

Griffith College

Quality Enhancement Strategy 2011 – 2014

1. Quality Strategy

The purpose of a quality enhancement strategy is to identify the means by which the College seeks to continuously improve on the quality of programmes delivered to learners. The College has consistently developed policies and procedures to ensure a high level of quality in all of its programmes. This process has led to a number of developments within the College. The founding of the Centre for Academic Excellence, to support the academic development of academic staff in the College, the development of the Quality Assurance Manual which is the repository of all policies and procedures in relation to all aspects of programme development and delivery, and the continued policy of College support for academics engaged in further education.

The College has set out its mission statement as:

Pursuing excellence in applied education and the relentless pursuit of the advancement of individual learner attainment

Delivering on this mission requires a commitment to placing the educational fostering and nurturing of others at the core of the College's academic activities. It involves a commitment to defining and advancing programme learning outcomes and to constructing robust teaching, learning and assessment methodologies by which they can best be advanced.

In particular, it requires all those involved in course design, delivery and assessment to deliver a quality service as course directors, year heads, lecturers and administrators and applies to all aspects of the College's activities across all its locations.

The Hunt Report¹ was published in late 2010 and sets out a comprehensive strategy for Higher Education in Ireland for the coming years, up to 2030. Many of the report recommendations relate to improving the quality of programmes being offered. The College is mindful of the recommendations in Hunt and will continue the process of quality enhancement, strengthening what is good and adding where recommendations support the College mission statement above.

March 2011 saw the election of a new government who have committed² to implementing the recommendations of the Hunt report. They have also committed to the development of the Knowledge Economy.

These developments provide the background to the quality enhancement strategy set out in this report.

2. Definition of Quality Enhancement

In the context of education 'quality' can be defined as the process of delivering on the expectations of, and proposed outcomes for, all stakeholders. This includes, Learners, Educators, Accrediting Bodies, Employers, and the Community. In Griffith College we define this as excellence in all aspects of College activities, from learner application for a programme through to graduation from the programme.

The process of Quality Enhancement is the continuous re-appraisal of the processes and procedures in place to deliver on quality. It involves setting out clearly the steps to be taken to ensure that quality is maintained and continuously improved upon.

A Quality Strategy sets out the objectives to be achieved and a Plan to achieve them.

¹ National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 – Report of the Strategy Group

² Government for National Recovery: 2011 - 2016

3. Objectives of the Quality Strategy

The objectives of the quality strategy can be stated as follows. The College will seek:

- To meet, and where possible exceed, the expectations of learners who study on College programmes
- To meet, and where possible exceed, the expectations of the employers who employ graduates of the College's programmes
- To strengthen and develop the supports available to all staff to allow delivery to learners to the highest possible standards
- To increase engagement with employers to ensure all programmes are delivering on the requirements identified
- To foster an ethos of quality enhancement in all aspects of College activity so that it remains a central focus for all
- To ensure consistency of College Quality Assurance procedures with all national and international benchmarks for quality in education

4. Elements of the Quality Strategy

In order to achieve the objectives set out above, the College needs to manage the quality assured processes and continuously monitor progress. This monitoring needs to focus on:

- Reflection on the effectiveness of current College Quality Assurance Procedures
- Planning for quality enhancement
- Implementation of quality enhancement
- Evaluation of Quality Strategy

4.1 Reflection on the Effectiveness of Current Quality Assurance

Procedure

Quality assurance procedures are only effective if properly implemented. Oversight of the QA Policies, Procedures, Practices and Guidelines is an essential element of monitoring the implementation of policy and of ensuring that the policies and procedures are fit for purpose.

Quality Assurance policies and procedures will only be effective if they are supported by all stakeholders. Quality is the responsibility of everyone in the College and the College requires all Learners, Staff and Partners to engage with the process.

The College encourages a culture of quality enhancement at all levels. This means inclusiveness in all aspects of Quality Assurance. This includes the involvement of Learners, Academic Staff, External Examiners, Verifiers and Employers.

