

# **Review of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) in relation to the commencement of its degree-awarding powers**

## **EXTERNAL REVIEW PANEL REPORT**



**July 2010**

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2003, the Oireachtas passed a Private Act (the RCSI (Charters Amendment) Act, 2003) amending the charters of the RCSI, to enable it to award degrees in the disciplines of surgery, medicine, nursing, radiology, pharmacy, anaesthesiology, physiotherapy, dentistry and such other further disciplines, as may be provided for by bye-laws made by the Council of the College. In accordance with this Act, the RCSI submitted bye-laws for the approval of the Minister for Education and Skills, seeking to have its degree-awarding powers commenced. As it has been the practice to date that degree-awarding powers are granted or delegated to institutions only on foot of an external review, in January 2010 the then Minister for Education and Skills requested that the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) undertake such a review of the RCSI, and subsequently provide advice to the Minister on the granting of the approval requested.

The Terms of Reference for the review were agreed with the Department of Education and Skills in March 2010 with a focus on four main criteria, the operation and management of the RCSI; education and training programmes offered by the RCSI; research activities and their relationship to programmes of education and training leading to awards at master's and doctoral level; and participation in the Bologna Process and implementation of related national policies. In the light of the objective of the review, it was understood that the balance of emphasis would be placed on the first and second criteria. However, careful consideration would also be given to the development of the College's research activities, to its awarding of higher degrees and to its current levels of engagement with regards to the Bologna Process and related national developments.

The HEA and the NQAI invited seven highly experienced individuals, based nationally and internationally, to form an External Review Panel to conduct the review of the RCSI on their behalf. Collectively, the Panel members contributed their expertise from the medical, quality assurance, operations and management, regulatory and student perspectives. In addition to the College's Self-Assessment Report and related documentation, the Review Panel was provided with submissions received as a result of a public consultation undertaken by the HEA and the NQAI. The Review Panel conducted its site visit of the RCSI from 19-21 May 2010 inclusive, and met a wide range of internal and external stakeholders over this time.

The RCSI received the Review Panel in a thorough and professional manner and the site visit was characterised by an open and constructive interaction between the Review Panel and representatives of RCSI's leadership, staff and students. Even if the Review Panel's initial impression was that the Self-Assessment Report was somewhat lacking in providing analysis of the College's operations, the Review Panel was upon completion of the site visit satisfied that it had obtained a good insight into the RCSI and had gained credible evidence on which to base its conclusions.

The following report sets out the Review Panel's advice to the HEA and the NQAI regarding the RCSI's application for degree awarding status to be granted, and also provides a number of commendations and recommendations for the College to review and implement. The report of the Review Panel, along with the response from the RCSI will be submitted to the Authorities of the HEA and the NQAI in September 2010. This documentation will then be submitted to the Minister for Education and Skills for final decision regarding the granting of degree-awarding status to the RCSI.

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **Findings of the External Review Panel**

The External Review Panel examined the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) against the criteria determined by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and agreed with the Department of Education and Skills (DES). The following is an executive summary of the Review Panel's findings.

## **Overall findings**

- (i) The Review Panel considers that the RCSI's application to the Minister for Education and Skills for approval of bye-laws to enact its awarding powers should be granted.
- (ii) The Review Panel has made a number of commendations and recommendations to the RCSI against the criteria established by the HEA and the NQAI. These are set out in the report which follows and are reproduced below. The Panel notes that the national quality assurance body to be established in 2011 will carry out reviews of all institutions under its remit, including the RCSI. Among its functions, this body will externally review the effectiveness of internal quality assurance policies, procedures and structures. The Panel recommends that an external review of the RCSI by the national quality assurance body should take place no later than two years from the time of the granting of awarding powers to the College, and should as part of its remit, establish the level of implementation of the recommendations as set out in this report.

## **Review Commendations and Recommendations**

The Review Panel has made a number of commendations and recommendations to the RCSI against the criteria determined by the HEA and the NQAI. These have been reproduced below:

### **Commendations**

The Panel wishes to commend the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) on the following:

### **The Operation and Management of the RCSI**

- The expansionary activities that the RCSI has undertaken over the past decade, both in Ireland and overseas, appear to have been well-organised and effectively managed

at all levels within the College. The Panel was impressed by the positive manner in which staff have been involved in and have supported the operational changes that such expansion has brought about. Despite its growth over recent years, the College has maintained a relatively flat management structure and short lines of communication still exist. Hence the College is a responsive organisation that can react quickly, find solutions to difficulties, and respond to entrepreneurial opportunities that present themselves.

- There is evidence of a sense of confidence and a ‘can do’ attitude across all of the College’s campuses. Significant cooperation and teamwork at inter-school level is apparent and commendable.
- A high level of student satisfaction was expressed during the review visit. Students cited many aspects of the operation and management of the College which they found to be very satisfactory, including the approachability of staff and faculty and the management of services and facilities.
- External stakeholders also expressed satisfaction with how the RCSI is delivering its services and the professional interaction of the organisation with external stakeholders.

### **Education and Training Programmes**

- The College’s stated focus on quality as a concept and on the primary importance of the learner experience was very much borne out by the discussions the Panel had with undergraduate and postgraduate learners. The learners were uniformly satisfied that their experience was of a high quality and that their views were actively considered and acted upon. In short, they considered themselves to be very well supported by the College in every respect.
- The College’s wish to promote collaboration between disciplines appears to be a very successful and fruitful initiative for all involved. It has led to a harmonious existence where those pursuing healthcare and medical professions seem to flourish equally.
- In terms of its quality assurance structures, the Panel was impressed by the College’s formal feedback questionnaire and the speed and transparency of the results that are provided to learners in all sites in which a given programme is running.
- The College has been subject to extensive professional and regulatory reviews and appears to use these opportunities to positively influence the currency and relevance of curriculum design.
- The College has harnessed information technology very effectively and uses it to keep in ongoing communication with learners across schools and sites. This has undoubtedly contributed to a learner perception of having an important voice within a larger entity.

- The development of the MSc in Leadership and Management by the College's Institute of Leadership and Management was a progressive and positive step, which has sought to contribute in a systematic manner to the continued professionalism of the College's staff.

### **Research Activities and their relationship to programmes of education and training leading to awards at master's and doctoral level**

- The College's research students largely expressed satisfaction with the postgraduate programmes and facilities provided by the RCSI. Research space provided by the College appears to be appropriate and of a high quality. In addition, the RCSI displays significant flexibility in the delivery of its programmes in order to accommodate the needs and requirements of postgraduate students.
- The College has a strong reputation nationally and internationally as evidenced by the willingness of institutions and organisations to collaborate with the RCSI towards a variety of research goals. The extent of collaboration in which the College has engaged to date is noteworthy.
- The structured PhD programmes provided by the RCSI have a strong reputation, and appear to provide a very supportive environment for the learner.
- The RCSI's programmes of education and training appear to have significantly benefited from the College's research activities and experience.

### **Participation in the Bologna Process and implementation of related national policies**

- The College has obviously committed significant time and resources to the modularisation of its programmes and to the application of ECTS compatible credits to these modules and programmes.
- The College has a number of interesting models of cooperation with a range of institutions abroad. The PhD Co-Tutelle arrangements with institutions in France appear particularly novel and potentially very rewarding for the learner.

## **Recommendations**

The Panel wishes to make the following recommendations to the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI):

### **The Operation and Management of the RCSI**

- The RCSI requires a governance model that, in structure and process, encourages and facilitates positive and proactive institutional development, along with relationship-building strategies focused on stakeholders (including staff and students), on markets and on sustained revenue generation. Governance structures currently in place at the RCSI may not be appropriate for the challenges the College will face in assuming the role of a degree-awarding institution, or to succeed in a potential period of financial instability. The current opaque role of the Council makes it less evident that the corporate governance structures are clear, transparent and consistently applied both in relation to specific functions and to the particular responsibilities attached to them.

The Panel strongly supports the RCSI governance committee in its endeavours to amend the governance structures, including amending the role and membership of the Council. An in-depth review by the College of the membership and role of the Council is essential. The changes arising from such a review could strengthen the RCSI's ability as a degree-awarding institution, to demonstrate accountability to the wider public. The Panel recommends therefore that the RCSI should engage in public consultation as part of the process of amending its governance structures. An amended governance model will emphasise the centrality and importance of the attitudes, values and expectations of RCSI's extensive body of internal and external stakeholders and has a symbolic importance, even if many or all of the functions of the Council are delegated to boards. Such a structure will promote a more consensual understanding of the policies of the College and will promote a spirit of collaboration with stakeholders. The Panel considers that such an improved governance structure can contribute to strengthening the high-level governance of the RCSI; to reinforcing transparency and public accountability; and to clarifying the governance of the degree-awarding function of the College.

- The RCSI should ensure that its corporate governance policies and procedures are informed by best national and international practice.
- The RCSI should consider changing the designation of CEO to a title more in keeping with comparable positions in other Irish higher education institutions.
- Although staff generally expressed satisfaction with current resource allocation strategies, the panel recommends that more formal and robust processes on resource allocation should be put in place. The development of policies in this area will support the allocation of resources in an effective and equitable manner. Such an



approach should significantly contribute to continuous quality improvement within the College.

- The RCSI faces challenges and opportunities surrounding its business model with regard to sustaining its long-term viability. In this context, the strategy of the College with regard to its involvement in education, research and healthcare service provision abroad, was not wholly evident to the review panel during its review. As research has grown in importance in the College, additional costs have been incurred, and there is a need to generate increasing revenue from tuition from international students; contracts for management of international clinical institutions; management of local (Irish) endowment; and philanthropic fund raising. While it is recognised that the international campuses may require a period of investment before seeing a financial return, sustaining this enterprise comes at a substantial opportunity cost. The Panel recommends that the RCSI continues to keep its graduate programmes abroad under review and where appropriate engage external advice to objectively evaluate the return on investment on this business model. Plans to enhance efforts in philanthropy are to be encouraged and more focus here may have a greater return and result in less diversion for the faculty and staff than operating education programmes abroad.
- Assuming all of the functions of an awarding body will require resources and planning. Accordingly, the RCSI should set out a plan and structure for dealing with the additional administrative responsibilities that will ensue once this activity is assumed by the College. In addition, the RCSI should engage with relevant national bodies and institutions to fully understand its additional duties as an awarding body and to put in place systems and processes in order to fulfil these responsibilities.

## **Education and Training Programmes**

- As a provider and awarding body the RCSI is expected to develop and operate robust and cohesive internal quality assurance/quality improvement policies, procedures and structures. The effectiveness of these internal policies, procedures and structures will be subject to external review by the national quality assurance body expected to be established in 2011. The Panel considers it essential that the College should give careful consideration to the recommendations below as a means of commencing its preparation for fulfilling its responsibilities in this regard.
- Whilst acknowledging the evident existence of quality within the College, a comprehensive quality culture is not evident across all levels and areas of the College's operations. The core elements of a quality assurance/quality improvement system for the College have only recently been agreed and accordingly have not yet been implemented. The Panel considers it essential that the College should progress the establishment of a Quality Assurance Office within the timeframe it has indicated in its Self Assessment Report, and develop systematic processes of quality assurance within the College and across its sites, as a matter of priority. This is particularly important in the context of the College as an awarding body and will contribute to

ensuring that the College is not only reactive to the needs and requests of learners, staff and external bodies, but that it is also developing its own assurances of quality which supports individual initiative on quality matters. Systematic quality assurance will lead to a greater level of internal cohesion and a capacity to self-evaluate. It will support the institution as it continues to grow and respond to opportunities and will reinforce existing activities.

