same year, NUIM introduced Performance Management Development System (PMDS) which was first piloted by four departments. The first cycle of reviews was completed in 2007. The cycle of reviews is two years, thus the second cycle was being completed at the time of the review visit. The Heads of Department are responsible for communicating any training needs resulting from these discussions to the Staff Development Office. The ISAR of the University lists several staff development activities that were put in place as a result of this system: for example, workshops for leadership and managing change, recruitment skill, a training programme for technicians and their managers, setting up a forum for Heads of Departments and Deans to share experiences.

As a matter of urgency the University is recommended to work on a systematic benchmarking as a means of quality enhancement. Currently, benchmarking is managed mainly through informal channels. A recurrent theme in many meetings was the difficulty of finding counterparts with similar profiles. The Team suggests that, in addition to looking into institutional level benchmarking, NUIM should consider exploring benchmarking at the level of disciplines, which in many cases may be even more fruitful and result in more concrete benefits. The Team feels also that, at NUIM, there is need for stronger links between evaluation activities (quality assurance) and quality enhancement activities in order to further develop its Quality Culture. For example, a stronger involvement of the CTL in the development of teaching competencies through effective, non-threatening evaluations.

POSTGRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

Analysis of NUIM's research performance demonstrates an impressive increase in research productivity in recent years. The University has also done well in competing for research funding. As research activity

has grown, the University has developed support structures to maintain it. Currently it provides centralised assistance to those applying for research funding, offers professional project/contract management services and maintains institutional statistics on research productivity. Professional assistance and counsel is provided also for faculty wishing to protect and/or commercialise research output.

Two of the nine strategic goals of the University deal with postgraduate studies and research: "refine and enhance the provision of taught postgraduate activities" and "develop and enhance postgraduate research". The University's investment at the postgraduate level seems to be paying off: the number of PhD graduates between 2004/05 and 2008/09 has doubled. In 2008 a new post of Dean of Graduate Studies was filled and a Graduate Studies Office was established separately from the Research Office when the Academic Council decided that NUIM would have one Graduate School that would provide a framework through which the University policy and strategy would be implemented. The NUI Maynooth *Strategy for Graduate Education* outlines the principles based on which the activities are developed: one of them being a move to implement structured doctoral programmes for all research students.

The Review Team was concerned to learn of serious deficiencies related to the postgraduate experience at the University and urges NUIM to address this issue, especially considering the importance given to postgraduate education in the University's strategy. The Team learned and read of good practices in many departments – students working as teaching assistants, regular meetings between supervisors and students, peer support groups among students, and seminars organised to instruct students about publication practices in their chosen field of study/research. However, such good practices were not applied consistently and serious deficiencies were revealed in some areas – only one supervisor assigned, unacceptable delays in receiving feedback from a supervisor. The University is aware of this issue and has recently appointed of a Dean of Graduate Studies, but urges that high priority be given to the development of a code of practice for graduate studies that is applied consistently across all academic units. The Team commends the IUQB booklet, *Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education* as a useful reference tool.

STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

One of the nine strategic goals NUI Maynooth has set in its Strategic Plan 2006-2011 is to "improve offerings as leader in provision of access and lifelong learning" and in its self-assessment report, the University estimates that approximately one quarter of the students come from non-traditional backgrounds. Based on its observations during the visit and the documentation provided, the Team commends the University for the work it is doing with access students. Information gleaned by the team during the site visit suggested true commitment from both the support and academic staff to work towards realising this goal. Furthermore, the statistics provided indicate that the work done in this field has been highly successful. Clearly the learning resources and support for these students are well managed: there is a mature students' pre-entry programme, a mature student advisor within each academic department (which is going to be extended for disabled students as well), an individual plan prepared for each student with disabilities at the beginning of their studies and a peer mentoring programme.

As indicated in the introduction, the student numbers at NUI Maynooth have grown rapidly in recent years, resulting in an unfavourable lecturer-student ratio and extremely large student cohorts, especially in first

year, in some disciplines (for example, Geography and English). This poses extra challenges in the delivery of effective pedagogy and does not allow personal tutoring of students. The University is clearly aware of this problem and has been addressing it in various ways, such as training lecturers to use new equipment which facilitates teaching in large classes, and using postgraduate students as teaching assistants. While acknowledging the value of the measures taken to date, the Team encourages the University to continue to explore more creative and innovative approaches to the problem of large classes. Much can be learned from the extensive literature that already exists on this subject. Any delays in giving the issue urgent attention risks damaging the student experience at NUIM and, in the end, may be detrimental to the University's reputation.

