



Dearbhú Cáilíochta
agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and
Qualifications Ireland



Higher Education Pathway Assessment Report: Dublin City University



About this assessment

This report details the findings of the assessment conducted by an Assessment Panel on behalf of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) of Dublin City University's (DCU) IEM Application Statement (IEMAS), which was submitted to QQI as part of the provider's application for authorisation to use the TrustEd Ireland mark. The desk assessment was conducted by the following Assessment Panel:

Name	Role	Affiliation
Prof Mark Rogers	Chairperson	Former Registrar, Deputy President and Acting President, University College Dublin, Ireland
Fiona Crozier	Report Writer/secretary	International Higher Education Consultant, United Kingdom
Fernando Galán	International Education Expert	University of Granada, Spain
Maria Malik	Learner	Atlantic Technological University, Ireland

Outcome of the assessment

This assessment evaluates the provider's compliance with the criteria set out in the Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners (HE Code). From the evidence provided by the provider in the self-assessment document, the IEM Application Statement (IEMAS), the Assessment Panel concludes that the provider should be:

Outcome	Please tick
Authorised to use TrustEd Ireland Mark	✓
Not Authorised to use TrustEd Ireland Mark	

Please see below a summary of the outcome by HE Code principle (5.1-5.6)

5.1 Marketing and Recruitment:

Principle: HE providers recruit international learners in a transparent and ethical manner. In their marketing and promotional materials, they ensure that clear, accurate, transparent, accessible, relevant and up to date information is provided.

5.1.1 (a) HE providers shall endeavour proactively to understand the information needs of prospective international learners.

5.1.1 (b) HE providers shall ensure that information provided to potential international learners about the institution and its provision is clear, accurate, transparent, accessible, relevant and up to date. This shall include information about the intended purpose of the provision e.g., to prepare a learner for further study or specific employment. Where necessary, it should also include information on associated immigration requirements, including requirements for learners requiring entry visas and/or immigration permission.

5.1.1 (c) Where applicable, information should also be provided on the professional accreditation status of programmes.

5.1.1 (d) Where applicable, information on practice placement requirements, and how these may be fulfilled, should also be made be known to prospective international learners.

5.1.1 (e) HE providers shall be compliant with information for learner requirements, as set out in Section 67 of the 2012 Act as amended. They shall confirm:

- (i) whether or not the successful completion of the programme entitles the learner to an award;
- (ii) the awarding body making the award;
- (iii) the title of the award;
- (iv) whether the award is one that is included within the NFQ;
- (v) the level at which the award is included within the NFQ;
- (vi) whether the award is a major, minor, special purpose or supplemental award, as identified within the NFQ;
- (vii) the procedures for access, transfer and progression that are in place, including the pathways for international learners for further study, employment, and residency, where applicable (see also section 4.2 above);
- (viii) details, where appropriate, of the arrangements in place for the protection of enrolled learners under Section 65 of the 2012 Act as amended (see section 4.5.2 above and Appendix Two of this code).

5.1.1 (f) HE providers shall ensure that information is provided in a way that is accessible to international learners and assists them in making informed decisions. This information should support international learners in understanding all matters related to a programme prior to enrolment. If provided in a different language, it is the responsibility of the HE provider to ensure that the information is clear, accurate, transparent, accessible, relevant and up to date.

5.1.1 (g) HE providers shall accurately represent their organisation and facilities in all marketing and promotional materials and ensure that no false or misleading information is issued.

5.1.1 (h) HE providers shall provide appropriate contact details for an appropriate person or persons to provide assistance with queries from international learners prior to enrolment.

5.1.1 (i) HE providers shall state the commencement dates for all programmes.

5.1.2 (a) Prior to enrolment, HE providers shall ensure the availability and provision of relevant financial information pertaining to the study and average subsistence costs of their programme provision, from the period of enrolment through to graduation.

5.1.2 (b) Prior to enrolment, HE providers shall ensure that the learner is made aware of any insurance requirements, e.g., medical or travel insurance, and of the availability of accommodation, and any accommodation services provided.

