QUALITY IN IRISH HIGHER EDUCATION: A SYSTEM AND UNIVERSITY VIEW

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A TRADITION OF
INDEPENDENT
THINKING

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Irish Higher Education System

- Irish higher education system:
  - Previously established universities (7)
  - Technological universities (first established 2019)
  - 235,644 enrollments: 51% (f) 49% (m)
  - 80 % (FT), 17 % (PT) 3% (remote)

- Higher Education Strategy to 2030

- Key agencies
  - Higher Education Authority (HEA)
  - Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
  - National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning

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Higher Education Strategy to 2030

- First published in 2011, at a time of austerity
- Affirmation of the role of higher education in supporting societal and economic change
- Emergence of a strong central policy steering core:
  - A new contractual relationship or **service level agreement** between the State and the higher education institutions should be established, as part of a wider strategic dialogue, and this should be used to ensure that the requirements for performance, autonomy and accountability are aligned. Through this process, **institutional strategies will be defined and aligned with national priorities**.

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Education Strategy 2030 Priorities

Higher education institutions

- Quality of the student learning experience
- Quality of teaching, scholarship and external engagement
- Research and innovation
- External engagement

System level priorities

- Cross-government structures to develop and oversee implementation of national priorities for HE
- Regional clusters of institutions
- Institutional mergers between Institutes of Technology
- Funding framework

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Quality in Irish Higher Education

- Previously Universities had their own quality system (Universities Act 1997)
  - a common quality framework
  - shared methodology
  - Good practice guides
  - Met requirements of European Standards Guidelines

- New approach consolidation of quality assurance agencies for Further Education, Training and Higher Education (3) in 2011
- Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI) established in 2012

- Scope all further and higher education and training

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QQI: Responsibilities

- Defined by the Qualifications & Quality Assurance Act (2012, revised 2018)

- National Framework of Qualifications , underpinned by Quality Assurance

- Internal provider owned quality (internal QA policies and procedures)

- External quality assurance QQI:
  - Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines
  - Annual Institutional Quality Report
  - Periodic external review of institutions (CINNTE REVIEW)

Scope of Quality Responsibilities

- "a comprehensive system. Quality assurance is embedded in the provider's activities **at all levels**. Quality assurance spans both the corporate domain (e.g. governance, finance, human resources) and academic domain"(**QQI Core Guidelines, 2016: 10**)
- University reports annually to QQI on all its quality activities, reviews, plans

Scope of Quality Responsibilities

- Previously established universities, including National University of Ireland (NUI) are autonomous and must have regard to QA guidelines

- The provider is committed to the active development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, quality assurance, quality improvement and enhancement.

(**QQI Core Guidelines, 2016: 14**)

University College Cork (UCC)

- Founded in 1845 by Royal Charter under the Colleges (Ireland) Act
- 115 students enroll in 1849
- George Boole, first Professor of Mathematics 1849
- Today UCC a comprehensive research intensive University
- 21,000 students:
  - 15,000 in undergraduate programmes
  - 4,400 engaged in postgraduate study and research
  - 2,800 Adult Continuing Education students, and.
  - 3,300 international students representing over 100 countries worldwide.

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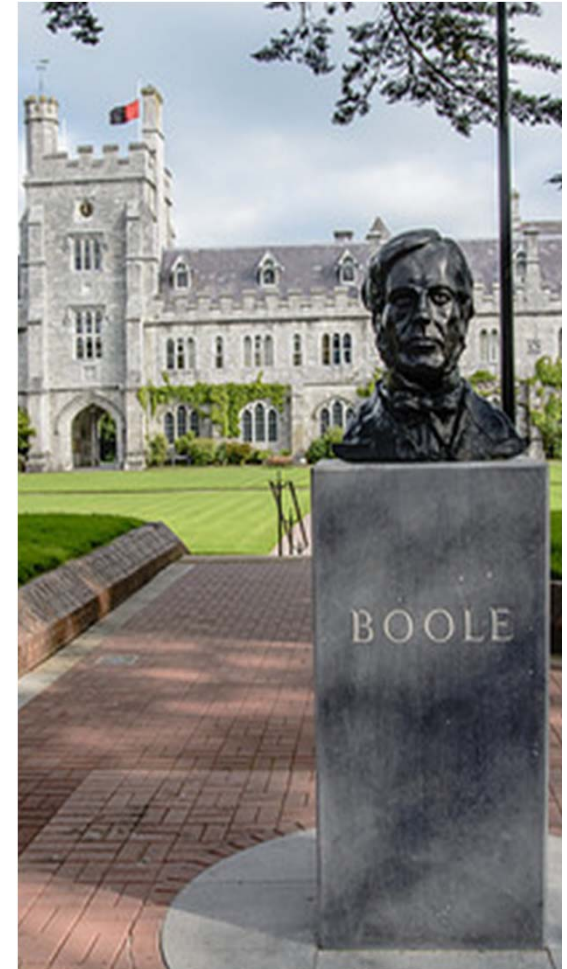
UCC Quality Strategy

"By embedding a strong quality-enhancement ethos, we will use our quality processes to ensure a culture and experience of best practice in the delivery of our academic mission, demonstrating our commitment to continuous evolution and improvement"

Strategic Plan 2017-2022, p.23

Quality Policy Principles

- Our approach to quality is founded on openness, **systematic self-evaluation, engagement with peer review processes** and a commitment to enhancement-based outcomes that are responsive, creative, enabling and **student-centred**.