- The role of the Director of Quality Assurance is crucial to the College's development as it makes the transition to becoming an awarding body and as it prepares to be externally reviewed under the revised national quality assurance arrangements. It is equally important that the College communicates to all staff a clear and well understood remit for the Director of Quality Assurance and his/her office. This should reflect a developed understanding of how this office will interact with the Quality Committee and clarify which aspects of quality assurance are managed centrally and which are managed departmentally; both in Ireland and abroad. The Panel would like to emphasise that the College will need to consider in this context how it can maintain the advantages of decentralised ownership of quality assurance whilst maximising the benefits to be accrued from more mainstreamed, centralised and strategic quality assurance / quality improvement management.
- The role of the Director of Quality and of the importance and impact of the introduction of systematic quality assurance processes, appropriate to the College's role as an awarding body, must be supported and understood at the most senior levels of the organisation. Quality assurance should inform the organisation's thinking about its governance model and should contribute to its strategic planning.
- Notwithstanding the number of policies and procedures that have been developed incrementally the College must, through the Quality Assurance Office, develop its quality assurance/quality improvement handbook as a matter of priority and in collaboration with staff on all of its sites. The College should consider externally available examples of quality handbooks and should seek to communicate with colleagues in higher education and training to discuss their experiences in this regard. The College should be cognisant of the *European and International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* and the *UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education* in devising its quality assurance/quality improvement handbook. Equally, it will be important to refer to the guidelines and operating principles produced by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland; the quality assurance guidelines and procedures produced by the Irish Universities Quality Board and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council; and the documentation produced by the Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN), including the *Provision of Education to International Students: Code of Practice and Guidelines for Irish Higher Education Institutions*. Further, in its capacity as a body responsible for its own awards, the College should consider seeking membership of the IHEQN as a means of regularly communicating with other awarding and quality assurance bodies in the State.

- As a national awarding body, the College has a responsibility to ensure that its policies and procedures regarding programme development, approval, delivery and assessment are particularly strong; with an emphasis on ensuring that programmes developed, are demonstrably linked to the learning outcomes of the award-types and levels of the National Framework of Qualifications; are taught in a manner that is consistent with the achievement of these learning outcomes; and are assessed in a manner that ensures that learners can demonstrate their attainment of these outcomes.
- With regards to the internal review procedures of schools and non-academic departments and services, which the College shall be establishing as part of its quality assurance/quality improvement procedures, the Panel recommends that the College considers inviting representatives from other higher education institutions to participate in these review groups. This would enable a very useful exchange, whereby the College has the benefit of perspectives from disciplines in which it does not engage, and the external party has the opportunity to learn about the quality systems which the College is developing.
- The College should consider how it can communicate in more detail with its international partners (i.e., Bahrain, Penang and Dubai) regarding the implications of the College becoming an awarding body and the impact this will have on learners, staff and quality assurance/quality improvement processes and structures.
- As detailed above, the range of supports for lecturers within the College has evidently developed over the last number of years. However, there appears to be an absence in the current provision of support on more fundamental issues, such as effective delivery of material, the design of appropriate assessment, and the relationship between these elements and programme/module learning outcomes. As the College moves to the status of having its own awarding powers, the building of capacity within the College on these issues will be crucial to order to ensure that appropriate standards are set and maintained. The Panel recommends that consistent and transparent arrangements are put in place for the training and support of teaching staff.
- Whilst the Panel is fully supportive of the rebalancing of promotion opportunities in line with the College's focus on education and training as well as research, the College should consider how to make more transparent its criteria for establishing effective teaching and learning.
- Whilst it is evident that equality of opportunity for students and staff is promoted and achieved, the RCSI should undertake to ensure that gender equality is evident across all the activities of College.
- Action taken in response to issues raised in student feedback questionnaires should be documented so that the operational impact of student feedback mechanisms is recorded and clear.

- Under the European Standards and Guidelines, there is a requirement that institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities. The Panel recommends that RCSI ensures that key indicators are systematically applied across all of its programmes and activities in order to fulfil this requirement.
- RCSI should ensure that it regularly publishes up-to-date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about all the programmes and awards offered by the College.

The Panel makes the following additional recommendations to the RCSI, the HEA, the NQAI and the Department of Education and Skills (for consideration in consultation with the Department of Health and Children, the Medical Council and the Health Services Executive where relevant):

- The Panel recommends that discussions be coordinated with the national parties responsible for the professional regulation of awards in Ireland, regarding the extent to which these responsibilities apply to the professional regulation of awards of an Irish awarding body abroad.
- The Panel further recommends that the conditions, if any, regarding an Irish awarding body making awards abroad which it does not award in its home country, should be clarified.

### **Research Activities and their relationship to programmes of education and training leading to awards at master's and doctoral level**

- The Panel concurs with the RCSI that the College's research activities are key to the reputation and standing of the College both nationally and internationally. The Panel advises the College to put in place additional metrics and benchmarks against which to assess the research capabilities and outputs of the RCSI against best practice nationally and internationally.
- The Panel understands that research activity should contribute to Ireland's overall national objectives for higher education and research, in particular those set out in the National Development Plan (NDP) and other key policy documents that have been adopted by Government, such as the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (SSTI), the National Skills Strategy, the Report of the Enterprise Strategy Group, Building Ireland's Smart Economy (2008) and the Report of the Innovation Taskforce (2010). The overarching principle is to contribute to the creation of a strong, world-class higher education and research system which address the needs of Irish society and economy and our role in the development of the European Research Area. In this context the Panel recommends that the research activity at the RCSI should be concentrated in areas of specific expertise through sustained investment and the

institutional strategic plan should be at the cornerstone of its research strategy. It is recommended that the RCSI should concentrate on its existing strengths and on specifically identified areas of new and emerging potential areas of interest. Furthermore, as Ireland is a small country, the RCSI should seek to continue its research activity in a manner which promotes effective strategic collaboration between itself, other higher-education institutions and other relevant partners.

- Given the expansion of the College over recent years, the Panel recommends that the RCSI puts in place a comprehensive research strategy across all campuses and faculties. This institutional strategy should include plans to extend research activities and research-led teaching to its international campuses. Structural integration across the College's various research institutes should also form part of the strategy.
- In light of the changing national funding environment and potentially diminishing funds, it is important that RCSI considers as part of its research strategy how research will be funded over the coming years. The Panel strongly supports the RCSI in its resolve to attain 15-20% of its research funding from philanthropic sources.
- The RCSI's plans to strengthen and develop strategic partnerships in the research field are supported by the Panel. It is recommended that the College should seek to broaden its activity in international collaboration. This will serve to augment the College's expertise in international collaboration; give the College an opportunity to extend its reputation internationally; and also assist in identifying additional non-national funding sources.
- The Panel recommends that the strategy put in place for the RCSI Research Institute should be closely aligned with the strategy for research activity throughout the RCSI. This will help to ensure that this important initiative, and one that is unique to RCSI, is better integrated with the rest of the research agenda within the College. It will also ensure that research expertise across all areas is shared and available throughout the College, and that the Research Institute has the same level of scrutiny and transparency in terms of funding as the other RCSI research programmes.

Further, the panel recommends that research activities under the Medical and Health Sciences Board and the Surgery and Postgraduate Faculties Board be coordinated. The remit of the Quality Office which the RCSI is about to put in place should extend to both Boards.

### **Participation in the Bologna Process and implementation of related national policies**

- The average level of knowledge across the College of the purpose and processes underpinning the Bologna Process is relatively low, as is understanding of its relationship with national developments such as the National Framework of

Qualifications (NFQ). The Panel considers that the College, including at its most senior levels, should inform itself in more detail regarding the Bologna Process and its objectives and carefully consider how it tangibly applies to national policy developments and in turn to the activities of the College. This knowledge will greatly benefit the College as it goes about formalising its quality assurance/quality improvement handbook and associated structures, as described on pages 19 and 20. The Panel further recommends that the Institute should use this increased knowledge and expertise to position itself within these developments more centrally and to connect with other institutions and government bodies in this regard.

- As an awarding body, the College is in a position to influence the future shape and function of the NFQ and to engage more proactively than at present with other State organisations in Ireland offering education and training awards included in the NFQ. The Panel recommends that the College takes this opportunity and that it explores the possibility of having its professional (including surgery and postgraduate professional awards) as well as its academic qualifications recognised through the NFQ. It further emphasises the importance in this regard of its recommendation on page 21 regarding further staff development in the areas of writing learning outcomes at a programme and module level that articulate clearly with NFQ levels and award-types, and designing suitable teaching, learning and assessment models.
- It is evident that the College supports some student and staff mobility but not necessarily under the umbrella of the Erasmus or Erasmus Mundus programmes. While such lack of engagement is not particular to the RCSI, indeed it is a difficulty shared by medical educators across Europe, the RCSI could do more to stimulate participation in this particular initiative. The Panel therefore recommends that the College should consider developing and promoting the Erasmus exchange programmes from the point of view of the value that can be achieved for the learner in participating in and experiencing such initiatives.
- It is recommended that the College utilise the Irish NARIC services, situated within the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, for direct comparison advice with Irish qualifications.

## **THE REPORT OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW PANEL**

# **Review Criterion 1: The Operation and Management of the RCSI**

## **Context**

Over the past decade, the RCSI has gone through a period of extensive growth. During this time the College has extended its education, research and healthcare service activities. It has also substantially increased the size of its institutions, both in Dublin and at its overseas campuses. A total of 3,980 students are registered across all campuses of the RCSI for the 2009/10 academic year and almost 1,200 staff are employed.

The following section of the report focuses on a range of matters that contributed to the review criterion of *operation and management* of the College. It includes an overview of the College's stated mission and strategy; its governance model; facilities and operations management; the management of its international campuses; its funding and financial model; and its relationship with internal and external stakeholders. It concludes with the Review Panel's commendations and recommendations in this regard.

## **Mission and Strategy**

The RCSI's stated mission is to be a leader in health sciences education, research and healthcare education delivery in Ireland and internationally. This is embodied in the College's noble purpose, "Building on our heritage in surgery, we will enhance human health through endeavour, innovation and collaboration in education, research and service". Each school within the College has its own policies in place targeted at its specific purposes and endeavours in line with the mission for the RCSI as a whole. These policies are generally developed by the academic staff which are responsible for their implementation and effective communication to stakeholders involved in the validation, delivery and management of its programmes. The mission of the RCSI appears to be well embedded amongst all staff members within the organisation. Collective interest, and pride in the achievements of RCSI students and alumni, are very evident.

The RCSI commissioned a major strategic review in 2003. Entitled Project Catalyst, 'Creating our Future', it involved wide consultation and was completed in association with external consultants. It resulted in an Institutional Strategy for the period 2004-2010 and focused on six key strategic imperatives which included renovating the core medical programme, expanding RCSI's international footprint by opening Bahrain as the Medical School's third campus and extending fund-raising activities. RCSI is coming to the end of this strategy and evidence was provided that many targets and objectives identified in the strategy have been substantially achieved.



