

IRISH UNIVERSITIES  
QUALITY BOARD

**Irish Universities Quality Board Student Handbook  
on 'Quality' within Irish Universities**



**YOUR RIGHT TO  
QUALITY  
IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION**

**BACKGROUND TO THE QUALITY HANDBOOK**

This handbook has been produced by the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) to explain 'quality' in Irish universities to students, provide awareness of the importance of student involvement in quality assurance processes and to provide information to students about quality assurance. Separate but similar provisions for quality assurance exist for non-university higher education (HE) institutions.

## **YOUR RIGHT TO QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

As a student in higher education in Ireland you have the following rights:

- **A RIGHT TO A HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION**
- **A RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALITY OF YOUR EDUCATION**

Under the Universities Act 1997 you have the right to:

- **INFORMATION ON THE QUALITY OF AN ACADEMIC PROGRAMME OR UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT/ SCHOOL OR UNIVERSITY SERVICE**

## WHAT IS MEANT BY 'QUALITY'?

A DEFINITION OF QUALITY'

*'Fitness for purpose'* Juran

It should be noted that there are many **different perceptions** of what is meant by quality in higher education.

### A Definition of Quality Assurance (QA)

'Quality Assurance' is the way in which **an institution can guarantee** with confidence and certainty, that the **standards and quality** of its educational provision are being maintained and assured.

### What does Quality Assurance mean for you as a Student in education?

Quality Assurance ensures that standards and procedures within Irish universities are adhered to and that education and services meet the **requirements** of its students.

## WHAT AREAS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE ARE MEASURED?

Quality in higher education is a **multi-dimensional concept**, which should embrace all its functions and activities:

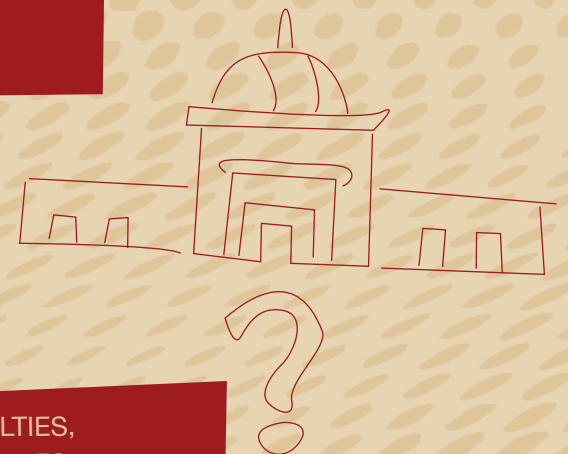
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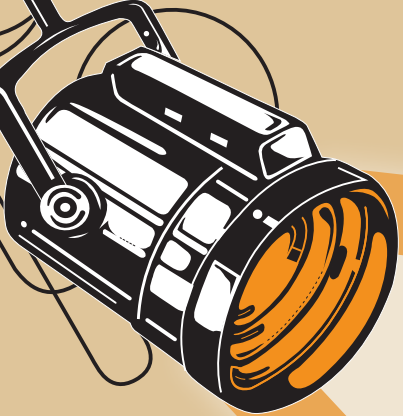
RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP

STAFFING

STUDENTS

BUILDINGS, FACULTIES, EQUIPMENT, SERVICES THE COMMUNITY AND THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT





## WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR QUALITY IN IRISH UNIVERSITIES?

It is primarily the responsibility of the **universities themselves.**

Each university has a quality office managed by a quality officer along with support staff (see information on your university's website).

**THE FOLLOWING ARE THE WEB LINKS OF THE SEVEN UNIVERSITY SU OFFICES**

DCU: <http://life.dcu.ie>  
NUI Galway: <http://www.su.nuigalway.ie/>  
NUI Maynooth: <http://www.nuimsu.com/>  
TCD: <http://www.fcdsu.org/>  
UCC: <http://www.ucc.ie/en/SIN/su.ucc.ie/>  
UCD: <http://www.ucdsu.net/index.php/>  
UL: <http://www.ulsu.ie/>

The following are contact details and web links of the Quality Offices:

**Dublin City University, (DCU), Quality Promotion Unit,**  
Tel: 01-7008411 <http://www.dcu.ie/qpu/>

**National University of Ireland, Galway, (NUI Galway), The Quality Office,**  
Tel: (0)91 524411 <http://www.nuigalway.ie/quality/>

**National University of Ireland, (NUI Maynooth), Quality Promotion Office,**  
Tel: 01-708 3487 <http://qpo.nuim.ie/>

**Trinity College Dublin, (TCD), Quality Office,**  
Tel: 01-896 3169 <http://www.tcd.ie/vp-cau/qu/vpindexqo.php>

**University College Cork, (UCC), Quality Promotion Unit,**  
Tel: (0) 21 490 3650 <http://www.ucc.ie/en/qpu>

**University College Dublin, (UCD), Quality Office,**  
Tel: 01 716 2039 <http://www.ucd.ie/quality/>

**University of Limerick, (UL), Quality Support Unit,**  
Tel: (0)61 202096 <http://www.quality.ul.ie/>



## WHO ARE WE?

The **Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB)** was established in 2002.

We are funded by annual subscriptions from the Irish universities and by an annual grant from the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

The IUQB offices are situated at 10 Lower Mount Street in Dublin city. [www.iuqb.ie](http://www.iuqb.ie)

## WHAT WE DO

IUQB performs the following core activities in relation to quality assurance in the Irish university sector:

- We conduct regular external reviews of how effective quality procedures are in Irish universities.
- We provide information on QA to stakeholders (via our website, publications and organised events).
- We promote QA in Irish universities and partner with the universities on QA/QI initiatives.
- We publish **Good Practice Booklets** on various Higher Education themes.
- We operate in line with agreed **European standards and guidelines**.
- We co-operate with national and international organisations.

## VISION

Irish higher education committed to a **culture of quality**

## MISSION

To support and promote a culture of quality in Irish universities and independently evaluate the effectiveness of quality processes

## WHAT WE DO NOT DO

- We do not produce **league tables**.
- We are not responsible for **internal quality reviews** within Irish universities as this is the responsibility of universities themselves.
- We are not responsible for quality assurance outside the university system.
- We are not a **regulatory agency** but have delegated statutory powers (within Irish law) to conduct external quality reviews of Irish Universities.
- We **do not deal with complaints** from university students as these must be handled by the university concerned according to their own internal mechanisms.

# WHAT IS MEANT BY STUDENT ENGAGEMENT?

## YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO GET INVOLVED IN THE QUALITY OF YOUR EDUCATION.

It is your responsibility to get involved in the quality of your education. Also, it is an opportunity for you to make a difference to the quality of your own (and fellow) 'student experience' and see the part you can play to change things for the better. Getting involved in QA (Quality Assurance) activities at your university also provides you with valuable skills that will benefit your future career.

These skills include:

- Team work
- Analytical skills
- Decision Making
- Interpersonal and communication skills
- Time/Task management
- Report writing

Some of the mechanisms for student involvement used by institutions will vary between universities and may include involvement:

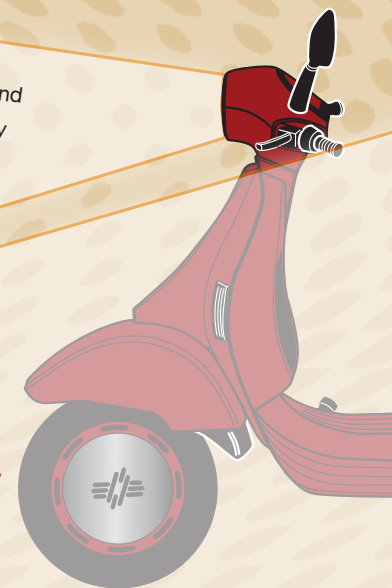
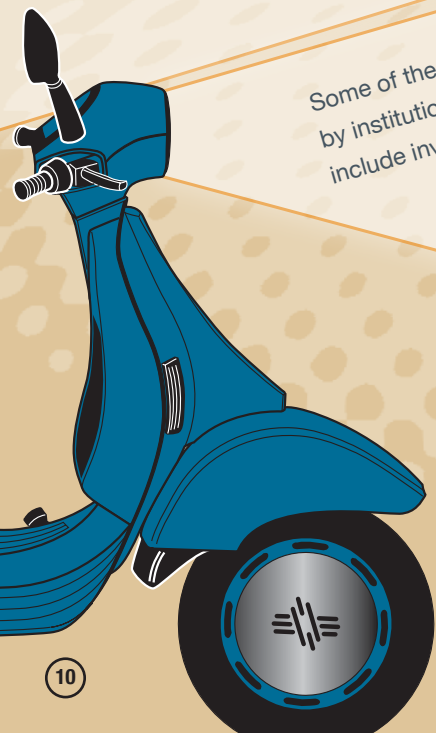
- at Institutional level,
- at School, Faculty and Departmental level,
- in Students Unions and Associations.