An annual Quality Assurance Review will be published by the Quality Assurance Office in the College, reviewing the implementation of policy and making any recommendations for enhancement into the future. The adoption of any such recommendations is the responsibility of the Academic and Professional Council of the College. The implementation of any such recommendations is the responsibility of all Staff, and will be driven by the Quality Assurance office.

4.2 Planning for Quality Enhancement

Developing a culture of continuous quality enhancement across the College is central to this strategy. The Academic and Professional Council, and its standing QA Sub-Committee, are responsible for the development of policy, strategy and procedures in these areas. The QA Sub-Committee will continue to keep quality under review and recommend updates to policy as required.

The identification of best practice through engagement with accrediting bodies, published material and with other Colleges is also essential. This is a shared responsibility, with particular relevance to the Office of the Director of Academic Programmes, the Quality Assurance Office and the Centre for Promoting Academic Excellence. The purpose is to ensure that all Quality Assured procedures remain relevant and valid in accordance with changing internal and external circumstances.

The College will ensure that planned and systematic management of academic standards, that is enhancement focussed, is a central element of the achievement of a high quality Learner experience. The processes involved will be learner focussed with the aim of ensuring that Learners play a key role as partners in their own learning. Academic Managers and Staff are encouraged to be reflective in relation to their own procedures, pedagogical style and practices.

To achieve this culture of continuous quality enhancement the College will consistently seek to create a clear understanding amongst Staff and Learners of the importance of internal review and annual programme monitoring processes.

Recommendations for change can come from internal faculty review, annual programme reviews, accrediting bodies or other monitoring and review procedures already in existence.

All updates to Quality Assurance policies or procedures shall be ratified by the College Academic and Professional Council and will be brought to Council by the Quality Assurance Officer.

4.3. Implementation of Quality Enhancement

College Management

Senior management in the College are responsible for creating the conditions within which the learning experience takes place. An important element of a Quality Enhancement Strategy is the assessment of risk and a clear knowledge of the challenges, both internal and external, which the College faces.

The Management Board is responsible for the financial performance of the College and will continue to monitor the effectiveness of internal management and control, based on internal audits and reports. In recent years management structures have been enhanced to include faculty and department heads in more decision making processes. Investment in College resources remains a priority in ensuring that teaching and learning takes place in an environment that is of the highest standard possible.

The College Management Board monitors College financial performance and evaluates progress in meeting objectives. Quality Enhancement remains at the core of College Strategy.

External Agents

External examiners, verifiers, statutory and regulatory bodies play a crucial role in quality enhancement. They do this through bringing their professional expertise to bear in an atmosphere of peer review and critical analysis. Commendations, recommendations and advice can then be analysed and where applicable shared across the College to inform the enhancement strategy.

External examiners and verifiers reports are addressed in annual programme reports, issues arising from statutory and regulatory bodies are addressed through the office of the Director of Academic Programmes and the Quality Assurance Office.

All of these issues inform the annual Quality Assurance Review published by the Quality Assurance Office and presented to the Academic and Professional Council of the College.

Learners

The role of Learners in the quality assurance processes of the College is central to quality enhancement. Learners participate in quality assured procedures in a variety of ways. Feedback is sought from all learners on a number of occasions during the academic year. This feedback is responded to within the faculty or department and that process is reported on in the annual programme report. Learner representatives are also included at APC, at course committee meetings, and their input is constantly sought through regular contact at faculty/department level.

In conjunction with the Students' Union, training will be provided to Learner Representatives in order to enhance their ability to participate in College processes and to represent the learners in their classes in the best way possible.

The process of learner induction is an important element of College life. This is recognised in the Hunt report which recommends that Colleges "*should expand the*

*provision of induction and preparation programmes for first-year students*³ Griffith College has a comprehensive induction programme for all new learners. An annual review of this process is a part of the Annual Quality Review and consideration of any recommendations for change are brought to the Academic and Professional Council.