## **Governance**

The RCSI governance structures reflect the historical origins of the College and its independent status. The College was established under Royal Charter in 1784. The Charter has been changed and updated by a series of amendments culminating in the 2003 Act of the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament), The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (Charter Amendment) Act 2003. This Act, and the earlier Charters, outline that the Governing Body of the RCSI is the Council and that the Council shall be composed of twenty-one elected Fellows of the College. The electorate shall be composed of Members and Fellows of the College. It is thus noteworthy that only surgeons may apply for membership and accordingly vote in the Council. The President of the College chairs the Council, which has a two-year term of office.

Following its strategic review conducted in 2003, the RCSI identified the need to review and remodel the high level governance structures of the College in order to "broaden participation to reflect public interest, staff participation and appropriate expertise". It has since put in place a governance committee which is currently working through a process to amend the Council structure, including extending representation on the Council to other fields in addition to surgery. Further, the Council has recently established two Boards to oversee the main educational, training and research activities of the College; the Medicine and Health Sciences Board which will oversee the degree awarding activities of the College and the Surgery and Postgraduate Faculties Board which will oversee postgraduate vocational training. A first meeting of the Medicine and Health Sciences Board is planned for September 2010.

The relationship between governance and the internal environment of teaching and learning was explored during the review visit. As a whole, faculty consider that institutional governance is supported and shared, and has enhanced the development of teaching and learning within the College over the past decade. The faculty leadership appear to seek to create and sustain conditions that motivate and support staff in their educational activities and innovative teaching and learning approaches, such as web-based teaching initiatives and blended learning, are encouraged across all levels within the College. Faculty feedback also indicates that there is strong central academic leadership in the RCSI.

Traditionally, schools have acted somewhat independently in terms of the development of policies and procedures. However recent and planned initiatives to further centralise decision-making and service provision are welcomed by staff.

## **Facilities and Operations Management**

The RCSI maintains that the physical facilities currently available to support the academic programmes and research activities of the College are extensive and appropriate. This

conclusion was supported by staff and students interviewed during the review visit. The fundamental issue of resource allocation was also explored with staff. Currently, the allocation of resources is determined based on the assessment of business cases submitted by the relevant school. Staff appeared generally satisfied with the procedures for resource allocation that are currently in place.

## **Management of campuses outside Ireland**

As indicated previously, the RCSI has recently expanded its degree programme provision in three overseas locations in particular, Bahrain, Malaysia and Dubai. The governance and management arrangements which are in place at each of these venues are tailored to the requirements of that particular institution. Effective management of the various campuses has been facilitated by the appointment of strong management teams; by the appointment of Irish academics who had experience of working with the RCSI in Dublin; by the utilisation of information technology for communication and information exchange; and by adopting the same course and information management system Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) as RCSI Dublin (see pg 24). In all cases, strong links between RCSI Dublin and the overseas campuses have been fostered by means of frequent management and faculty meetings, and collaboration between faculty at the various campuses in areas such as module development and revision and examination setting.

The RCSI is currently planning a period of consolidation which aims to centralise provision of services to the overseas campuses in Dublin. There was evidence that the international campuses have contributed to the development of this plan and are in favour of its implementation.

## **Funding and Financials**

The RCSI, as a not for profit independent academic institution with charitable status, takes the view that it must create its own future and therefore must always plan a sustainable financial model. Approximately 65% of the RCSI's income derives from education and training (of which 8% is provided by the Irish government<sup>1</sup>), 15% from externally funded research, with the balance from endowments and fundraising. Therefore, the RCSI operates a primarily self-funding model.

Over recent years, extending the internationalisation of the RCSI's education activities has necessitated significant financial investment. The establishment of key infrastructure including the development of the new university building in Bahrain, the development of a hospital education centre building and the implementation of the Graduate Education Programme in Dublin, have all necessitated significant financial commitment on the part of the College. A five-year financial plan (to September 2015) has been put in place by the

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<sup>1</sup> This figure does not reflect income arising or value added to RCSI as a result of activities carried out on behalf of, or in conjunction with, the Department of Health and Children and/or the Health Services Executive.

RCSI, and the financial focus over the coming five years has two strands: revenue generation, and a cost containment model intended not to impact upon service levels to students and stakeholders. The RCSI believes that its financial model is flexible, and has the advantage of limited bureaucracy which allows for quick decision-making. It considers that its financial model has, over many years, proven its robustness and sustainability as a consequence of stable income streams, a strong asset base both in Ireland and abroad, allied to strong financial management. The College provided assurance and the Panel accepted that there appeared to be no immediate financial risk to the RCSI and that appropriate governance arrangements are in place so that the RCSI should be resilient to any financial challenges that might arise in the future.

### **Relationship with internal and external stakeholders**

It was very evident throughout the visit that the student voice is highly valued at the RCSI. Students are represented on every College committee and student input is sought across all of the activities of the College (see pgs 23 and 24). Certain aspects of the College's relationship with its staff, including promotion and continuous professional development opportunities, are discussed on pg 25.

The Panel was provided with evidence of the College's good working relationships with external stakeholders. These included health as well as research and education related stakeholders. (Full details of organisations and representatives with whom the Panel met are provided in Appendix 4). An example of an area that appears to be working well for the RCSI is its strong reputation and impact in the translational research field; many external stakeholders commented on the strong track record of the College and its openness in collaborating with external stakeholders in this regard.

### ***Commendations***

The Panel wishes to commend the College on the following:

- The expansionary activities that the RCSI has undertaken over the past decade, both in Ireland and overseas, appear to have been well-organised and effectively managed at all levels within the College. The Panel was impressed by the positive manner in which staff have been involved in and have supported the operational changes that such expansion has brought about. Despite its growth over recent years, the College has maintained a relatively flat management structure and short lines of communication still exist. Hence the College is a responsive organisation that can react quickly, find solutions to difficulties, and respond to entrepreneurial opportunities that present themselves.
- There is evidence of a sense of confidence and a 'can do' attitude across all of the College's campuses. Significant cooperation and teamwork at inter-school level is apparent and commendable.

- A high level of student satisfaction was expressed during the review visit. Students cited many aspects of the operation and management of the College which they found to be very satisfactory, including the approachability of staff and faculty and the management of services and facilities.
- External stakeholders also expressed satisfaction with how the RCSI is delivering its services and the professional interaction of the organisation with external stakeholders.

## ***Recommendations***

The Panel wishes to make the following recommendations to the College:

- The RCSI requires a governance model that, in structure and process, encourages and facilitates positive and proactive institutional development, along with relationship-building strategies focused on stakeholders (including staff and students), on markets and on sustained revenue generation. Governance structures currently in place at the RCSI may not be appropriate for the challenges the College will face in assuming the role of a degree-awarding institution, or to succeed in a potential period of financial instability. The current opaque role of the Council makes it less evident that the corporate governance structures are clear, transparent and consistently applied both in relation to specific functions and to the particular responsibilities attached to them.

The Panel strongly supports the RCSI governance committee in its endeavours to amend the governance structures, including amending the role and membership of the Council. An in-depth review by the College of the membership and role of the Council is essential. The changes arising from such a review could strengthen the RCSI's ability as a degree-awarding institution, to demonstrate accountability to the wider public. The Panel recommends therefore that the RCSI should engage in public consultation as part of the process of amending its governance structures. An amended governance model will emphasise the centrality and importance of the attitudes, values and expectations of RCSI's extensive body of internal and external stakeholders and has a symbolic importance, even if many or all of the functions of the Council are delegated to boards. Such a structure will promote a more consensual understanding of the policies of the College and will promote a spirit of collaboration with stakeholders. The Panel considers that such an improved governance structure can contribute to strengthening the high-level governance of the RCSI; to reinforcing transparency and public accountability; and to clarifying the governance of the degree-awarding function of the College.

- The RCSI should ensure that its corporate governance policies and procedures are informed by best national and international practice.

- The RCSI should consider changing the designation of CEO to a title more in keeping with comparable positions in other Irish higher education institutions.
- Although staff generally expressed satisfaction with current resource allocation strategies, the panel recommends that more formal and robust processes on resource allocation should be put in place. The development of policies in this area will support the allocation of resources in an effective and equitable manner. Such an approach should significantly contribute to continuous quality improvement within the College.
- The RCSI faces challenges and opportunities surrounding its business model with regard to sustaining its long-term viability. In this context, the strategy of the College with regard to its involvement in education, research and healthcare service provision abroad, was not wholly evident to the review panel during its review. As research has grown in importance in the College, additional costs have been incurred, and there is a need to generate increasing revenue from tuition from international students; contracts for management of international clinical institutions; management of local (Irish) endowment; and philanthropic fund raising. While it is recognised that the international campuses may require a period of investment before seeing a financial return, sustaining this enterprise comes at a substantial opportunity cost. The Panel recommends that the RCSI continues to keep its graduate programmes abroad under review and where appropriate engage external advice to objectively evaluate the return on investment on this business model. Plans to enhance efforts in philanthropy are to be encouraged and more focus here may have a greater return and result in less diversion for the faculty and staff than operating education programmes abroad.
- Assuming all of the functions of an awarding body will require resources and planning. Accordingly, the RCSI should set out a plan and structure for dealing with the additional administrative responsibilities that will ensue once this activity is assumed by the College. In addition, the RCSI should engage with relevant national bodies and institutions to fully understand its additional duties as an awarding body and to put in place systems and processes in order to fulfil these responsibilities.

## Review Criterion 2: Education and Training Programmes

### Context

The RCSI considers itself first and foremost to be a teaching and learning led-institution. Its primary objective is to develop as a bio-medical sciences institute of international standing. In this regard it has aligned its research and corporate activities with this purpose. The College currently trains students to undergraduate level in Medicine, Physiotherapy, Pharmacy and Nursing. It also provides research based taught masters and both structured and unstructured doctoral programmes in Ireland. The most recent accreditation at its Dublin site was the Graduate Entry Programme in Medicine. The nature of the College's provision leads to learners undertaking clinical practice off-site in a number of disciplines and the management of this process as part of the provision of its education and training programmes was explored by the Panel. The College also incorporates an Institute of Leadership and Healthcare Management which engages primarily in the provision of professional development programmes for those in the medical and healthcare professions.

Abroad, the College has developed more than one model of provision. It describes the university it has established in Bahrain as a "mirror-image" of the College in Dublin. Its provision in Malaysia (Penang) is a joint venture clinical site with University College Dublin (UCD). At RCSI-Dubai, postgraduate education, training and consultancy in leadership, management and patient safety and quality are offered. Shared boards between the Dublin and international sites have been established to develop and monitor the academic and quality assurance dimensions of these enterprises.

The academic qualifications of the RCSI have been awarded by the National University of Ireland (NUI) since 1978 and the College has been subject to that institution's external quality assurance, particularly in the areas of programme validation and external examining. These NUI awards are included in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The RCSI's programmes, at home and abroad, are also subject to various reviews from a range of professional bodies; this normally includes a self-evaluation and a site visit. In 2005 and 2008 the RCSI voluntarily submitted itself for review of its undergraduate medical programmes against the World Federation of Medical Education (WFME) Global Standards for Quality Improvement in Basic Medical Education. A similar review in the School of Postgraduate Studies is planned for 2010/2011.

