Adaptations to Internal Quality Assurance in Irish HEIs in response to COVID-19

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Methodology

Sources for Analysis

- QQI Quality Dialogue Meeting Notes
  Conducted online in June/July 2020
- Survey of websites of Irish public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
  Conducted from March – end August 2020
Methodology

Areas of Focus

- Policies and Procedures (ESG 1.1)
- Governance (ESG 1.1)
- Information to Stakeholders (ESG 1.8)
Overview

- Core institutional QA policies and procedures largely considered sufficiently robust and flexible to accommodate the exceptional circumstances.
- In some cases, existing procedures supplemented or amended to reflect online methodologies and provide additional flexibility for students.
- Sectoral collaboration highly valued – particularly in the IoT sector.
Changes to Core Policies & Procedures

**Progression**
Additional flexibility on resits, carrying modules/credits, greater discretion on borderline cases and previous performance.

**Academic Integrity**
Enhancement of P&Ps to reflect online/remote assessment (e.g. proctoring, students accessing external information sources)

**Deferral/Extenuating Circumstances**
Criteria extended to reflect COVID circumstances & procedures adapted to enable online submissions

**Online QA Processes**
Amendment to existing processes to reflect online external examination, viva voce, exam boards (data protection), programme accreditation.
Augmentation of Governance Structures

“Typically, hierarchies of committees and working groups were involved in dealing with the coordinated management and implementation of change. Academic councils (or equivalent) were at the top of the hierarchy for the approval of modifications to programmes.” QQI TLA Report

Groups involved in responding to and planning to mitigate the effects of Covid-19 included:

- **Contingency** planning groups (academic and professional services)
- **Operational** planning groups and sub-groups (‘return to campus’; placements; financial management)
- **Horizon-scanning** groups to consider long-term impacts
Approaches to Academic Decision-Making

No single sectoral approach, but similar approaches evident:

- **Subsidiarity-based approach/Devolution of authority** by Academic Council to a sub-group to enable swift and agile decision-making
  - Time-limited (‘sunset clause’ with possibility of extension)
  - Existing or newly convened group
  - Representation on group

- **Retention** of existing governance decision-making structures where these were deemed sufficiently flexible to respond to the rapidly evolving public health situation
Information to Stakeholders (ESG 1.8)

Teaching & Learning Moves Online

Government Announces Covid-19 Restrictions

March 12 2020

Alternative Assessment

April 2020

Graduation brought forward for Medical Students

6 April 2020

Examination Results

April/May 2020

Virtual open days for prospective students

June 2020

Today - Roadmap to reopening

Sept / Oct 2020

QQI
Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Communication Channels with Students

Key Messages & Areas of Focus

- Health & Campus Access Information
- Alternative arrangements for TLA
- Tools & supports for online TLA
- Urging students to stay connected to the institution
- Making students aware of all options available and sources of support (peer support highly valued by students)
- Targeted information to international students.
Conclusions

• The principles of **autonomy and subsidiarity** supported **agility** and enabled **tailored decision-making**.

• **Sectoral networks and collaboration** were instrumental in ensuring co-ordinated, coherent and effective responses.

• **Students and student representatives** provide important contributions at institution level and were seen to be an **invaluable means of communication with the wider student population**.

• “The **quality assurance infrastructure** established by institutions proved **crucial in the approaches to change management** which inspires confidence in the reasonableness of those changes.” [TLA Report]
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https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Coronavirus-COVID-19---Updates-from-QQI.aspx