PROGRAMMATIC REVIEW 2015/16 - A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF PANEL REPORTS

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INTRODUCTION

The academic year 2015/16 saw a high level of programmatic review activity in CIT. The CIT Cork School of Music underwent both phases of programmatic review, while the Schools of Business and Humanities and the CIT Crawford College of Art & Design finalised Phase 1 and underwent Phase 2, the Phase 1 site visits having taken place in May and June 2015 respectively.

This activity resulted in 23 expert panel reports (4 Phase 1 Reports, incl. a Phase 1 Follow-Up Report for CCAD; 19 Phase 2 Reports), leading to the eventual revalidation of 91 awards and associated programmes resp. programme suites.

Given the number of reports, a thematic analysis of the commendations, recommendations and requirements appeared promising. The aim was to identify common instances of good practice and quality issues highlighted across sufficiently many programmes to allow some extrapolation on institutional performance as reflected in the 'house of mirrors' that is a panel review.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. *Number of Panel Comments Analysed and Distribution of Broad Areas*

- Thematic analysis of the (transferable) commendations, recommendations or requirements (CRR) of the 2015/16 programmatic review panels resulted in a set of 63 thematic units for Phase 1 and 321 units for Phase 2.

- For Phase 1, the largest group of comments considered (25, or 40%) relates to operational issues, encompassing governance and management processes and performance of institutional functions; of these 8 are commendations.

- For Phase 2, close to half (48%) of the overall CRR, and over half (53%) of recommendations and requirements alone, relate to programme design issues, while the broad area attracting most commendations (28, or 42%) was programme operation and performance.

2. *Determination and Ranking of Themes*

- Themes were determined by grouping together sets of thematically related CRR under headings largely derived from the review criteria. While some themes are specific to one phase, many comments relate to features which were considered, at different levels, during both phases. To gain an understanding of concerns carried through both phases, the thematic 'labels' were aligned as far as possible.

- 4 of 16 Phase 1 themes attracted distinctly greater panel interest than the remainder:

  o Student Supports, Welfare & Feedback
  o Research & Postgraduate Research Study
  o Staffing & Staff Development
  o External Engagement

Together, these top four themes gained over half (54%) of the Phase 1 panel commentary.

- While there were no clear 'peaks' in panel attention among the 23 common themes determined for Phase 2, 50% of the Phase 2 CRRs relate to 5 top themes:

  o Professional Value, Graduate Profile & Career Path
  o Assessment Methodology & Scheduling
  o Work Placement
  o Programme Structure & Subject Streams
  o Student Supports, Welfare & Feedback

- Of the themes running across both phases, the highest proportion of comments went towards *Student Supports, Welfare & Feedback*, which attracted 10% (39) of the total CRR analysed.

3. *Distribution and Ranking of Commendations and Recommendations / Requirements (RR)*

- Phase 1 commendations are spread across 11 thematic areas. While most areas gained one or two commendations, *Student Supports, Welfare & Feedback* received six, clearly exceeding the 'next-best' area, *External Engagement* (3).

- In Phase 2, of 11 areas in which commendations were made, the two highest-ranked by far are *Student Supports, Welfare & Feedback* and *Professional Value, Graduate Profile & Career Path*, which together attracted over half (53% / 35) of all panel commendations.

- In terms of recommendations and requirements, the Phase 1 'top spot' is shared between *Research & Postgraduate Research Study* and *Staffing & Staff Development*, which gained 7 (17%) of the recommendations and requirements each.

- The four Phase 2 themes with the highest number of recommendations and requirements all concern programme design aspects:

  - Assessment Methodology & Scheduling (12% / 30)
  - Work Placement (11% / 28)
  - Programme Structure & Subject Streams (11% / 27)
  - Module Content & Delivery (10% / 26)

  Together these four 'top' themes gave rise to 44% of all Phase 2 RR.

- Looking across both review phases, the distribution of commendations, as well as the ratio of commendations to recommendations for the top two commended themes, aligns well with the CIT mission of providing "student-centred, career-focused education and research [...]", and would seem to provide some indication of the effectiveness of the efforts of the areas reviewed to meet the strategic commitments of CIT.

4. *Student Supports, Welfare & Feedback*

- Apart from being the most commented-on individual theme overall, *Student Supports ...*:

  o Received the highest amount of commendations in each review phase; and

  o Was the only theme for which commendations exceeded recommendations in each phase, and by a significant margin (19 commendations to 9 RR) in Phase 2.

- Commendations are distributed across a range of aspects and cover arrangements for academic provision as well as welfare supports and the physical and social learning environment. The spread of commendations may be an indication that the areas reviewed did not limit their efforts to isolated 'headline' initiatives, but strove to foster learner welfare across all aspects of the learning environment.

- By contrast, all recommendations and requirements (bar one) focus on two aspects, Student Feedback Mechanisms and Individual Welfare Supports, of which the former is the more prominent. CIT had previously identified room for improvement in fostering more formal and more active learner involvement in programme quality assurance and development, and took active steps to address this enhancement theme during 2015/16, notably with the launch of the SParQs initiative. The impact of such measures would not have fed through to the programmatic review findings of the same year however.

5. *Professional Value, Graduate Profile & Career Path*

- *Professional Value, Graduate Profile & Career Path* attracted the highest amount of CRR in Phase 2, with 34 (11% of the) comments, and a commendation and a recommendation each in Phase 1 also.

- Phase 2 commendations and RR related to *Professional Value, Graduate Profile & Career Path* are fairly evenly matched, with 16 commendations to 18 RR (compared to a minimum of 2 RR to 1 commendation in all other thematic areas except *Student Supports ...*).

- The commendations under this theme again cover a variety of design and operational aspects. Also included are some comments indicating that the programmes and the capabilities of their graduates enjoy a good reputation within the professional community.

- Only one comment referenced the preparedness of graduates for an academic or research career, as opposed to a professional career 'in the field', even though panels commented on related aspects.

6. *Assessment Methodology & Scheduling*

- In addition to receiving 30 recommendations and requirements in Phase 2, Assessment Methodology & Scheduling gained four commendations (three in Phase 2; one in Phase 1).

- Given the significance of assessment, it may be worth noting that four of 18 Phase 2 panels did not comment on this feature.

- Assessment issues which received multiple mentions in the RR include:

    - 'Bunching' of assessments
    - Imbalances in assessment weighting relative to effort, or across modules
    - High number of (esp. low-weighted) assessments, 'overassessment'
    - Formalisation of assessment in skills-based modules with 100% CA
    - Formative feedback.

    Suggestions to address pressure points and imbalances are quite 'standard' and encompass improved coordination and production of programme assessment strategies and schedules.

- Assessment methodologies favoured by a number of panels were Cross-modular Assessment and Reflective Journals / Portfolios. Journals or portfolios were also suggested as suitable pedagogical tools to promote rich independent learning.

- Group Work (including ensemble work) also received notable attention from panels, with five separate panel comments (1 commendation / 4 RR) under both Assessment and Teaching & Learning Methodology.