5.1.2 (c) HE providers shall have a written agreement with each education agent, recruitment partner or consultant that formally represents their programme provision.

5.1.2 (d) HE providers shall ensure that any contractual arrangements entered with an education agent, recruitment partner or consultant incorporate the principles of the London Statement. Existing contracts that do not incorporate these principles shall be amended appropriately within two years of the date of the HE provider's application for authorisation to use the IEM.

5.1.2 (e) The contract between the HE provider and education agent, recruitment partner or consultant shall include a termination clause in instances where the agent does not comply with the principles of the London Statement or is found to have acted in an unethical fashion to the detriment of international learners.

5.1.2 (f) HE providers shall conduct due diligence e.g., three reference checks, to verify the track record of education agents, recruitment partners or consultants, in relation to learner protection issues, prior to entering into a contractual agreement.

5.1.2 (g) HE providers shall ensure that all education agents, recruitment partners or consultants contracted to them are in possession of accurate and up to date information regarding the provider and its provision.

5.1.2 (h) HE providers shall have in place a transparent process for monitoring and reviewing the activities of education agents, recruitment partners or consultants including, where appropriate, feedback from applicants, to ensure that the education agent, recruitment partner or consultant is operating within the spirit of the HE Code and the London Statement.

5.1.2 (i) HE providers required to put in place arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners under Section 65 of the 2012 Act as amended shall do so prior to the recruitment of learners (see also section 4.5 and Appendix Two of this HE code).

Summary

The panel concurred with the University's assessment that 17 of 18 criteria are applicable in Principle 5.1: Marketing and Recruitment. Criterion 5.1.2 (i) is not applicable to DCU. However, the panel agrees with the University's assessment that it is fully compliant in 16 of these criteria. In relation to 5.1.1 (e), the panel considers the University partially compliant for reasons set out below.

The panel accessed various links to and from the DCU Global web page, all of which led to clearly presented and useful information relating to the information referred to in criteria 5.1.1 (a)-(i) and information related to finance, subsistence and other costs (5.1.2 (a) & (b)). This confirms the University's claim that it is a "comprehensive hub" that offers "clear and accessible information." This information is reinforced and supplemented by a series of accessible International Webinars. In relation to programme information, a dedicated member of the DCU Student Recruitment Team works with all faculties and other relevant University units to ensure that published information is consistent and accurate. However, the panel noted that, in relation to criterion 5.1.1 (e), DCU does not currently publish the NFQ level of each programme on the programme pages, instead referring the reader to the QQI website. In order to comply fully with this criterion, the NFQ level must be clearly stated in information regarding each relevant programme. This is therefore a condition of authorisation.

The panel found that, while the principles in the London Statement are not explicitly set out, nonetheless, they are clearly incorporated into International Agent Agreements (5.1.2 (d)).

DCU demonstrates comprehensive engagement with its education agents, including clear expectations, performance monitoring, and remedial actions when agents underperform. Robust agent training is provided via a training platform, and monitoring systems are in place to evaluate the performance of agents, identify any issues and tackle them. A comprehensive review of DCU's contracts with international agents was carried out in 2023 and led to a number of changes, which have now been implemented. The panel was also provided with training records and survey feedback from 2023, which evidenced the effectiveness of the approach described by DCU in its application (5.1.2 (c)-(h)). The panel would have been interested to know completion rates in relation to the agent survey.

Condition 1

5.1.1 (e): The panel sets the condition that the University must publish the NFQ level of each programme on its website programme pages within 24 weeks of TrustEd Ireland authorisation

Recommendation 1

5.1.2 (g): The university could consider further strengthening the value of its training and monitoring of agents by publishing the rate of completion on the training platform.

Commendation 1

5.1.2 (h): The panel commends the university's transparent and constructive engagement with agents, including performance monitoring, training, and feedback mechanisms, as a model of good practice.

Principle 5.2 Admissions and Qualifications' Recognition:

HE providers operate fair, transparent and consistent admission policies that support the successful participation of international learners in their chosen programmes

5.2 (a) HE providers shall clearly specify entry requirements for international learners that support the successful participation of the learners in their chosen programmes.

