

5 April 2011

Achim Hopbach
President
European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)
Porkkalankatu 7 A
FI-00180 Helsinki
FINLAND

Dear Achim,

RE: IRISH UNIVERSITY QUALITY BOARD (IUQB) PROGRESS REPORT

I am writing in response to your letter, dated 10 June 2009, confirming IUQB's full membership of ENQA. Within the letter, you requested the IUQB to submit a progress report in relation to three areas of development identified by the ENQA Board no later than June 2011.

This letter provides the formal progress report from the IUQB outlining each of the three areas identified by the ENQA Board alongside a progress report from the IUQB Board. I am also attaching for reference as Annex 1, a copy of the immediate response from IUQB in relation to the three issues of development, submitted on 30 June 2009.

ENQA Identified Areas for Development and IUQB Progress Report

ENQA Area for Development 1: Resources

IUQB should secure funding for its activities. A budgetary and resource framework should be put in place to resource the implementation of the strategic plan. IUQB should be more independent as regards funding;

A budgetary framework was approved by the IUQB Board at its March 2009 meeting to support delivery of the IUQB Corporate and Operational Plans (2009 – 2011). Since 2009 the IUQB has operated on a 50:50 funding basis with funding received from IUQB subscribers (the seven Irish Universities) and the Higher Education Authority (the funding body for higher education in Ireland). IUQB Board members and funders confirmed in 2009 that the IUQB managed institutional review process (IRIU) should be prioritised above all other IUQB activities in terms of workload and funding allocations, thus IUQB resources are fully flexible in relation to delivery of the core IUQB review function. A medium-term budgetary framework will be considered in the context of the Irish government's proposal to establish a new agency with responsibility for external quality assurance in Irish further and higher education in 2011/12.

ENQA Area for Development 2: Assessments

The Board recommends IUQB to develop its capacity to undertake the reviews of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities itself rather than subcontracting them to external agencies;

Since 2009/10 the IUQB has operated a second cycle of institutional reviews, entitled Institutional Reviews of Irish Universities (IRIU). The IRIU Handbook was published by March 2009 following a six month consultation process (http://www.iuqb.ie/info/iuqb_publications.aspx?article=9eb53995-c4b4-47d5-a7d4-fe4d565865bf). The process was designed and developed in accordance with Part 2 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area., to provide explicit confirmation of whether Irish universities are (i) operating in line with the requirements of Section 35 of the Universities Act 1997 and are (ii) operating in accordance with Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EGS). Information regarding the IRIU process has been published, alongside the schedule of IRIU reviews (2009/10 – 2012/13) at: <http://www.iuqb.ie/info/iriu.aspx>

The design, delivery and monitoring of the six year IRIU cycle, alongside the training, recruitment and deployment of reviewers, is entirely managed by the IUQB executive. Since 2009, nominations have been invited to populate the IRIU Register of Reviewers from which the IRIU review teams are selected by the IUQB Board, usually 12 months in advance of deployment. To date, the IUQB has recruited 100 national and international experts into its Register of Reviewers, from which review teams, consisting for six reviewers are selected. A nomination form for the roles of: international reviewer, national reviewer, student reviewer, external stakeholder and coordinating reviewer is available at: http://www.iuqb.ie/news/latest_news.aspx?article=811d2d9e-bd3c-4136-b949-9428c9417372

IUQB has to date facilitated site visits to four of the seven Irish universities (in line with the agreed schedule of reviews), has published main and summary review reports from three institutional review visits, and follow-up reports from two institutional reviews. Information regarding the published IRIU Review Reports, institutional responses to IRIU, Follow-Up reports one year after IRIU, the composition and experience of IRIU Review Teams, and Guidance Notes for universities and reviewers engaging with the IRIU process, are made publicly available at: <http://www.iuqb.ie/info/iriu.aspx>

In September 2010, the IUQB undertook a formal impact analysis of the first two IRIUs, operating in line with the IUQB's Quality Policies http://www.iuqb.ie/info/strategic_plan.aspx. The overall purpose of the formal evaluation was to: (i) assess the fitness of purpose of the IRIU method; (ii) identify its strengths and weaknesses, (iii) inform ongoing support, training and information to those engaged with the method to ensure they are effectively prepared and supported in fulfilling their roles and (iv) ensure that procedures are sufficient to ensure the review team's findings and recommendations are evidence based. A mid cycle evaluation is to be conducted in September 2011 analysing feedback from the first four IRIUs. In 2012/13 an end of cycle evaluation will be undertaken to examine the effectiveness of the IRIU process against the Part 2 requirements of the ESG. This will be conducted in advance of the IUQB's own compliance review against the Part 3 ESG requirements conducted as part of the 5 yearly agency review for ENQA membership.

It is proposed that the Irish government's new quality assurance agency will take over responsibility for the external quality assurance review of the universities, from 2011/12 onwards. The current cycle and schedule of IRIU will be completed as published. Depending on the date of establishment, the IUQB or the new Agency, will be responsible for the development and delivery of the third cycle of external institutional reviews from 2013/14 onwards.

ENQA Area for Development 3: Strategic Plan

There is a lack of a current strategic plan. IUQB should complete the preparation of a strategic plan for 2008-2010 and should prepare business/operational plans on an annual basis. Shortcomings in strategic focus and selection of priorities were found by the panel in considering plans for the future development of the IUQB and its activities. The strategy plan should reflect that external QA is the main activity of the agency.