7. *Work Placement*

- The relative prominence of *Work Placement* (which also features in Phase 1) needs to be seen in the context of the decision of the Schools of Business and Humanities to introduce placement across the board into all programmes where this was deemed appropriate. This would have been well signposted in the submissions.

- Of the recommendations on Work Placement, only a few deal with the potential for loss of academic content or disruption of thematic through-lines following from reorganisation of a programme to accommodate placement. The vast majority are linked to planning, organisational and quality control issues to be considered in order to ensure the success of placement, introduction of which gained broad support from the panels.

8. *Programme Structure and Subject Streams*

- Several recommendations concern the necessity to improve the information given to learners on the development of competences and specialisms, particularly in programmes with a "multitude" of electives.

- While the 2015/16 reports contain no calls to include additional electives in the schedules, some panels again commented on operational constraints which are hampering the take-up of elective choices in practice.

- Only one comment related directly to particular features of the CIT model of modularised delivery, which may point towards a certain 'bedding in' of M&S at this point.

9. *Alignment with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG 2015)*

- While the programmatic review criteria do not currently require panels to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the information management (ESG 1.7) or of the public information (ESG 1.8) of the areas under review, several panel comments under various headings are relevant to a review of institutional performance against these standards.

- A noteworthy public information issue which emerged from commentary on programme structures was the enhancement of formal guidance for learners on the development of competences and specialisms (see also above).

- In the context of a future review of the programmatic review process, consideration might be given to introducing criteria specifically referencing performance against the ESG standards on information management and public information.

METHODOLOGY

Thematic analysis of the commendations, recommendations and requirements contained in Programmatic Review Reports involved structured qualitative judgments on thematic correlations and units within a criteria framework derived from CIT and national quality assurance policy.

Themes were arrived at by grouping together sets of thematically related CRRs under headings derived largely from the programmatic review criteria, with addition of some topics raised by panels or, in the case of Work Placement, introduced by the faculty on foot of significant programme development activities.

This meant that in some cases a commendation or recommendation as formulated by the panel was determined to belong to more than one theme. By contrast, comparable comments were at times included under differing headings in different reports.

Commendations or recommendations deemed to be uninformative or of very low 'transfer' value for other programmes (e.g. largely formulaic expressions of appreciation; comments applicable to a particular specialism only) were not included in the collation and comparison. Most Phase 2 reports in particular would have contained a (moderate) number of these.

While detailed findings were occasionally drawn on to fully clarify panel intentions, the analysis was restricted to commendations, recommendations and requirements, as these represent 'actionable' aspects brought to the attention of the Institute to highlight either a need for future action or the success of actions already taken. In the following the term "panel comments" should be read as shorthand for commendations, recommendations and requirements, rather than all panel findings.

Apart from being assigned to different thematic groups, the panel comments analysed were separated into commendations and recommendations/requirements, to gain a better indication of how the provision performed against CIT's strategic commitments and the *Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA* (ESG). A distinction of recommendations and requirements was not deemed meaningful in this context; experience has shown that panels have a variety of reasons for deciding on one or the other which are rarely verbalised in the report itself.

It needs to be emphasised that any figures and percentages given relate only to the data set generated by the method outlined (i.e. generalisable/ transferrable thematic units identified on the basis of commendations, recommendations and requirements). While they may be useful in pointing towards trends and preponderances, their reliability for establishing exact hierarchies and numeric correlations between individual themes has to be considered low.

PHASE 1 REPORTS

Overall Distribution of Commendations, Recommendations and Requirements (CRRs)

The Phase 1 data set contains 63 commendations, recommendations or requirements by thematic unit, consisting of 21 (33%) commendations and 42 (67%) recommendations or requirements.

Distribution of Phase 1 Themes

The Phase 1 themes were arrived at by grouping together sets of thematically related commendations, recommendations and requirements as per the methodology outlined above.

While some themes are specific to the strategic focus of Phase 1, others relate to features of the provision which were also considered, at a more detailed level, during Phase 2. To obtain a reasonable indication of concerns carried through both phases, the thematic 'labels' for Phase 1 were aligned to those chosen for Phase 2 (commentary for which was analysed first) as far as possible. Where more than one possibility for alignment suggested itself for a particular comment, the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG; 2015 edition) were utilised to determine the best fit.

Following this, the individual themes were grouped into four broad areas which approximate, if not fully replicate, the dimensions identified for Phase 2, to gain some further understanding of the through-lines between the different review phases if possible.

The broad thematic areas identified for Phase 1 are:

(a) Institutional Identity and Regional, National & International Role ($\cong$ strategic, structural and contextual issues);
(b) Governance & Management Processes and Performance of Institutional Functions ($\cong$ operational issues);
(c) Features of the Taught Programme Provision;
(d) Research and Postgraduate Study.

A table of Phase 1 themes identified is provided overleaf.

Of the 16 themes, four attracted distinctly greater panel interest than the remainder, namely *Student Supports, Welfare & Feedback*; *Research & Postgraduate Research Study*; *Staffing & Staff Development*; and *External Engagement*.

Together, these top four themes gained over half (54%) of the Phase 1 panel commentary.

Phase 1 Theme	Broad Area	No. of Comm.	No. of Recom./ Requ.	Totals for Ph. 1 Theme	Totals in %
Student Supports, Welfare & Feedback	(b)	6[1]	5	11	17%
Research & Postgraduate Research Study	(d)	2	7	9	14%
Staffing & Staff Development	(b)	1	7	8	13%
External Engagement[2]	(a)	3	3	6	10%
Benchmarking	(a)	0	4[3]	4	6%
Strategic Positioning, USP & Identity	(a)	0	4[4]	4	6%
Programme Structure & Subject Streams	(c)	2	2[5]	4	6%
Work Placement	(c)	1	2	3	5%
Governance and Management	(b)	1	1	2	3%
Programme Viability	(b)	0	2[6]	2	3%
Professional Value, Grad. Profile & Career Path	(c)	1	1	2	3%
Professional & Academic Skills Development	(c)	1	1[7]	2	3%
Programme Portfolio	(c)	2	0	2	3%
Teaching, Learning & Assessment Methodology[8]	(c)	1	1	2	3%
Access, Transfer & Progression	(b)	0	1	1	2%
Resources, Facilities & Funding	(b)	0	1	1	2%
	TOTALS:	21	42	63	100%

1 – Incl. one comment also captured under Research & Postgraduate Research Study;

2 – Many Phase 2 comments also reference industry engagement. However, in Phase 2 the focus generally lies on features of the provision which benefit from the engagement (frequently the graduate profile or professional value of a programme), rather than the extent and quality of the engagement activity itself;

3 – Linked recommendations, all CCAD;

4 – Of which one was closed on follow-up in Phase 2;

5 – Incl. one recommendation on embedding external engagement in the curriculum;

6 – Incl. one recommendation also captured under Benchmarking;

7 – Relates to guidance to make graduates industry-ready; incl. under "Student Support" in the panel report;

8 – Split into two separate themes in Phase 2.

Discussion of Phase 1 Themes

Governance & Management Processes and Performance of Institutional Functions

The largest group of comments (25, or 40%) relates to operational aspects at unit or institutional level; of these 8 are commendations.