5.2 (b) HE providers' entry requirements shall clearly specify English language proficiency requirements for applicants whose first language is not English. These should include references to the benchmarks used in assessing proficiency requirements and, like other entry requirements, support the successful participation of international learners in their chosen programmes.

5.2 (c) HE providers shall adopt the principles, and follow the guidance, contained in the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) and subsidiary texts in assessing the qualifications presented by international learners for the purpose of admission to their programmes. Qualifications should be assessed in an accessible and fair manner and within a reasonable timeframe.

5.2 (d) HE providers should recognise qualifications that are recognised for the purpose of access to programmes in an international applicant's own higher education system, unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated between the requirements for admission in the applicant's own higher education system and those of the Irish HE provider.

5.2 (e) HE providers shall provide a timely written response to international applicants who are refused admission.

5.2 (f) Where a HE provider decides to withhold recognition of a qualification from an international learner for the purpose of admission, the reasons for the refusal to grant recognition shall be stated, and information provided concerning possible measures the applicant may take to obtain recognition at a later stage. If a HE provider decides to withhold recognition of a qualification for the purpose of admission, or if no decision is taken, the applicant shall be able to make an appeal within a reasonable time limit.

5.2 (g) HE providers shall support QQI, as appropriate, in implementing its statutory function to facilitate the recognition outside the state of awards made in the state, including the home countries of their international learners.

Summary

The panel concurs with DCU's assessment of full compliance with all 7 of the criteria for principle 5.2: Admissions and Qualifications Recognition.

Much like the information referred to in principle 5.1 above, the panel found the information specified in criteria 5.2 (a) & (b) to be clearly presented to international learners through various web pages, including DCU Global and the web pages for the individual study programmes.

The University maintains oversight of trends in admissions through the individual academic departments and issues are progressed through the institutional governance structure. The effectiveness of entry requirements in terms of their effectiveness in supporting learner achievement is reviewed through the Periodic Programme Review process. Relevant stakeholders are also involved in reviews of admissions routes and entry requirements.

DCU follows a robust process for qualifications recognition using ECCTIS and NARIC tools.

However, it does not explicitly reference the Lisbon Recognition Convention or EAR-HEI.

The University demonstrates a strong commitment to fair and transparent qualification recognition, especially for non-traditional or less common qualifications. Processes are robust and involve the use of ECCTIS and other international comparators.

However, although the recognition policy aligns with the principles contained in the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), the panel is of the view that an explicit link to this and structured tools such as EAR-HEI would provide even further transparency in the assessment of qualifications presented by international learners and would bring DCU even further in line with international norms and expectations. (5.2 (c) & (d). Applicants who are refused admission on the basis of non-recognition of their qualification receive timely and informative correspondence (5.2 (e) & (f).

Recommendation 2

5.2 (c): The University could consider updating its recognition policy and/or accompanying guidance

to explicitly reference the Lisbon Recognition Convention and/or tools such as EAR-HEI, thereby strengthening transparency and international alignment.

Principle 5.3 Fees, Refunds and Subsistence:

HE providers provide all learners with clear, accurate, transparent, accessible, relevant and up to date information on all study costs, including subsistence and accommodation. HE providers shall inform learners about fees and other costs associated with undertaking a programme of study in Ireland

5.3.1 (a) HE providers shall provide information on compulsory fees for the full duration of the programme from registration and admission to graduation or exit from the programme. Where fees may change, this shall be clear to applicants in the information provided.

5.3.1 (b) HE providers shall provide information on the collection or payment of fees, including sanctions for late payment and debt collection for moneys owed.

5.3.1 (c) HE providers shall establish a fees structure that supports the mission of the organisation and reflects the costs associated with quality provision.

5.3.1 (d) HE providers shall ensure that there are no additional fees or unexpected charges that international learners have not been made aware of.

5.3.1 (e) HE providers shall issue a receipt to international learners upon receipt of payment of fees which will include a breakdown of fees paid.