In response to recommendations in the Expert Review Panel Report, the IUQB Board approved for publication in March 2009 the IUQB Corporate Plan 2009-2011, following a five month consultation process. The IUQB Corporate Plan is used as the basis for the IUQB's Annual Operational Plans, and for IUQB Staff Annual Achievement Plans. IUQB Operational Plans include an associated budgetary and resource framework (incorporating a fully costed programme of IRIU activities).

IUQB Corporate Strategy and Operational Plans (2009 – 2011)

<http://www.iuqb.ie/info/strategy.aspx>

The IUQB Corporate and Operational Plans confirm that the main objective for IUQB, delegated to it by the universities and set out in its *Memorandum and Articles of Association*, is the external review of quality assurance in the universities. In 2009 the IUQB Board and its funders approved an organisational rebalance in response to the recommendations from the external review of IUQB. Operationally and financially the institutional review process is the IUQB's number one priority with all other IUQB activities including quality improvement events and publications, operating as secondary priorities to reinforce and support the work preparing for and responding to institutional reviews.

The goals in the Corporate Plan are underpinned by dates for completion and associated budget profiles in Annual IUQB Operational Plans, all of which have been made publicly available via the IUQB Website following IUQB Board approval.

Progress and achievements made against the Corporate and Operational Plans are monitored by the IUQB Board members at each Board meeting. Furthermore, the final Board meeting of each calendar year receives and considers a report confirming delivery against the current year Operation Plan, and also formally approves the proposed operational plan for the coming year. Notes of Board Meetings are made available following their approval at the subsequent Board meeting at:

http://www.iuqb.ie/info/notes_of_board_meetings.aspx

Additionally, progress against the Corporate Plan is monitored at the IUQB Annual General Meetings with members of the company, and at the annual meetings with the Higher Education Authority. Achievements against the Operational and Corporate plans are published in IUQB Annual Reports:

IUQB Annual Report 2009, published June 2010

http://www.iuqb.ie/info/iuqb_publications.aspx?article=b474d91c-66ff-4718-976b-3790293b11b5

IUQB Annual Report 2008, Published August 2009

http://www.iuqb.ie/info/iuqb_publications.aspx?article=220ca09c-939f-452c-b336-99ccdb7c95b6

In November 2010, the IUQB Board approved a refresh of the 2009 – 2011 Corporate Plan. This is due to be published shortly. IUQB's corporate and operational plans and processes are scheduled to continue until, and in terms of the IRIU process, into the Irish government's proposed new agency with responsibility for external quality assurance in Irish further and higher education, anticipated to be established in 2011/2012.

I hope the information provided above is sufficient to confirm to the ENQA Board that sound progress has been made by the IUQB since full membership of ENQA was confirmed in 2009. Please do not hesitate to contact me or the IUQB office if additional information or hard copies of any of the documents referenced in this progress report are required to assist the ENQA Board in monitoring the progress made by IUQB in relation to the three aspects identified as areas for development.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Padraig Walsh". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Dr Padraig Walsh
Chief Executive

Bruno Curvale
President
European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)
Unioninkatu 22 / Havis Business Centre
FI-00130 Helsinki
FINLAND

30 June 2009

Re: IUQB - Full Membership of ENQA

Dear Bruno,

Thank you for your letter of 10 June informing me that IUQB has been granted full membership of ENQA for five years from 2 June 2009.

This news is most welcome and IUQB will be delighted to continue to contribute to the work of ENQA.

I note the ENQA Board and its Review Committee's comments in relation to the final review report on IUQB and as requested, IUQB agrees that it will submit a progress report no later than June 2011 on the matters identified in Annex 1 to your letter.

At this stage, I am already in a position to report on two of the matters referred to in Annex of your recent letter. Following the receipt of the review report in September 2008, IUQB identified a number of matters that had to be resolved, prior to submitting an application to ENQA for full membership.

Principally among these was (a) the lack of a Strategic and associated Operational Plans for 2008-10 and (b) the capacity for IUQB to undertake the review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities itself rather than subcontracting them to external agencies.

Between September 2008 and March 2009, IUQB finalised its Strategic (Corporate Plan) 2009-11 and the associated operation plan for 2009 and following consultation with the universities and the Higher Education Authority (the funding body for Irish higher education institutes) and other stakeholders agreed to the process for the 2nd cycle of institutional review of Irish universities, which would be undertaken by IUQB as distinct from sub contracting the reviews to an external agency, as occurred in 2004-05.

The Strategic (Corporate Plan) 2009-11 and the handbook for the Institutional Review of Irish Universities (IRIU) were finalised and published in March 2009. Only when both of these were complete did we submit our application to ENQA in April 2009.

The following were submitted as Appendices to our Application in April last.

- Institutional Review of Irish Universities (IRIU) Handbook (Appendix VI)
- IUQB Corporate Plan (2009-2011) (Appendix XIV)
- IUQB Operational Plan (Appendix XV)

I enclose further copies of the above for your consideration.

I am also happy to enclose the agreed timetable for the 2009-12 review of the Irish universities which will be conducted by IUQB under the IRIU process.

IUQB will be happy to submit a progress report before June 2011 on the areas included in Annex 1 to your letter but I thought it helpful to clarify that IUQB already has (a) a published Strategic (Corporate) Plan (2009-2011) and (b) a published handbook explaining clearly that, from 2009, IUQB will undertake the reviews of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities itself rather than subcontracting them to external agencies.

With kind regards,

Dr Padraig Walsh
Chief Executive