This broad area incorporates the theme receiving both the greatest individual amount of attention from the Phase 1 panels overall and – as in Phase 2 – the highest individual number of commendations, namely *Student Supports, Welfare and Feedback*.

The six commendations under *Student Supports, Welfare and Feedback* praise the overall level of support for, and communication with, learners; the positive assessment of staff approachability by learners; retention initiatives; and the positive assessment of the CCAD ethos by learners, founded on a sense of community, approachability of staff, and encouragement to take risks in creative practice

(as detailed in the principal findings). The addition of dedicated postgraduate rooms in Business & Humanities since the last programmatic review was also commended.

Three of the five recommendations on Student Supports concern the need to develop or "nurture" formal structures for staff-student partnership and for class representation. The other two relate to a demand for additional and more focused counselling services and the development of the School website to facilitate greater communication between the School, students/graduates and industry.

The recommendations on *Staffing and Staff Development*, which also attracted a good tranche of the comments, predominantly focus on "lean" staffing levels and the diminished ability of teaching staff to carry extra administrative or coordination duties without these being recognised in their workload allocations, particularly in the face of new programme start-ups. While one panel saw the need for additional staff resources, another panel observed that despite staff expressing feelings of being "'overstretched and under-resourced'", there had been "no evident move towards further [...] programme consolidation" in programmatic review (p. 5, Phase 1 Follow-Up Report, CCAD). A need for flexible contract arrangements for visiting artists, and the need for greater encouragement and formal monitoring of staff CPD were also noted.

Some calls for enhancement were also made under the theme of *Resources, Facilities & Funding* and *Programme Viability*. These include a requirement for faculty implementation plan to address identified facilities issues and recommendations to resist reducing student numbers to increase programme quality, and to consider the success of *Uversity* in attracting international students.

While physical facilities were discussed extensively during the site visits, and the detailed Phase 1 findings show that provision of adequate teaching & learning spaces is still a significant ongoing concern for most areas (with possible exception currently of CSM), there was also recognition of the progress made, despite an adverse funding environment, in addressing the serious building maintenance issues noted during the last programmatic review, especially in CCAD. Conversely, the significant contribution of CSM's state-of-the-art facility to creating a supportive learning environment was observed during Phase 2 of the review.

Outside of Student Supports, the remaining two operational commendations relate to the positive learner perception of staff expertise, and evidence of effective leadership in CCAD. The one recommendation on governance concerns CSM representation on the Institute Executive Board of the Institute following restructuring measures (now in effect).

Taught Programme Provision

The second-largest group, with 15 comments (24%), relates to features of the taught programmes which, at a more granular level, are the subject of deliberations during Phase 2. The comments are split evenly between commendations and recommendations, each covering a variety of aspects.

Commendations encompass the high programme quality from an employer point of view; the strong integration of theory and practice; the value of work placement; the successful redesign of existing, or introduction of new, programmes; and curriculum innovations, including a broadening of modules dedicated to professional skills development, and the range of assessment methodologies.

Recommendations concern the embedding of external engagements into the curriculum; the potential for further expansion of work placement, ensuring dissemination of good practice; the

necessity to engage with industry to identify emerging industry requirements, and to involve external collaborators in placements, curriculum development and assessment; provision of career-focused guidance to make (arts) graduates industry ready; and the exploitation of the "modular curriculum framework" for more interdisciplinary collaboration at programme level.

Institutional Identity and Regional, National & International Role

Institutional identity and the role of the academic units within the external environment attracted 14, or 22%, of the comments (which includes four linked comments on benchmarking in CCAD).

The three commendations relate to engagement, recognising the level of engagement with stakeholders in general and with industry and professional bodies in particular. Specific mention was made of the collaboration of CSM with DIT and RIAM in the "Conservatoires Ireland" initiative.

Recommendations focused on the need for an academic unit (in this case, CCAD) to identify its USP and to clearly articulate this USP internally and through a well-defined external footprint, both physical and virtual. The Phase 1 panel further recommended use of external benchmarking as a tool to support the strategic development of the USP, to allow CCAD to obtain an indication of performance as well as impulses for the further development of good practice in agreed areas of strategic importance. Following a review of progress in the benchmarking process set in train after Phase 1, the follow-on panel gave some further steerage on maximising the utility of benchmarking; this relates to using the process to identify new models for sustainable programme delivery which will work within the college's own infrastructure.

Research and Postgraduate Research Study

This theme gained the second-highest amount of Phase 1 panel comments (9 comments, or 14%).

Commended are the significant increase of research activity in the Business & Humanities Schools since the last programmatic review, as well as the addition of dedicated postgraduate rooms in the same area (captured under Student Supports also).

One group of recommendations relates specifically to research carried out in the creative disciplines, with calls to articulate the research more clearly against internationally established categories and to achieve, through a dialogue within traditional research parameters, greater recognition of creative practice and performance as research output. Another group of recommendations centres on ways to recognise and build staff research capacity through development of strategic research networks and clusters and provision of (interdisciplinary) residency opportunities, for the benefit also of achieving 'critical mass' for research degree provision. Support for staff interested in engaging in doctoral research, including potential development of a DMA, was also thematised by panels.

PHASE 2 REPORTS

Overall Distribution of Commendations, Recommendations and Requirements (CRRs)

The Phase 2 data set contains 321 commendations, recommendations or requirements by thematic unit. Of these, 21% (66) are commendations and 79% (255) recommendations or requirements. While no data from previous years or other institutions are available for comparison at this point, this ratio does not appear out of the ordinary for the detailed programme review, whose main function appears to be largely (still) understood as the identification and 'critique' of programme areas in need of enhancement.

Distribution of Broad Themes

For Phase 2, commendations, recommendations and requirements were initially assigned to one of three broad themes derived from the CIT criteria framework for programmatic review:

(a) Professional Value, Graduate Profile, Career Path and Award ($\cong$ external programme context and 'raison d'etre');
(b) Programme Operation and Performance ($\cong$ institutional context and implementation); and
(c) Programme Design and Specification ($\cong$ programme concept).

Panel comments which did not fit under either of these were assigned to category (d) 'Other'; these made up 4% of the CRR only.

Close to half of all panel comments (155, or 48%) and more than half of the recommendations and requirements taken separately (136, or 53%) relate to aspects of programme design. By contrast, the broad area attracting most commendations (28, or 42%) was programme operation and performance. While the former finding appears to be 'par for the course' for the programme phase of PR, the latter is not as readily interpretable with the data available at this point.

Distribution of Sub-Themes

Subsequently, the Phase 2 sub-themes were determined by grouping together sets of thematically related CRRs as per the methodology previously outlined.

The aim was to achieve a reasonably cogent and manageable thematic structure without imposing too rigid a taxonomical hierarchy which might obscure rather than highlight common areas of praise or concern identified by the panels.