For further information on these (student involvement) mechanisms and your right to feedback on the impact of your assessment of the quality of your education you should contact your Quality Office within your university. (See contact details page 7).

## HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED IN THE QUALITY OF YOUR EDUCATION?

The following are opportunities to get involved in the quality of your education:

- Filling out student questionnaires and engaging in quality related activities that require student input
- As an elected Class Representative on your programme (you may receive training on QA related matters)
- As an elected representative on:
  - ~ Governing Authority
  - ~ University Quality Committee
  - ~ Academic Council
- Getting involved in self-assessment mechanisms used by a university School/Department/Service Unit undergoing a quality review which may require student input.
- Initiatives organised by the quality office in your university
- Your Student Union Office/er and Societies
- IUQB Institutional Quality Reviews, Projects, Seminars, Conferences or other IUQB quality driven initiatives





# HOW DOES QUALITY ASSURANCE WORK WITHIN IRISH UNIVERSITIES?

Irish universities are responsible for the quality of their programmes and their awards. The quality assurance system supports institutional autonomy and enables universities to be self-governing enterprises. Universities must have in place internal QA procedures aimed at improving the quality of education and related services they provide.

At a national level, these internal and external quality assurance processes are further explained in the IUA/IUQB publication 'A Framework for Quality in Irish Universities' which is available on our website at: [www.iuqb.ie](http://www.iuqb.ie)

At a European level, these internal and external activities are supported by an agreed document called the 'Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area', 2005

(See publication on ENQA website (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) at: [www.euqa.eu](http://www.euqa.eu))

## THE OBJECTIVE OF THE INTERNAL QUALITY REVIEW PROCESS

The objective of the review process is to examine the activities of the School/Dept./Unit. The visiting review group evaluates the quality of education and services within the university. The review cycle is generally, every five to six years.

## THE OBJECTIVE OF THE EXTERNAL QUALITY REVIEW PROCESS

The external quality assurance agency (IUQB) must check the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes within the university. It does this by conducting an external review of each of the Irish universities every five to six years.