Whereas some programmes of the University deal with very large student cohorts, the Review Team noted from the statistics provided by the University (the ISAR in particular) that there are some study programmes and modules which are attended by few students. This is the case in particular at Master's level. In many cases, there may be excellent strategic reasons for maintaining these programmes or modules, but nevertheless, the Team finds that the University should consider whether it is sensible to continue with some programmes that attract very few students.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

With regard to student services, the library is of pivotal importance in any University and, therefore, high priority should be assigned to addressing the current problems that exist including lack of study space and disturbance. The impending significant expansion of the library is welcomed by the Review Team. Similarly, attention should also be given to ongoing concerns with computer access at peak usage periods. The Team noted that the commitment to universal availability of WIFI, at least in those buildings for which it is possible, has been achieved and it will help to overcome the barriers to access encountered by many students until recently.

Although the quality of student support services was generally lauded, with commendable co-operation among various support units and a welcome atmosphere of mutual esteem among colleagues, the Review Team recognised that some aspects of student support services require urgent attention. There is particular concern about academic advisory and career services. Both services suffer from an acute shortage of staff relative to the demand for these services in a university of the size of NUI Maynooth. Currently, following a recent retirement, the constraints imposed by the Employment Control Framework have left only one staff member in the academic advisory office. The career service, which also has a depleted staff complement, appears to have a low profile and, indeed, is not well known to many students. The Team recognises that strengthening these services in the current economic climate would be very challenging, but feels that some action must be taken to remedy the gaps that presently exist.

INTERNATIONALISATION

Following the recommendations of the EUA review, internationalisation has been one of the priorities for the University in recent years. It has actively aimed at recruiting international staff and students as well as invested in an infrastructure to support internationalisation. As a result, the intake of foreign students has increased. Neither the documentation nor the interviews could quite demonstrate to the Team how

internationalisation as one of the key priorities identified in the NUIM strategy is considered in the quality assurance processes. The University is encouraged to incorporate the strategic goal of internationalisation visibly into the quality management assurance processes.

COMMENDATIONS:

4.1   NUI Maynooth is making excellent progress towards an ethos of academic excellence and quality;

4.2   The University has done well in competing for research funding;

4.3   NUIM's research performance demonstrates an impressive increase in research productivity in recent years;

4.4   The Team commends the University for the work it is doing with access students;

RECOMMENDATIONS:

4.5   NUIM should consider exploring benchmarking at the levels of disciplines, which in many cases may even be more fruitful and result in more concrete benefits;

4.6   The University should address the problems of large classes through adoption of more creative and innovative approaches;

4.7   There is a need for stronger links between evaluation activities (quality assurance) and quality enhancement activities in order to develop a quality culture;

4.8   Action must be taken to remedy the gaps that presently exist in the academic advisory and career services;

4.9   The University should incorporate the strategic goal of internationalisation more visibly into the quality management assurance processes.

COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 35 OF THE UNIVERSITIES ACT, 1997 AND CONSISTENCY WITH THE PART 1 ESG

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

The statutory requirements for quality assurance processes of Irish universities are presented in The Universities Act 1997 and they can be summarised as follows:

- Regular evaluation (not less than once every ten years) of each department or faculty and any service provided by the University by persons competent to make national and international comparisons;
- Regular assessment – including students – of the teaching, research and other services provided by the University;
- Publication of findings of reviews;
- Implementation of findings arising from reviews, providing the resources are available, and the findings are reasonable and practical.

Having examined the material provided and checked the information through interviews, the Review Team feels confident in stating that the University is compliant with the above mentioned statutory requirements. The University's first cycle of quality reviews extended over 10 years. At the commencement of the second cycle in 2006, it was decided that the cycle of reviews should be shortened to five years to match the strategic planning cycle of NUIM. Review reports are available at http://reviews.iuqb.net/nuim-main.html and http://qpo.nuim.ie/quality/. The Review Team was also provided with reports and evidence demonstrating the actions taken based on the review findings.