- We seek to: preserve our institutional autonomy through accountability and transparency which will enable the diversity of our activities; **recognise and share good practice;** increase our reflexive capacity; support institutional learning and development
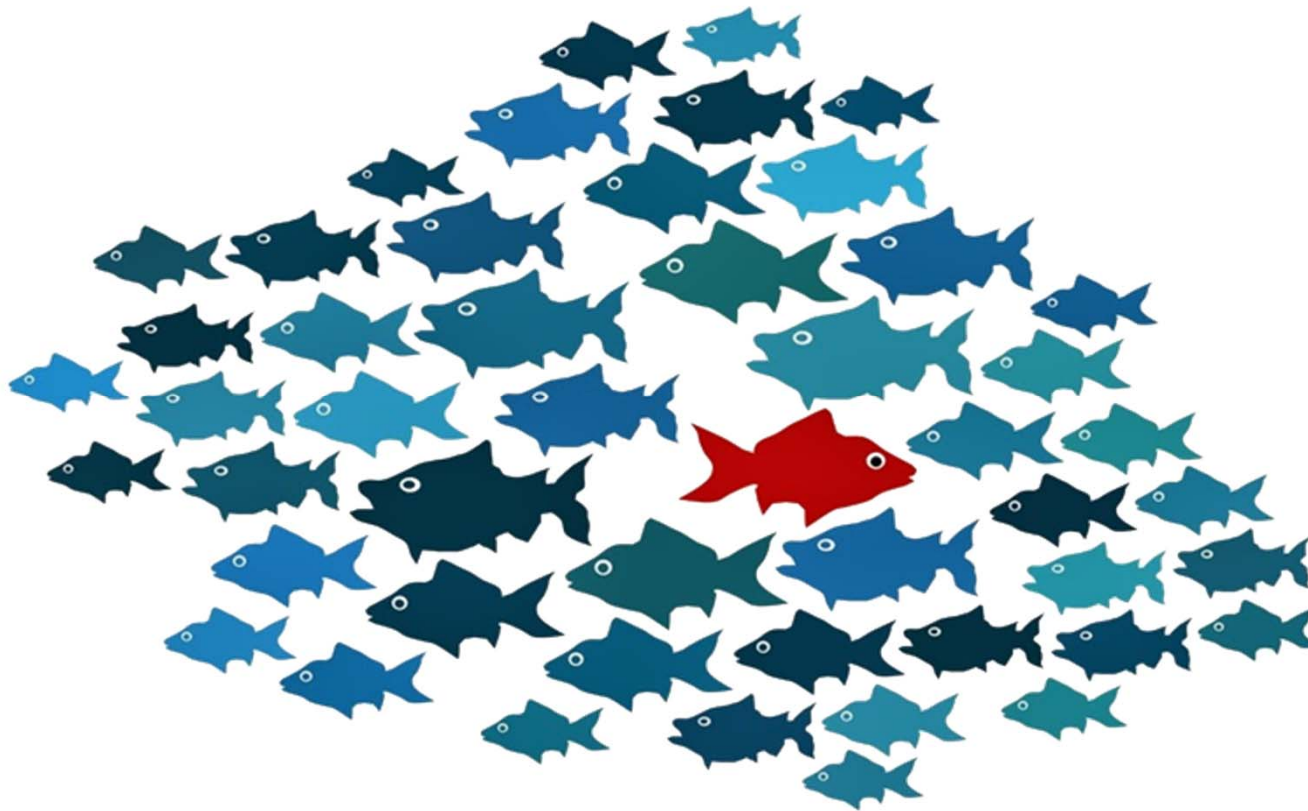
https://www.ucc.ie/en/qeu/quality-enhancement-policy/

Quality Enhancement?