## BOTH THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL QUALITY REVIEWS FOLLOW THE SAME PROCESS WHICH INVOLVES:

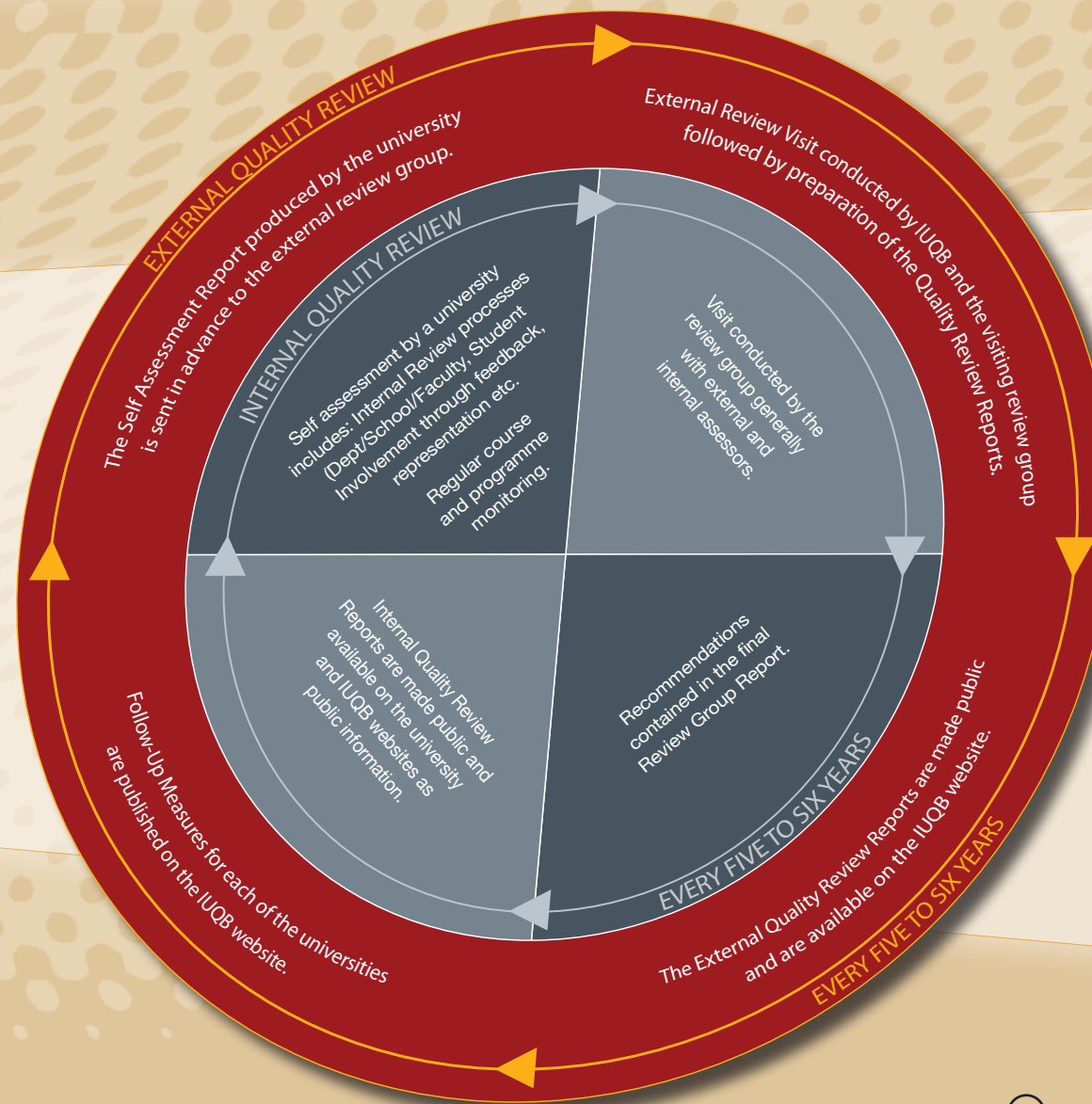
- Self Assessment
- Review Visit \*\*
- Follow-up and Recommendations
- Quality Review Reports available as Public Information

The review team are sent the Self-Assessment Report and other documentation in advance of the review visit, which takes place over two to three days. Following this a Review Report is prepared. The university internal quality review reports are published on the university quality office website. The first external review of Quality Assurance Procedures in the seven Irish universities was conducted in 2004. These review reports are available on the IUQB website at: [www.iuqb.ie](http://www.iuqb.ie)

\*\* In regard to the External Quality Review, the composition of the visiting review team differs as it is appointed by IUQB and includes: ►►

- International and Irish Senior Academics
- A student representative
- International Experts from quality assurance agencies
- An employer representative

Universities must organise regular evaluations of the quality of their education and services and publish the outcomes of such evaluations. IUQB is responsible for verifying that the universities' internal quality assurance procedures are effective.



## QUALITY REVIEW REPORTS

How you find out about the quality of a particular school/faculty within a university?

You can access the website of your quality office or the IUQB website at:  
**[www.iuqb.ie/reviews/](http://www.iuqb.ie/reviews/)**  
to find out about what quality reviews have taken place in Irish universities.

## WHAT INFORMATION ON QUALITY IS AVAILABLE?

It should be noted that each university has a different format for how they present their Quality Review Reports.

## WHAT OTHER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE ON OUR WEBSITE ? [WWW.IUQB.IE](http://WWW.IUQB.IE)

- More detailed information on the Quality Review process
- Information on IUQB Good Practice Guides and other IUQB publications
- IUQB News and Events



# GLOSSARY OF USEFUL TERMINOLOGY

## What is Quality Improvement (QI) or /Quality Enhancement (QE)?

Quality Enhancement is the process of positively changing activities in order to provide for continuous improvement in the quality of institutional provision.