Altogether, this methodology yielded 23 sub-themes of differing magnitude, as per the table on the following page:

Phase 2 Sub-Theme	Broad Theme	No. of Commend.	No. of Recomm. / Requirem.	Totals per Sub-Theme	Totals per Sub-Th. in %
Professional Value, Grad. Profile & Career Path	(a)	**16**	**18**	34	11%
Assessment Methodology & Scheduling	(c)	3	**30**	33	10%
Work Placement	(c)	4	28	32	10%
Programme Structure & Subject Streams	(c)	5	27	32	10%
Student Supports, Welfare & Feedback	(b)	**19**	9	28	9%
Module Content & Delivery	(c)	0	26	26	8%
Access, Transfer & Progression	(b)	6	**15**	21	7%
Teaching & Learning Methodology[1]	(c)	**6**	12	18	6%
Resources, Facilities & Funding	(b)	0	14	14	4%
Staffing and Staff Development[2]	(b)	0	11	11	3%
POs & Core Graduate Attributes	(a)	0	10	10	3%
Promotion & Recruitment	(a)	0	10	10	3%
Delivery Modes	(b)	3	7	10	3%
Professional & Academic Skills Development	(c)	1	9	10	3%
Award & Programme Title	(a)	2	7	9	3%
Programmatic Review Process	(d)	0	5	5	2%
Research	(d)	0	5	5	2%
Programme & Module Credit Weighting[3]	(c)	0	4	4	1%
Data Analysis & Benchmarking	(b)	0	3	3	1%
Timetabling and Module Choice	(b)	0	2	2	1%
Internationalisation & ERASMUS	(d)	0	2	2	1%
Attendance	(b)	0	1	1	0%
Integrated / Collaborative Activities	(d)	1	0	1	0%
TOTALS:		66	255	321	100%

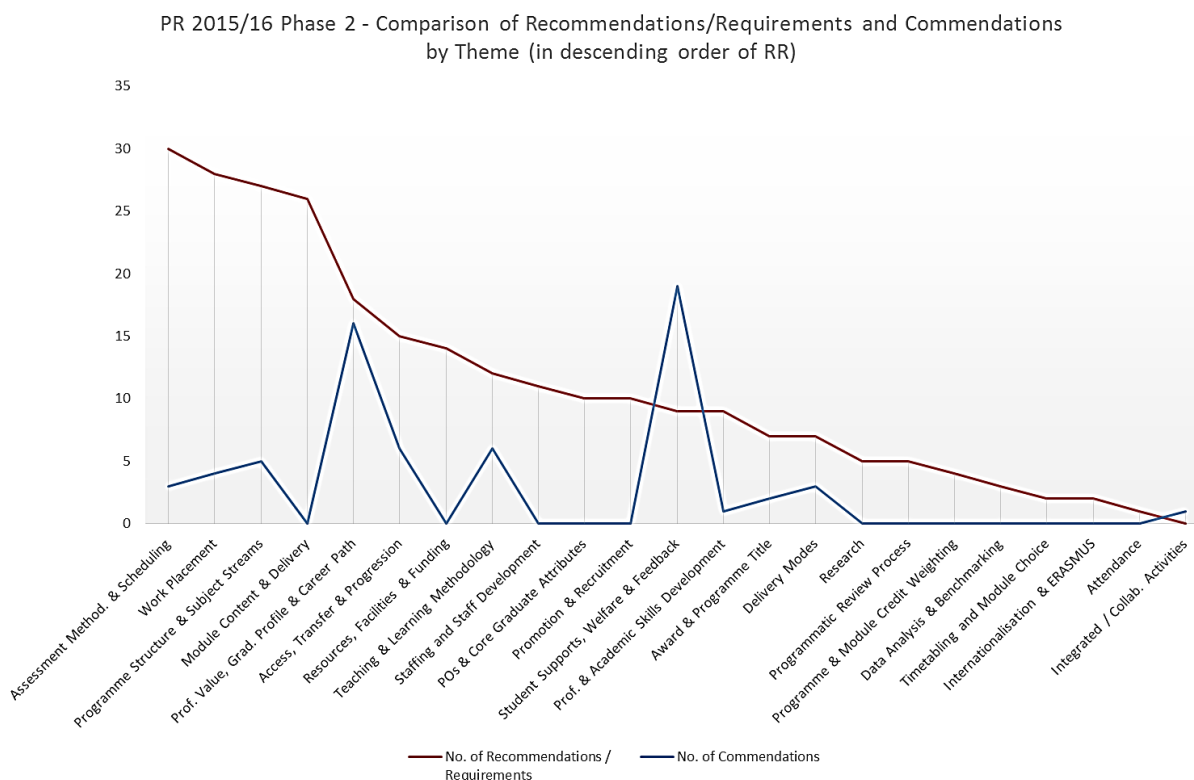1 – Plus further recommendations on online & blended learning in Delivery Modes (b)

2 – This includes four 'double-counted' RRs on the staffing of Work Placement specifically

3 – All relating to one programme

- While there are no individual peaks in panel attention among the sub-themes identified, the highest proportion of commentary overall was dedicated to the theme of *Professional Value, Graduate Profile & Career Path*. This is followed closely by three themes linked to programme design issues: *Assessment Methodology & Scheduling*, *Work Placement*, and *Programme Structure & Subject Streams*. The most commented-on operational aspect is *Student Supports, Welfare & Feedback*.

  Taken together, half (159 / 50%) of all CRRs issued by the Phase 2 panels in 2015/16 centred on these top five thematic areas.

Fig. 1

PR 2015/16 Phase 2 - Comparison of Recommendations/Requirements and Commendations by Theme (in descending order of RR)

No. of Recommendations / Requirements No. of Commendations

- Looking at the commendations only, two themes clearly stand out (see also Fig. 1): *Student Supports, Welfare & Feedback*, which garnered 19 positive comments (or 29% of all commendations), followed by *Professional Value, Graduate Profile & Career Path*, with 16 (24%).

  Together, the top two areas attracted over half (53%) of all panel commendations.

- The highest number of recommendations and requirements analysed concern *Assessment Methodology & Scheduling*, with 30 RR (12%), followed by *Work Placement* (28, or 11% of RR), *Programme Structure & Subject Streams* (27, or 11% of RR) and *Module Content & Delivery* (26, or 10% of RR). Next are recommendations and requirements relating to *Professional Value, Graduate Profile & Career Path* (18, or 7% of RR). In terms of programme operation and performance, most RR were made on *Access, Transfer & Progression* issues (15 / 6% of RR).

  It may be worth noting that the four themes with the highest numbers of RR all relate to aspects of programme design; together they gave rise to 44% of all requirements and recommendations analysed.

Correlation of Commendations with Recommendations/Requirements

While in general the number of commendations and of recommendations/requirements in particular thematic areas does not appear to be correlated, the two most commended areas merit comment in this regard:

- *Student Supports, Welfare & Feedback* is the only area where the Phase 2 commendations significantly exceed recommendations and requirements (19 commendations against 9 RR).

(The theme *Integration of Activities and Interdepartmental Collaboration* arose from a single panel comment and has no corresponding recommendation.)

- Commendations and recommendations/requirements related to *Professional Value, Graduate Profile & Career Path* are fairly evenly matched, with 16 commendations to 18 RR.