At NUIM, the Governing Authority has delegated the responsibility for the implementation of the reviews and the follow-up to the Quality Promotion Sub-Committee (QPSC) which meets regularly, up to 15 times in an academic year. QPSC reports regularly to the Governing Authority which continues to supervise the quality policy developments.

The Governing Authority is strongly supportive of the quality process and demonstrates responsible governance in its level of involvement.

Departmental level commitment to the review processes and the use of the reviews to promote the sense of community and departmental level strategic planning are clearly the strengths of the quality review process within NUIM.

CONSISTENCY WITH PART ONE ESG

The Review Team was also invited to examine if the university is consistent with Part 1 ESG standards and in this regard to the outcome is positive. The University has in place both policy – although very recent – and procedures for quality assurance and it performs periodic reviews of study programmes as part of its internal reviews as well as through an external examiner system (annual reviews). Assessment of students is done routinely, and it appears that students can have access to relevant information regarding the exams. The university has in place learning resources and support for students and it publishes information about its study programmes.

Quality assurance of teaching staff is organised in various ways. The qualifications are evaluated when recruiting the staff according to predefined criteria. Just recently, the University has clarified its promotion criteria, which takes into account achievements in the field of teaching and service as well as service to department, university and community in addition to research. However, this new promotion and appointment procedure has not yet been tested in practice because, since its adoption, the University has not been able to process applications for promotion or to recruit new staff members as previously discussed.

As far as student participation is concerned, the students are represented in the Governing Authority, the Academic Council and its Committees including that for Teaching and Learning. In addition, students have opportunities to provide feedback on teaching and academic support services such as the library through their class representatives, staff-student committees and module feedback surveys.

ENGAGEMENT WITH NATIONAL, EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL GOOD PRACTICE

The Team found evidence to suggest that the University is taking account of national, European and international good practice. At present this is mainly achieved through an external examiner system, research co-operation or various kinds of projects or informal contacts with colleagues from other universities. In addition, the University has defined a set of key performance indicators which it uses to monitor the achievements in various strategically important areas. During the review visit, the Team learnt that these indicators have also been developed with the aim of being used in identifying benchmarking partners as well as for being used as a tool for benchmarking.

SECTION 6

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the Review Team's evaluation of the Institutional Self Assessment Report, supporting documentation and meetings conducted during the Main Review Visit, the Team found sufficient evidence to confirm:

CATEGORY:	KEY REVIEWER FINDINGS
Statutory Requirements	**The Review Team concluded that the University's activities are compliant with statutory requirements.**
European Standards	**The Review Team found the University's quality assurance arrangements to be consistent with Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG).**
National, European and International Best Practice	**The University is taking account of national, European and international best practice.**

The Team found sufficient evidence to commend the following examples of good practice for further promotion internally, nationally and internationally:

6.1	The distribution of responsibilities and roles between the Governing Authority, President and other senior officers of the University seems to work well;
6.2	The overall impression is of a shared sense of commitment to the University and a common vision on how to develop NUIM further;
6.3	The University managed to engage a remarkably large part of the University community in the exercise and produced a report which provides a comprehensive and candid picture of the University's activities;
6.4	The Team commends NUIM for having the courage to be the first University to undergo the IRIU process;
6.5	The University has streamlined procedures so to ensure that there is a clear feed-back loop between quality assurance processes;
6.6	NUIM has improved noticeably its management information systems;
6.7	The University has developed effective procedures for compiling and analysing data related to academic performance and processes for public recognition of excellence, whether in research or teaching;
6.8	NUI Maynooth is making excellent progress towards an ethos of academic excellence and quality;
6.9	The University has done well in competing for research funding;
6.10	NUIM's research performance demonstrates an impressive increase in research productivity in recent years;
6.11	The Team commends the University for the work it is doing with access students.