5.3.1 (f) HE providers shall establish and publish a procedure on full and partial refunds. This procedure shall outline the conditions under which a refund will be granted e.g., a refused entry visa application, in the case of a non-EU/EEA Swiss learner.

5.3.1 (g) HE providers shall provide information on any financial supports or resources that exist within the organisation, or nationally, for international learners.

5.3.2 (a) HE providers shall provide information on the indicative costs of studying on their programmes e.g., the costs of textbooks, electronic resources, computer requirements, protective equipment.

5.3.2 (b) HE providers shall furnish prospective learners with general advice regarding the average cost of living e.g., accommodation, food, transport and medical care, for the programme duration.

5.3.2 (c) HE providers shall provide information on:

- (i) fees for accommodation services, if offered by the HE provider or other accommodation service providers;
- (ii) fees for complaints and appeals procedures as relevant e.g., rechecking of exam results.

5.3.2 (d) HE providers shall provide information on any other costs related to the provision of student services as considered relevant by the provider.

Summary

The panel concurs with DCU's assessment of full compliance with all 11 of the criteria for principle 5.3: Fees, Refunds and Subsistence.

The panel found evidence of full compliance with criteria 5.3.1 (a), (b) and (g) through the comprehensive and transparent information that is provided online.

Likewise, the panel found the University to be in full compliance with criteria 5.3.1 (c) – (e). Although DCU clearly communicates its refund policy online and provides additional support

through Student Support & Development, and a refund process is available, in the view of the panel the clarity and visibility of this process (criteria 5.3.1 (f)) could be improved, perhaps by being more prominently located or presented more clearly as part of the pre-arrival guidance for international students.

The panel found clear evidence of full compliance with criteria 5.3.2 (a), (c) and (d). However, in relation to 5.3.2 (b), whilst cost-of-living estimates are provided, these are not always in a standardised format; in the view of the panel, embedding this as a consistent part of the pre-arrival pack would be beneficial.

Recommendation 3

5.3.1 (f): The visibility and accessibility of the refund policy and associated processes could be improved through more direct presentation on the website and in pre-arrival materials.

Recommendation 4

5.3.2 (b): Information on cost-of-living expenses could be standardised and embedded as a consistent part of the pre-arrival.

Principle 5.4 Supports and Services for International Learners

HE providers shall foster a supportive environment which supports the wellbeing and integration of all learners into the student body and ensures a positive learning experience for all learners

5.4.1 (a) HE providers shall designate appropriate personnel to be responsible for inquiries about learner support issues from international learners e.g., course coordinator, counsellor, or international officer.

5.4.1 (b) HE providers shall offer information to international learners prior to their arrival to help them adjust to their new surroundings e.g., information on transport, banking, availability of accommodation and accommodation services.

5.4.1 (c) HE providers shall ensure that inductions offered to learners also meet the needs of international learners, including intercultural awareness. They should direct learners to services, supports and facilities relevant or appropriate to their programme of study. They should also remind international learners requiring entry visas and/or immigration permissions of their responsibilities under the Department of Justice's student immigration regime.

5.4.1 (d) The induction programme shall be provided to all cohorts of international learners who register or enrol at various times of the year, including learners who access programmes through advanced entry.

5.4.1 (e) HE providers shall provide information on appropriate learner supports and services to facilitate learner integration into the wider HE community.

5.4.1 (f) HE providers shall ensure that international learners are aware of opportunities to participate in, and be represented at, engagements between the provider and the learner body. Where possible, they should provide, in collaboration with learner representative bodies, information on national learner engagement initiatives and opportunities for international learners to avail of training opportunities.

5.4.1 (g) HE providers shall have mechanisms in place to support international learners financially in instances of personal or other emergency or hardship.

5.4.1 (h) HE providers shall facilitate and encourage feedback from international learners on the delivery of any supports and services. This includes informing learners about complaints processes for these services.

5.4.1 (i) Institutional approaches to quality assuring learner services and supports will include all learners, including international learners.