International Learners

International Learners form a very particular group in the College and are represented across almost all faculties/departments. The College has been involved in International education for over twenty years, both through individual learners from abroad taking College programmes and through collaborations with international institutions. The College has a lot of experience of the particular challenges faced by both educators and learners in dealing with diverse cultural and educational backgrounds.

In September 2009 a subcommittee appointed by the Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN) published a Code of Practice and Guidelines on the provision. This sub-committee was chaired by the President of Griffith College, Mr Diarmuid Hegarty. Having produced the Code of Practice the report stated:

“It is intended that all HEIs will make a conscious commitment to adopt and maintain these standards in relation to the recruitment, reception, education, pastoral care and welfare of their international students ensuring the continued high standing of Irish HEIs as education and training providers worldwide.”⁴

Griffith College has fully endorsed the report and is committed to adopt and maintain the standards outlined. The code of practice and guidelines form a central plank of the College’s quality assurance procedures in relation to international students. It will continue to inform College procedures and practices in future years.

The Hunt report also addressed the question of internationalisation of learning. Chapter six of the report examines this in detail. In terms of quality enhancement

³ Hunt, recommendation 5, page 64

⁴ Provision of Education to International Students: Code of Practice and Guidelines for Irish Higher Education Institutions

two particular sections are relevant. The first refers to the introduction of a quality mark.

“The quality of pastoral care available to international students is an increasingly important factor in student decision-making, and this will be reflected in the introduction of a Quality Mark for international education which will take into account pastoral care/student support issues in addition to academic quality assurance. It is likely that the introduction of such resources will also lead to an overall increase in the quality of support services for all students.”⁵

The College would welcome the introduction of such a Quality Mark. Our experience in the international market informs our approach to learners, but we are aware of the challenges that are there. Such markets must be developed in a sustainable way and any bad experience by a learner in Ireland will reflect on all Higher Education Institutions here. As Hunt states:

“While it is desirable to set ambitious long-term targets for the attraction of international students, growth in international student numbers must be sustainable, and must have regard to the infrastructure required to ensure a quality learning and living experience for international students. The flow of students cannot be turned on and off depending on capacity in any given year – to do so would damage relationships in the sending countries and would jeopardise longer-term prospects.”⁶

The existence of a quality mark which recognises the level of pastoral care, and the institutional experience in dealing on the international market, will lessen the danger of such a stop/start approach. In international terms, Ireland has a good reputation as an educational provider and it is important that this is maintained.

The recently elected Fine Gael / Labour government in Ireland has, in line with the policy of the previous government, stressed the importance of international education in Ireland. The programme for government states:

⁵ Hunt Report, page 84

⁶ Ibid

International Education

- *A National Strategy for International Education will be implemented, to develop the 'Education Ireland' brand, to encourage more international students to study here and to create new jobs in the sector.*
- *Our objective will be to double the number of international students studying in Ireland, particularly targeting students from India, China and the Middle East.*
- *This policy will be pursued in line with employment, academic and skill requirements of overall economy and education sector.*
- *We will overhaul the student visa system and ensure advertising, diaspora policies and quality assurance systems are strategically developed to best position the international education sector.*
- *We will permit postgraduate students to be allowed work here for up to a year after they complete their studies.*
- *High-value research students will be permitted to bring families if they are staying more than two years.⁷*

Griffith College welcomes this and recognises that increased competition across the sector requires renewed vigilance in relation to quality enhancement. All College reviews and reports are now required to include specific reference to International learner experience.

Academic Staff

The Centre for Promoting Academic Excellence provides support for all academic staff in an atmosphere of peer review. The centre delivers a Training and Education special purpose award at level 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications. It is College policy that all academic staff will take this award, or an equivalent, in order to ensure best practice in teaching and learning across the College.

The International Conference on Engaging Pedagogy (ICEP) conference was founded by Griffith College academic staff and has been running successfully each year since 2009. Academic staff from UCD, NUIM, NUIG, DCU, and many of the

⁷ Government for National Recovery : 2011 – 2016, page 12.