The Team found sufficient evidence to recommend the following activities to the University for attention and development:

6.12	The President and Chair of the Governing Authority should make vigorous representations to the highest levels of Government in an attempt to tackle the current funding impediments;
6.13	The Irish Universities Association (IUA) is advised to lobby the Government to ensure the Irish Universities receive the funds required to enable international competitiveness both in teaching and research;
6.14	NUIM must demonstrate innovative strategies and the capacity for management with limited resources;
6.15	NUIM should address as a matter of urgency the lack of adequate administrative support for Deans and Heads of Academic Departments;
6.16	NUIM is encouraged to think fundamentally about its organisational and committee structures with an aim to prioritise and focus;
6.17	The University's response to the self-assessment process demonstrates an institutional capability to address real or potential problems and the Team encourages NUIM to continue the development of a quality culture;
6.18	Although the University has started to integrate the strategic planning and quality assurance processes, more work is required and the Review Team encourages the University to continue to consolidate this integration further;
6.19	The University should establish effective institution-wide communication and follow-up procedures to be implemented after each quality review;
6.20	The University should consider revising the Guidelines for Department Reviews so that expectations and recommendations are better aligned with the resources available to the University;
6.21	The University should adopt a consistent approach to collecting feedback from students on teaching and learning and to report on appropriate follow-up actions;
6.22	The University is encouraged to develop further processes for systematic tracking of graduates;
6.23	NUIM should consider exploring benchmarking at the levels of disciplines, which in many cases may even be more fruitful and result in more concrete benefits;
6.24	The University should address the problems of large classes through adoption of more creative and innovative approaches;
6.25	There is a need for stronger links between evaluation activities (quality assurance) and quality enhancement activities in order to further develop a quality culture;
6.26	Action must be taken to remedy the gaps that presently exist in the academic advisory and career services;
6.27	The University should incorporate the strategic goal of internationalisation more visibly into the quality management assurance processes.

APPENDICES

MAIN REVIEW VISIT - TIMETABLE

DAY 1: MONDAY 7TH DECEMBER 2009 (MEETINGS IN COUNCIL ROOM, RIVERSTOWN LODGE, NUIM)

TIME	ATTENDEES	PURPOSE
8.00	Review Team	Breakfast meeting of the team to prepare for visit
9.15	Review Team	Taxi to Riverstown Lodge, NUIM
9.30 **President's Boardroom**	Review Team	Private discussion
10.30	Review Team & IC	Introductory meeting with IC – discussion of logistical issues and arrangements for the review visit
11.00 Coffee	Review Team	Private discussion
11.45	Review Team & IC	Room set-up
12 .00 – 13.00	Review Team & President	Welcome from President to the Team
13.15 – 14.30 Lunch, Cana Room, Pugin Hall	Review Team, Deputy President & Registrar	Discussion of the institutional mission, goals, strategic aims and direction in relation to quality assurance and improvement
14.30 – 15.30	Review Team & Members of the QPSC	Discussion of the role of quality assurance within institutional committee structures and decision-making processes, to include a discussion of the Universities Act and ESG Part 1 requirements
15.30 – 16.15	Review Team & Students Union Officials & Students selected by the SU	Meeting with student representatives to discuss the effectiveness of the mechanisms used for engaging students in decision-making and quality assurance and enhancement procedures
16.15 – 17.00 Coffee	Review Team	Private discussion to exchange first impressions
17.00 – 18.00 **2 Parallel Sessions** **President's Boardroom** **& Council Room**	Review Team & Undergraduate Students	Meeting with Undergraduates to discuss the effectiveness of the mechanisms used for engaging students in decision making and quality assurance and enhancement procedures.

| 18.00 | Review Team | Taxi from Riverstown Lodge |
| 19.00 Dinner | Review Team, President, Deputy President, Vice-President for Research & Registrar | Discussion of the key issues to be explored during the visit |

DAY 2: TUESDAY 8TH DECEMBER 2009 (MEETINGS IN COUNCIL ROOM, RIVERSTOWN LODGE, NUIM)