There is a strong emphasis on an interdisciplinary approach to education and training programmes. There appears to be active encouragement for individuals within schools to seek to cooperate and exchange expertise with the other related disciplines in the College.

The following section of the report focuses on the College's *education and training programmes* in terms of quality assurance / quality improvement structures and measures; processes for programme design, delivery and assessment; staff development arrangements;

use of information technology; and provision of student supports. It concludes with the Review Panel's commendations and recommendations in this regard.

### **Quality Assurance / Quality Improvement Measures**

The College made it evident during the site visit that it considers the development and maintenance of a quality culture as being crucial to its ongoing ability to attract learners. It thus strongly equates the concept of quality with reputation.

In terms of internal quality assurance structures it has, particularly since 2002, been undertaking what it terms a 'quality journey'. It has developed a wide range of policies and procedures over the intervening period which have addressed the requirements of its academic awarding body and the range of professional bodies with which it interacts. It is the intention of the College to develop its existing policies and procedures into an e-handbook which will be applicable to its Dublin and international sites.

It was expressed by a number of parties that the review procedures and mechanisms of professional bodies' have been a significant driver of quality in the College. Whilst this has led to many positive developments, schools are not always aware of the processes or outcomes of external reviews in which they are not directly involved. The lack of a centralised system of quality assurance has reinforced something of a silo effect in this regard. The College now intends putting in place a revised quality assurance / quality improvement structure, which will lead to the introduction of an appropriately staffed Quality Office. The Quality Office will be populated by a newly appointed Director of Quality Assurance, a senior administrator and a junior administrator. In discussions with a range of parties within the College, this was considered a positive development which should solidify the quality developments taking place across the College's schools and provide a better basis for dialogue and collaboration on quality processes within and across the RCSI's sites. It is intended that the Quality Office will receive policy and strategic direction from a Quality Committee, which will include internal and external representation in its membership.

In terms of particular quality measures, the College has placed a strong emphasis on feedback from learners, and has established an Evaluation Working Group to oversee this process. Feedback is gathered through formal and informal means. The formal processes include student representation on programme committees and the circulation of online questionnaires twice a semester. The questionnaires ask learners to comment on the programme as a whole and on individual modules. The quantitative results from these online questionnaires are made available to all students (on each site running the programme) immediately after the survey has been completed. Qualitative responses are analysed and checked for accuracy with learners before any responses are proposed. Over and above these formal methods for communicating with learners, the College encourages an open door culture and there is evidence that a good deal of informal exchange takes place between staff and learners on an ongoing basis and from which changes in practice appear equally likely to arise. The Students' Union, which consists of a President and six other non-sabbatical positions, plays an important role in representing the needs of learners and in ensuring that the rate of

response from the College to learner needs remains high. The College articulated its concern to ensure that the quality of the learner experience in the clinical context is of a comparable standard to that which is received in the College itself. It has introduced initiatives such as the appointment of specific personal tutors for learners in the clinical environment and has, as a result of feedback from students, communicated details of and arrangement for clinical placements to learners at the earliest opportunity.

In terms of its PhD programmes, it was reported that the College has adopted the guidelines on PhD programmes devised by the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB). As a result, it has introduced mentors for structured PhD learners to date, and intends doing so for all PhD students by 2011.

### **Programme Design, Delivery and Assessment**

A further element of the College's 'quality journey' has been the formation of a Curriculum Development Committee and the establishment of a strong focus on updating the curricula and ensuring that it reflects most recent developments in medicine and the health sciences, and is appropriate to the profile and needs of its learners. The extent to which the College has been subject to external reviews by professional and regulatory bodies has supported this objective. Learners reported that programme development is dynamic and subject to ongoing revisions in response to external developments and internal discussion and feedback. In this regard, the learner appears central to the development of new programmes. This process was described as starting with an analysis of graduate needs and working backwards to identify the required competencies, skills and knowledge that should be incorporated into a programme in order to meet these requirements. Credit is applied to the programme as a whole and a blended teaching and learning approach is often adopted.

The assessment methodologies adopted in the College appear to be reasonably mixed and have diversified in line with the WFME support for the use of a broad range of assessment tools. Learners, on the whole considered that they understood the function of individual pieces of assessment and how they related to their programme. They also identified their awareness of the existence of appeals processes and how these mechanisms operate in the College. The College utilises Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment), a course and information management system, for some aspects of its delivery (e.g., presentations and video clips) and assessment (e.g., multiple choice continuous assessment), as well as for the submission of certain coursework.

The external examining aspect of assessment is well known and established within the College due to its relationship with the NUI. The College and the NUI have also sought to ensure that comparable processes for external examining have been applied to the College's provision abroad. The same external examiners are largely used for provision on all sites to ensure that a comparison of standards across cohorts is possible. In terms of internal quality assurance, assessment is subject to second marking on all sites.



## **Staff Development Mechanisms**

In its recruitment of staff the RCSI seeks to ensure that individuals have well developed presentation abilities and induction is provided for those recruited. Since the 2008/2009 academic year induction has been extended to clinical tutors and lecturers. Reviews of staff appear to have taken place on an annual basis since 2006 and a Promotions Committee reviews applications made by staff for advancement. Historically promotions were made more on the grounds of research achievements. More recently, the promotional basis is weighted more evenly with teaching and learning. Contribution to college life is also considered important in this context. A system of prize giving for lecturers is in place, with winners nominated by students and rotated amongst schools. In a clinical setting, the College takes due consideration of student feedback when assessing the quality of delivery.

Training is available onsite for lecturers to develop and improve their teaching skills. A three day course designed specifically for the teaching modalities and VLE systems in RCSI has been developed and is offered to incoming and existing staff. Opportunities to avail of ongoing continuous professional development appear to be available through ad hoc and continuous workshops. To date these are primarily in assessment, learning outcomes and use of the College's information technology tools that support teaching and learning. More formally, the College introduced an MSc in Leadership and Management through its Institute of Leadership and Management in 2007 as an acknowledgement of the need to support individuals balancing the demands of research, teaching, administration and clinical responsibilities. Those not wishing to undertake the full programme can attend stand alone modules. The College has also placed an emphasis on providing training support for lecturers in dealing with the range of issues arising when acting as a personal tutor.

The RCSI states a core strategic objective for 2010-2012 as being the development of a competency framework for the College which will link recruitment, learning and development, and performance review to its strategic objectives.

## **Information Technology and student support**

The College evidently regards the achievement of a positive learner experience, as a central institutional priority amongst its student cohorts. In order to assist in the oversight of services provided to the student it has established a Student Services Project Team. The purpose of this group is to ensure that student services are provided in an integrated and cohesive manner.

It has harnessed information technology and learning resources such as Moodle, referenced in the context of delivery and assessment above, to support it in meeting this objective. The College also provides information technology support to address any technical difficulties arising and has ensured that a number of areas in the College have wireless access to Broadband. With regards to library resources, learners commented that there was a reasonable degree of access to the literature and journals they required, whilst suggesting that

online facilities are more suitable to the breadth of their needs than the physical resources available in the library. The College considers the need to activate planned developments of the library as a key infrastructure challenge.

In terms of wider supports, undergraduate students have access to free General Practitioner arrangements, while a cost is incurred by postgraduate students for this service. The College also appears conscious of the international mix of its students and has sought to ensure that particularly inclusive social events are provided occasionally so that all students can participate. Religious orientation is also accommodated through, for instance, the provision of prayer rooms.

## ***Commendations***

The Panel wishes to commend the College on the following:

- The College's stated focus on quality as a concept and on the primary importance of the learner experience was very much borne out by the discussions the Panel had with undergraduate and postgraduate learners. The learners were uniformly satisfied that their experience was of a high quality and that their views were actively considered and acted upon. In short, they considered themselves to be very well supported by the College in every respect.
- The College's wish to promote collaboration between disciplines appears to be a very successful and fruitful initiative for all involved. It has led to a harmonious existence where those pursuing healthcare and medical professions seem to flourish equally.
- In terms of its quality assurance structures, the Panel was impressed by the College's formal feedback questionnaire and the speed and transparency of the results that are provided to learners in all sites in which a given programme is running.
- The College has been subject to extensive professional and regulatory reviews and appears to use these opportunities to positively influence the currency and relevance of curriculum design.
- The College has harnessed information technology very effectively and uses it to keep in ongoing communication with learners across schools and sites. This has undoubtedly contributed to a learner perception of having an important voice within a larger entity.
- The development of the MSc in Leadership and Management by the College's Institute of Leadership and Management was a progressive and positive step, which has sought to contribute in a systematic manner to the continued professionalism of the College's staff.

## ***Recommendations***

The Panel wishes to make the following recommendations to the College:

- As a provider and awarding body the RCSI is expected to develop and operate robust and cohesive internal quality assurance/quality improvement policies, procedures and structures. The effectiveness of these internal policies, procedures and structures will be subject to external review by the national quality assurance body expected to be established in 2011. The Panel considers it essential that the College should give careful consideration to the recommendations below as a means of commencing its preparation for fulfilling its responsibilities in this regard.
- Whilst acknowledging the evident existence of quality within the College, a comprehensive quality culture is not evident across all levels and areas of the College's operations. The core elements of a quality assurance/quality improvement system for the College have only recently been agreed and accordingly have not yet been implemented. The Panel considers it essential that the College should progress the establishment of a Quality Assurance Office within the timeframe it has indicated in its Self Assessment Report, and develop systematic processes of quality assurance within the College and across its sites, as a matter of priority. This is particularly important in the context of the College as an awarding body and will contribute to ensuring that the College is not only reactive to the needs and requests of learners, staff and external bodies, but that it is also developing its own assurances of quality which supports individual initiative on quality matters. Systematic quality assurance will lead to a greater level of internal cohesion and a capacity to self-evaluate. It will support the institution as it continues to grow and respond to opportunities and will reinforce existing activities.
- The role of the Director of Quality Assurance is crucial to the College's development as it makes the transition to becoming an awarding body and as it prepares to be externally reviewed under the revised national quality assurance arrangements. It is equally important that the College communicates to all staff a clear and well understood remit for the Director of Quality Assurance and his/her office. This should reflect a developed understanding of how this office will interact with the Quality Committee and clarify which aspects of quality assurance are managed centrally and which are managed departmentally; both in Ireland and abroad. The Panel would like to emphasise that the College will need to consider in this context how it can maintain the advantages of decentralised ownership of quality assurance whilst maximising the benefits to be accrued from more mainstreamed, centralised and strategic quality assurance / quality improvement management.
- The role of the Director of Quality and of the importance and impact of the introduction of systematic quality assurance processes, appropriate to the College's role as an awarding body, must be supported and understood at the most senior levels

of the organisation. Quality assurance should inform the organisation's thinking about its governance model and should contribute to its strategic planning.