5.4.2 (a) HE providers shall offer induction that is accessible to all learners and, where appropriate, tailored to the needs of international learners. They shall provide full information and advice on all relevant institutional and academic policies.

5.4.2 (b) Induction shall be provided to learners and cohorts who enrol at different points during the year, including those accessing programmes through advanced entry.

5.4.2 (c) HE providers shall ensure the information provided at induction is easily accessible throughout the academic year and shall offer reminders of this information at key points during the year e.g., in the lead-up to examinations or submission of assignments.

5.4.2 (d) HE providers will include academic integrity as a core component of induction for all learners, including international learners. Recognition will be given in inductions to the different education cultures of international learners, and the content, advice and support they impart will be relevant and specific to the Irish higher education context. Formal and informal conversations about academic integrity should be held on an ongoing basis throughout the period of enrolment of all learners, including international learners.

5.4.2 (e) HE providers shall endeavour to integrate their international learners, through their inductions and through their policies, procedures, and services, into the wider learner community.

5.4.2 (f) HE providers shall continue to provide staff with training and support to facilitate an appropriate and effective delivery of programmes and services to international learners. This should include, where appropriate, training in intercultural competence and support for the development of English language education competence.

Summary

The panel concurs with DCU's assessment of full compliance with all 15 of the criteria for principle 5.4: Supports and Services for International Learners.

The University provides a comprehensive and well-integrated system of supports and services that effectively address the academic, personal, and social needs of international learners.

Dedicated personnel are in place across relevant units, including Student Support & Development and international offices, ensuring clear lines of assistance throughout the learner journey (5.4.1 (a)). DCU offers pre-arrival information, orientation programmes tailored to diverse learner cohorts, and ongoing guidance on practical matters such as transport, accommodation, and immigration (5.4.1 (b) – (e)). Information about services remains accessible throughout the academic accessible throughout the academic year, with regular reminders at key academic points. The University has processes in place for the quality assurance of its supports and services. These processes provide an opportunity for all learners, including international students, to be included. The institution also ensures that academic integrity and learners' rights are clearly communicated (5.4.2 (c) & (d)).

Intercultural awareness is embedded in induction processes and, although initially the application focuses on the Chaplaincy and the Interfaith Centre in terms of intercultural awareness, further scrutiny reveals details about staff training on the matter and projects such as the Human Library and the MELLIE project which indicate awareness of the breadth of intercultural matters beyond

faith/religion (5.4.2 (f)).

International students are actively encouraged to engage in student representation structures, for example as a peer-to-peer mentor or a class representative, and institutional quality assurance, for example through surveys, workshops and focus groups. Emergency financial supports, access to counselling and personal development services, and structured communication channels all contribute to a positive and inclusive learner experience (5.4.1 (f) - (h)).

Commendation 2

Section 5.4: The panel **commends** DCU's approach to principle **5.4**, in particular the exemplary integration of international learner support services within institutional systems, offering well-structured, accessible, and responsive services throughout the learner lifecycle.

Principle 5.5 English Language Policy Statement and International Foundation Year Programmes

The English language supports provided by HE providers to international learners, including through the provision of international foundation year programmes, are underpinned by a coherent and transparent institutional policy approach.

5.5 (a) HE providers shall have an English language policy statement for international learners that shall:

- (i) document the policy approach and process to the assessment of English language proficiency entry requirements;
- (ii) document, as appropriate, the institution's policy approach to the provision, support, and development of English for Academic Purposes;
- (iii) set out the institution's policy approach to the provision of English language supports to non-native English speakers prior to commencement and throughout the duration of their higher education programmes;
- (iv) document the arrangements, including, as appropriate, the quality assurance, credit and/or awarding arrangements, for different types of EAP programmes, such as:
 - pre-sessional programmes/modules,
 - in-sessional programmes/modules

5.5 (b) HE providers offering international foundation year programmes shall set out in their English language policy statement for international learners

- (i) the quality assurance, credit and/or awarding arrangements for these programmes,
- (ii) the corporate and academic governance arrangements in place where such programmes are provided in partnership with other entities e.g., a private English language education provider, other independent/private education provider or campus company.