TIME	ATTENDEES	PURPOSE
08.45	Review Team	Taxi to Riverstown Lodge, NUIM
09.00 – 09.15	Chair, CR & IC	Brief meeting with the IC to clarify and pick up any issues arising from Day 1 that might impact on the schedule
09.15 – 10.15	Review Team & members of the ISAR Working Group	Discussion of the institutional approach to self assessment – the process employed and the inclusive nature of the exercise, including a discussion of the institutional response to the first cycle institutional review (2005)
10.15 – 10.45 Coffee	Review Team	Private discussion
10.45 – 12.15	Review Team, Deans of Teaching & Learning & Graduate Studies & Manager of International Office & Heads of Academic Departments	Discussion on the institution's arrangements for ensuring quality assurance activities operate in line with national, European and international best practice, including the ESG Part 1 and the Universities Act
12.30 – 13.45 Lunch, Cana Room, Pugin Hall	Review Team & members of Governing Authority	Discussion of the mechanisms employed by the Governing Authority for quality assurance and enhancement within the university in line with the Universities Act requirements
14.00 – 15.00	Review Team, Bursar, Director of Corporate Services, Deputy Director of Human Resources, Librarian, Director of Computer Centre, Admissions Officer, Director of Students Services, Director of Access & Staff Development Officer	Discussion with those responsible for quality enhancement activities in administrative and service areas together with administrative/support staff in areas that have recently been reviewed.
15.00 – 16.00	Review Team & Student Support Services Staff	Discussion with staff involved in the delivery of quality enhancement activities.

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16.00 – 16.30 Coffee	Review Team	Private discussion
16.30 – 17.30	Review Team, Deputy President, Registrar, Dean of Teaching Learning & Manager & Staff from Centre for Teaching & Learning, Freedom of Information & Data Protection Officer & Dept Representatives	Discussion of Quality Enhancement Theme:
17.30 – 17.45	Review Team	Review of meetings
17.45	Review Team	Taxi from Riverstown Lodge
19.00 Dinner	Review Team	Private discussion

DAY 3: WEDNESDAY 9TH DECEMBER 2009 (MEETINGS IN COUNCIL ROOM, RIVERSTOWN LODGE, NUIM)

TIME	ATTENDEES	PURPOSE
08.45	Review Team	Taxi to Riverstown Lodge, NUIM
09.00 – 09.15	Chair, CR & IC	Brief meeting with the IC to clarify and pick up any issues arising from Day 2 that might impact on the schedule
09.15 – 10.30	Review Team & Academic Staff	Discussion with academic staff & staff from Finance Office who have recently participated in quality review processes including those responsible for quality management at a departmental/school level
10.30 – 11.00 Coffee	Review Team	Private discussion
11.00 – 12.00	Review Team, Manager & Staff from Centre for Teaching & Learning, PGDHE Students, PCTL Students & Recipient of Teaching Award	Discussion of the effectiveness of quality assessment activities in teaching & learning, in the light of national and international best practice

Time	Attendees	Purpose
12.00 – 13.00 **Two Parallel Sessions** **Team 1 – Council Room** **Team 2 – President's Boardroom**	I - Review Team, Staff from Research Support & Commercialisation Offices & Directors of Research Institutes & Heads of Academic Departments II- Review Team, Researchers from Centres of Excellence & Post Doc Researchers (who have come from outside NUIM)	Discussion of the management and conduct of quality reviews of research activities, in the light of national and international best practice
13.15 – 14.30 Lunch, Cana Room, Pugin Hall	Review Team, Faculty Deans, Dean of Graduate Studies & Manager of International Office	Discussion of the mechanisms employed by the university and their effectiveness for addressing findings and recommendations arising from quality processes
14.45 – 15.45	Review Team & Postgraduate Students	Meeting with PG students to discuss the effectiveness of the mechanisms used for engaging students in decision making and quality assurance and enhancement procedures
15.45 – 16.15 Coffee	Review Team	Private discussion
16.15 – 17.45	Review Team	Review of meetings and discussion to draft the outcomes report – in particular the summary findings and recommendations that will form the basis of the Oral Report
17.45	Review Team	Taxi from Riverstown Lodge
19.00 Dinner	Review Team	Private discussion

DAY 4: THURSDAY 10TH DECEMBER 2009 (MEETINGS IN COUNCIL ROOM, RIVERSTOWN LODGE)

TIME	ATTENDEES	PURPOSE
08.45 – 09.00	Review Team	Taxi to Riverstown Lodge, NUIM
09.00 – 09.15	Chair, CR & IC	Brief meeting with the IC to clarify and pick up any issues arising from the Team's discussions over dinner
09.15 – 11.00	Review Team	Preparation for Oral Report