(In all other thematic areas in which both recommendations/requirements and commendations were issued, RR exceed commendations by at least 2:1.)

Without detracting from the need for more detailed analysis, it can probably be stated at this point that the distribution of commendations aligns well with the CIT mission of providing "student-centred, career-focused education and research [...]" (Strategic Plan 2012 – 2016).

Both the number and proportion of commendations in the two most commended areas, *Student Supports, Welfare & Feedback* and *Professional Value, Graduate Profile & Career Path*, would seem to provide some indication for the effectiveness of the efforts of the Schools of Business and Humanities, the CIT Cork School of Music and the CIT Crawford College of Art & Design to meet the strategic commitments of the Institute. In fact, one panel noted verbatim that the [Counselling & Therapy] programmes "articulat[e] operationally [...] with the Cork Institute of Technology's own stated commitment to student centred education, inclusive access, regional development, response to the needs of the community and the provision of a career focused education" (p. 8 of the relevant Programme Panel Report).

The conclusions on *Student Support, Welfare & Feedback* seem to be further corroborated by the outcomes of the analysis of Phase 1 CRR, which shows comparable trends with regard to number and ratio of commendations (though on its own the more modest number of Phase 1 CRR might have suggested a more cautious reading of the numeric data).

Discussion of Individual Themes

Student Supports, Welfare and Feedback (b)

This theme received comments from 13 of the 18 Phase 2 panels (72%).

The 19 **commendations** related to the student experience are spread across a range of aspects and cover arrangements for academic provision as well as the physical and social learning environment. Commended features of the provision were:

- Good staff-student relations, accessible staff interested in student progress, partnership approach [multiple mentions];
- Student success initiatives (Good Start, Just Ask, PALS, Pitstop Leadership, Academic Success Coaching, Early Intervention and SParQS);

- Scaffolding and monitoring of student welfare in training for clinical or therapeutic work and clinical placement ("despite the significant work associated with this");
- Small class groups in practical subjects;
- Exemplary area-specific mechanism for individual welfare support (CSM Tutor system);
- Mechanisms for gaining student input into programme quality and development (esp. programme board participation);
- Successful management of the ensemble approach (CSM);
- Strong protocols and procedures around ethics and health & safety-relevant aspects of training; pro-active demonstration of collaborative good practice in health & safety inspections;
- Creation of 'synergies' through collaboration across programmes.

The beneficial environment created by the "superb building and facilities" of the Cork School of Music was also praised, though this is less readily replicable in other areas in the current climate.

By contrast, the 9 **recommendations** focus on two aspects only:

- Student feedback mechanisms;
- Individualised welfare support and guidance.

For each of these aspects, instances of good practice were also highlighted by a panel or panels.

Regarding Student Feedback, two enhancement issues were identified: a need to put in place structured mechanisms for ongoing student feedback in the first place; and a need to encourage students to make greater use of existing feedback and representation mechanisms, "with a clear articulation of the actions based on inputs".

With regard to Welfare Supports, panels raised concerns over the staffing of areas where students required support for emotional work; a need to clearly signpost existing supports; and concerns over the potential loss of face-to-face support in the move to online provision.

The spread of commendations may be an indication that the areas under review did not limit their efforts to isolated 'headline' initiatives, but strove to foster learner welfare across all aspects of the learning environment, from informal social relations to formal structures at programme and institutional level.

One area where CIT had previously identified room for improvement, enabling and fostering more formal and more active involvement of learners in programme quality assurance and development, continued to feature as an enhancement theme during the 2015/16 reviews. While the Institute, with strong support from the CIT Students' Union, took active take steps to address this area during the academic year, notably with the launch of the SParQs initiative, the impact of any such measures would not have fed through to the programmatic review findings of the same year.

Professional Value, Graduate Profile & Career Path (a)

This theme was commented on by 15 (83%) of the Phase 2 panels.

Commended features of the provision under this theme encompass:

- High regard for programmes from stakeholders and national / international professional bodies

- Industry focus, relevance and depth of the programmes; graduate profile reflects employer needs; programme responds to needs of communities;
- Commitment to practitioner development; good preparation for work or academic progression;
- Graduates are very capable [multiple mentions], industry-ready, adaptable and possess good communication skills;
- Dynamic engagement with changing industry is reflected in updating of programmes, new modules and work placement, opening new career opportunities; proactive integration of employer feedback into programmes;
- Work placement is key to graduate employability, creates follow-on opportunities for students for P-T work to gain experience and financial support; impressive care in matching students to placement employers; key mentoring role of industry stakeholders;
- Embedding of specific professional training resp. professional awards enhances students' skills base and opportunities for professional accreditation/registration on graduation;
- Embedding of SPAs opens new CPD opportunities for working professionals.

Recommendations and requirements centred on:

- Uncertainty over entrant/learner demand and the 'professional value proposition';
- A need for active measures to further develop the range of graduate opportunities through forging links resp. entering discussions with relevant external organisations;
- A need to enhance student and graduate awareness of professional opportunities;
- A need to establish the professional aim and functions of a particular programme more clearly;
- Creation of additional or enhanced opportunities for professional recognition and certification.

In one case, the confirmed ongoing lack of demand for the graduate profile of two programme streams led a panel not to recommend validation of two new specialist awards proposed for these streams. By contrast, the awards proposed for three other streams, for which sufficient demand was anticipated, were validated.

Again, the commendations under this theme are distributed over a good range of aspects, and reference design as well as operational features. Also included are comments indicating that the programmes and the capabilities of their graduates enjoy a good reputation within the professional community. Of course, since stakeholders are invited by the faculties, a favourable predisposition of the graduates and industry representatives present can – in a functioning institution at least – normally be assumed. Heeding a panel call to include non-CIT employers in future programmatic reviews would certainly have merit in confidently demonstrating that panels need not 'talk to the converted' to arrive at a positive assessment of the Institute's provision.

Only a single comment referenced the preparedness of graduates for an academic or research career, as opposed to a professional career 'in the field', even though panels commented on related topics, including opportunities for progression to Level 10, research development and aspects of academic learning such as the dissertation. It may be worth considering if there is a case for supplementing the questions asked in review to ensure that observations on the readiness of graduates for postgraduate study and research activity are captured more systematically.

Assessment Methodology and Scheduling (c)

Assessment was commented on by 14, or 78%, of the Phase 2 panels. Given the significance of assessment both to award standards and the student and staff experience, if anything it is worth noting that 4 panels did not comment on this feature.

The 3 **commendations** under this theme relate to

- The general rigour, validity and formative value of the assessment in particular programmes;
- A good mix of assessment methods including authentic practical and skills assessments;
- The use of interdisciplinary cross-modular assessment.