The electric lightbulb did not come from the continuous improvement of candles
Oren Harari

Quality & Autonomy

Quality Enhancement Activities

- **Periodic Quality Review** for education, research and services
- **Thematic Reviews** any topic
- **University Student Surveys** : Irish Survey of Student Engagement
- **Academic Development Support** for Units working together
- **Quality assurance of Transnational Education** and Educational Collaborations with other HEIs
- **Enhancement Projects University-wide**:
  - Programme development, approval, review and monitoring (2018/19)
  - Leadership development for Heads of School (2019/20)

Objectives of Periodic Quality Review: Academic Units

1. Reflect on and promote the strategic enhancement of their academic activities to ensure an outstanding learning experience for all students (**enhancement** dimension)

2. Evaluate the effectiveness of their processes for assuring academic standards and provision, in line with the University's academic mission and strategy (**assurance** dimension)

7 year review cycle

Outcomes of review are published and are part of a public set of information on quality of higher education

Complies with European Standards Guidelines (2015) and QQI Statutory Guidelines (2016)

Self-Evaluation

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Self Evaluation Process

Schools' Evidence-based evaluation

- **What** does the Unit/School do?

- **Why** does the Unit/School do it (values, belief, assumptions, aspirations)

- **How** does the Unit/School know this is important/worthwhile?

- **What** evidence does the Unit/School have to support this opinion?

School Evaluation Report

1. Executive Summary

2. Context/history

3. Vision/mission strategy

4. **Key issues and opportunities**

5. School structure – data

6. Programme portfolio

7. Teaching, Learning, Assessment: **Good Practice Case-Study**

8. **Unit/School's recommendations**

Academic Review Process

- The Review Panel usually consists of 6-7 people:
  - 2-3 External Disciplinary Experts (national and international)
  - 2-3 Internal Reviewers (including Chair)
  - 1 Student Reviewer
  - Rapporteur (QEU)

- **Site visit over 2 days** programme of meetings: management, academic staff, students, stakeholders (external and internal)

- **Quality Enhancement Plan** within 6 months

- **Follow-up** 12 -18 months later

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Student Involvement in Quality

- Students participate in periodic review
- Student lens in systematic review of quality
- Training and orientation
- Digital Badge to recognise contribution to review process
- Only Irish University engaging students in this way

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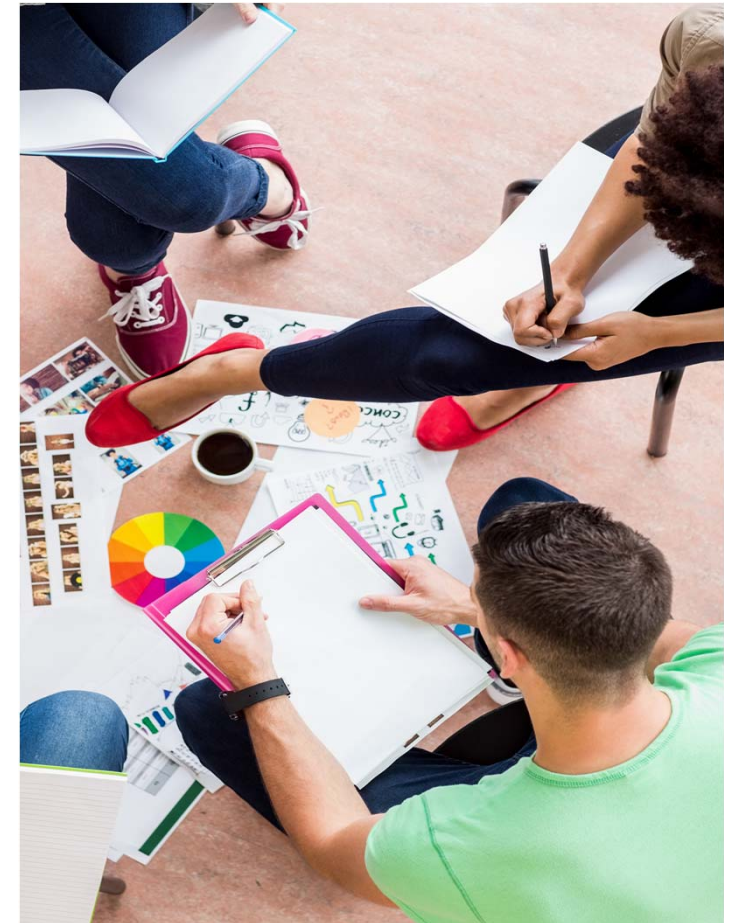
Quality Practices: Case Studies of Good Practice

https://www.ucc.ie/en/qeu/casestudiesofgoodpractice/

Peer Quality Review Report

1. Executive Summary

2. Context/history of the Centre Unit/School

3. Vision/mission

4. Key developments, issues and opportunities

5. School structure – data

6. Programme portfolio

7. Teaching, Learning, Assessment: Good Practice

   Case-Study

8. **Panel recommendations and commendations**

- UCC Review Reports:
  https://www.ucc.ie/en/qeu/qualityreviewreports/

Research Quality Review

A University-wide evaluation exercise to:

- provide an **independent assessment** of the quality and level of research activity at UCC at Department/ School/Research Institute level, benchmarked on a disciplinary basis;

- provide a means of **international comparability** across research units;

- provide an **overview** of the status of research on a broad disciplinary-based level across the University;

2009 first cycle, 2015 second cycle and third cycle in development

REPORT
OF THE RESEARCH
QUALITY REVIEW

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK
2015

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Structure of the Review

Research Activity Indicators (RAI)

- **RAI, 1**. Selected published output

- **RAI, 2.** Total published output

- **RAI,3.** Peer esteem

- **RAI,4.** Research-related activities

- **RAI, 5.** Postgraduate research environment

- **RAI,6.** Research income

Basis of Evaluation

- International peer review Panels (15)

- Census of all staff for inclusion

- Submission of 5 pieces of research (2008-2014)

- Assessment of quality of research by remote reviewers (300)

- Site visit by Disciplinary Panel Chairs and Vice-Chairs

- 5 scale evaluation scale

- An overall research evaluation (ORE) score

Evaluation Scale 1-5

- **Level 5 Quality** that is of **leading international standard**. The research work or activity will be excellent, displaying a very high level of originality, significance to the discipline and rigour; it will be innovative and potentially agenda-setting in research and/or policy fields

- **Level 4 Quality** that is of **very good standard** in terms of originality, significance and rigour comparable with such work internationally. The research work or activity has had or is likely to have a significant impact on research and/or policy agendas

- **Level 3 Quality** that **demonstrates significance** to the discipline and rigour to a good standard. The research work has had or is likely to have a recognised impact on research and/or policy agendas

- **Level 2 Quality** that **demonstrates significance** to the discipline and rigour to a fair standard, likely to have a marginal impact upon existing paradigms.

- **Level 1 Quality** that falls below the adequate standard of recognised work within the discipline. The research work or activity is poor and has had no impact nor is it likely to have an impact upon existing paradigms and agendas within the discipline.

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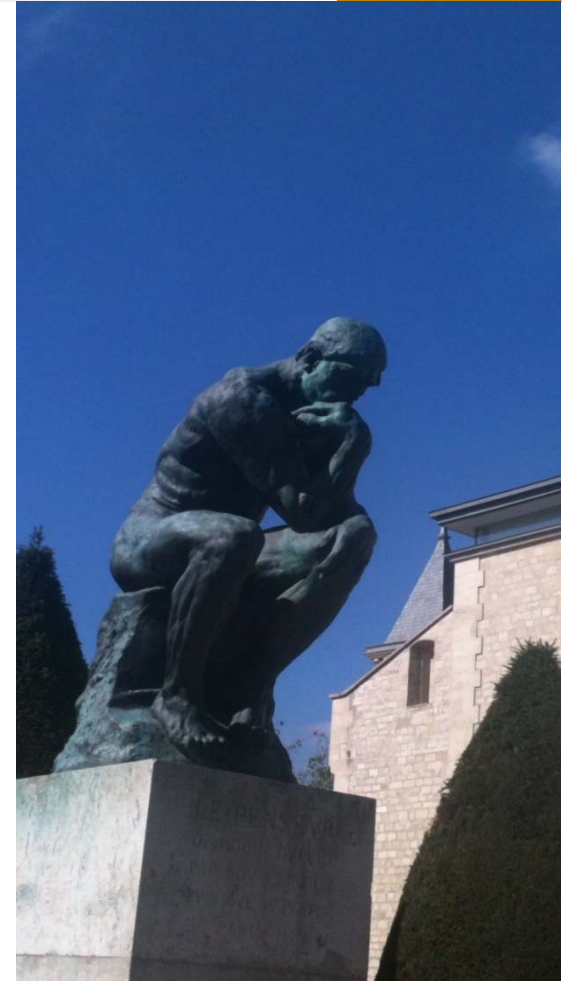Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Themes from 2015

- Increase in top scores, with 57% of units obtaining a score of 4 or greater in 2015 compared to 43% in 2009

- Largest increase in score occurred in RAI 5 (postgraduate research education)

- **Research strategy** that connects University, College, School and disciplinary areas should be sufficiently transparent to enable staff locally to think strategically about their research

- **Policies to support** the delivery of the research strategy, including: academic workloads; sabbaticals; balance between research and teaching activities,

- **Research impact**: to communicate research impact to a range of audiences in local, national and international contexts

- **Publication strategies**: maximising through publication in high quality journals

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Governance of Quality

- Quality Enhancement Committee chaired by Rector
- Reports to the University Management Team
- Reports annually to the Governing Body of University
- Director of Quality Enhancement Reports to Rector
- Quality Enhancement Team is 7 staff: Director, 3 Development/Advisory staff and 3 administrative support

www.ucc.ie/qeu

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Quality Enhancement as an open process

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS?

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