Ollscoil na hÉireann
National University of Ireland

Institutional Review of Quality Assurance Effectiveness

Institute of Public Administration

8th & 9th September 2021

Contents

Section 1: Introduction and Context

1.1 Introduction

The National University of Ireland (NUI) is a federal university comprising the largest element of the Irish university system. As a unique and historical focal point in Irish higher education, NUI serves the interests of its member institutions, by providing services to them and to their graduates.

In accordance with the [Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act](#) 2012, NUI is a 'designated awarding body'. The Act requires NUI to establish quality assurance arrangements in respect of 'linked providers' that deliver educational programmes leading to NUI awards. The Institute of Public Administration (IPA) is a linked provider of the National University of Ireland (NUI).

In 2017, as part of its statutory obligations under Part 3 (section 37) of the Act, the IPA submitted its Quality Assurance policies and procedures to University College Dublin (UCD), their Designated Awarding Body at the time. The IPA was a Recognised UCD college between 2011 and 2018 and, before that, a Recognised College of the NUI between 2001 and 2011.

These QA policies and procedures were subsequently approved by UCD's Academic Council Quality Enhancement Committee (ACQEC) on 17 October 2018 on foot of a panel review to consider their appropriateness to 'safeguard academic standards and to promote a positive learning experience for students'.

In 2018, by agreement between all parties (IPA, UCD, NUI), the IPA reverted to its former status as a Recognised College of the NUI. When the Memorandum of Agreement with UCD ended, the NUI once again became the IPA's Designated Awarding Body. In November 2018, the NUI Senate adopted the Institute's QA processes that had been approved by UCD the previous month.

In January 2020, NUI approved a short addendum to the IPA's QA Procedures to cover new governance and accreditation arrangements in place between NUI and IPA (as a Recognised College) following its transition from UCD.

The Act charges NUI with reviewing the effectiveness of the IPA's approved quality assurance and enhancement policies and procedures at least once every seven years following initial approval (Institutional Quality Assurance Effectiveness Review ('Institutional Review')). Effective quality assurance is of the highest significance for the IPA and the NUI. It underpins both the University's mission of upholding the value and prestige of NUI qualifications at home and abroad and the IPA's mission to enhance the professional expertise of the public service.

1.2 Profile of the Institute of Public Administration

The mission of the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) is to advance the understanding, standards and practice of public administration and public policy. Under the aegis originally of the Department of Finance and, since 2011, the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform, the IPA has been supporting the development of public servants and the public sector in Ireland and abroad for almost sixty-five years.

The IPA differs from other educational providers in that it is focused on the public sector and adopts a multi-faceted approach – in addition to accredited third-level education, the Institute specialises in public sector training and development, consultancy and advisory services, commissioned research, and publishing. The IPA is organised into divisions to fulfil its obligations. This cross-sectoral approach ensures that the IPA applies a unique, whole-of-government perspective to its activities. Together, the divisions respond to the demands of state and government in ways not possible if the IPA were principally a higher education college, a training company or commissioned research body.

The IPA is now a Recognised College of the National University of Ireland (NUI), and the IPA's division responsible for the provision of NUI accredited third-level programmes is the Education Division. Essentially, the Education Division functions like a university school, but one that incorporates the Registrar's Office, QA Office and Administrative Office into its structure. Like other divisions within the IPA, the activities are supported by overarching cross-divisional corporate services.

The Education Division's accredited programmes fulfil the IPA mission by attending to two core activities of the public service: the formulation and the implementation of policy through administrative activities, governance, leadership and management. The IPA addresses each of these activities by offering over 40 multi-disciplinary qualifications from NFQ Level 6 to Level 10. The IPA has 1,920 students who are in-service public sector professionals across the wider public service (civil service, local government sector, health sector, justice sector, state bodies etc). Over 960 IPA students were awarded NUI qualifications at the 2020 conferring ceremony.

The Division's approach to programme content and delivery blends academic principles, scholarship, critical enquiry and practical application – an education that serves practising public servants and their parent agencies and departments. The learning outcomes associated with IPA programmes place a premium on the development of professional skills and knowledge within an academic framework (and vice versa).

The IPA fulfils its remit to build capacity in the public sector by delivering accredited programmes that have an academic and practitioner appeal. The Institute underpins its education provision with appropriate third-level quality assurance systems and a public sector corporate governance and management system.

1.3 Contextual Factors

The IPA was preparing for the institutional review at a time when many restrictions were in place to help stop the spread of Covid-19. Due to the closure of education institutions, all teaching, learning and assessment was conducted on-line, with staff working remotely.

The IPA found that existing QA procedures broadly provided support for changes to programme delivery and assessment during the pandemic. The frameworks and principles for the creation and coherent presentation of content for remote learners were robust and pragmatic. This was also the case with frameworks for the management of programme delivery and lecturing staff. Likewise with procedures for handling breaches of academic integrity.

Internal quality assurance practices remained fundamentally unchanged, but in many cases their scope and focus were adapted and extended.

Where the IPA found it necessary to change an approach, such as online interactive sessions, they made sure these interventions were fully integrated into the curriculum and existing learning materials. New or updated guidance documentation was produced for students and lecturers in the knowledge that additional procedures and guidelines served to establish and safeguard standards.

Due to ongoing restrictions and the uncertainty around travel, a decision was taken in July 2021 to hold the review site visit remotely. MS Teams was used as a platform for all scheduled meetings. The Review Panel found this to be a very effective and efficient platform and it had no negative impact on the review outcome.

1.4 Terms of Reference for the Institutional Review

This institutional review has three core objectives:

- **Objective 1:** To review the implementation of NUI-approved QA policies and procedures in the IPA.
- **Objective 2:** To review how the IPA enhances quality through governance, policies, and procedures, with regard to its stated mission and quality targets.
- **Objective 3**: To review the effectiveness and implementation of the IPA's procedures for student access, transfer, and progression.

The student body in the Institute comprises professionals employed in Ireland, primarily in the public sector. The IPA do not cater for international learners or deal with exchange or Erasmus students. In light of this, the Institute agreed with the NUI that Objective 4 of the NUI's Guidelines for the Institutional Review of Quality Assurance Effectiveness at Recognised Colleges (also Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI's) CINNTE Objective 4), which deals with compliance with QQI's 2015 Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners, would not fall within the ambit of this review.

The three core objectives were assessed through analysis of the following thematic areas:

1. **Governance & Management**: How effective are the IPA's governance and management structures in underpinning the accredited education provision?
2. **Quality Assurance Procedures**: How effective are the IPA's internal quality assurance processes? To what degree are their outcomes used in decision-making and strategic management in the context of quality assurance and enhancement of educational provision?
3. **Management of Academic Standards**: How effectively does the IPA fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards?
4. **Enrichment of the Learner Experience**: How effectively does the IPA fulfil its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning experiences and opportunities?
5. **Public Information & Stakeholders**: How effectively does the IPA engage with its stakeholders? How effectively does the IPA communicate public information, that it is responsible for providing, to students and other stakeholders?

Section 2: IPA Self-Evaluation Report

2.1 Methodology Used to Prepare the ISER

The IPA established a Steering Group to prepare the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER). The Group comprised a project group and oversight group from across the Institution. An ISER Project Group took responsibility for the primary drafting and information gathering. The group met regularly (on MS Teams due to Covid-19 restrictions). The group included representatives from key parts of the Division, including the Registrar's Office, programme delivery area, QA area, associate lecturers and students.

Overseeing the work of this group was a sub-Faculty group. This group acted as a conduit between the ISER Project Group and IPA Faculty, Senior Management Group, IPA Education Committee, IPA Board and NUI.