The 30 **recommendations and requirements** can be grouped under a number of common issues, of which the first five in particular received multiple mentions:

- 'Bunching' of assessments leading, or contributing, to a spike in learner workload
- Imbalances in the weighting of assessments in relation to each other and/or to workload;
- High number of (especially low-weighted) assessments and overassessment;
- In skills-based modules with continuous practical assessment: A need to formally document learner attainment criteria; and a need to summatively assess and allocate formal marks to skills learning over the semester;
- Formative feedback (different issues): A need for more regular formative feedback; a need for formative feedback on academic writing skills; a need to give students sufficient time to incorporate feedback into later assignments; and a need to ensure students are aware when formative feedback is given;
- Overdependence on written work; a need to include more practical assessments aligned with proposed graduate attributes and workplace needs, or to include assessments crediting experiential learning;
- Group work assessment: A need to ensure consistency in group work assessment, and to standardise the approach to assignment of individual marks and peer assessment;
- Reassessment modalities;
- A need to reflect the overall assessment philosophy in the programme and module descriptions;
- A need to provide clear assessment descriptions in modules;
- Issues pertaining to the dissertation/thesis (balance of elements, research methodology).

A number of recurrent issues noted by the 2015/16 panels also, such as the balance and overall amount of assessments within programmes, are bound up with features of a modularised delivery model and may therefore simply require a certain level of ongoing attention. Panel suggestions to address these were quite 'standard' and encompassed improved coordination and production or review of a (pedagogically motivated) programme assessment strategy or schedule.

An assessment methodology favoured by several panels was Integrated Assessment respectively Cross-modular Assessment; this was proposed as a possible solution to address overassessment, or to provide learners with a multi-disciplinary 'capstone' project.

Reflective Journals or Portfolios were suggested by one panel as useful instruments to enable summative assessment of skills learning throughout the semester; this complements recommendations on the use of reflective journals and portfolios to promote rich independent learning (captured under Teaching & Learning Methodology).

Finally, the organisation of Group Work also features in the recommendations on Teaching & Learning Methodology; altogether, group (or ensemble) work received five separate panel comments, including one commendation and four recommendations.

Work Placement (c)

Since the Schools of Business & Humanities used the occasion of programmatic review to introduce work placement into all programmes where this was deemed appropriate, this element received significant panel attention. 14 panels commented on placement resp. internship, including panels for CCAD and CSM. Panel comments ranged across all aspects of placement, including professional value, operational aspects, and programme design aspects proper.

Apart from endorsing the incorporation of new work placement modules or proposed changes to existing modules and their assessment, the four **commendations** relate to

- The strong link between placement and the supporting personal and professional development modules; and
- The "impressive care" exhibited in matching students with placement employers, and good support for students before, during and after placement.

The 28 **recommendations and requirements** focus on:

- The importance of proper planning and operation of placement;
- A need for dedicated administrative support [several mentions], appropriate supervision allocation for academic staff involved, and for adequate resourcing in general;
- A need to develop and implement best practice policies and procedures at School/Faculty/Institute level, to assist amongst others with the development of MoUs;
- A need to produce clear, comprehensive guidance documents for staff, workplace mentors (e.g. on the mentoring process, roles & responsibilities) and students; and to clarify the expectations of placement students and their mentors in advance;
- Suggestions to introduce placement where not currently available (e.g. in lieu of a dissertation) and concerns over the relevance of proposed alternatives such as seminars;
- A need to strengthen existing (limited) placement by extending its duration, making it mandatory, and/or increasing its credit value;
- Placement scheduling, with a suggestion for delivery in several shorter blocks in a programme where seasonal effects play a role;
- Enhancing student preparedness for placement through: pre-placement modules (with attendance requirement); accommodation of students wishing to extend periods of preparatory practical work; or articulation of 'placement lifecycle' case studies for students and employers;
- A need to ensure an adequate level of supervision, and a need to ensure placement supervisors have appropriate expertise and receive supervision training, e.g. on assessment;
- A need for more structured and formal communication with professional/industry stakeholders on placement; potential for generation of additional placements through collaboration with industry;
- A need for a formal placement contract between student, supervisor and institutions.

For the formal placement contract, the recommended headings are: minimum standards for supervisor training; student development plan; core competencies and competencies around

professional standards; content, purpose (formative not summative) and protocol of the three-way meeting; and extension of placement.

Finally, two recommendations concern not so much placement itself, but the potential for a diminution of academic research or loss of thematic coherence in subject areas which were reorganised to accommodate placement. Since the vast majority of RR focus on ways to safeguard adequate quality and standards in the delivery of placement, or to maximise its effectiveness, broad support for this programme element across all disciplines may be assumed even where unstated.

Programme Structure and Subject Streams (c)

This theme was commented on by 15 programme panels, including all CCAD and CSM panels.

The 5 **commendations** under this theme relate to:

- The successful integration and mutual support of different programme 'pillars' (esp. theoretical and practical strands);
- The achievement of "congruence" in practitioners within the context of modularised delivery;
- Programme induction schemes; the introduction of learners to fundamental professional skills through the CIT module
- Proposed revisions to academic and professional skills modules (mathematics, business) to improve engagement and retention
- Development of new professional and technical skills and competences through mandatory modules, with a potential for creating CPD offerings in these areas for practicing professionals through new SPAs

The 27 **recommendations and requirements** on structural issues and the development of subject strands relate to:

- A mismatch between the structure of a Masters suggested by the programme schedule and the actual delivery schedule;
- A suggestion to extend the duration of a Masters to spread a heavy workload;
- Continuity breaks and sequencing issues within thematic strands or imbalances between strands; a need for more holistic integration between strands (esp. theoretical / practical)
- Omission of core areas of knowledge required for professional practice; a suggestion to use external professional competence frameworks to identify and review core themes;
- Delivery of key themes through electives only, leading to a concern over the delivery of the programme outcomes;
- A need to visualise overall competence development over the years (via an 'infogram' showing horizontal and vertical through-lines and the contributions of cognate electives); a need to identify and map the key skills developed through elective pathways;
- A suggestion to establish a clearer programme identity by reducing the number of electives and creating explicit pathways of related modules, indicating competences developed;
- A need for strong, sufficiently formal guidance on elective streams through programme literature (website, leaflets) and recurrent information events, to enable effective development of specialisms;
- A need to clarify and strengthen elective regulations;
- A need to visualise commonalities between cognate programmes and to indicate implications for progression and transfer, internally and externally;

- A need to distinguish the academic profile of an add-on L8 programme from that of the underpinning L7 by ensuring the relevant key feature (dissertation) is mandatory;
- A suggestion to build in mechanisms which will allow annual variation in the coverage of rapidly changing industry trends, within existing modules or through guest lectureships, to maintain programme relevance;
- The potential to develop specific programme strands into SPAs for purposes of staff development or provision of CPD for external professionals;
- A suggestion to investigate the possibility for a small number of 'long thin modules' in conjunction with the M&S Implementation Group and AC.

As opposed to previous reviews, only one comment related to the modularised delivery model, which may point towards a certain 'bedding in' of modularisation a decade after its introduction.

A number of recommendations cluster around the need for programme teams to achieve clarity on the key areas of knowledge, skill and competence which contribute to and define the distinct graduate profile (referencing external competence frameworks where appropriate), and to give clear guidance to learners on thematic progression and elective pathways. Thus, while there were some calls for a reorganisation of the relevant programmes themselves, several other comments were concerned with the enhancement of the information given to learners on the development of competences and specialisms, particularly where there are a "multitude" of electives.

