

# **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>1</sup>
- Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB): *Institutional Review of Universities (IRIU) Handbook* (2009); *Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education* (2009)<sup>2</sup> Irish Higher Education Quality Network:

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hetac.ie/publications.cfm?SID=44>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.iuqb.ie/info/iriui.aspx>; [http://www.iuqb.ie/info/good\\_practice\\_guides.aspx](http://www.iuqb.ie/info/good_practice_guides.aspx)

*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>3</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>4</sup>
- MEDINE The Thematic Network on Medical Education in Europe, *WFME Global Standards for Quality Improvement in Medical Education – European Specifications*<sup>5</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:

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.iheqn.ie/publications/default.asp?NCID=154>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG\\_3edition%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_3edition%20(2).pdf)

<sup>5</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>6</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.

---

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG\\_3edition%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_3edition%20(2).pdf)

- *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.

- *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