5.5 (c) For compliance with this HE Code, an international foundation programme shall lead to one of the following awards included within the NFQ:

- (i) QQI preparation for undergraduate programmes, leading to NFQ Level 5 Special Purpose Award (foundation qualification)
- (ii) QQI preparation for postgraduate programme, leading to NFQ Level 8 Special Purpose Award (foundation qualification)
- (iii) equivalent programmes leading to awards that are included within the NFQ and validated by an Irish awarding body.

5.5 (d) Where HE providers currently offer international foundation year programmes that do not lead to awards that are included within the NFQ, they must secure programme validation/course approval for such programmes through an Irish awarding body within two years of the date on which they are authorised to use the IEM.

Summary

The panel has considered the evidence provided and considers that DCU is non-compliant with 2 of the criteria under this principle 5.5 (b) and (c) for the reasons set out below.

English language requirements and support mechanisms for on-campus students are articulated in the English Language Policy Statement (ELPS) and there is adequate detail on English language provisions for transnational and online cohorts, particularly for the Princess Nourah University partnership. However, section 4.4 of the Policy, on English language supports, focuses exclusively on the Pre-Sessional Programme (PSP). In the view of the panel, this section should be expanded to refer to any in-sessional English language support in order to provide greater clarity for international students who may require such support after arrival at the University. (5.5 (a) & (b)).

Recommendation 5

5.5 (b) - (c): The panel recommends that the University provide more information in the English Language Policy Statement on the in-sessional English language supports available to international learners at DCU within 12 weeks of TrustEd Ireland authorisation.

Currently, DCU's International Foundation Year (IFY) is delivered by DCU International Academy (DCUIA), which is also responsible for all necessary quality assurance for the IFY. The IFY is accredited by NCUK and the University currently deems this accreditation appropriate for the admission of those international learners who complete the programme successfully.

However, in order to comply with criterion 5.5 (c) DCU is committed, within two years, to admit international learners who have successfully completed an IFY validated by an Irish awarding body and only to recognise those awards that are located on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). DCUIA has been informed of this intention, including the timeframe and the steps involved to achieve provider approval from QQI and to have the IFY validated through QQI's Initial Access to Validation (IAV) process. At the same time, DCUIA will also seek TrustEd Ireland authorisation as an English Language Education (ELE) provider.

DCU has initiated discussion with QQI on these matters, including next steps and interdependencies between the IFY validation and TrustEd Ireland authorisation as an ELE provider. The timeline is now dependent on the outcomes of discussion between DCUIA and QQI. Both DCUIA and DCU clearly understand that this matter must be resolved within two years of

authorisation to use the TrustEd Ireland mark and therefore a contingency of six months has been built into the plan to allow for stakeholder engagement and market research.

Currently DCU does not comply with 5.5 (b) & (c). In the view of the panel, DCU clearly recognises the issue, there is a robust and timebound action plan in place, and part of this action plan is dependent on actions external to DCU. It is therefore confident that, so long as the external parties involved also act in a timely way, the University will comply with the criteria within the stated timeframe of two years. The panel encourages all parties to be mindful of the importance of monitoring the action plan across the two-year timeframe to ensure that internal and external co-dependencies remain in line and also to maintain appropriate oversight.

The panel sets the following condition:

That the University ensure that the International Foundation Year programme leads to a Level 5 Special Purpose Award on the NFQ within two years of TrustEd Ireland authorisation **(5.5 (b) and (c))**.

Principle 5.6 International Learners outside the State

HE providers ensure that learners outside the state who are enrolled on their programmes receive quality learning experiences, where these programmes lead to awards that are included within the NFQ, and whether they are offered in transnational education settings and/or through remote, fully online modes of learning.

5.6.1 (a) HE providers, having regard to their statutory quality assurance obligations, shall ensure that the academic quality, standard and recognition of their transnational education programmes are equivalent to the academic quality, standard and recognition of the programmes they provide within the state.