- Notwithstanding the number of policies and procedures that have been developed incrementally the College must, through the Quality Assurance Office, develop its quality assurance/quality improvement handbook as a matter of priority and in collaboration with staff on all of its sites. The College should consider externally available examples of quality handbooks and should seek to communicate with colleagues in higher education and training to discuss their experiences in this regard. The College should be cognisant of the *European and International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* and the *UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education* in devising its quality assurance/quality improvement handbook. Equally, it will be important to refer to the guidelines and operating principles produced by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland; the quality assurance guidelines and procedures produced by the Irish Universities Quality Board and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council; and the documentation produced by the Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN), including the *Provision of Education to International Students: Code of Practice and Guidelines for Irish Higher Education Institutions*. Further, in its capacity as a body responsible for its own awards, the College should consider seeking membership of the IHEQN as a means of regularly communicating with other awarding and quality assurance bodies in the State.
- As a national awarding body, the College has a responsibility to ensure that its policies and procedures regarding programme development, approval, delivery and assessment are particularly strong; with an emphasis on ensuring that programmes developed, are demonstrably linked to the learning outcomes of the award-types and levels of the National Framework of Qualifications; are taught in a manner that is consistent with the achievement of these learning outcomes; and are assessed in a manner that ensures that learners can demonstrate their attainment of these outcomes.
- With regards to the internal review procedures of schools and non-academic departments and services, which the College shall be establishing as part of its quality assurance/quality improvement procedures, the Panel recommends that the College considers inviting representatives from other higher education institutions to participate in these review groups. This would enable a very useful exchange, whereby the College has the benefit of perspectives from disciplines in which it does not engage, and the external party has the opportunity to learn about the quality systems which the College is developing.
- The College should consider how it can communicate in more detail with its international partners (i.e., Bahrain, Penang and Dubai) regarding the implications of the College becoming an awarding body and the impact this will have on learners, staff and quality assurance/quality improvement processes and structures.

- As detailed above, the range of supports for lecturers within the College has evidently developed over the last number of years. However, there appears to be an absence in the current provision of support on more fundamental issues, such as effective delivery of material, the design of appropriate assessment, and the relationship between these elements and programme/module learning outcomes. As the College moves to the status of having its own awarding powers, the building of capacity within the College on these issues will be crucial in order to ensure that appropriate standards are set and maintained. The Panel recommends that consistent and transparent arrangements are put in place for the training and support of teaching staff.
- Whilst the Panel is fully supportive of the rebalancing of promotion opportunities in line with the College's focus on education and training as well as research, the College should consider how to make more transparent its criteria for establishing effective teaching and learning.
- Whilst it is evident that equality of opportunity for students and staff is promoted and achieved, the RCSI should undertake to ensure that gender equality is evident across all the activities of College.
- Action taken in response to issues raised in student feedback questionnaires should be documented so that the operational impact of student feedback mechanisms is recorded and clear.
- Under the European Standards and Guidelines, there is a requirement that institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities. The Panel recommends that RCSI ensures that key indicators are systematically applied across all of its programmes and activities in order to fulfil this requirement.
- RCSI should ensure that it regularly publishes up-to-date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about all the programmes and awards offered by the College.

The Panel makes the following additional recommendations to the RCSI, the HEA, the NQAI and the Department of Education and Skills (for consideration in consultation with the Department of Health and Children, the Medical Council and the Health Services Executive where relevant):

- The Panel recommends that discussions be coordinated with the national parties responsible for the professional regulation of awards in Ireland, regarding the extent to which these responsibilities apply to the professional regulation of awards of an Irish awarding body abroad.

- The Panel further recommends that the conditions, if any, regarding an Irish awarding body making awards abroad which it does not award in its home country, should be clarified.

## **Review Criterion 3: Research Activities and their relationship to programmes of education and training leading to awards at master's and doctoral level**

### **Context**

Quality training of postgraduate students is a key objective for the RCSI. Prior to 1997, RCSI research students were registered with and graduated from other national higher education institutions, such as University College Dublin. Since 1997, amended procedures have been put in place, which have facilitated RCSI registering, overseeing and graduating postgraduate students independently. In 2006, the RCSI School of Postgraduate Studies was established to oversee postgraduate education and training, in collaboration with the RCSI Research Institute. The range of postgraduate programmes in the areas of medicine and healthcare, provided by RCSI and awarded by the NUI, include PhD, MD, MSc, MCh and MAO by research, as well as several Masters and Diploma courses delivered by taught modules and dissertations at locations in Ireland, Bahrain, Malaysia and Dubai. The number of post-graduate students at each of the RCSI campuses has risen substantially over recent years. The two research areas in which RCSI is most active are biomedical science and translational medicine.

RCSI competes nationally at graduate and post-graduate level for research funding and has a strong track record in securing such funding. Currently, approximately 15% of RCSI income derives from externally-funded research. Over the past decade, RCSI research and training programmes have undergone frequent internal and external review in the form of assessment of programme proposals, research outputs (published in peer reviewed journals) and site visits in the case of larger research grants. Since 1998, RCSI research strategy and programmes have been reviewed by international panels under the five cycles of the HEA Programme for Research in Third-level Institutions (PRTLTI). The reviews assessed the quality of the research programmes, the quality of research and infrastructure, research performance and coherence between strategy and ongoing/planned research and training programmes.

The following section of the report focuses on the College's *research activities and their relationship to programmes of education and training* in terms of its research strategy; its impact on teaching and learning; the extent to which it is involved in collaboration; and its support for national research objectives. It concludes with the review panel's commendations and recommendations in this regard.

### **Research Strategy**

The Strategic Plan for Research and PhD training 2009–2014 forms the basis for RCSI's current research activity. In this regard the principal advances that have been made from

2003 until 2009 include the appointment of a Director of Research; the establishment of the RCSI Research Office; the establishment of the RCSI Research Institute (2005); the establishment of the School of Postgraduate Studies (2006); increased provision of structured PhD programmes; the establishment of the Division of Population Health Sciences (2006); and the establishment of Strategic Disease Research Clusters (2007). Under its current strategic plan, RCSI intends to commit its research activities, infrastructure and funding resources specifically into Translational Medicine, building on a sound basis of Biomedical and Population Health Research.

During the Panel review visit, the College research representatives stated that to date, research developments have been principally built on the College's existing strengths in medicine and science. Initiatives have thus been put in place at faculty level as opposed to the RCSI implementing a coordinated research strategy throughout the College as a whole. For the most part, research strategies have been moulded according to the research funding available nationally and internationally. The extent of research activity varies greatly between the Irish and international campuses. For example, research activity in Bahrain is apparently at a rudimentary stage in comparison with Dublin. The College attributes the variance in research activity to the lack of systematic publicly or privately-funded research mechanisms in the countries in which the College is based.

### **Impact of research on teaching and learning**

Staff research experience and research illustrations underpin teaching across all programmes at the RCSI. The Panel found that RCSI professors and lecturers are research active and that they leverage the research areas in which they are active in their teaching. Integration of research expertise of staff into their teaching work improves teaching quality at the RCSI and in some cases, through academic peer-reviewed publications, supports the health sciences educational endeavour internationally. The RCSI provided a number of examples of how research has been incorporated into teaching across a number of its faculties.

### **Institutional collaboration and supporting national objectives for research**

There is evidence that the RCSI is very open to cooperating with other institutions and it collaborates extensively with higher education institutions and organisations throughout Ireland. Examples of such collaboration includes a partnership with the Children's Research Centre at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Dublin in the area of childhood cancer research; a research partnership established with Molecular Medicine Ireland (MMI) to accelerate the translation of biomedical research into improved diagnostics and therapies for patients; and a suite of research programmes put in place with the Biomedical Diagnostics Institute (BDI) focussed on the development of next-generation biomedical diagnostic devices. The College has also forged alliances with universities without medical schools, its main research partnership are with Dublin City University and National University of Ireland Maynooth



(NUIM). Recently, the RCSI entered into a strategic research partnership with DCU, NUIM and Dundalk Institute of Technology to create a Translational Research Hub (TRH) in the greater north Dublin/Leinster region. The TRH will have strong foundations in academia, industry partnerships and the health services and has the objective of attracting pharmaceutical and medical devices industries to Ireland.

The College collaborates with institutions at an international level, for example a Co-Tutelle PhD agreement with the Universities of Montpellier and Naples has recently been put in place. The RCSI also engages with research networks throughout Europe. Additional research activities have been identified by the RCSI which will provide opportunities for cross-collaboration at institutional level and sponsorship. Commercialisation opportunities will be identified and pursued through a combination of efficient IP identification and protection processes and close co-operation with industry partners. The development of Ireland as one of the most competitive knowledge-based societies and economies in the world underpins Government policy statements and strategies. The RCSI considers itself to be a significant contributor to the realisation of this objective through its national and international research activities.

## ***Commendations***

The Panel wishes to commend the College on the following:

- The College's research students largely expressed satisfaction with the postgraduate programmes and facilities provided by the RCSI. Research space provided by the College appears to be appropriate and of a high quality. In addition, the RCSI displays significant flexibility in the delivery of its programmes in order to accommodate the needs and requirements of postgraduate students.
- The College has a strong reputation nationally and internationally as evidenced by the willingness of institutions and organisations to collaborate with the RCSI towards a variety of research goals. The extent of collaboration in which the College has engaged to date is noteworthy.
- The structured PhD programmes provided by the RCSI have a strong reputation, and appear to provide a very supportive environment for the learner.
- The RCSI's programmes of education and training appear to have significantly benefited from the College's research activities and experience.

## ***Recommendations***

The Panel wishes to make the following recommendations to the College:

- The Panel concurs with the RCSI that the College's research activities are key to the reputation and standing of the College both nationally and internationally. The Panel advises the College to put in place additional metrics and benchmarks against which to assess the research capabilities and outputs of the RCSI against best practice nationally and internationally.
- The Panel understands that research activity should contribute to Ireland's overall national objectives for higher education and research, in particular those set out in the National Development Plan (NDP) and other key policy documents that have been adopted by Government, such as the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (SSTI), the National Skills Strategy, the Report of the Enterprise Strategy Group, Building Ireland's Smart Economy (2008) and the Report of the Innovation Taskforce (2010). The overarching principle is to contribute to the creation of a strong, world-class higher education and research system which address the needs of Irish society and economy and our role in the development of the European Research Area. In this context the Panel recommends that the research activity at the RCSI should be concentrated in areas of specific expertise through sustained investment and the institutional strategic plan should be at the cornerstone of its research strategy. It is recommended that the RCSI should concentrate on its existing strengths and on specifically identified areas of new and emerging potential areas of interest. Furthermore, as Ireland is a small country, the RCSI should seek to continue its research activity in a manner which promotes effective strategic collaboration between itself, other higher-education institutions and other relevant partners.
- Given the expansion of the College over recent years, the Panel recommends that the RCSI puts in place a comprehensive research strategy across all campuses and faculties. This institutional strategy should include plans to extend research activities and research-led teaching to its international campuses. Structural integration across the College's various research institutes should also form part of the strategy.
- In light of the changing national funding environment and potentially diminishing funds, it is important that RCSI considers as part of its research strategy how research will be funded over the coming years. The Panel strongly supports the RCSI in its resolve to attain 15-20% of its research funding from philanthropic sources.
- The RCSI's plans to strengthen and develop strategic partnerships in the research field are supported by the Panel. It is recommended that the College should seek to broaden its activity in international collaboration. This will serve to augment the College's expertise in international collaboration; give the College an opportunity to

extend its reputation internationally; and also assist in identifying additional non-national funding sources.