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09.15 – 11.00 **Office of Deputy President**	IC & IUQB Quality Reviews Manager	Parallel meeting to enable the institution to give feedback to the IUQB on the conduct of the review team and feedback on their experience of the process. Clarification on the post-visit process will be provided
11.00 – 11.30	Review Team	Coffee
11.30 – 12.00	Review Team & IUQB Quality Reviews Manager	Meeting to enable the Chair and the Team to ensure that the proposed findings and recommendations are evidence based and robust and to give feedback to the IUQB on the conduct of the review
12.00 – 13.00	Review Team, IUQB Quality Reviews Manager, the Senior Officers & ISAR Working Group	Oral Report, in which the Chair gives an confidential presentation of the draft key findings and recommendations of the review team and confirms actions and timescales associated with post-review drafting, publication of the reports and any follow-up actions
13.00 – 14.00 Lunch, Pugin Hall	Review Team, IUQB Quality Reviews Manager, the Senior Officers & ISAR Working Group	Lunch followed by departure

OVERVIEW OF THE IRIU PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

1. Universities have requirements under Section 35 of The Universities Act 1997 to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance and, more relevantly to the IRIU, to arrange for a review of the effectiveness of internal procedures *"from time to time and in any case at least every 15 years"*. These reviews of effectiveness are designated in The Act as the responsibility of the individual governing authorities. In this way the autonomy permitted in the organisation of internal reviews is complemented by accountability. In 2002, the governing authorities of all seven universities authorised the establishment of the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and delegated to IUQB the function of arranging regular reviews of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures, which are institutional in their scope.

2. In 2004-05, the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) jointly commissioned the European University Association (EUA) through its Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) to undertake the first cycle of external reviews of the seven Irish universities. The resulting sectoral report, published in April 2005, found *"the systematic organisation and promotion of quality assurance at the initiative of the universities themselves"* as being *"unparalleled in any other country in Europe, or indeed in the United States or Canada"*. The reviewers deemed the system *"to strike the right tone and combination of public interest, accountability, and university autonomy. It encourages a greater focus on quality and improvement than some systems worldwide, while at the same time being less intrusive than some other systems in Europe"*. The report concluded that it was, however: *"time to move to a new phase"* that *"should build on the existing system, linking it more closely to strategic management and feeding its outputs into the ongoing development of the universities, individually and collectively"*.

3. In October 2006, after consultation with the universities, it was agreed that a second cycle of institutional reviews would be initiated in 2009/10. The Institutional Review of Irish Universities (IRIU) process was approved for publication by the IUQB Board in March 2009. By the end of this rolling cycle of reviews, independent reviewers will have confirmed whether Irish universities are operating in line with the requirements of (i) Section 35 of the Universities Act, 1997, and are (ii) consistent with the Part 1 requirements of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area 2005 (the ESG).

IRIU METHOD

4. The aims and objectives of the IRIU method are:
    *   to operate an external review process consistent with The Act, and the Part 2 Standards outlined in the ESG
    *   to support each university in meeting its responsibility for the operation of internal

quality assurance procedures and reviews that are clear and transparent to all their stakeholders, and which provide for the continuing evaluation of all academic, research and service departments and their activities, as outlined in The Act, incorporating the Part 1 ESG Standards

- to provide evidence that each university continues to engage with national, European and international guidelines and standards, particularly in accordance with the Bologna process
- to support institutional strategic planning and ownership of quality assurance and enhancement to operate as part of the Framework for Quality in Irish Universities
- to support the availability of consistent, robust, and timely information on the effectiveness of quality assurance and enhancement processes operating within Irish universities
- to provide accountability to external stakeholders in relation to the overall quality of the system and thereby instil confidence in the robustness of the IRIU process

5.   There are four elements to the IRIU method:
- Element 1: Institutional Self-Assessment Report (ISAR)
- Element 2: The Review Visit(s) – Planning Visit and a Main Review Visit
- Element 3: Review Report
- Element 4: Institutional and Sector Level Follow-up

6.   Institutions can expect to undergo IRIU normally every six years. The schedule for the second cycle of institutional reviews (2009/10 – 12/13) is published on the IUQB website and was developed in consultation with each Irish university and approved by the IUQB Board in June 2009.