IOTs have joined the ICEP committee (see www.icep.ie). The conference is now a widely recognised and respected forum for collaborative engagement with pedagogical issues. All academic staff are encouraged to participate by presenting work or by attending.

The College has an annual President's Award for Academic Excellence. This award is presented in each academic year to a member of staff who has demonstrated academic excellence in their field. It is part of a series of initiatives to support quality enhancement in teaching and learning.

The College will continue to support academic staff engaging in further education and research. This is an investment in future quality of teaching within the College and is also an incentive to staff in relation to personal development.

Feedback from academic staff is taken in a number of ways. Every academic completes a module report for each module taught at the end of each semester. Academics will also continue to input to Course Committee meetings and to Annual Programme Reviews. Academic staff also feedback informally through engagement with the Centre for Academic Excellence.

The College has a number of campuses throughout the country, and a number of partner Colleges outside of Ireland. It is essential that the quality of programmes delivered is consistent across all campuses. This is a challenge for all involved. The College has a single, consistent set of quality assurance policies and quality assured procedures for all programmes. Programme managers and the Office of the Director of Academic Programmes have direct responsibility to ensure that learners across all College campuses have an equal educational experience.

Office of Director of Academic Programmes

The Office of the Director of Academic Programmes is directly responsible for the academic management of all programmes across the College. There is a particular responsibility to ensure that the requirements of Accrediting Bodies are met in all areas of QA management. The Office also has responsibility to manage the process of new programme development and external review processes.

The use of internal communication structures to ensure that all Staff are aware of the changing regulatory environment within which the College operates has been developing and will continue to develop.

Quality Assurance Office

The Quality Assurance Office comes under the Office of the Director of Academic Programmes and is responsible for on-going monitoring of Quality Assured procedures and maintenance of QA records within the College. Engagement with the faculties/departments in relation to annual and other reviews, managing the production of QA documentation, and ensuring that the College is at all times using best practice come under its remit.

The QA office will continue to work with faculties/departments to agree QA timetables for production and review of all required documentation. The Office will also facilitate internal review of these procedures and seek at all times to streamline processes.

The QA office will produce annually a Quality Assurance Review which will be used to disseminate best practice across faculties/departments and to recommend changes leading to enhancement where appropriate. The QA Office also manages the formal quinquennial review of the QA Policies, Procedures and Guidelines which is next due in 2013.

External Stakeholders

A College must be a part of its community of stakeholders. Education happens in an environment of collaboration and we all learn from one another. Recognising this, the College has taken a number of initiatives which it will continue over the period covered by this strategy.

The College is situated in Dublin 8 and continues to develop links with the local community. One example of this is Griffith College's involvement with the Dolphin House Social Plan Development Project in association with McKinsey & Company, the residents of Dolphin House, Service Providers to Dolphin House and political representatives.

Employers are central to the process of ensuring that programmes deliver on the educational needs of learner. All programme development now requires the input of employers in order to ensure that programmes are in tune with industry. Employer feedback is also required during the process of internal and external review processes. It is a requirement for all such reviews to consider employer feedback as part of the process.

“The engagement mission combines very well with the expansion of flexible learning, the promotion of work placement and upskilling, and the closer involvement of external stakeholders in curriculum design;”⁸

As Hunt points out, such engagement has many benefits for both employer and the institution. Griffith College has developed many good relations with industry through work placement programmes, research projects and through engagements with our alumni.

Alumni are an important resource for any College. They have experienced the programmes as learners and have then gone on to further education or to industry carrying with them the knowledge, skills and competencies learned. They have a unique contribution to make to quality processes within the College. Griffith College is committed to developing its alumni database, contacts and feedback to the maximum extent possible. The College is committed to completing and publishing a first destination survey annually in order to further inform ourselves of how our graduates are doing. Graduate involvement is also part of any programme review process.

In 2010 the College took an initiative to create a role dedicated to enhance outreach to industry and other educational institutions. This role has been taken by one of the senior directors of the College. It is noted that such collaboration is recommended in the Hunt report.⁹ This role will be reviewed annually by the Management Board.