- The Panel recommends that the strategy put in place for the RCSI Research Institute should be closely aligned with the strategy for research activity throughout the RCSI. This will help to ensure that this important initiative, and one that is unique to RCSI, is better integrated with the rest of the research agenda within the College. It will also ensure that research expertise across all areas is shared and available throughout the College, and that the Research Institute has the same level of scrutiny and transparency in terms of funding as the other RCSI research programmes.

Further, the panel recommends that research activities under the Medical and Health Sciences Board and the Surgery and Postgraduate Faculties Board be coordinated. The remit of the Quality Office which the RCSI is about to put in place should extend to both Boards.

## **Review Criterion 4: Participation in the Bologna Process and implementation of related national policies**

### **Context**

As a national awarding body, it is expected that the RCSI will play a collaborative role with other State actors in meeting the country's objectives regarding education and training in a European and international context, and that it will have due regard and input into related national policy developments.

One of the central European developments of note in the area of higher education and training is the 'Bologna Process', which commenced with the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1999. It aims to create a European Higher Education Area, in which learners can choose from a wide and transparent range of high quality programmes across Europe and can benefit from effective recognition procedures. A number of action lines relating to the Bologna Process have been agreed by European Ministers for Education, which collectively seek to achieve three overarching objectives: the introduction of the three cycle system of degree programmes (bachelor/master/doctorate); quality assurance; and the recognition of qualifications and periods of study.

The Bologna Process and the action lines that have developed around it, in terms of higher education and training programmes and increasingly research, have become embedded in Irish policy design and implementation. In this regard, the development and implementation of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), with its emphasis on learning outcomes, credit, recognition of qualifications and improved access, transfer and progression arrangements, is a key national tool in meeting these wider objectives.

The following section of the report demonstrates the engagement of the College with the Bologna reform agenda and related national developments to date, and is followed by the Panel's commendations and recommendations for future actions in this regard.

### **Participation in the Bologna Process and implementation of related national policies**

The academic programmes provided by the RCSI, have been awarded by the National University of Ireland (NUI) since 1978. They are articulated in terms of learning outcomes and are included in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

The College has placed a significant emphasis on modularising its programmes and in assigning to them European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) compatible credit. In terms of access, transfer and progression, the RCSI's programmes can now be applied for through the Central Applications Office (CAO) and Irish and European students are accessing the College

through this means. International students are required to meet comparably high academic standards for admission both in Ireland and abroad and the College provided evidence that the record of successful participation and achievement at different sites is comparable and supports the assertion that equivalence is applied to admission criteria. A large proportion of the College's intake is international and so it has been cognisant of the importance of recognising awards achieved abroad.

With regards to learner mobility, the College's engagement with the Erasmus and Erasmus Mundus exchange programmes is very limited, while it has hosted a small number of learners in this regard. Outside of this framework however, the College has engaged in bilateral exchange agreements with a number of institutions and has developed a Co-Tutelle PhD arrangement in conjunction with the NUI and a number of participating institutions in France. In this model the learner is assigned a supervisor in each location but undertakes one *viva voce*.

Despite its engagement with a number of elements nationally which contribute to the realisation of the objectives of the Bologna Process, the Panel's meetings with learners and staff, as well as the results of a staff survey question on the topic, revealed that awareness levels regarding the Bologna Process varied considerably amongst staff and between disciplines. However, there was a strong willingness expressed to become more informed about and engaged with such developments, at a national and a European level.

## ***Commendations***

The Panel wishes to commend the College on the following:

- The College has obviously committed significant time and resources to the modularisation of its programmes and to the application of ECTS compatible credits to these modules and programmes.
- The College has a number of interesting models of cooperation with a range of institutions abroad. The PhD Co-Tutelle arrangements with institutions in France appear particularly novel and potentially very rewarding for the learner.

## ***Recommendations***

The Panel wishes to make the following recommendations to the College:

- The average level of knowledge across the College of the purpose and processes underpinning the Bologna Process is relatively low, as is understanding of its relationship with national developments such as the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The Panel considers that the College, including at its most senior levels, should inform itself in more detail regarding the Bologna Process and its objectives and carefully consider how it tangibly applies to national policy developments and in turn to the activities of the College. This knowledge will greatly

benefit the College as it goes about formalising its quality assurance/quality improvement handbook and associated structures, as described on pages 19 and 20. The Panel further recommends that the Institute should use this increased knowledge and expertise to position itself within these developments more centrally and to connect with other institutions and government bodies in this regard.

- As an awarding body, the College is in a position to influence the future shape and function of the NFQ and to engage more proactively than at present with other State organisations in Ireland offering education and training awards included in the NFQ. The Panel recommends that the College takes this opportunity and that it explores the possibility of having its professional (including surgery and postgraduate professional awards) as well as its academic qualifications recognised through the NFQ. It further emphasises the importance in this regard of its recommendation on page 21 regarding further staff development in the areas of writing learning outcomes at a programme and module level that articulate clearly with NFQ levels and award-types, and designing suitable teaching, learning and assessment models.
- It is evident that the College supports some student and staff mobility but not necessarily under the umbrella of the Erasmus or Erasmus Mundus programmes. While such lack of engagement is not particular to the RCSI, indeed it is a difficulty shared by medical educators across Europe, the RCSI could do more to stimulate participation in this particular initiative. The Panel therefore recommends that the College should consider developing and promoting the Erasmus exchange programmes from the point of view of the value that can be achieved for the learner in participating in and experiencing such initiatives.
- It is recommended that the College utilise the Irish NARIC services, situated within the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, for direct comparison advice with Irish qualifications.

## APPENDICES

### *Appendix 1 – Members of External Review Panel*

The review of the RCSI was conducted by the following panel of seven reviewers appointed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI). The review team obtained a briefing on the requirements and objectives for the review process during the weeks of 4 and 10 May 2010. The main review visit was conducted by the panel between Wednesday 19 and Friday 21 May 2010.

#### **Professor Christian Thune – Chair of Review Panel**

##### **Former president of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)**

Christian Thune was, for a number of years, Professor of International Politics at the University of Copenhagen, and he was Dean of the Faculty of Economics, Law and Political Science. In 1992 the Danish government appointed him Director of the new Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Higher Education. During the period of 1992-99 the Centre evaluated all higher education programmes in Denmark. From 1999 until 2006 Christian was Director of the Danish Evaluation Institute that was established by the government with the mandate systematically to evaluate all levels and sectors of Danish education. From 2007 he has been Vice-Chair of the Danish Accreditation Council responsible for accrediting all higher education programmes.

From 2000 until 2005 Christian was President of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

#### **Professor Edward Holmes**

##### **Distinguished Professor, University of California Vice Chancellor/Dean Emeritus of Health Sciences, UCSD Executive Deputy Chairman, Biomedical Research Council, Singapore Executive Chairman, National Medical Research, Singapore**

Edward Holmes was appointed a Howard Hughes Medical Investigator at Duke University School of Medicine in 1974 and later became the James B. Wyngaarden Professor of Medicine. From 1991 until 1999, he worked with the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and subsequently became the Joseph Grant Professor in the School of Medicine, the Senior Associate Dean for Research, Vice President of Translational Medicine and Clinical

Research, and Special Counsel to the President of the University on Biomedical Research at Stanford University.

In January 1999 Edward returned to Duke University as the Dean of the School of Medicine and Walter Kempner Professor in Medicine and Genetics. He was appointed Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences and Dean of the School of Medicine at the University of California, San Diego in the fall of 2000 and served in this role until October 2006. He is currently a Distinguished Professor of Medicine at the University of California, and Vice Chancellor/Dean of Health Sciences, Emeritus at the University of California, San Diego. Edward became the Executive Deputy Chairman of the Biomedical Research Council and the Executive Chairman of the National Medical Research Council in Singapore in October 2006, and he also holds an appointment as the Lien Ying Chow Professor of Medicine at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore.

Edward has engaged in basic biomedical and clinical research throughout his academic career and his laboratory has focused on the molecular bases of human disease.

Edward has served on the Council of Advisors for the National Institute for Diabetes, Digestive, and Kidney Diseases of the National Institutes of Health, and he served as Chair of the Research Advisory Board of GlaxoSmithKline. He also serves on the Grand Challenges Explorations Innovation Review Panel for the Gates Foundation.

### **Professor Aidan Moran**

**Former Registrar and Vice President of Academic Affairs at University College Cork, Ireland**

**Member of the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB)**

Aidan Moran is a graduate of University College Dublin. He has held academic appointments at Trinity College Dublin, the University of Reading and University College Cork where he was Professor of Statistics. He has been a Fulbright Fellow at the University of Stanford. His teaching and research interests have included medical statistics. From 1989 to 2003 Aidan was Registrar and Vice President of Academic Affairs at UCC.

Aidan is a former member of the Senate of the National University of Ireland and is currently a member of the Irish Universities Quality Board and the Board of Governors of Mercy University Hospital Cork.

### **Professor Júlio Pedrosa**

**Former Rector, University of Aveiro, Portugal**

**Former Minister for Education, Portugal**

Júlio Pedrosa de Jesus graduated with a Licenciatura in Physics and Chemistry, from the



University of Coimbra, Portugal in 1967, where he started as a research assistant the same year. After three years serving in the Navy (1968-71) he returned to Coimbra, where he stayed until moving to the new University of Aveiro, in 1974, just after it was created.

Having obtained his PhD in Chemistry at University College, Cardiff, UK, Julio retired, as Full Professor of University of Aveiro in June 2009, continuing as Senior Researcher of Ciceco, the Centre for Research in Ceramics and Composite Materials and Associated with the Research Centre in Governance, Competitiveness and Public Policies of the same University. His main research interests and publications, in recent years, have focused on Science and Education Policies and Governance, after being involved with research on Bioinorganic and Materials Chemistry for 25 years, field in which he has more than one hundred publications.

Vice-rector of the University in the period 1987-92 he was elected Rector in 1994. Re-elected in 1998, he interrupted this activity in July 2001, to be Minister of Education of Portugal until April 2002, being elected by Parliament as President of the National Council of Education, in 2005, for a mandate finished in June 2009.

Since 2009, Julio has been a member of the Board of UTAD, the University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro and of ITQB, the Institute for Biological and Chemical Technology, in Lisbon.

Julio maintains a strong interest in university and research evaluation, organization and management, being currently a member of the Register Committee of EQAR – European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education, designated by EUA. Associated with the Institutional Evaluation Program of EUA, he was involved with institutional evaluations in Ireland, Spain and Turkey, as well as in the evaluation of the System of Higher Education in Turkey.

### **Mr Hugh Sullivan**

#### **Education Officer of the Union of Students in Ireland**

Hugh Sullivan was Education Officer of the Union of Students in Ireland in 2009/2010. Hugh holds an Honours Bachelor Degree in Management Science from Trinity College Dublin. Hugh's role as the Education Officer at USI was to implement USI's policies in relation to student grants, the national policies on higher education standards, quality assurance, assessment, qualifications and teaching principles and access to education.

**Ms Isabel Nisbet****Acting Chief Executive of the UK Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual)**

Isabel Nisbet is the Chief Executive of the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) which regulates qualifications (excluding university degrees) and National Curriculum assessments in England. She is also an independent member of the Council of St George's Medical School, which is part of the University of London.