THE REVIEW TEAM

7.   The recruitment of national and international experts to the IRIU Register of Reviewers is conducted biannually. Each team of reviewers is selected by the IUQB Board from the Register of Reviewers based on the reviewer's ability to demonstrate current or recent experience in at least three of the seven criteria categories published in the IRIU Handbook. Reviewers are trained, deployed and paid on a per review basis. IRIU Reviewers are not IUQB employees. As part of the nomination and selection process, reviewers sign to confirm any conflicts of interest. Additionally, universities have an opportunity to comment on the proposed composition of their review team in advance of deployment to ensure there are no conflicts of interest in the proposed review team, and thus the IUQB Board will ensure that an appropriate and entirely independent team of reviewers is selected for the institution being reviewed. The IUQB Board has final approval over the composition of each IRIU review team.

8.   The IRIU review teams will normally consist of:
- two international reviewers (one of which will also act as Review Chair)
- an Irish reviewer
- a student representative
- a representative of external stakeholders
- a co-ordinating reviewer

REVIEWER TRAINING AND DEPLOYMENT

9.   Each review team will receive institutionally specific training in advance of deployment. The purpose of reviewer training/briefing is to ensure that all reviewers:
   • understand the social, cultural, economic and legal environment that Irish universities are operating within
   • become familiar with the Framework for Quality in Irish Universities
   • understand the aims and objectives of the IRIU process as well as the key elements of the method
   • understand the statutory requirements placed on Irish universities in relation to quality, as outlined in The Act and the ESG
   • understand their own roles and tasks and the importance of team coherence and delivering a robust, evidence-based report in a timely manner

REPORTING

10.   In the interests of equity and reliability, the review team's findings and recommendations presented in the review reports will be based on recorded evidence. In line with ESG guidelines, the team will be asked by the IUQB Reviews Manager on the final day of the Main Review Visit to confirm that the review procedures used have provided adequate evidence to support the team's findings and recommendations on the university's procedures and practices in relation to:
   • its fulfilment of its statutory requirements, which includes the:
      » regular evaluation of each department/faculty and any service provided by the university by persons competent to make national and international comparisons on the quality of teaching and research and the provision of other services at university level
      » assessment by those, including students, availing of the teaching, research and other services provided by the university
      » publication of findings arising out of the application of those procedures
      » implementation of any findings arising out of the evaluation having regard to the resources available to the university
   • its consistency with the Part 1 Standards of the ESG
   • operating in line with national, European and international best practice
   • identifying and enhancing good practice in the management of quality assurance and enhancement
   • identifying issues for further development in relation to the management of quality assurance and enhancement

11.   Two review reports arise from the IRIU - a brief non-technical summary report and a full review report for specialist audiences. Both reports are prepared by the Co-ordinating Reviewer and are signed off by the Chair following consultation with all review team members. The university will be given five weeks in which to comment on factual accuracy and if they so wish, to provide a 1-2 page institutional response to the report that will be published as an appendix to the review report. Each IRIU report will be formally signed off and approved by the IUQB Board once satisfied that the review process was

completed in accordance with published criteria. Reports will be published by the IUQB thereafter. In accordance with Section 41 of the Universities Act, 1997, the IUQB will submit review reports to the Minister.

FOLLOW-UP

12. One year after the Main Review Visit the university will be asked to produce a follow-up report (incorporating the institutional action plan), normally submitted alongside the Annual Institutional Report (AIR) and discussed as part of the Annual Dialogue (AD) meeting with the IUQB. Within the report, the university should provide a commentary on how the review findings and recommendations have been discussed and disseminated throughout the university's committee structure and academic units, and comment on how effectively the university is addressing the review outcomes. The report should identify the range of strategic and logistical developments and decisions that have occurred within the institution since the review reports' publication. Institutions will continue to have flexibility in the length and style of the follow-up report but should address each of the key findings and recommendations that the reviewers presented. The follow-up report will be published by the IUQB.

13. If an IRIU review team identifies in its review report what it considers to be significant causes of concern, particularly in relation to the institution's fulfilment of its statutory requirements, (in accordance with the IUQB's Memorandum of Association, 2006) the IUQB will consult with the university in question to agree an immediate action plan to address the issue(s) of review team concern, including the time frame in which the issue(s) will be addressed. The university will report to the IUQB every six months on progress against the action plan for the duration of the plan. Where the IUQB considers that progress in implementing the action plan is inadequate, the IUQB may, in consultation with the university and the HEA, intervene to secure a revision or acceleration of the plan, or to arrange a further review visit, ideally involving most or all of the original review team.