In preparation for the Effectiveness Review, the IPA pursued the following lines of action:

- The Registrar's Office and QA Officer continued to complete iterative quality related activities, surveys and reports as per the approved QA policies and procedures. They also engaged with QA reviews and developments arising from deliberations by Faculty and its sub-group, the Teaching Learning and Assessment Group (TLAG).
- The Registrar's Office, QA Officer and ISER Project Group gathered reports, minutes, QA completion records and other data relevant to the main report and Appendices.
- The ISER Project Group formulated a structure for the Self-Evaluation Report. The Group identified a series of self-assessment questions to frame their evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of the approved QA system.
- The ISER Project Group and Oversight Group discussed strengths/challenges that would provide the basis for a series of consecutive responses to the self-assessment questions. The proceedings of these meetings facilitated the Project Group's preparation of the ISER narrative.
- The Oversight Group secured input into successive drafts of the ISER from IPA Faculty (members of academic staff, librarian), senior managers across the Institution (SMG), administrative staff supporting the programmes, and from the Education Committee composed of key stakeholders. The Group also kept the Board informed. The IPA kept the NUI updated on progress during the IPA-NUI Steering Committee meetings.
- Where appropriate, and during the winter/spring/summer of 2020/2021, the Head of Education tabled at Faculty additional development and enhancement work where the Steering Group's deliberations were identifying areas of specific challenge for the Institute.

2.2 Effectiveness of the ISER

The Review Team was impressed with the quality of the self-evaluation report. The ISER is a comprehensive, well-written and analytical document, which is supported with additional documentation by way of hyperlinks and appendices.

In order to address the three key objectives of the review, the self-evaluation was conducted under five thematic areas. Key questions were addressed under each thematic area to evaluate the effectiveness of quality assurance and enhancement processes and procedures. Each chapter was supported by case studies as evidence of good practice. A collegial approach was taken to the self-evaluation exercise and the finalised ISER was a very open document, outlining many areas of current good practice but also acknowledging challenges and areas that need further attention going forward. In that sense, the document was self-reflective.

During the main review visit, the Review Team met with members of the ISER steering group, which included the student representative. All members participated fully in the discussion and outlined in detail their approach to the ISER. Participants reiterated that they wanted to get something meaningful from the process and were very open in outlining the strengths and challenges of the IPA.

The Review Team commends the IPA for the very comprehensive and analytical self-evaluation report which was supported by case studies of good practice and detailed appendices.

The IPA considers its students as primary stakeholders. The self-evaluation process was supported by data drawn from pre-existing student surveys and the steering group had a student representative. However, there was little evidence of engagement with external stakeholders during the self-evaluation process. The lack of external stakeholder input into the ISER process, with the exception of committee representatives, was a missed opportunity for valuable stakeholder contribution and engagement.

The Review Team recommends the IPA develop a more formal method of obtaining external stakeholder input as part of the overall quality assurance framework.

Section 3: Quality Assurance Effectiveness by Thematic Area

3.1 Governance and Management

3.1.1 Vision, Mission and Strategy

The IPA uses a commonly adopted approach to the development of its strategic plan. Typically, the strategy is for a time period of three to five years. During the development of the strategy, all relevant stakeholders are consulted, including students and staff, with senior management and the board working closely together. During this process, a business environment analysis is performed and the IPA's future role discussed. The implementation of the strategy is supported by the annual planning and budgeting process. In addition, organisational structures help implement the strategy throughout the IPA. Team leaders, senior management team, the board and the committees follow the implementation of the strategy.

The Review Team commends the IPA for their comprehensive strategic development process, which is inclusive of all relevant stakeholders, including students and staff.

The current strategic plan is designed for five years (2017-2021) and has three strategic goals and 12 different priorities that define the important strategic development areas including quality assurance. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on how people study and work globally in the future. This will require analysis and discussion of questions like: What is the role of the IPA? What is the added value the IPA delivers? What are the profitable business models i.e. what kind of organisation does the IPA want to be post-pandemic?

With a more agile strategic development process, the IPA could better respond to the changing needs of customers such as students and other stakeholders allowing for growth in a competitive market. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated the need for more agile strategic development processes.

Typically, the process of developing a strategic plan can be quite cumbersome and time consuming. Agile methods can help to improve the quality of work, cost-effectiveness of the organisation and increase well-being at work. Modern digital technologies allow continuous collection of data to support more agile strategic development processes and support faster follow-up of strategy implementation.

The Review Team recommends the IPA continues to adopt more agile strategy development processes in order to increase the strategic agility of the organisation.

3.1.2 Board and Senior Management Team

In order for the board to be able to carry out its own role as a determinant of strategic direction, it is important that the board systematically obtains high-quality information for decision-making from the senior management group and also from the other stakeholders. The IPA board meets 10-11 times per year and receives systematic updates on organisational performance. The Board also meet the senior management group (SMG) for an annual strategic planning day.

The IPA's Board of Directors consists of thirteen members. There are ten members from different organisations representing the public sector area. In addition, the student voice is heard through the student representative. The Director General is also a member of the Board and attends all meetings. The IPA has complex multi-governance arrangements: a public funded organisation under the aegis of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform; a company limited by guarantee; a

registered charity; and, recognised college of the NUI. These arrangements can create accountability challenges and different reporting arrangements which must place a burden on the IPA.

The senior management group, headed by the Director General, consists of directors responsible for Accredited Education Programmes; Publications & Research; Training, Development, Consultancy and International Services; Human Resources; and, Finance, IT and Support Services.

The IPA's governance structure was tested in a crisis situation when the Covid-19 pandemic began. The governance structure, information flow between the key actors, key processes, and the decision-making capability enabled the transition to the online mode of operation. The validation process was performed effectively. Students' feedback on the online experience was very positive.

The Review Team commends the IPA for the engagement and formal & informal communication between board and senior management group, especially during the pandemic to guarantee quality services.

The Board places great emphasis on the performance of educational programmes. As the strategic development areas are defined by three strategic goals and 12 different priorities, one may ask whether there are too many strategic areas or what choices have been made. In addition, financial, human resources (HR), internal processes and risk management indicators must be monitored. KPIs should show how much progress has been made in each of the selected strategic areas.

The Review Team recommends the IPA define annual strategic key performance indicators (KPIs) with regular reporting of targets to the board. The IPA clarified these are contained in annual business plans.

The Review Team recommends a review of the IPA's governance arrangements in an attempt to simplify the legal status of the organisation and its accounting arrangements.

3.1.3 Operational Model and Staff Competencies

The IPA consists of five operational units. The Whitaker school is responsible for educational programmes and has 10 academic staff, assistant registrar, senior editor/programme delivery specialist, two quality support personnel, four library staff, 12 administrative support staff and 20 external examiners.

The IPA staff are highly motivated and customer focused. Appropriately varying tasks in different roles make their work meaningful as a whole. Despite financial and Covid-19 challenges, the staff development budget has increased. The Institute has trained staff in certain areas such as system security and has also identified that there is a need for upskilling of staff in the latest online delivery application. The IPA Staff handbook covers aspects of the employment experience.

The Review Team commends the IPA for their motivated and dedicated staff, who are very customer and student focused.

The Covid-19 pandemic changed the way we study and work. This placed demands on skills requirements for IPA staff, for example, pedagogical skills and technological skills. The current competence development process is relatively slow. Staff identify competence development needs annually, which is a long time in today's working environment. There is merit in assessing if skills development requirements could be carried out on in a more agile way e.g. take place on a quarterly basis, in order to address ongoing staff development needs.

The Review Team recommends the IPA to pilot a more agile staff competence development process.

The IPA as an organisation needs to have a deeper understanding of fundamental changes in the way of work and how this new type of work is led by current and future leaders. This will be reflected in the content of the current programmes, and challenges the IPA to develop new programmes and new business opportunities to meet this new context. Continuous discussion with client organisations is necessary and essential to understand their needs and the price-levels they are willing to pay. High-quality and "fit for purpose" services can be cost-effectively developed together with clients and other stakeholders using co-creation techniques.

The Review Team recommends the IPA continues to implement strategic HR initiatives and identify post-pandemic strategic competences required for high-quality service delivery.

The Review Team recommends the IPA to develop a co-creation model piloted with client organisations to ensure high quality (digital) services in the future.