## A Quality Assurance System

'Quality Assurance' is the way in which an institution can guarantee with confidence and certainty, that the standards and quality of its educational provision are being maintained and improved

## Stakeholder

A stakeholder is "a person with an interest or concern in something".

## IUQB

The Irish Universities Quality Board ([www.iuqb.ie](http://www.iuqb.ie))

## ENQA

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education ([www.enqa.eu](http://www.enqa.eu))

## Benchmark

A benchmark is a standard by which something can be measured or judged.

## Self-Assessment

Self-assessment of a department (or other unit) under review is a critical evaluation of the teaching, research, administrative and other activities performed by the academic, administrative, support and technical staff.

## Standards

Standards describe levels of attainment against which performance may be measured. Attainment of a standard usually implies a measure of 'fitness for a defined purpose'.

## Quality Culture

Quality Culture can be seen as the ability of the institution, programme etc. to develop quality assurance implicitly in the day to day work of the institution.

## OTHER USEFUL TERMINOLOGY USED

Each university has its own traditions, history, structure and procedures so there are differences in the terminology used denoting roughly the same activity or function.

**Course Representative** – used in a generic sense and covers various terms including "programme representative", "class representative" etc.

**Department** – the departmental level is recognised as being called the "school" in some institutions and in other institutions as being a subject unit.

**Staff-Student Liaison Committee** – a committee that provides a relatively informal means for communication between staff and students about the quality of teaching and facilities within a Department or School.

**Student's Union** – used as a generic term for the student representative body within an institution. These include: Student Societies, Students Associations and Student Representative Councils.



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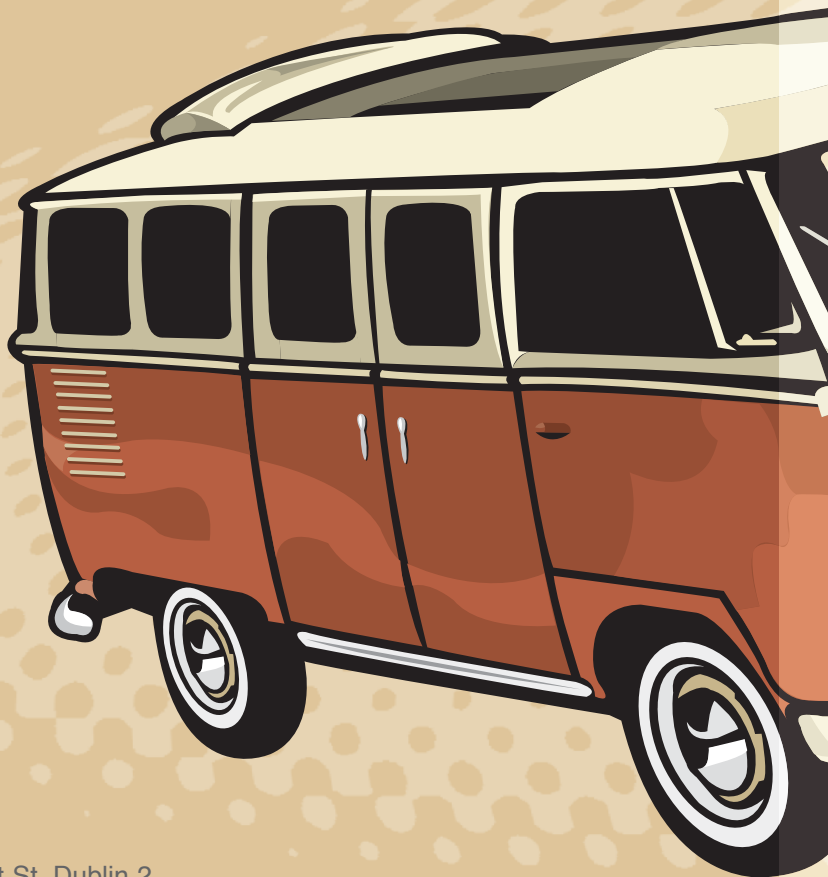
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[www.iuqb.ie](http://www.iuqb.ie)



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