From 2005 until 2008 Isabel was Director of Regulation and Standards at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. In July 2004 she led the establishment of the Postgraduate Medical Education and Training Board (PMETB) and in 2003 she set up a new regulatory body, the Council for the Regulation of Healthcare Professionals, and was its acting Chief Executive. Before that she held Director posts at the General Medical Council, at a time of comprehensive reform. From 1995 - 1999 she was Deputy Health Service Commissioner (Ombudsman) for England, Scotland and Wales.

Isabel was a senior civil servant, with a career in Government spanning the Scottish Office, the Cabinet Office and the Department of Health. She lives in London and the West Midlands, but was brought up in Glasgow and retains links there.

**Dr Jim Kiely****Health Policy Advisor, Development Cooperation Directorate, Department of Foreign Affairs**

Jim Kiely is a medical graduate of UCD medical school (MB. BCH. BAO) and has a Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians in Ireland (FRCPI) and a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) from the University of Limerick. Jim was Chief Medical Officer with the Department of Health and Children from 1997 until 2008. Since 2008 Jim has held the post of Health Policy Advisor in the Development Co-Operation Directorate at the Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland.

## ***Appendix 2 – Terms of Reference, Criteria and Procedures for RCSI Review***

### **Review by the Higher Education Authority and National Qualifications Authority of Ireland of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland in relation to the commencement of its degree-awarding powers**

#### **- Terms of Reference, Criteria and Procedures**

#### **1. Background**

The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) was established under charter and is currently a recognised college of the National University of Ireland. For over two hundred years the RCSI has played a major role in medical education and training in Ireland. Founded in 1784 to train surgeons, a medical school was later established in 1886. Today RCSI has Schools of Pharmacy, Physiotherapy and Nursing. In addition to undergraduate education RCSI delivers postgraduate training and education through its Faculties of Radiology, Dentistry, Sports & Exercise Medicine, Nursing, the School of Postgraduate Studies and the Institute of Leadership in Healthcare Management. The RCSI also has a Research Institute which brings together basic and clinical researchers from various collaborating institutions to share advanced facilities with the aim of integrating basic and clinical research, so that advances in medical science are translated as quickly as possible into patient treatments.

In 2003, the Oireachtas passed a Private Act (the RCSI (Charters Amendment) Act, 2003) amending the RCSI charters to enable it to award degrees in the disciplines of surgery, medicine, nursing, radiology, pharmacy, anaesthesiology, physiotherapy, dentistry and such other further disciplines, as may be provided for by bye-laws made by the Council of the College. In accordance with the Act, RCSI has submitted bye-laws for the approval of the Minister for Education and Science, seeking to have its statutory degree-awarding powers commenced.

It has been the practice that degree-awarding powers are granted or delegated to institutions only on foot of an external review. In this context, the Minister has requested the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) to undertake such a review of RCSI and to advise him on the matter. This document, which has been prepared by the HEA and NQAI in consultation with the RCSI, and which has regard to best national and international practice, proposes criteria and procedures for the review of RCSI.

## 2. Review Objectives

Higher education institutions which acquire statutory degree-awarding powers are entrusted with serious responsibilities for which they are accountable. In broad terms, these responsibilities relate to the operation and management of an institution, and to the quality assurance of its education and training provision. The objectives of the review will be to assure the Minister, and the wider national and international public, that appropriate and effective policies and processes are in place relating to:

- the quality of education, training and research carried out by the RCSI, both nationally and internationally, in the disciplines of surgery, medicine, nursing, radiology, pharmacy, anaesthesiology, physiotherapy, dentistry and such other further disciplines as may be included and that these processes can be maintained into the future
- the standards of the awards, including research degrees, made by the RCSI
- the contribution by RCSI to national objectives for collaborative higher education and research activity including the development of structured education for researchers, the transfer of knowledge between research and the education and training curriculum at both postgraduate and undergraduate levels and on to medical practice
- the ongoing management and organisational capacity of the RCSI to deliver high quality education and training.

## 3. Basis of Review Criteria and Procedures

To meet the review objectives, the RCSI will be evaluated and assessed against criteria and procedures that are informed by institutional review practice within the Irish higher education system, and by the standards and guidelines for quality assurance agreed by the Ministers of the Bologna signatory states. The review will also have regard to broader international best practice guidelines pertaining to the fields of study in which the RCSI seeks to have degree awarding powers commenced. Specifically, the proposed criteria and procedures are informed by the following documents:

- Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC): *Criteria and Procedures for the Delegation of Authority to Make Awards* (2004); *Policy on Institutional Review of Providers of Higher Education and Training* (2007); *Supplemental Guidelines for Institutional Review* (2008); *Supplementary Guidelines for the Review of Effectiveness of Quality Assurance Procedures* (2008)<sup>2</sup>
- Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB): *Institutional Review of Universities (IRIU) Handbook* (2009); *Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish*

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.hetac.ie/publications.cfm?SID=44>

*Higher Education* (2009) <sup>3</sup>*Irish Higher Education Quality Network: Principles of Good Practice in Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement for Higher Education and Training* (2005); *Principles for Reviewing the Effectiveness of Quality Assurance Procedures in Irish Higher Education and Training* (2007); *Provision of Education to International Students: Code of Practice and Guidelines for Irish Higher Education Institutions* (2009) <sup>4</sup>

- *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA): Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn., 2009) <sup>5</sup>
- *MEDINE The Thematic Network on Medical Education in Europe, WFME Global Standards for Quality Improvement in Medical Education – European Specifications*<sup>6</sup>.

## 4. Review Criteria

The following are the proposed criteria and procedures for the review of the RCSI in relation to the commencement of its degree-awarding powers. These criteria will apply to the College's operations and educational provision both in Ireland and overseas.

### 4.1 The operation and management of the RCSI

An institution granted taught and research degree awarding powers is governed, managed and administered effectively, with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic standards. Its financial management is sound and a clear relationship exists between its financial policies and administration and the maintenance of the quality and standards of its education and training provision.

This criterion is intended to assist in evaluating the College's operation and management, and to assess whether the existing systems are appropriate to, and capable of sustaining education and training programmes leading to the award of degrees in the disciplines of surgery, medicine, nursing, radiology, pharmacy, anaesthesiology, physiotherapy, dentistry and such other further disciplines as may be included in the future.

Specifically, the RCSI will be expected to provide evidence that:

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.iuqb.ie/info/iri.u.aspx>; [http://www.iuqb.ie/info/good\\_practice\\_guides.aspx](http://www.iuqb.ie/info/good_practice_guides.aspx)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.iheqn.ie/publications/default.asp?NCID=154>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.engq.eu/files/ESG\\_3edition%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.engq.eu/files/ESG_3edition%20(2).pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.eua.be/fileadmin/user\\_upload/files/newsletter/EUROPEAN-SPECIFICATIONS-WFME-GLOBAL-STANDARDS-MEDICAL\\_EDUCATION.pdf](http://www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/newsletter/EUROPEAN-SPECIFICATIONS-WFME-GLOBAL-STANDARDS-MEDICAL_EDUCATION.pdf)

- its strategic, financial planning and resource allocation policies are coherent and relate to its education and training provision in the disciplines of surgery, medicine, nursing, radiology, pharmacy, anaesthesiology, physiotherapy, dentistry and such other further disciplines as may be included in the future
- the College has appropriate physical and other facilities to deliver degree programmes in the fields of surgery, medicine, nursing, radiology, pharmacy, anaesthesiology, physiotherapy, dentistry and such other further disciplines as may be included in the future
- the funding model for the college is sustainable, covering the full range of the college's activities and that appropriate safeguards are in place to protect the interests of students
- its education and training mission and the associated policies and systems are understood and applied by its staff and, where appropriate, its students
- the same mission and policies are developed, implemented and communicated in collaboration with those who have responsibility for delivering education and training programmes and other relevant stakeholders
- its corporate governance structures are clear, transparent and consistently applied both in relation to specific functions and the particular responsibilities attached to them
- its corporate governance policies and procedures are informed by best national and international practice
- there is a strong academic leadership in the disciplines of surgery, medicine, nursing, radiology, pharmacy, anaesthesiology, physiotherapy, dentistry and such other further disciplines as may be included in the future
- the College has effective risk and change management strategies, and has robust systems in place to ensure that the academic standards of its education and training provision are not put at risk
- equality of opportunity for students and staff is promoted and achieved
- it has appropriate pastoral and other non-academic support policies and services for its students
- it has appropriate arrangements in place with external stakeholders, including Government Departments, the Health Services Executive, the Higher Education Authority, individual hospitals, professional bodies and other academic institutions in relation to the delivery of its programmes.

## 4.2 Education and training programmes offered by the RCSI

Ireland is committed to maintaining high quality in teaching and learning in accordance with its obligations under the Bologna Process. The criteria set out here are intended to assist the examination of the College's quality assurance processes for the programmes of education and training for which it is seeking to commence its degree-awarding powers. In line with practice in the Irish higher education sector generally, and Ireland's commitment to the Bologna Process, the criteria used here are the standards from Part 1 of the European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions. These criteria should be considered in conjunction with the accompanying guidelines as set out in *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn. 2009), pp. 16-19.<sup>7</sup> The guidelines provide additional information about good practice and in some cases explain in more detail the meaning and importance of the standards.

- *Policy and procedures for quality assurance*

Institutions should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. In the case of the RCSI, these policies and procedures should cover both the education and clinical aspects of their programmes. The RCSI should also have clear mechanisms for monitoring whether stated objectives are being met and a means to respond to any identified weaknesses in a timely and effective manner. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.

- *Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards*

Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.

- *Assessment of students*

Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.

- *Quality assurance of teaching staff*

Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so. They should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports.

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.engq.eu/files/ESG\\_3edition%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.engq.eu/files/ESG_3edition%20(2).pdf)

- *Learning resources and student support*

Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered.

- *Information systems*

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities.

- *Public information*

Institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering.

- *Appeals procedures*

The RCSI should have processes in place to deal with any complaints or appeals in respect of academic and non-academic matters.

#### **4.3 Research activities and their relationship to programmes of education and training leading to awards at masters' and doctoral level**

This criterion is intended to assist the examination of the College's research activities in the disciplines of surgery, medicine, nursing, radiology, pharmacy, anaesthesiology, physiotherapy and dentistry.

The College should provide evidence that the training and supervision of research students is informed by advanced knowledge and experience of current research and scholarly activity in the relevant subject area. The College should demonstrate how its PhD programmes provide for the quality training of early-stage researchers, with specific reference to the IUQB's *Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education* (2009), and the SSTI recommendation on the introduction of structured PhD programmes. In addition, the College should demonstrate how its research activities

- are strategically planned
- impact on undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and learning in the College
- support national objectives for research, including those set out in the Government's *Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (SSTI)* [2006] and 'Building Ireland's Smart Economy – a Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal' (2008)



- promote institutional collaboration with other higher education institutions on the island of Ireland and
- are linked to an effective knowledge transfer and innovation strategy.

#### **4.4 Participation in the Bologna Process and implementation of related national policies**

As a signatory state to the Bologna Process, Ireland is committed to the establishment of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) based on international cooperation and academic exchange that is attractive to European students and staff, as well as to students and staff from other parts of the world. The EHEA is intended to facilitate mobility of students, graduates and higher education staff; prepare students for their future careers and for life as active citizens in democratic societies, and support their personal development; and to offer broad access to high-quality higher education, based on democratic principles and academic freedom.