Because the Institute is a relatively small organisation and staff work in many areas, multi-tasking is often required. Committed and dedicated staff are at risk of working excessively long days and weekends. Multitasking and increased workload in the long run can lead to a decline in organisational performance and staff well-being and thus reflect the quality of work and services. Therefore, the IPA should also systematically monitor staff well-being.

The Review Team recommends the IPA develop a system to systematically monitor staff well-being.

3.1.4 Policies and Risk Management

The IPA has a wide range of policies and procedures which comply with statutory requirements. The policies are regularly reviewed, updated and approved by the SMG. The policy structure forms a solid basis for the IPA management system. Polices consists of Governance, Finance, Information & Communications Technology (ICT), HR, Risk Management and Quality Assurance. Policies provide a standardised way of working by creating guidelines for the staff. Standardization decreases uncertainty in the organisation and also creates predictability. Policies also act as a basis for continuous improvement cycles – when improvements are made in the organisation, they are reflected in policy updates. New or revised policies are communicated to staff and other stakeholders e.g. external lecturers, so they can reflect changes in work practices. Team leaders and supervisors play an important role in policy implementation.

The Review Team commends the IPA for the comprehensive policies and procedures in place forming the basis of a management system to ensure high-quality service provision.

The IPA has a comprehensive risk management framework in place. The Audit and Risk Committee systematically reviews risk. The Institute has nominated a Chief Risk Officer with overall responsibility for risk management. There is also a system of internal control, and its effectiveness is reviewed by the Board and SMG. Once a year the system is reviewed to ensure its meets Department of Expenditure and Reform (DPER) guidelines. Internal audits of various areas have been carried out annually. It is important for the Institute, as a public sector body, to maintain and promote high ethical behaviour and standards. One part of the risk management process is the use of an anonymous channel for suspected misconduct.

The Review Team recommends the IPA analyse the potential requirement for a Whistleblowing Policy and an anonymous reporting channel be used by staff and other stakeholders, if necessary. The IPA provided additional information on their protected disclosures policy.

The IPA is committed to compliance and conformance with the various requirements contained in Legal, Regulatory and Governance Frameworks, particularly the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. Policies, procedures and frameworks are in place to enable staff to adhere to legal

and ethical requirements. The IPA is also committed to the continuous improvement of the organisation. The IPA identifies its strengths and weaknesses, collects data from students and uses data to improve quality of the educational provision. Moving forward, there is a need to develop agility in the organisation in order to remain effective and efficient.

3.2 Quality Assurance and Procedures

3.2.1 Governance and Management of Quality

The IPA's Strategic Plan 2017-2021 positions the development of QA as a formal strategic objective. The Director General works in conjunction with the Assistant Director General/Head of Education to deliver Quality Assurance as a strategic objective. This is monitored by the Board of the IPA. The overall role of the Board is to satisfy itself that procedures and structures are in place to ensure high quality service. There is a student representative on the Board.

From an operational perspective, responsibility for driving QA development, implementation and evaluation lies with the Assistant Director General/Head of Education in conjunction with the Assistant Registrar. The Education Division's Quality Office, Administration Office and Faculty members play a central role as managers, administrators and academics. The IPA's Education Committee and the IPA-NUI Steering Committee both contain provisions within their terms of reference for oversight of QA in the IPA.

3.2.2 Quality Assurance Framework

The IPA has undertaken transformational work on its quality assurance systems and processes in recent years. The aim of these QA procedures is to maintain and enhance the effectiveness of teaching, learning, assessment and support, and the Institute's management of these core activities. This was clearly evidenced in the comprehensive ISER and during the main review visit in discussions with staff, students and external stakeholders.

At each level of governance and management, there are clear lines of responsibility for appropriate QA-related activities and there are defined reporting relationships and advisory/oversight committees. These are clearly articulated in the IPA's Governance, Oversight and Quality Framework, an impressive document which covers all aspects of quality assurance and quality enhancement.

The framework clearly articulates the governance and management of quality, outlines individual and collective roles and responsibilities, gives a detailed overview of the QA policies and procedures, monitoring and review mechanisms and continuous improvement.

The framework is supported by a range of QA policies and procedures. All policies follow a policy template which clearly outlines the policy owner, related policies, key implementation mechanisms and key monitoring mechanisms using a templated approach. All policies are reviewed systematically under the defined criteria of relevance, user-friendliness and practice, implementation and effectiveness.

The Review Team commends the IPA on their comprehensive quality assurance framework which provides central underpinning mechanisms for the establishment and maintenance of an embedded, coherent and comprehensive quality regime.

3.2.3 Annual Module Review

As part of the suite of QA policies and procedures, the IPA has an [Annual Module Review](#) policy. The aim of this policy is:

a) To provide clear policy and procedures for the review of modules and programmes to ensure they achieve the learning objectives and outcomes set for them.
b) To facilitate the upgrading of content and continuous improvement in teaching and learning.
c) To ensure that review activities occur in a regular and systematic manner.

A case study was used in the ISER to outline the effectiveness of the implementation of annual module reviews. The procedure is in place since 2017 and was designed to coincide with the anonymised survey feedback from students, feedback from examiners on the annual examinations and extern commentary on the module/programme. When returning exam results, lecturers / examiners and module / programme co-ordinators complete a module review pro-forma. The pro-forma addresses key areas to be evaluated – appropriateness and success of the module aims, learning outcomes, teaching methods, assessment strategies and resources provided, and allows for concerns to be raised and resolutions to be identified. The IPA Coordinator responsible for the academic direction and management of the module, in turn, reviews these forms, along with extern commentary and student feedback, and confirms whether any revisions/actions are necessary for the next academic year.

Effectiveness of the process was also in evidence during discussions with staff and students at the main review visit. Lecturers and associates found it useful to their teaching. As one participant noted: "I like it, it forces me to spend time each year looking at every module. We have a breadth of modules to look at, but it helps to prioritise and examine my work." It also helps to identify potential issues with individual modules, which can be addressed immediately. The triangulation of feedback from various sources strengthens the overall process and leads to evidence-based quality enhancement to programmes.

The Review Team commends the IPA on the comprehensive module review mechanism which is triangulated with feedback from examiners and student surveys.

3.2.4 Areas for Further Consideration

The implementation of quality assurance processes and procedures in an educational institution is not without its challenges. There is a myriad of statutory requirements to take into consideration as well as continuously striving for quality enhancement. As one participant commented during the main review visit: "The whole quality area begets itself and becomes its own life-force. It's a big machine." Another participant felt that the quality agenda was big and disproportionate to the size of the organisation. Given the heavy burden of the implementation of QA policies, processes and procedures, the findings from this institutional review may be an opportunity to take a reflective look at the return on investment in quality assurance and the impact on current resources which are already heavily stretched.

During the main review visit, the panel met with the senior management team, members of full-time and associate teaching staff as well as staff members from support functions. All participants were passionate about their role within the IPA and are all hugely committed to ensuring students have a high-quality student experience. While processes and procedures are in place to facilitate this, there is an abundance of institutional knowledge and expertise residing with individual staff members. While the documenting of processes and operational procedures helps to capture the high-level procedural steps in a process, these are often underpinned by individual knowledge and expertise.

The Covid pandemic has placed particular challenges on the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector. The IPA's ICT Unit and IT staff in the Education Division were very

responsive in facilitating the IPA to move online during the pandemic and in supporting staff and students during the transition to on-line delivery. It continues to be proactive in developing new systems and procedures to promote the digital transformation and protecting the IPA regarding system security. However, finding and retaining IT talent remains a challenge. As one participant in the review remarked: "We just need to focus on staff retention and how ICT is growing".

The age profile of staff, particularly among the senior team, was also identified during the main review visit as an area for concern over the coming years. It is imperative to the continuing success of the Institute, that processes are put in place for staff retention and succession planning, to ensure that valuable institutional knowledge is not lost due to staff retirements and/or staff turnover.

The Review Team recommends the IPA devise initiates for staff retention and succession planning to capture institutional knowledge and avoid a 'brain drain' of expertise due to staff retirement and/or turnover in the coming years.