⁸ Hunt Report, page 75

⁹ Hunt Report, Recommendation 19, page 111

International Collaborations

International collaborations are managed under agreed quality assurance arrangements with accrediting bodies. Such collaborations are an extension of the policy on internationalising education and of creating a coherent framework of education not only within Ireland but across the World.

In the European context particularly, the development of the Bologna Process¹⁰, and the creation of the European Higher Education Area, has assisted the transfer and progression of learners across the area and the development of closer links between educational institutions. Griffith College has been an active participant in the process and sees the strengthening of collaborative links across Europe as an important strategic objective.

Further afield, Griffith has a lot of experience engaging with learners and institutions in Asia, and particularly China. Developing these links with a view to 'exporting' Irish education and attracting learners to Ireland is also of strategic importance. Managing the quality assurance for such links is a challenge and needs to be constantly monitored. It is policy that all faculties/departments engaged in international collaborations, specifically review the performance of these programmes annually with a view to constantly seeking quality enhancement.

4.3 Communication and Information Management

The quality of engagement with any institution is often related to the quality of information available. A quality service cannot be provided if information is lacking, inaccurate or difficult to access. Therefore, information management, ease of access to information, and issues of accuracy are central to the quality strategy of the College. This element of quality management has both an internal and an external aspect.

Offices such as the Marketing Department, Admissions and the International Office disseminate information publicly. It falls under their remit to ensure that such information is appropriate, accessible and accurate. However, the information they disseminate is supplied by Faculties/Departments and Central Administration. These centres must also ensure that the information they supply is accurate. Many

¹⁰ For information see www.ehea.info

College procedures have developed over time and are fit for purpose. However, the College has initiated a complete review of its data management processes through the QA sub-committee of the Academic and Professional Council and will complete this within the 2011/12 academic year.

Communication is also of major importance and in today's technological world response times are critical. A number of initiatives have been taken within the College in recent times, setting guaranteed response times to learner or applicant queries. The Office of the Director of Academic Programmes has been tasked with carrying out a review of all such communication processes with a view to developing a set of college-wide standards for use by all.