As well as the quality assurance standards set out in section 4.2 above, additional reforms to support the development of the EHEA relate to qualification structures (the establishment of easily readable and comparable degrees organised in a three-cycle structure, with defined learning outcomes); and the fair recognition of foreign degrees and other higher education qualifications in accordance with the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention. In addition, work is also being undertaken in areas of broader societal relevance, such as the links between higher education, research and innovation; equitable participation and lifelong learning.

As part of the review process relating to the commencement of its degree awarding powers, the College will be invited to demonstrate its engagement with the Bologna reform agenda, particularly in relation to the key national priorities of:

- the implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications
- the provision of access, transfer and progression opportunities to learners
- increasing student and staff mobility
- the recognition of foreign qualifications for the purposes of further study.

## **5. The Review Process**

This document, which has been prepared by the HEA and NQAI, in consultation with the RCSI, and with the agreement of the Department of Education Science, establishes the Terms of Reference for the review.

In line with best national and international practice, the review process will consist of the following elements:

- an institutional self-assessment report to be prepared by the RCSI addressing the agreed criteria and terms of reference
- a review of the RCSI self-assessment report by the expert panel and consideration by the panel of any other information they might consider relevant
- visit by expert panel appointed by the HEA and NQAI
- preparation of a review report by expert panel for submission to HEA and NQAI, which will include findings and a recommendation on commencement of degree awarding powers
- institutional response to the expert panel report to be prepared by the RCSI
- consideration of review report and institutional response by the boards of the HEA and NQAI, and formulation of advice to the Minister.

The executives of the HEA and NQAI will provide secretarial support to the expert panel, including drafting of the expert panel's report. The HEA and NQAI will also appoint an advisory group to assist in the appointment of the expert panel and to input as appropriate in relation to the formulation of advice to the Minister. The advisory group will include representatives of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Irish Universities Quality Board and the National University of Ireland.

## 6. Indicative Timetable for Review

Agreement of terms of reference and protocol for review	March 2010
RCSI commences self-evaluation report against agreed criteria	March 2010
Appointment of expert review panel by HEA and NQAI	March 2010
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable by HEA and NQAI	March 2010
Briefing for expert review panel	April 2010
RCSI self-evaluation report completed and submitted to HEA and NQAI for circulation to expert review panel	April 2010
Expert review panel site visit	May 2010
Expert review panel report completed	July 2010
RCSI submits response to expert review panel report to HEA and NQAI	August 2010
HEA and NQAI considers reports and submits advice to the Minister	September 2010

## ***Appendix 3 – Review Visit Programme 19 – 21 May 2010***



### **Degree Awarding Status (DAS) Application: Site Visit**

**Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> to Friday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2010**

#### **SCHEDULE**

#### **Day 1: Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2010**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Attendees</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Venue</b>
08.45	Review Team	Meet in hotel foyer to travel to RCSI	
09.00	Review Team arrive at RCSI <b>Group B</b>	Welcome by RCSI officials	St Stephens Green entrance
9.10 – 10.00	Review Team, HEA & NQAI	Briefing of the Review Team by the HEA and the NQAI	Robing Room
10.00 – 10.20	Review Team and RCSI visit Co-ordinator  <b>Dean</b>	Introductory Meeting with co-ordinator – discussion of logistical issues and arrangements for the review visit	Robing Room
10.20		COFFEE	Robing Room
10.35- 11.00	Review Team & Vice-President ( <b>A</b> )	Welcome from Vice-President RCSI to the Team	Robing Room

11.00 – 12.15	Review Team & CEO, Deputy CEO, Dean, Director Surgical Affairs  <b>Group B</b>	Discussion of the institutional mission goals, strategic aims and direction in relation to quality assurance and improvement	VC Room
12.15- 13.00	Review Team & guides	Site visit – virtual and actual – Moodle overview and walk-about in RCSI	Stephens Green facilities
13.00 – 14.00	Review Team	LUNCH	Robert Smith Room
14.00- 15.00	Review Team and Heads of Schools –  <b>Group E</b>	Discussion with Heads of Schools and Departments	VC Room
15.00- 16.00	Review Team and Members of the Quality within Academic Depts & Schools  <b>Group J</b>	Members of the quality initiatives within Academic Departments & Schools	VC Room
16.00- 16.15	Review Team	COFFEE	Robing/VC Room
16.15- 16.45	Review Team & Student Union Officials & students selected by SU  <b>Group K</b>	Meeting with student representatives to discuss the effectiveness of the mechanisms used for engaging students in decision-making and quality assurance and enhancement procedures	VC Room
16.45- 17.15	<b>Parallel Session 1</b>  Review team and Undergraduate Students  <b>Group L</b>	Meeting with undergraduates to discuss the effectiveness of the mechanisms used for engaging students in decision-making and quality assurance and enhancement procedures (Medical students)	VC Room
16.45- 17.15	<b>Parallel Session 2</b>  Review team and Undergraduate	Meeting with undergraduates to discuss the effectiveness of the mechanisms used for engaging students in decision-making and quality assurance and enhancement procedures (Physiotherapy & Pharmacy)	Robert Smith Room

	Students <b>Group L</b>	students)	
17.15-17.30	Review Team	COFFEE	Robing Room
17.30-18.30	<b>Review Team</b>	Private discussion to exchange first impressions	Robing Room
19.00	Review Team & RCSI <b>Group A &amp; B + governance</b>	Dinner at RCSI	Board Room

**Day 2: Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2010**

Time	Attendees	Purpose	Venue
<b>08.00</b>	Review Team	Breakfast meeting including video-linked observation of 'Surgical Grand Rounds' – regular weekly multi-site video-linked medical class training session by clinician	RCSI VC Room
<b>08.45-09.00</b>	Chair & RCSI Visit co-ordinator  Dean & LL	Brief meeting with the co-ordinator to clarify and pick up any issues arising from Day 1 that might impact schedule	VC Room
<b>09.00-09.15</b>	Review Team	Private Discussion ( <i>and Penang set-up</i> )	VC Room
<b>09.15 – 09.50</b>	Review Team & Penang Medical College Leadership (R)	Penang Medical College	VC Room
<b>09.50-10.00</b>	-	<i>Sign off and set-up time Penang &amp; Bahrain</i>	
<b>10.00-11.00</b>	Review Team & RCSI Bahrain leadership  <b>Group Q</b>	RCSI Bahrain	VC Room

<b>11.00</b>	Review Team	<b>COFFEE</b>	Robing/VC Room
<b>11.15-12.00</b>	Academic Staff <b>Group F</b>		VC Room
<b>12. 00-12.45</b>	Clinical Staff <b>Group G</b>		VC Room
<b>12.45-14.00</b>	Review Team	<b>Lunch</b>	Robert Smith Room
<b>14.00-14.30</b>	Review Team & Staff Unions <b>Group U</b>		VC Room
<b>14.30 - 15.15</b>	<b>Parallel Session 1</b>  Review Team and non-academic HODs <b>Group H</b>		VC Room
<b>14.30 - 15.15</b>	<b>Parallel Session 2</b>  Review Team, and non-academic HODs <b>Group I</b>		Robert Smith Room
<b>15.15-16.00</b>	Review Team & postgraduate doctoral students <b>Group N</b>		VC Room
<b>16.00-16.45</b>	Review Team	COFFEE/REVIEW	Robing Room
<b>16.45-17.45</b>	Review Team & School of Postgraduate Studies <b>Group M</b>		VC Room
<b>17.45-18.30</b>	Review Team	Review of Meetings and discussion to draft the outcomes report – in particular summary findings and recommendations	Robing Room

		that will form the basis of the Oral Report	
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**Friday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2010**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Attendees</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Venue</b>
<b>08.15</b>	Review Team	<b>Breakfast meeting of the team to prepare for day 3 of the visit</b>	<b>RCSI Robing Room</b>
<b>08.45</b>	Chair & RCSI Visit co-ordinator  Dean & LL	Brief meeting with the co-ordinator to clarify and pick up any issues arising from Day 2 that might impact schedule	Robing Room
<b>09.00-09.30</b>	<b><i>Parallel Session 1</i></b>  Review Team, and research (non-student) staff  <b>Group X</b>		VC Room
<b>09.00-09.30</b>	<b><i>Parallel Session 2</i></b>  Review Team, and taught masters students  <b>Group Y</b>		Robert Smith Room
<b>09.30-10.20</b>	Review team & Director of Research, Research Support & Commercialisation Staff <b>(Group S)</b>		VC Room
<b>10.20-10.35</b>	Review Team	COFFEE	Robing/VC Room
<b>10.35-11.25</b>	Review Team & Institute of Leadership and Healthcare		VC Room



	Management Team <b>Group T</b>		
<b>11.30– 12.30</b>	<b><i>Parallel Session 1</i></b>  Review Team and Stakeholder 1  <b>Group V</b>	<i>(Group V &amp; W: possibility for three groups/rooms if needed)</i>	President's Meeting Room
<b>11.30 – 12.30</b>	<b><i>Parallel Session 2</i></b>  Review Team and Stakeholder 1  <b>Group W</b>		Robert Smith Room
<b>12.30- 13.45</b>	Review Team	Lunch and Private Discussion	Robing Room
<b>13.45- 14.15</b>	Review Team and RCSI Senior Staff  <b>Group B</b>	Close out Session	VC Room
<b>14.15- 15.00</b>	Review Team and NQAI and HEA	Oral report by Review team to the NQAI and the HEA	VC Room
<b>15.00</b>	END		

## ***Appendix 4 – List of External Stakeholders met by Review Panel***

### **Group: Health-related external stakeholders**

**Professor Gerard Bury**, Director of Medical Education and Training, Health Services Executive (HSE)

**Dr Philip Crowley**, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health & Children Group

**Ms Sheila Earley**, former Medical Manpower Manager, Beaumont Hospital

**Dr Anne Keane**, Head of Education & Training, Irish Medical Council

**Mr Tom Kearns**, Education Officer, An Bord Altranais

**Ms Orla Keegan**, Head of Education, Research and Bereavement Services, Irish Hospice Foundation

**Mr Ambrose McLoughlin**, Chief Executive, Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland

**Mr Stephen McMahon**, Chief Executive, Irish Patients Association

**Mr Ruaidhri O'Connor**, Chief Executive, Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists

**Ms Helen Shortt**, Business Development and Planning Manager, Beaumont Hospital

### **Group: Education and research related external stakeholders**

**Dr Anne Cody**, Head of Clinical and Applied Biomedical Research, Health Research Board

**Ms Avril Daly**, Chairperson, Genetic and Rare Disorders Organisation (GRDO)

**Ms Andrea Durnin**, Deputy Registrar, National University of Ireland

**Dr Ruth Freeman**, Director, Enterprise and International Affairs, Science Foundation Ireland

**Mr Martin Hynes**, Director, Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering & Technology

**Mr Leo Kearns**, Chief Executive, Royal College of Physicians of Ireland

**Professor Carlos Bruno**, Director of Research, National Children's Research Centre

**Professor Eugene Kennedy**, Vice-President for Research, Dublin City University

**Dr Keith O'Neill**, Director, Lifescience & Food Commercialisation, Enterprise Ireland