Communication is a key characteristic of organisational success. Effective communication strengthens the connections between an institution and its stakeholders, both internal and external. As stated in the ISER "'achieving successful student engagement is not about enforcement and compliance; it's about building up a meaningful culture and two-way communications".

While it was generally felt amongst staff that there are strong internal communication processes in place, there is potential to enhance communication with students and external stakeholders. Findings from a student survey in 2019 highlighted the need for improved communication. This was corroborated during discussions with students at the main review visit.

This was also very much in evidence during discussions with external stakeholders. There was diversity in the level of engagement between larger and smaller organisations. There was also a sense of duality of purpose, with the IPA and stakeholder organisations both surveying students for feedback on programmes. Many of the smaller organisations were not aware of the module review mechanism in place. To enhance student and stakeholder engagement, perhaps there is an opportunity to share the results of student feedback surveys with relevant stakeholder groups. Currently that depth of strategic engagement appears to be lacking.

The Review Team recommends the IPA develop a comprehensive communications strategy to keep staff, students and external stakeholders up to date on current initiatives and future developments.

3.3 Management of Academic Standards

How effectively does the IPA fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards?

3.3.1 The Market

The management of academic standards is inextricably linked to the mission of the IPA. We learn from the ISER (page 2) that:

- "The mission of the Institute of Public Administration is to advance the understanding, standard and practice of public administration and public policy.
- Essentially, the Education Division (Whitaker School) functions like a university school.
- The learning outcomes associated with IPA programmes place a premium on the development of professional skills and knowledge within an academic framework (and vice versa)".

Set alongside this, the Director General indicated that the IPA is a commercial entity which must cover its costs.

The Review Team saw some internal incongruities in these statements. University schools do not appear to have the same explicit financial pressures as the IPA, although this is <u>not</u> to suggest that universities are not financially prudent and work to strict value for money principles. Their funding model is different. The IPA is dependent on an annual resource grant from DPER and must generate most of its income through student fees and the provision of public sector education, training and consultancy services (ISER page iv). Aside from the funding model, the IPA sees the development of professional skills and knowledge as a key priority to a much greater extent than a university school. Taken together, there is the potential for mission ambiguity. What, for example, makes the IPA different from a management consultancy firm in professional skills and knowledge development?

In addition, the public sector context in Ireland has shifted radically. Previously staff entering the sector may not have had primary academic degrees. This has changed significantly. As one senior official noted in the review: "Ten years ago, it [the IPA] might have been one of the only actors in the space but there are now a large number of practitioners offering a similar product, so it's gotten more competitive in this landscape". These comments and others in a similar vein prompt questions about the specific role of the IPA in the current market place.

Mission ambiguity was exemplified in comments made by the IPA and its main client organisation. The Review Team learned from the IPA's Director General that: "our first priority [as a client organisation] is the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). Their call for a programme will always be our first priority". This closeness to DPER and its educational needs was seen somewhat differently by the Department: "we want to develop specialist training that we would have done with the IPA back in the day but there is more of a distance now compared to before".

One key stakeholder emphasised the unique competitive advantage of the IPA: "engagement with practitioners is still a very important element which other providers don't have. There are other areas of real strengths such as public sector governance, general economics and management courses which introduce people to these concepts and their broad parameters".

The management of academic standards going forward for the IPA therefore demands a radical rethink of its raison d'être. If it is to function 'like a university school' then its funding model, client base, research and consultancy work needs a strategic overhaul. If, on the other hand, it is to function as an institute with a focus on training, short courses and professional development, then it should not aspire to teaching and research at the masters and professional doctorate levels. At present it is clear to the Review Panel that Faculty are trying their best to fulfil both missions and are overburdened as a consequence. As one IPA Senior Manager noted: "we have squeezed Faculty until the pips squeak".

The Review Team is <u>not</u> calling for a huge resource lift for the IPA but rather for it to define the market in which it has a competitive advantage and reorient accordingly.

The Review Team commends the IPA for its long history of serving the public sector in Ireland. It has provided access to higher education for officials, many of whom would not otherwise have had such opportunities. We also commend the senior leadership in steering the organisation through hugely turbulent times particularly during the last 18 months which demonstrated the agility of the IPA to meet the challenges of the pandemic.

The Review Team recommends the IPA complete a strategic review of its current mission taking into account the changing public sector context in which it is operating. The Review Team do not wish to pre-empt such a review but from the ISER and interviews with key stakeholders it would

appear that the IPA should focus more towards a professional development and skills training organisation.

We do not recommend, and are not calling for, additional resources to maintain the status quo since we do not think it is sustainable, particularly the delivery of the DGov programme without the requisite research capacity of Faculty. The new strategy direction we recommend may also help to address the 'retirement cliff' facing the IPA where a number of key staff are due to leave.

3.3.2 Teaching

The ISER report and interviews with the IPA Senior Management Team and Faculty indicate that a robust system of programme design and validation is in place. The quantum and breadth of programmes is however extensive for a relatively small institution. The ISER notes that the IPA offer 40 NUI qualifications and 64 programmes, all of this with a full-time teaching Faculty of 10. Delivery also involves 58 associates with varying contributions to the IPA teaching portfolio. Qualifications are offered from level 6 (certificates and diplomas) through to level 10 (Professional Doctorate). Approximately 25% of current programmes have been delivered in direct response to requests from government departments and agencies, some of which are time sensitive and may have a relatively short shelf-life.

There must be a concern about the balance between full-time and associate lecturers in the delivery of the IPA's teaching portfolio. This is acknowledged in the ISER: "the academic development of associate lecturing staff is a challenge for the Institute in terms of cost and expectation" (page 65). That said, the ISER also notes: "The established structures have supported effective performance from lecturers. However, some challenges remain. We are vigilant about over-relying on associate lecturers" (page 66). Associates demand significant oversight for quality assurance purposes from full-time Faculty. As one Faculty member described it: "it is a challenge to bring them [associates] from guest speaker to educator, we are aware of this".

To support the delivery of the courses offered, the ISER notes that 110 bespoke course texts are produced to act as a quality control mechanism. These ensure that teaching associates have consistent foundation materials, regardless of who delivers the course. Faculty explained during the main review visit that supplementary materials are also provided to students through Moodle. Keeping these course texts up-to-date in a fast-changing public administration context raises questions about the resource investment in core course materials.

The ISER notes (page 65) that: of the Education Division's full-time Faculty, seven have PhDs and five have Masters-level qualifications (page 65).

Since Faculty are teaching up to and including level 10 qualifications, it is reasonable to expect that all should hold doctorate qualifications.

There is much to commend in the teaching provided by IPA Faculty. Student survey results would indicate a high satisfaction rate from a discerning market. Course design, validation, examinations, marking and appeal processes are well documented and have been finely honed over the years. Full-time Faculty and Associates deserve praise in delivering such a wide portfolio of courses.

The students we spoke with offered appreciation not only to the teaching staff but also support services: registry, library, admissions and examinations. It is clear the IPA is a student-centred organisation.

Having said that, the Review Team has concerns about the breadth of teaching, expectations of IPA Faculty that they must respond to the latest and often eclectic needs of the marketplace, and be

responsible for a large cohort of associates who, in the main, are experienced practitioners rather than educators.

The Review Team therefore recommends a reconsideration of the balance between full-time Faculty and Associates. At present the teaching resource is too reliant on Associates. This recommendation is predicated on the IPA continuing to offer what it currently does.

The Review Team has something to say about whether this should be the case.

Given the level of qualifications which the IPA provides, we recommend that all full-time Faculty should hold a doctorate qualification and that all Associates should be expected to complete a professional development teaching qualification (Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education is one suggestion).

The rationale for bespoke course materials was well-made by Senior Editor/Programme Delivery Specialist in the IPA. The Review Team considered that, on balance, the huge investment in producing, updating and printing/digitalising this resource would be better expended in other areas of the Institute's work, given the competing budgetary and academic pressures faced by the IPA. We therefore suggest a review of current practice in the use of bespoke course material.