Quality Enhancement Process

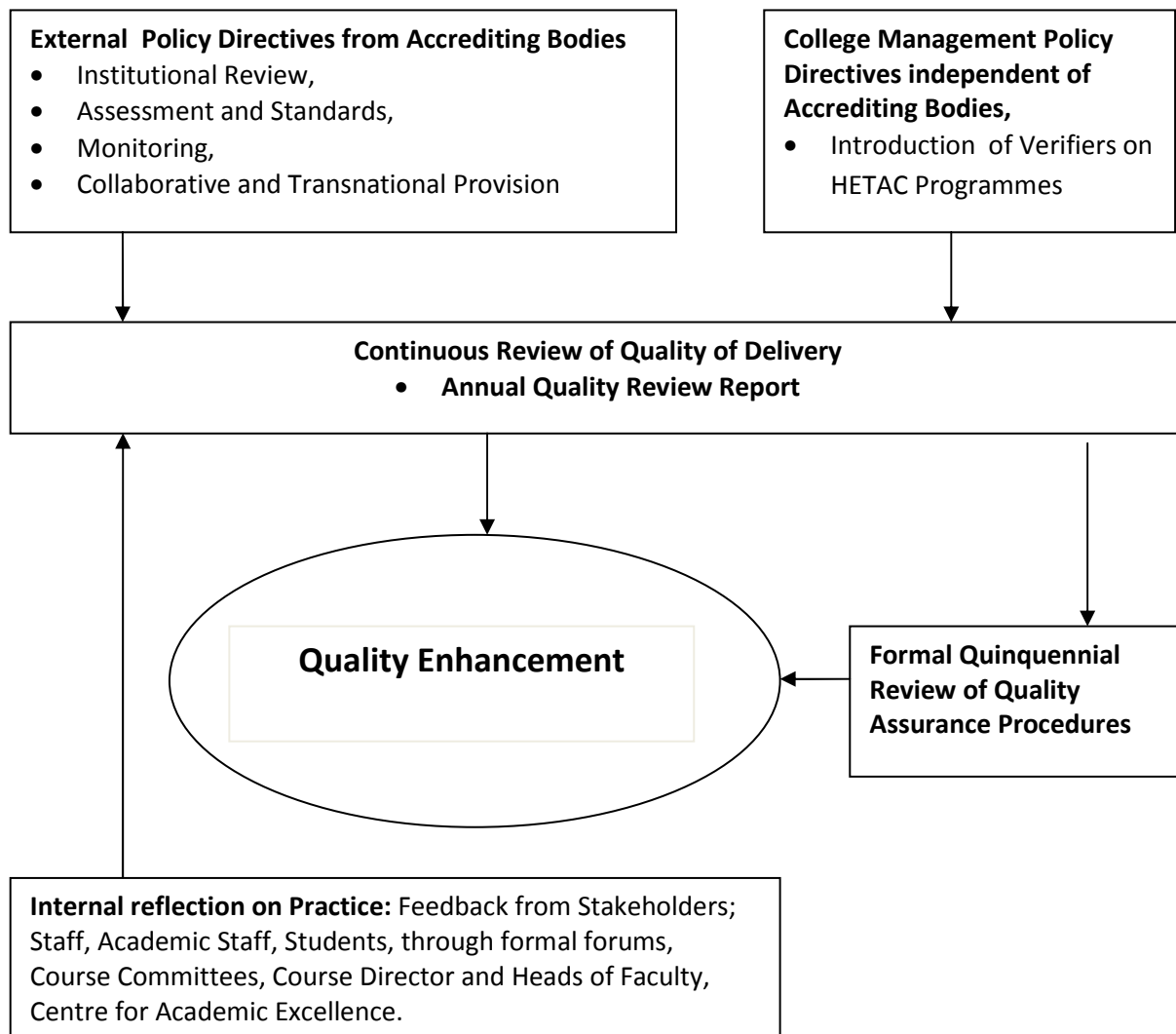


Figure 1: Quality Enhancement processes

5. Evaluation of Quality Strategy

Having agreed the elements of the Quality Strategy it is important that throughout the period of the strategy, regular evaluation of progress is undertaken. This requires the consideration of goals and timescales. This will be the responsibility of the QA sub-committee of APC. In the next section we have set out a series of goals and timescales within which we expect them to be achieved.

The main evaluation tool over the period will be the Annual Quality Review which will be presented to the Academic and Professional Council.

6. Goals and Timescales

Goal	Addressing	Responsible	Completed By
Annual Quality Review	Quality Procedures Induction Learner involvement Partner involvement	QA Office	Annual
Annual Programme Reports	International Learners Other campuses Collaborations	Faculty/departments	Annual
Review of Data Management	Student data Programme data QA data	Office of DAP	June 2012
Review of Outreach Role	Partners Engagements	Management Board	Annual
Review of Learner Engagement	Students Union Faculties Student Reps	Office of DAP	August 2011
Review of Communication Processes	Marketing International Admissions Faculties Departments Partners	QA Sub committee	August 2011
Development of Alumni Database	Contacts Feedback Involvement	Office of DAP	September 2011

7. Conclusion

Quality enhancement requires a constant vigilance by all engaged in higher education. We must constantly question what we are doing, how we are doing it,

and how we can make it better. Only in this way can we deliver a quality learning experience to our learners so that they are equipped to face the challenges that they will face on graduation. A central component of this is the involvement of learners in their own learning. Quality is a matter for all and procedures are in place to ensure input from all involved. Griffith College is committed to quality provision and to a continuous culture of quality enhancement.

The College has put in place a number of structures and procedures to ensure that quality enhancement is at the core of all processes. The strategy outlined in this document clearly articulates the need for the involvement of all stakeholders. The College has a responsibility to our learners, our staff and our peers to ensure that we are continuously delivering the highest quality educational experience to our learners. We are committed to meeting that responsibility at all times.

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