Overall the programme schedules reviewed appear to include a satisfactory amount of elective choice; the 2015/16 reports contain no calls for additional electives. As in previous years, however, a few reports comment on operational constraints hampering the take-up of elective choices. These point out the, at times considerable, reduction of de facto choice due to timetabling, spatial and resource constraints. Of particular concern to one panel was adequate learner access to language provision in a programme where linguistic proficiency should be a key graduate skill.

Module Content and Delivery (c)

On consideration of their thematic 'allegiances', many of the Panel comments in the "Modules" sections of the reports were included with other themes they aligned better with, e.g. programme structure and subject streams. In addition, the Modules sections often contain (a moderate amount of) commentary which is of little relevance outside of the immediate specialism, and was therefore not included in the analysis.

Transferable themes within the 26 **recommendations and requirements** relate to:

- Duplication and overlap of content;
- Excessively broad range of topics and overloading of modules; suggestions to cover fewer aspects in greater detail, or to leave 'ancillary' content not required for the minimum intended learning outcomes to independent learning;
- A need to align the intellectual demands of the module content with the module level and the learner abilities;
- A need to ensure consistency and internal alignment of all module elements, including a good fit of the module title with the learning outcomes and content;
- A need to achieve consistency of module learning outcomes across a programme and an appropriate alignment between module learning outcomes and programme outcomes;

- A need to ensure that resource listings are up to date and balanced, and that referencing standards are consistent and correspond to the standard set for written student work;
- Various workload breakdown issues: A need to clearly break down contact hours into diverse forms of delivery; a need to provide for independent student learning; and conversely a request for increased staff contact time in a dissertation module.
- Technology-related modules: A need to amplify and improve student exposure and access to specialised IT systems and software, while recognising resource and licensing limitations; a need for module descriptors to demonstrate greater awareness of emerging technologies.

With regard to enhancing student access to industry-specific technology, it is worth noting that departments were not asked directly to purchase additional equipment or software, as they might have been in the past. Instead, one panel asked the department to "explore new ways" of achieving this without major expenditure (p. 7, Programme Review Report for Accounting). Another panel suggested that software suppliers might be convinced to install sample equipment units with the relevant software packages built in.

Access, Transfer & Progression (b)

This theme received comments from 12 panels, including all Humanities panels.

The 6 **commendations** concerned

- High recruitment, retention and graduation rates [several mentions];
- Clearly articulated pathways for FE entrants;
- Clear progression pathways through a programme suite;
- Implementation of RPL for entry.

The 15 **recommendations and requirements** under ATP focus on:

- A need to address access barriers such as travel or on-campus presence requirements (esp. in P-T programmes), e.g. through online or blended learning;
- A need to introduce specific practice-based or experiential entry requirements; a need to document entry requirements and the policy on 'fitness to study / practice';
- A need to maintain existing non-standard entry routes to third-level education;
- A need to address inconsistencies in entrant standards from different L6/L7 feeder routes (where there is no direct CAO access) to ensure greater consistency of outcomes;
- A need to clarify and document entitlements and requirements for transfer and progression to internal and external follow-on programmes;
- A need to identify alternative L10 progression pathways beyond the traditional PhD.

Teaching & Learning Methodology (c)

10 panels made comments specifically on elements of the teaching & learning methodology, though some comments on online and blended delivery (under Delivery Modes) and on Work Placement also encompass pedagogical aspects. This aspect of the provision also attracted a better-than-normal ratio of commendations.

The 6 **commendations** relate to several different aspects of delivery:

- Use of Blackboard which is particularly supportive for P-T students; use of Cloud-based content to support a 'flipped classroom approach';
- Guest lectures by high profile practitioners;
- Innovative use of live case studies;
- Staff ability to teach highly technical content in the absence of a dedicated laboratory;
- Development of communities of practice around particular thematic areas.

The 12 **recommendations and requirements** cover some of the same territory:

- A need to develop an overall teaching & learning strategy;
- Suggestions to make greater use of digital media or of online or blended learning;
- A need to enhance use of Blackboard "beyond a mere repository of lecture notes";
- A suggestion to introduce Reflective Journals and/or Portfolios to promote independent learning, incl. of theory; a suggestion to use different digital and online resources to develop and enrich journals and portfolios (Mahara IT platform; social media, blogs, "cinema club");
- A need for more industry site visits (actual or "VR"), or industry input through guest lectures, to expose learners to the application of principles in professional practice;
- A need to better operationalise Group Work, to make sure students understand its requirements and benefits, and to standardise and formalise the approach to group formation, effective group work and dispute resolution.

Observations on Further Themes

- *Resources, Facilities & Funding*: Recommendations largely concern additional spatial requirements and the need to update or upgrade the technological infrastructure.

  Comments stating the need for additional investment either state or imply that this is "subject to budget constraints". Specific proposals for addressing these constraints include identifying external organisations which might e.g. sponsor specific project work; ringfencing a percentage of the revenues of a profitable programme to feed back into programme and staff development; and scoping collaboration and sharing of facilities with programmes in other areas.

- *Staffing & Staff Development*: Comments include suggestions to leverage internal staff expertise (e.g. in facilitation, ethical research with minors) to develop CPD offerings for CIT staff and students, or to contribute to the development of CIT policy.

  With regard to staffing levels, an issue which 'carried over' from previous reviews was a concern over potential expertise gaps due to impending retirements of key teaching staff.

  There were also four calls for extra administrative support. Three of these relate specifically to the additional requirements of work placement, the fourth points out the need for extra coordination should student numbers grow on commencement of several planned new embedded or special purpose awards.

  Lastly, while adequate technical staff support had come up in previous programmatic reviews, no comments were made on this topic during the 2015/16 Phase 2 reviews.

- *Programme Outcomes & Core Graduate Profile*: Recommendations focus on the need for accuracy in the expression of the graduate profile and competences; the alignment between the stated

programme outcomes, programme specification and award; and the need to define outcomes for embedded exit awards.

- *Award & Programme Title*: Similarly, the comments hereunder deal in the main with the need for both the award type and award title to match the graduate profile, spectrum of professional roles, and programme specification, including those for embedded awards.

- *Programme Promotion & Recruitment*: Recommendations identify a potential for greater stakeholder involvement in programme promotion and the need to increase the visibility of some programmes in a more "robust" fashion.

- *Professional & Academic Skills Development*: Recommendations focus on general and 'soft' business skills, business start-up skills and entrepreneurship, academic research skills, and area-specific professional skills.

- *Delivery Modes*: Several commendations and recommendations relate to flexibility in response to learner needs, either achieved through part-time or online delivery, or required. In relation to the proposed move of an existing programme to fully online delivery, some questions were raised on demonstration of objective demand and ramifications for shared modules.

- *Other*: Panels also raised a small number of additional themes not explicitly included in the scope of the Phase 2 review. Comments concerning strategic rather than programme-level issues link back to similar observations made by the members of the Phase 1 panels and include research and internationalisation/ERASMUS. Also included were comments on the programmatic review process itself.