3.3.3 Research

An important aspect of any organisation offering accredited courses at the masters and professional doctorate level is that teaching is research-informed. This demands time available for Faculty to conduct high quality, peer-reviewed published research. It is clear both from the ISER and in interviews with Faculty that there is very limited time for this to happen. When asked by the Review Team to approximate their workload, Faculty indicated: 50% spent on course and programme management; 30% on teaching; and 20% on research and consultancy. The ISER (page 59) gives examples of consultancy work which IPA staff engage in: the introduction of audit committees in Bulgaria, review of public administration system in Cyprus, and local government efficiency review in Ireland. Faculty also suggested that they were indirectly active in research through supervision of projects at the masters and professional doctorate levels. During the main review visit Faculty agreed that there is "no time to research" even though they would like to so: "we would like more time to engage in a formal manner with more research but it has evolved the way it has. We have engaged with the students and need to read around what they are intending to study and keep up to speed".

Given the pressures on Faculty time, research appears to take place by a process of osmosis through supervision of student projects. This cannot support research informed teaching at the masters, still less DGov levels. Yet the IPA hosts a very active and reputable Research Unit. The ISER notes (page 63): "While the main emphasis of staff in the IPA's Research Unit is on bespoke, applied and commissioned research and publications, research unit staff also contribute to accredited programmes by teaching on modules and supervising dissertations. The IPA's public service research unit is the only dedicated full time resource devoted to the study and development of public management in Ireland".

The Review Team did not get the impression of synergy between the Research Unit and core teaching Faculty. As one Faculty member noted: "the corporate perspective is that the Research Unit would get drawn into the education division too much if it was not separate from it". Another Faculty commented: "I personally would welcome more interaction but the focus is on commissioned work…I find it frustrating, I would like it integrated more into my work. It's a challenge, having a PhD background, to not engage with primary research'.

The Review Team commends the willingness and enthusiasm of Faculty to become engaged in primary research. They recognised the value of this work and supported ideas which would facilitate a transition from their current balance of responsibilities.

The Review Team recommends:

- **If the IPA is to continue in its current format it must find the time/space for Faculty to engage in primary research. Teaching at Masters and professional doctorate levels demands this level of scholarship. We recommend a review of Faculty responsibilities to facilitate this.**
- **At present consultancy work looks eclectic in nature and driven by opportunities as they arise. If the IPA continues its consultancy role, we recommend that there should be a strategic roadmap as to which topics/themes they have a particular expertise in and how work in these areas can contribute to the IPA's research and teaching portfolio.**
- **The IPA is missing an opportunity by having a detached research unit with such a unique expertise in public management in Ireland. We recommend much greater integration with the Whitaker School which would offer reciprocal benefits: IPA teachers become more actively involved in primary research; IPA researchers develop teaching expertise and a forum for testing and disseminating their scholarship to the audience which they typically serve.**

3.4 Enrichment of the Learner Experience

3.4.1 Learner Voice

A Student Feedback & Participation Policy underpins the IPA's approach to ensuring that learner perspectives about the quality of learning and learner supports are captured and acted upon. Both the ISER and interviews during the main site visit outlined and confirmed a strong culture of student representation on the IPA board, as well as on the Education Committee. However, the ISER also outlined challenges in both the appointment of class representatives and in the operation of the current aggregated participatory feedback mechanisms, involving diverse student groups across multiple programmes. As a result of these difficulties, the authors suggest a re-institution of the staff-student feedback fora at programme level (in existence pre-2017). While it is noted in the ISER that there has been a general lack of interest amongst students to act as representatives, it is important that where at all possible, the students who engage in this process are elected by their peers to represent them, rather than being appointed by staff. Indeed, this is also important when it comes to student representation on boards and committees.

The Review Team recommends that the positions of learner representative at programme and committee levels are actively promoted and that the roles are filled via nomination/election by the student body.

The Review Team was impressed by the availability of learner feedback data via a variety of quality assurance mechanisms. A large amount of student feedback is received by the IPA via anonymous surveys. Data from student surveys were available from 2015 to present. A large amount of this data is systemically gathered at module and programme level, as outlined in the IPA's Student Feedback and Participation Policy. Cyclical feedback mechanisms appeared to be working well and there was evidence provided by one learner during the site visit that quality enhancements based on student feedback were evident as they moved from one year of study to the next. In order to close the loop, it is important that the IPA consistently communicates with students on how their feedback is used.

In addition to routine programme and module reviews, supplementary surveys have also been employed when required, most recently to capture students experiences of online learning during the academic year 2020-2021. Students that the Review Team spoke to during the site visit had been provided with an overview of the survey results by the IPA and were aware of the findings.

The Review Team commends the IPA for the very comprehensive survey data available via the learner feedback mechanisms employed to enhance the quality of the learning experience.

3.4.2 Access, Transfer and Progression

Quality Assurance policies relevant to learners and relating to Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP) are clearly available on the IPA website. Course prospectuses are also available online, providing detail to prospective students on the opportunities for recognition of prior learning and further academic progression within the IPA. A particular feature of the IPA's offering is the institute's Subject Accumulation & Interim Awards Structure. This gives enrolled learners greater flexibility and autonomy over how they complete their programme of study. Meetings during the site visit highlighted the positive impacts that the inclusive educational opportunities and pathways provided by the IPA have had on students from all levels of the public service.

The Review Team commends the IPA for their provision of flexible learning opportunities that enhance access and academic progression for professionals in the Irish Public Sector and beyond.

3.4.3 Teaching and Learning

IPA has clearly articulated processes for programme development and improvement. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Group (TLAG), which is a subgroup of the Faculty Committee plays an important role in the monitoring and improvement of teaching, learning and assessment, as outlined in the IPA's Teaching and Learning Policy.

The TLAG has played a particularly significant role this year in reviewing the results of the survey of Lecturers & Students on Online Tuition During Covid-19 (2021) and presenting a series of recommendations to Faculty. These recommendations are critical if the IPA intends to continue to offer blended programmes with a greater reliance on remote delivery methods. This is a crucial time to capitalise and build on the advancements and progress made in online provision which will contribute to the flexible nature of the IPA's educational offerings for busy professionals who are also managing many personal and family commitments.

In order to capitalise on the opportunities presented by a move to blended/online provision from traditional in-person delivery, the development of lecturers knowledge and skills through the attainment of further qualifications and professional training must also be supported. The Institute's Training and Development Policy encourages the development of staff members' individual skills and abilities. While associate lecturers are highly qualified and knowledgeable practitioners with areas of specific professional and vocational expertise, many would benefit from a structured approach to develop their knowledge, skills and competencies as educators. This was articulated by a member of the cohort of associate lecturers that the panel engaged with during the main site visit. In particular, it is felt by the Review Team that opportunities to develop and share best practice in pedagogy/andragogy, interactive digital content creation and Universal Design for Learning would be particularly beneficial at this time.

The Review Team strongly recommends the IPA develop more formal professional learning and development opportunities for associate lecturing staff applicable to their roles as educators.

The full migration to a Learning Management System (LMS, Moodle), with a streamlined structure and layout across all modules and programmes, provides strong foundations for the future. Full LMS utilisation and embedding of content will also support a greater use of accessible and engaging teaching and learning materials. Several students commended the use of recorded lectures as part of the remote delivery of programmes, explaining how beneficial the accessibility of the videos was for them in managing their learning. Increased usage of accessibility tools, such as lecture subtitles, was highlighted during the site visit by students as an area for improvement. Similarly, the need for a greater use of digital tools to support student engagement and interaction was identified via the survey of Lecturers & Students on Online Tuition During Covid-19 (2021). One relatively unique feature of the IPAs teaching and learning strategy, is the provision of bespoke course texts to learners. According to the ISER, the IPA now produce around 110 bespoke texts. Until recently, these were distributed as bound hard copy documents, but can now be accessed by students on Moodle. A TLAG-recommended project to digitise and enrich course texts had begun before being paused during the Covid-19 pandemic, in favour of a move to place simple pdf versions of bespoke course texts on Moodle. In their current format, the accessibility of the IPA's bespoke course texts could be greatly enhanced. For example, the text could be available in audio format, as well as being supplemented with interactive content such as videos and asynchronous quizzes.