14. The IUQB will regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the IRIU process, as part of an organisational commitment to actively contributing to the broader enhancement of a culture of quality across the Irish higher education sector and as required by Part 3 of the ESG.

APPENDIX 3

UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO THE IRIU

NUI Maynooth welcomes the report of the Review Team and congratulates the members for the thorough evaluation that they have undertaken. In particular it is pleased by the unambiguous nature of the key findings that

- the University's activities in regard to quality assurance and enhancement are compliant with statutory requirements;
- the University's quality assurance arrangements are consistent with Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG); and
- the University is taking account of national, European and international best practice.

We also welcome the endorsement of the NUI Maynooth policy document on quality assurance and enhancement, as well as the many commendations especially those that refer to

- the excellent progress being made towards an ethos of academic excellence and quality;
- the impressive increase in research activity in recent years;
- the work being done with access students;
- the commendable sense of collegiality, shared sense of commitment and common vision on how to develop the University further;
- the effective procedures for compiling and analysing management information data related to performance.

Furthermore, we welcome the recommendations of the Review Team, especially that NUI Maynooth, in conjunction with the Irish Universities Association (IUA), should continue to advocate for both adequate funding for the sector as a whole, and equitable distribution of funding within the sector. We are pleased to accept the constructive advice in relation to activities that need to be improved and/or developed further in order to enhance the University approach to quality assurance and enhancement. In particular we welcome the proposals in regard to

- addressing the administrative support requirements of Deans and Heads of Departments;
- remedying the gaps that exist in the academic advisory and career services;
- establishing effective institution wide communication and follow-up procedures;
- adopting a consistent approach to collecting feedback from students and implementing appropriate responses;
- benchmarking at the level of disciplines;
- adopting creative and innovative approaches to the problems associated with large classes; and
- incorporating the goal of internationalisation more visibly into the quality assurance processes.

Many of the recommendations are of a procedural nature and can be addressed within the current resources of the University. The recommendations relating to gaps in the academic advisory and career services can

now be addressed following the flexibility introduced in January into the Employment Control Framework for Universities. The administrative and support requirements for Heads of Departments and Deans are currently being reviewed as part of an adjustment strategy for the University. The response procedures following departmental reviews have been strengthened in the past year and they will be more effectively aligned in future with the annual University strategic work programme and budget process. There is already a process underway to support more effective and consistent feedback from students on teaching and learning, and on supervisory arrangements at postgraduate level. Work on international benchmarking will commence very soon.

The University is acutely aware of the challenges associated with large classes, and has already taken a number of initiatives. The admissions procedures used in 2009 resulted in a more even distribution of students across departments and a significant reduction in the size of the largest classes. Furthermore, several academic departments have introduced new approaches to teaching, and are also making greater use of teaching technologies that are improving the quality of the teaching and learning experience, especially in large classes.

We note that the Review Team express concern about some aspects of the postgraduate experience at the University. We accept that there are currently some weaknesses and a lack of consistency in the application of the many good practices that were noted by the Team. This is why NUI Maynooth has decided to move from the master-apprentice approach to graduate research supervision to a structured PhD model that includes mandatory taught modules, and supervisory panels to support and monitor progress of each student. This transition is already supported by policy documents that have been developed by the Dean of Graduate Studies and approved by Academic Council over the last eighteen months. These documents have been informed by the IUQB booklet on *Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education*. NUI Maynooth's extension of this structured PhD model and its improved support structures to all new students in September 2010 will put in place a significant safeguard of the quality of postgraduate experience in the future. The graduate students are also active participants in this transition following the establishment of a Postgraduate Feedback Council (the only one in Irish Universities), which is made up of taught and research postgraduates.

Our experience is that the review process currently implemented by the IUQB enabled the University to demonstrate comprehensively and effectively that it is fulfilling its statutory responsibilities, adhering to agreed European Standards, and taking account of national and international best practice. The involvement of an experienced international Review Team is an invaluable part of the process.

NUI Maynooth gratefully acknowledges the administrative support received throughout the process from the staff of the Irish Universities Quality Board, and especially the rigorous approach adopted by the Review Team. Their Report will be of great assistance as we continue to refine and enhance the broad approach to quality assurance and enhancement that they have endorsed.

Professor Jim Walsh,
Institutional Review Coordinator,
Deputy President and Vice President for Innovation