  Research-related recommendations concern the development of research networks and centres of excellence and the integration of research into taught undergraduate programmes. It may be worth noting that Phase 2 panels commented on staff research, but not on postgraduate research degree provision.

  RR on the *Programmatic Review Process* concern a need to provide more documentation on the quality assurance processes that shaped proposed programme changes (minutes of consultation meetings and focus groups, samples of course monitoring reports etc.), and a need to include a non-CIT graduate employer.

  Individual panels also critiqued the unwieldy nature of some programme and module specifications and noted inconsistencies between the description of certain programmes in the departmental submission and the Akari schedules, and queried if the report template could be pre-populated with "generic" elements before going to the panel.

  Recommendations on *Internationalisation* include a need to promote internationalisation and ERASMUS exchange more actively among students and staff, and to implement more robust feedback system for unsuccessful candidates.

- Finally, one recommendation related to the need to address poor *Attendance* through "suitable approaches to delivery and assessment", though the panel did not suggest specific measures.

Alignment of Phase 2 CRR with the ESG 2015

The *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area* (ESG 2015) have been adopted by QQI as the national standards for quality assurance in higher education institutions, and will thus form a significant part of the criteria framework for institutional review.

While the ESG exceed the purview of programmatic review, the majority of the standards for internal quality assurance apply, either directly or indirectly, to a review of the Institute's provision.

Standards 1.3, Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment; 1.5, Teaching Staff; and 1.6, Learning Resources and Student Support

For the most part these three core standards align in a fairly straightforward manner with a number of the core Phase 2 themes already discussed above.

It is not within the remit of a PR panel to comment directly on staff recruitment processes and conditions of employment, which are included in the ESG guidelines on Teaching Staff. Indirect references to working conditions concern an acknowledgement of the significant surplus work carried out by staff responsible for experiential learning outside of the classroom, like clinical training or placement, and recommendations to take such additional duties into account in the allocation of staff hours. While there was one expression of concern about understaffing, echoing Phase 1 findings about staffing levels in some areas, none of the Phase 2 panels raised points related to employment status, such as over-reliance on part-time staff for programme management duties, which had come up in previous reviews.

Other aspects of these standards which did not attract commentary from the 2015/16 panels include the role of the support services in facilitating national and international student mobility, the service response to the needs of students with disabilities, and the qualifications and competence development of support and administrative staff.

Standard 1.4, Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification

This standard is concerned with the formal 'staging points' in the student lifecycle.

The most relevant theme of the 2015/16 programmatic reviews is Access, Transfer & Progression, though a few commendations and recommendations under

- Programme Structure & Subject Streams (a need to state the implications of commonalities between programmes for progression and transfer);
- Students Supports, Welfare & Feedback (the Good Start induction programme); and
- Data Analysis & Benchmarking (a need to enhance the response rates and analysis of graduate destination surveys)

are also relevant.

Under Access, Transfer & Progression, the pertinent comments include three of four commendations (pathways for FE entrants, progression pathways through a programme suite, implementation of RPL) as well as several recommendations.

It should be noted that the guidelines under this standard are written from a distinctly pan-European perspective, with an assumption that the chief goal of the institutional processes is to enable mobility

within and across higher education systems in the EHEA. This differs somewhat from the approach of the programme panels, who in the main tend to focus on the contribution of the programme provision to meeting regional needs, in line also with the institutional mission.

This may be one of several reasons why the alignment of institutional recognition practices with the Lisbon principles and national practices did not come into view. Panels also saw no reason to comment on certification of graduates (parchments and diploma supplements).

Standard 1.7, Information Management

The focus of the Phase 2 review lies predominantly on the outputs of information management processes (e.g. stakeholder feedback, number of applications, retention data etc.) and their use to develop the programmes. Comments relevant to this standard therefore tend to be distributed among comments on the programme features that the information gathering mechanisms feed into.

A few panel comments specifically foreground the information management process itself; these have been captured under the separate theme of Data Analysis & Benchmarking. Two of these relate to a need to present a more detailed, appropriately referenced analysis of performance or benchmarking data, as well as information on steps taken on the basis of the data. One panel commented on the low number of graduate profiles available for analysis.

Comments on information management processes under other Phase 2 themes relate to:

- the provision and usage of student feedback mechanisms (attracting both commendations and recommendations);
- the need for more robust feedback mechanisms for unsuccessful ERASMUS candidates;
- the provision of more documentary evidence on continuous QA processes for the information of programme panels.

Though several commendations were made on rates of recruitment, retention and graduation, there is no discussion of the information-gathering mechanisms or their effectiveness, nor did panels comment on such mechanisms in relation to learning resources and student supports.

Standard 1.8, Public Information

The Phase 2 criteria do not explicitly reference this standard, and departments are not required to submit programme handbooks and other literature samples to programme review panels as standard (though a number of departments provide such documents of their own accord).

However, a fair amount of commentary on information provision is distributed among other themes. This relates to the following points, some of which attracted multiple comments: (A need for …)

- Accurate reflection of the programme specification and graduate profile in programme / award titles;
- Internal consistency of information on modules and avoidance of apparent contradictions between different module elements, in particular title, outcomes and content;
- Clear and formal documentation of experiential entry requirements, 'fitness to study' policy, and entitlements and requirements regarding transfer and progression;
- Clear and sufficiently detailed description of significant module elements, including assessment and workload breakdown;

- Clarification of elective regulations;
- Formal documentation of criteria for continuous skills assessment;
- Clear and sufficiently formalised learner guidance on: thematic through-lines and competence development; elective streams and development of specialisms; implications of programme commonalities for transfer and progression; and arrangements for work placement.

Learner guidance is to be provided via information documents and/or at regular information events as appropriate. Several panels asked for the information to be provided visually, via "infograms".

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Questions for Follow-On Analysis

A possible question for a future longitudinal analysis of panel commentary might be the existence and extent of a review bias.

The trend of the comments on programme structure & subject streams, for instance, leave some room to ponder to what extent the objectives and organisation of programmatic review might steer panels towards giving preference to structures and mechanisms which consolidate and deepen the specialist attributes of graduates, rather than those which foster interdisciplinarity and the development of broader resp. transferable skills and competencies.

Recommendations on other aspects (similarly made by previous panels) seem to support such a consideration. For instance, some panels asked departments to ensure that in-service maths and business modules contain enough material of direct relevance to the discipline at hand. By contrast, there were no calls for such modules to remain broad and generic to enable interdisciplinary use across many different programmes, even though cross-programme collaboration and efficiencies are generally favoured by panels where they are referenced.

Inclusion of ESG Standards 1.7 and 1.8 in the Criteria for Programmatic Review

In the context of a future review of the programmatic review process, consideration might also be given to introducing criteria specifically referencing performance against the ESG standards on information management and public information.

Scope

While the programmatic review reports cover a wide range of issues, there should be no assumption that they necessarily provide a complete – or indeed completely accurate – picture of instances of good practice or opportunities to improve the quality of the provision and its supports. The analysis of the panel commendations and recommendations can add significantly to institutional knowledge on performance against strategic goals and quality assurance standards, but any conclusions drawn need to be supplemented by and compared with information gained through other quality processes.

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