In saying this, this transitional period also presents an opportunity to review the cost-benefit trade off of the use of the bespoke course texts across the diverse range of programmes. While they are repeatedly identified by students and extern examiners as very useful elements of the IPAs delivery model, they have also been described in the ISER as being important for maintaining academic standards, by imposing disciplines on staff. It is possible that, as a side effect of their use to control the delivery of content by teaching staff, that they may become overly prescriptive, in a digital world in which rich and interactive content is so widely available. This is a particular concern at postgraduate level, where students must be autonomous managers of their learning and have the ability to assimilate academic information independently.

The Review Team recommends a critical review of the contribution of bespoke course manuals to the teaching and learning experiences on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered by the IPA.

3.4.4 Assessment

Assessment drives and measures student learning while also guaranteeing the legitimacy and integrity of awards. The IPA have four individual policies and procedures in place that govern different aspects of the assessment process: Marks and Standards, Exam Administration Procedures, Assessment Regulations, and Procedures for Appeal of Examination Results. The IPA are also currently implementing important assessment quality enhancements. For example, the dominant weighting of examinations relative to assignments is being reduced and updated grade descriptors have recently been approved by the IPA-NUI Steering Committee.

Notwithstanding the existence of an appropriate QA framework for assessment and the implementation of worthy quality enhancements, some assessment practices have room for improvement. Annual IPA student survey data presented in the ISER highlighted that assessment results were not always returned to students before they submitted the next one. Students also requested an improvement in the quality of feedback, including detailed comments on why they lost marks and how they can improve. They also wanted greater consistency between grades awarded and the associated feedback provided. Meetings with students provided further evidence to support these findings, with undergraduate students identifying that, in some cases, the briefs and guidelines provided to them regarding what was required of them in assessments were insufficient or unclear.

The experiences of some students also highlighted the existence of inconsistency when it comes to grading and feedback practices.

To address this, **the Review Team recommends an enhancement of assessment processes that ensure timely and consistent approaches to support students understanding of assessment criteria, grading and feedback.**

This should initially include guidance on standard sets of assessment information and the provision of marking/grading criteria or exemplars at module level. The setting of timelines for the return of assessed work and an offering of appropriate training for all associate lecturers who act as assessors will also be important.

3.4.5 Student Supports

The IPAs provision of student supports has recently undergone a period of development and enhancement. The ISER identified that student support had been highlighted as an area for improvement by student surveys from 2017- 2019. A range of improvements were introduced during this time, including adjusted tuition, the development of programme 'roadmaps' and presentations/tutorials on academic writing and referencing. Further enhancements are now being accelerated due to the Covid-19 pandemic, including the student support pilot project which is discussed later in this section.

While the IPA provides a range of student supports underpinned by a recently updated Student Support Policy, an important issue raised in the ISER is the need for clarity around the scope and meaning of support for students. Based on the Review Team's reading of Student Support Policy, the ISER and discussions during the site visit, it seems that supports offered by the IPA broadly cover:

1. Programme support: (Admission, transfer and progression, opportunities to engage with lecturers, clear course guidelines and mapping of programme requirements, point of contact for raising concerns/complaints).
2. Additional learning support (including disability support): (Library services, Information Technology (IT) support, academic writing, researching, studying, clear information on disability support and special accommodations).
3. Pastoral support: (A supportive environment to discuss professional or personal struggles or difficulties that may impact on studies).

As noted in the ISER and the IPA's Student Support Policy, the Institute recognises that, owing to its main student demographic, students will receive most pastoral supports off-campus via their community or employer. However, the site visit provided strong evidence of the provision of pastoral support to learners. Many students spoke very highly of the supports (change of status, leave of absence, assignment extension, feedback and guidance) provided by the IPA during times of great personal difficulties for them. Feedback on a student support pilot project launched during academic year 2020-2021 was also very positive. This pilot, which was initiated by the administrative team showed how pastoral care can have a great impact and that the institute can play a very positive role in this area of student support.

The Review Team commends the IPA for the ongoing enhancement of learner supports, by highly committed staff, that meet the needs of the institute's specific cohort of professional learners.

During the site visit, staff working in the area of student support services described the collaborative, learner centred nature of their work. Due to the nature and size of the IPA, it is

important to acknowledge that student support services are being managed by a small team of staff in administrative roles. In addition, these staff offer supports in a variety of areas, rather than individual staff being assigned distinct roles. As a result this team balances a large and diverse workload and a significant amount of multitasking. While this system may be necessary due to the relatively distinct nature and scale of operations at the IPA, it does mean that greater clarity is required for learners regarding points of contact for specific support services. For example, as there is no dedicated disability officer, very clear communications are required so that prospective and current students are aware of the supports available to them. It is clear to the review panel, that improvements are now needed to clarify the student support framework and increase its visibility for all learners. This should initially involve the creation of a dedicated student support information hub in the student section of the IPA website.

The Review Team recommends that efforts are now made to communicate an organisational wide approach to student supports available to all learners.

3.5 Public Information and Stakeholders

3.5.1 Stakeholder Engagement and Public Information

Students, graduates and public sector employers are identified by the IPA as the key stakeholders in relation to education provision and quality assurance. The Department of Public Expenditure & Reform (on behalf of the Minister), City and County Management Association, state agencies and the National University of Ireland are also listed as key stakeholders. Elsewhere in the ISER, the Government and taxpayers and the not-for-profit sector are mentioned as stakeholders.

The relationship between the IPA and the main public sector bodies is complex and unique, having evolved alongside the expansion of the range of services provided by the IPA. The Review Team recognises the centrality of this relationship to the IPA. The ISER outlines both formal and informal networks and connections. Public sector employers are represented on the Board of the IPA and on the Education Committee. Formal meetings with the City and County Managers Association representing local authorities were described, as were formal meetings with public service Human Resource (HR) managers and Training Officers. The full extent and impact of these networks could be more fully assessed if all the formal networks and collaborations of the IPA had been listed in the ISER.

IPA staff sit on various public sector entities such as audit committees and review boards and provide consultancy services. The IPA also ascribes the depth and durability of these networks to long-standing education programmes and the fact that graduates occupy influential roles across the public service. Examples were provided of the programme developments and enhancements that were facilitated by the IPA's networks.

From the perspective of the public sector bodies, it is evident that there is positive sentiment and a well of goodwill towards the IPA. Notwithstanding the increase in the number of providers of programmes to the public service, there is a "traditional" connection with the IPA. This relationship and goodwill are recognised as being of enormous value to the IPA in delivering on its mission. For some public sector bodies, particularly the local authority sector, the IPA has been and remains the "first port of call" for the provision of education services. The relationship with the local government sector is particularly strong.

Several aspects of the education and other services offered by the IPA were highlighted by the public sector bodies interviewed. They included the full suite of IPA services, the IPA's innate

understanding of their business needs, bespoke sector specific programmes, coverage of staff development and education for all career stages and all levels of responsibility, the country-wide provision of education services, the flexibility to develop and adjust programmes to meet emerging requirements, and availing of the research capacity of the IPA. The extent of the practitioner input was highlighted as a distinctive positive feature. The capacity to turn to the IPA to respond in times of need and the quality of programmes and value for money provided were also mentioned.

The ISER references the challenge faced by the IPA in meeting the demands of stakeholders. This is a reflection in part of the changes in the operating environment of the IPA. The public service comprises a complex stakeholder group impacting every aspect of society and economy[1]. Each part of the public service generates both specific and generic educational requirements. Specialist bodies or specialist staff seek exposure through education and training to government and public policy and analysis. Public sector bodies expect Government policy priorities such as the climate agenda, to be quickly adopted and integrated into programmes.

While the IPA remains uniquely connected in the public service, the nature of that connection cannot be assumed to be constant in the light of changes in the operating environment. For example, the move to tendering for the procurement of programmes for central Government Departments and offices.

