

NUI Maynooth Policy on Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement (November 2009)

NUI Maynooth will be recognised as a leading liberal arts and science University with an international reputation for teaching and research, that 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.

(Mission Statement, Strategic Plan 2006-2011)

In support of the ambition represented by its Mission Statement NUI Maynooth is fully committed to the development of a culture that recognises the importance of quality assurance and enhancement in all its activities. In this regard the relationship between teaching and research is particularly important and is guided by the principle that high quality teaching and research are inextricably intertwined. The University is committed to ensuring that the teaching in all its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes is provided by a community of active researchers.

The University policy on quality assurance and quality enhancement is guided by international best practice as espoused by the European University Association and it is also compliant with the statutory requirements in the *Universities Act, 1997* Section 35 and with the requirements of *Part 1: European Standards and Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance within Higher Education Institutions, 2005*.

The University 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, academic and otherwise; building upon its core values of inclusiveness, equality and service to enhance the public good; and maintaining a relationship with the State that balances autonomy and accountability. The long-standing concern for quality is evidenced by the establishment of a formal system for quality review in 1995, two years before the Universities Act, 1997 made such activity mandatory.

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.

On-Going Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policies and Procedures

In order to be effective as a quality focused University NUI Maynooth has already put in place, and will continue to implement, policies and procedures covering a broad range of activities, including:

- Policies in regard to Teaching and Learning, Continuing Education, Graduate Education, Research, Commercialisation, Internationalisation;
- Engagement of students in the Statutory Boards of the University and in all Committees, including the Quality Promotion Sub Committee which reports to the Governing Authority;
- Regular monitoring of academic entry requirements for all programmes, and interviews of applicants to a number of programmes;
- Provision of scholarships to promote and reward excellence among undergraduates and postgraduates;

- Provision of summer internship opportunities for up to 50 undergraduates each year that enable high calibre students to work with experienced researchers;
- Inclusion of external experts in procedures for approving new courses by the Academic Programme Committee;
- Professional accreditation of certain courses and programmes;
- External examiners for all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes;
- Procedures for regular formal student feedback;
- Student mentoring system (especially for first year students);
- Targeted interventions to overcome deficiencies in core competencies such as mathematics and academic writing;
- Feedback from employers after student work experience programmes;
- Use of external experts in procedures for appointment of all academic staff;
- Comprehensive induction workshops for new staff;
- Accredited professional training of lecturers and tutors;
- Regular training and development opportunities for all staff;
- Adoption of procedures for academic staff promotion that encourage and reward excellence in teaching and research;
- External peer review of scholarly research outputs and also of research funding applications;
- Periodic assessments of research outputs across the disciplines;
- Use of External peer reviewers by Research Committee to assess submissions for formation of research institutes;
- Implementation of Quality Guidelines produced by IUQB in areas such as the organization of PhD programmes, students services, institutional research and strategic planning at departmental level;
- Regular maintenance and upgrading, and enhanced provision, of the quality and quantity of physical infrastructure and equipment needed for teaching and research;
- Adoption and implementation of best practice principles in the Code of Governance.

Periodic Quality Reviews of Units of the University

In addition to the on-going quality assurance and enhancement supports noted above, NUI Maynooth will also operate a regular programme of quality reviews of all units in the University. Such reviews will typically involve a three phase process including the preparation of an internal self assessment report, a peer review visit and report, and implementation of a quality improvement plan that is aligned with the University Strategic Plan. The Peer Reviewer Reports and the Department Quality Improvement Plans will be made public on the University web site following notification of the Governing Authority. The process is designed to be inclusive of all staff and representatives of different student groups (for example, undergraduates and postgraduates); holistic in scope in that it covers teaching, research and all other activities undertaken by the department; developmental in orientation; and an opportunity for external benchmarking drawing upon the experience of the external peer reviewers. The process and procedures will be formally approved by the Academic Council and the Governing Authority.

Normally all units (Schools, Departments, Research Units) of each Faculty will be reviewed over the same period, typically one academic year, which will be followed by a Faculty level review to focus especially on recommendations from departmental reviews that may require inter- or trans-disciplinary responses. The review cycle will be five years in line with the University strategic planning cycle. Furthermore, there will be provision for Complementary Quality Reviews of departments / research institutes that are already subject to other reviews,

and Reviews of Small Units that have distinctive functions and merit being reviewed separately from larger departments.

All reviews will be undertaken in accordance with Guidelines that will be monitored on an annual basis and regularly updated. At the end of each cycle of reviews the Guidelines will be reviewed and amended as appropriate.

Implementation

Overall responsibility for the University quality assurance procedures lies with the Governing Authority which has delegated this particular role through the Planning, Development and Finance Committee to a Quality Promotion Sub Committee (QPSC) chaired by the Deputy President. The terms of reference of the QPSC are:

- To promote and encourage principles which will enhance the quality of the educational and work experience of students and staff;
- To promote and update guidelines for departments and units to carry out self-evaluation;
- To liaise with departments or units in their self-evaluation;
- To organise peer review procedures for departments or units;
- To liaise with the Human Resources, Staff Development and Equality Committee and the Staff Development Officer regarding programmes for staff development that will contribute to quality enhancement;
- To promote the integration of policies and processes aimed at enhancing the quality of outcomes across the University;
- To prepare an annual report for the Planning, Development and Finance Committee and such other reports as the President may require.

The membership of the QPSC, in 2009, consists of:

the Deputy President (Chair),

the Registrar,

the Vice President Research,

the Dean of Graduate Studies,

the Dean of Teaching and Learning,

the Faculty Deans (3),

the Librarian,

a representative of the students,

a representative of the administrative, technical and support staff, and

the Director of Quality.

The QPSC will receive executive support from the Quality Promotion Office. The main areas of activity of the Office will include: supporting the QPSC; facilitating the department quality reviews and promoting quality assurance activities in the University; cooperating with the Staff Development Office in the provision of an annual programme of training and development events; liaising with the Centre for Teaching and Learning in providing a range of teaching support and development activities; and representing the University on national committees and networks including the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB), the Irish Universities Association Quality Committee (IUAQC) and the Irish Universities Association Quality Officers Group (IUAQOG). The Director of Quality will report to the Deputy President.