While there are formal and informal connections into the public service, it was not evident to the Review Team that stakeholder engagement is systematically managed. The ISER recognises the need to gather data from employers as to the effectiveness of the IPA programmes in enhancing their operations. There is evidence from smaller public sector bodies of a desire for more engagement and feedback with the IPA. The current Strategy Statement of the IPA includes an action to develop a stakeholder engagement strategy.

The relationship between the IPA and the public service will remain a key advantage into the future. However, the implications for that relationship arising from the changes in the strategic environment outlined need to be addressed. Therefore, as the IPA considers its future strategic direction, it is advisable to undertake a fresh and comprehensive stakeholder analysis. This analysis would facilitate a systematic management of the relationship with stakeholders, appropriate to the each of the sectors and bodies that comprise the public service. The stakeholder analysis would also link into the communications strategy, focussed on delivering on the mission of the IPA. As an aside, it would be useful to reflect on the implications of the use in the ISER of both the terms "public sector body" and "public sector employer" as IPA stakeholders.

The Review Team commends the IPA on maintaining goodwill and a strong and mutually reinforcing network across the public service.

The Review Team recommends that the IPA undertakes a comprehensive stakeholder analysis in the context of the preparation of the Strategy Statement, with a view to a systematic future stakeholder engagement and communication process.

3.5.2 Alumni

The ISER outlines the engagement of the IPA with alumni and the scope for improvement. The input of graduates to quality enhancement is achieved primarily through surveys. As alumni most likely remain within the public service, a connection may be maintained through further education,

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[1] Central Government, Government offices (Revenue, CSO), regulators, local government, justice sector, education sector, health sector, defence sector, non-commercial state bodies.

training and consultancy, attendance at seminars, etc. However, staffing challenges within the IPA have prevented the development of an alumni network. Also, an initiative in the current strategic plan to advance an alumni project has been interrupted by Covid.

In interviews with Masters' and Doctoral graduates the gap in ongoing contact with the IPA was identified as was a desire for an alumni network. The mutual benefit of an alumni network is recognised by the IPA. This is all the more important in light of the changing strategic environment and the fact that most alumni will remain within the broader public service.

The Review Team recommends that the IPA develop an alumni network to the mutual benefit of both the IPA and alumni.

3.5.3 Public Information

The IPA has a public information policy in place and acknowledges the importance of "building integrity and public trust" and of providing timely, accurate, relevant and easily accessible information. The Head of the Whitaker School has overall responsibility for the information contained within the written documents, reports and brochures issued by the IPA and contained on its website.

There is clear evidence that, within the available resources, the IPA place a priority on ensuring the accuracy and relevance of student facing public information and that it is provided in accordance with the relevant QQI guidelines and European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) standards. This applies both to the presentation of material on the website and in hard copy.

The Review Team commends the quality of the public information on programmes available on the website and in hard copy.

The ISER advises that the presentation on the website of material in relation to quality assurance was being revised. At the time of this review the suite of policies and procedures impacting on assurance material and the material published on quality assurance outcomes was clear and easily accessible on the website.

Overall responsibility for communications within the IPA is less clear. The ISER references a wider debate about how the IPA currently projects itself and how communication strategies can be improved. The Review Team agrees that there is scope to improve how the IPA projects itself and the services it provides. Focussing on the future mission and objectives of the IPA, implementation of a communications strategy will underpin the work of the IPA and serve as an additional source of engagement with and feedback from policy makers, students and public sector bodies.

Section 4: Conclusions

4.1 Concluding Comments

As mentioned in the outset of this report, there were three primary objectives for the NUI institutional review of the IPA (Section 1).

The very comprehensive self-evaluation report and supporting case studies and appendices provided the Review Team with an abundance of evidence-based information from which to start the effectiveness review. This was substantiated during the site visit by a range of engagement meetings with staff, students and external stakeholders, all of whom were very positive in their feedback comments. The Review Team are satisfied that we met with a comprehensive range of staff, students and stakeholders. All participants engaged thoroughly with the process.

The Review Team would like to express their gratitude to the IPA's outstanding team, their student representatives and the external stakeholders for their contribution to the review process.

The Review Team are satisfied that the IPA meet all three objectives of the review.

- An extensive policy management framework and supporting processes and procedures are in place in the IPA to ensure the effective implementation of NUI-approved QA policies and procedures.
- Documented case studies and discussions with IPA staff and stakeholders clearly demonstrated how the IPA enhances quality through governance, policies, and procedures, with regard to its stated mission and quality targets.
- Effective processes and procedures are in place for student access, transfer, and progression.

The section below provides a summary of the Review Team's commendations of good practice and recommendations for further improvement.

4.2 Summary of Commendations and Recommendations

Commendations

1.	The Review Team commends the IPA for the very comprehensive and analytical self-evaluation report which was supported by case studies of good practice and detailed appendices. (**2.2 Effectiveness of the ISER**)
2.	The Review Team commends the IPA for their comprehensive strategic development process, which is inclusive of all relevant stakeholders, including students and staff. (**3.1.1 Vision, Mission and Strategy**)
3.	The Review Team commends the IPA for the engagement and formal & informal communication between board and senior management group, especially during the pandemic to guarantee quality services. (**3.1.2 Board and Senior Management Team**)
4.	The Review Team commends the IPA for their motivated and dedicated staff, who are very customer and student focused. (**3.1.3 Operational Model and Staff Competencies**)
5.	The Review Team commends the IPA for the comprehensive policies and procedures in place forming the basis of a management system to ensure high-quality service provision. (**3.1.4 Policies and Risk Management**)

6.	The Review Team commends the IPA on their comprehensive quality assurance framework which provides central underpinning mechanisms for the establishment and maintenance of an embedded, coherent and comprehensive quality regime. (**3.2.2 Quality Assurance Framework**)
7.	The Review Team commends the IPA on the comprehensive module review mechanism which is triangulated with feedback from examiners and student surveys. (**3.2.3 Annual Module Review**)
8.	The Review Team commends the IPA for its long history of serving the public sector in Ireland. It has provided access to higher education for officials, many of whom would not otherwise have had such opportunities. We also commend the senior leadership in steering the organisation through hugely turbulent times particularly during the last 18 months which demonstrated the agility of the IPA to meet the challenges of the pandemic. (**3.3.1 The Market**)
9.	There is much to commend in the teaching provided by IPA Faculty. Student survey results would indicate a high satisfaction rate from a discerning market. Course design, validation, examinations, marking and appeal processes are well documented and have been finely honed over the years. Full-time Faculty and Associates deserve praise in delivering such a wide portfolio of courses. (**3.3.2 Teaching**)
10.	The Review Team commends the willingness and enthusiasm of Faculty to become engaged in primary research. They recognised the value of this work and supported ideas which would facilitate a transition from their current balance of responsibilities. (**3.3.3 Research**)
11.	The Review Team commends the IPA for the very comprehensive survey data available via the learner feedback mechanisms employed to enhance the quality of the learning experience. (**3.4.1 Learner Voice**)
12.	The Review Team commends the IPA for their provision of flexible learning opportunities that enhance access and academic progression for professionals in the Irish Public Sector and beyond. (**3.4.2 Access, Transfer and Progression**)
13.	The Review Team commends the IPA for the ongoing enhancement of learner supports, by highly committed staff, that meet the needs of the institute's specific cohort of professional learners. (**3.4.5 Student Supports**)
14.	The Review Team commends the IPA on maintaining goodwill and a strong and mutually reinforcing network across the public service. (**3.5.1 Stakeholder Engagement and Public Information**)
15.	The Review Team commends the quality of the public information on programmes available on the website and in hard copy. (**3.5.3 Public Information**)

Recommendations

1.	The Review Team recommends the IPA develop a more formal method of obtaining external stakeholder input as part of the overall quality assurance framework. (**2.2 Effectiveness of the ISER**)
2.	The Review Team recommends the IPA continues to adopt more agile strategy development processes in order to increase the strategic agility of the organisation. (**3.1.1 Vision, Mission and Strategy**)
3.	The Review Team recommends the IPA define annual strategic key performance indicators (KPIs) with regular reporting of targets to the board. (**3.1.2 Board and Senior Management Team**)
4.	The Review Team recommends a review of the IPA's governance arrangements in an attempt to simplify the legal status of the organisation and its accounting arrangements. (**3.1.2 Board and Senior Management Team**)

5.	The Review Team recommends the IPA to pilot a more agile staff competence development process. (**3.1.3 Operational Model and Staff Competencies**)
6.	The Review Team recommends the IPA continues to implement strategic HR initiatives and identify post-pandemic strategic competences required for high-quality service delivery. (**3.1.3 Operational Model and Staff Competencies**)
7.	The Review Team recommends the IPA to develop a co-creation model piloted with client organisations to ensure high quality (digital) services in the future. (**3.1.3 Operational Model and Staff Competencies**)
8.	The Review Team recommends the IPA develop a system to systematically monitor staff well-being. (**3.1.3 Operational Model and Staff Competencies**)
9.	The Review Team recommends the IPA analyse the potential requirement for a Whistleblowing Policy and an anonymous reporting channel be used by staff and other stakeholders, if necessary. The IPA provided additional information on their protected disclosures policy. (**3.1.4 Policies and Risk Management**)
10.	The Review Team recommends the IPA devise initiates for staff retention and succession planning to capture institutional knowledge and avoid a 'brain drain' of expertise due to staff retirement and/or turnover in the coming years. (**3.2.4 Areas for Further Consideration**)
11.	The Review Team recommends the IPA develop a comprehensive communications strategy to keep staff, students and external stakeholders up to date on current initiatives and future developments. (**3.2.4 Areas for Further Consideration**)
12.	The Review Team recommends the IPA complete a strategic review of its current mission taking into account the changing public sector context in which it is operating. The Review Team do not wish to pre-empt such a review but from the ISER and interviews with key stakeholders it would appear that the IPA should focus more towards a professional development and skills training organisation. (**3.3.1 The Market**)
13.	The Review Team recommends a reconsideration of the balance between full-time Faculty and Associates. At present the teaching resource is too reliant on Associates. This recommendation is predicated on the IPA continuing to offer what it currently does. (**3.3.2 Teaching**)
14.	If the IPA is to continue in its current format it must find the time/space for Faculty to engage in primary research. Teaching at Masters and professional doctorate levels demands this level of scholarship. We recommend a review of Faculty responsibilities to facilitate this. (**3.3.3 Research**)
15.	At present consultancy work looks eclectic in nature and driven by opportunities as they arise. If the IPA continues its consultancy role, we recommend that there should be a strategic roadmap as to which topics/themes they have a particular expertise in and how work in these areas can contribute to the IPA's research and teaching portfolio. (**3.3.3 Research**)
16.	The IPA is missing an opportunity by having a detached research unit with such a unique expertise in public management in Ireland. We recommend much greater integration with the Whitaker School which would offer reciprocal benefits: IPA teachers become more actively involved in primary research; IPA researchers develop teaching expertise and a forum for testing and disseminating their scholarship to the audience which they typically serve. (**3.3.3 Research**)
17.	The Review Team recommends that the positions of learner representative at programme and committee levels are actively promoted and that the roles are filled via nomination/election by the student body. (**3.4.1 Learner Voice**)
18.	The Review Team strongly recommends the IPA develop more formal professional learning and development opportunities for associate lecturing staff applicable to their roles as educators. (**3.4.3 Teaching and Learning**) We recommend that all full-time Faculty

	should hold a doctorate qualification and that all Associates should be expected to complete a professional development teaching qualification (Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education is one suggestion). (**3.3.2 Teaching**)
19.	The Review Team recommends a critical review of the contribution of bespoke course manuals to the teaching and learning experiences on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered by the IPA. (**3.4.3 Teaching and Learning**)
20.	The Review Team recommends an enhancement of assessment processes that ensure timely and consistent approaches to support students understanding of assessment criteria, grading and feedback **(3.4.4 Assessment)**
21.	The Review Team recommends that efforts are now made to communicate an organisational wide approach to student supports available to all learners. (**3.4.5 Student Supports**)
22.	The Review Team recommends that the IPA undertakes a comprehensive stakeholder analysis in the context of the preparation of the Strategy Statement, with a view to a systematic future stakeholder engagement and communication process. (**3.5.1 Stakeholder Engagement and Public Information**)
23.	The Review Team recommends that the IPA develop an alumni network to the mutual benefit of both the IPA and alumni. (**3.5.2 Alumni**)

Appendices

Appendix 1: The Review Team

The Review Team was appointed by the National University of Ireland in March 2021. A profile of the team is presented below.

Role	Reviewer Profile
Chair	**Professor Colin Knox**, formerly of Ulster University and since 2016 Professor of Public Policy and Vice-Dean for Academic Affairs, Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan
NUI Academic Representative	**Professor Michelle Millar**, Professor of Public Policy and Public Administration and currently Dean of Students, NUI Galway
Employer / Industry Representative	**Maurice Quin**, former Secretary General of the Department of Defence
International Expert / Representative	**Kyösti Väkeväinen**, Managing Director of the HAUS Finnish Institute of Public Management Ltd.
Co-ordinating Reviewer	**Kim O'Mahony**, Quality Officer, University of Limerick
Learner Experience	**Rachael Doherty**, current MA in Educational Practice student at the National College of Ireland (NCI) and employee of Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (Youthreach Educator)

Appendix 2: Review Site Visit Schedule

Timetable for Main Site Visit to be held via MS Teams

Wednesday, 8 September 2021

8:30 – 8:45am	Welcome, introductions and points of clarification
8:45 – 9:15am	<u>Meeting 1</u>: Chair of the IPA Board
9:15 – 9:30am	Break
9:30 – 10:00am	<u>Meeting 2</u>: Director General of IPA
10:00 – 10:15am	Break
10:15 – 10:45am	<u>Meeting 3</u>: Chair of the IPA Education Committee
10:45 – 11:00am	Break
11:00 – 11:30am	<u>Meeting 4</u>: Head of the Whitaker School/ Assistant Director-General of IPA
11:30 – 12:30pm	Panel debrief
12:30 – 13:15pm	Refreshment/Lunch Break
13:15 – 13:45pm	<u>Meeting 5</u>: Members of Steering Group for ISER: Assistant Registrar Senior Editor/Programme Delivery Specialist QA Project Officer
13:45 – 14:45pm	Concluding session with Panel

Thursday, 9 September 2021

8:30 – 9:15am	**Meeting 6a:** IPA fulltime Lecturers / Coordinators
9:15 – 9:45am	**Meeting 6b:** IPA Associate Lecturers
9:45 – 10:00am	Break
10:00 – 11:00am	**Meeting 7:** Representatives of local authorities, central government, County and City Management Association (CCMA), Dept of Public Expenditure and Reform or other bodies that are considered key stakeholders
11:00 – 11:15am	Break
11:15 – 12:00pm	**Meeting 8: Representation of both <u>undergraduate</u> and <u>postgraduate</u> students**
12:00 – 12:30pm	Panel debrief and update session
12:30 – 13:00pm	Refreshment/Lunch Break
13:00 – 13:45pm	**Meeting 9: Other staff from key functions in IPA contributing to student experience e.g. Library staff, staff in admissions and examinations offices.**
13:45 – 14:30pm	Panel debrief and update session
14:30– 15:00pm	Meeting with IPA senior management team to offer feedback
15:00 – 15:15pm	Panel concluding session

Glossary

ACQEC	Academic Council Quality Enhancement Committee
ATP	Access, Transfer and Progression
DPER	Department of Expenditure and Reform
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines
HR	Human Resources
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IPA	Institute of Public Administration
ISER	Institutional Self-Evaluation Report
IT	Information Technology
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
LMS	Learning Management System
NUI	National University of Ireland
QA	Quality Assurance
QQI	Quality & Qualifications Ireland
SMG	Senior Management Group
TLAG	Teaching Learning and Assessment Group
TLAG	Teaching, Learning and Assessment Group
UCD	College of University College Dublin