5.6.1 (b) HE providers shall apply the principles and criteria set out in this HE Code in an equivalent manner in transnational education settings, including in relation to the provision of learner support services.

5.6.1 (c) HE providers shall support QQI, as appropriate, in implementing its statutory function to facilitate the recognition outside the state of awards made in the state. This facilitatory function extends to awards included within the NFQ, where the programmes leading to these awards are provided outside the state.

5.6.1 (d) Linked providers who intend to offer transnational education programmes that lead to awards within the NFQ shall only do so with the agreement of the designated awarding body or bodies making the awards.

5.6.2 (a) HE providers, having regard to their statutory quality assurance obligations, shall ensure that the academic quality, standard and recognition of their remote online programmes are equivalent to the academic quality, standard and recognition of the programmes they provide through other teaching and learning modes.

5.6.2 (b) HE providers shall apply the principles and criteria set out in this HE Code in an equivalent manner in relation to learners outside the state enrolled on remote online programmes that lead to awards included within the NFQ, including in relation to the provision of learner support services.

5.6.2 (c) HE providers shall support QQI, as appropriate, in implementing its statutory function to facilitate the recognition outside the state of awards made in the state. This facilitatory function extends to awards included within the NFQ, where the programmes leading to these awards are offered as remote online programmes.

5.6.2 (d) Linked providers who intend to offer remote online programmes to learners outside the state that lead to awards within the NFQ shall only do so with the agreement of the designated awarding body or bodies making the awards.

Summary

The panel concurs with DCU's assessment of full compliance with six out of the eight applicable criteria.

The University's internal quality assurance system includes appropriate processes for the assurance of the quality of online and TNE provision (5.6.1 (a) – (c)). A set of 'Collaborative Provision Approval Protocols' define the type of collaborative partnership, and the level of risk and due diligence determines the approval process to be used in each case. For example, in addition to the information required for normal programme approval, further information such as that on admissions, enrolment and credit is required to be presented for the approval of TNE programmes.

In relation to online provision, the University has developed 'Principles for Quality Assurance of DCU E-learning and Blended Provision' (which pertains to criteria 5.5.2 (a) – (c)) to ensure the equivalence of standards and the student experience between online/blended and face- to-face provision.

DCU's academic and pastoral support for TNE and online learners is well-structured. There is a solid framework of academic and pastoral supports for online learners, with services including tutorials, library access, orientation, and mental health supports. However, it remained unclear to the panel whether online learners are routinely and systematically included in academic programme evaluation and class representative structures which are important in ensuring the equity of learner voice in QA processes.

Recommendation 6

5.6.2 (a): DCU could consider strengthening the mechanisms by which international online learners are systematically included in programme-level feedback, class representation, and broader quality assurance processes.

Summary of assessment outcomes

This section provides for the Assessment Panel findings and outcomes by principle and criterion

Overview of the provider's international profile and activities

Dublin City University (DCU) is an Irish public university with a student body of over 19,000 students and a broad academic portfolio spanning five faculties. It has a well-established internationalisation agenda and a growing international student population, currently comprising over 3,000 international learners from more than 120 countries. DCU also maintains a modest but strategic and well-established transnational and online presence, including fully online programmes and international partnerships such as with Princess Nourah University in Saudi Arabia.

The University's international activities are embedded within its institutional structures and strategic planning, with the forthcoming Internationalisation Plan (2025) expected to strengthen governance and target-setting. The approach to international learners is one of integration and this is well-embedded, alongside a recognition of the need for specific support for international students in certain areas and at certain times. Equity of experience through shared responsibility across all institutional support services and academic departments is a clear institutional goal and the panel was able to confirm that this was the case through the evidence provided under the different sections of the Code.

Overall, the panel found DCU's application for the TrustEd Ireland mark to be clear and coherent and agreed with the University's assessment of compliance against all applicable criteria with the exception of criterion 5.1.1 (e), where the panel noted the need for the University to publish the NFQ level of all of its programmes on the relevant programme information, and 5.5 (b) & (c) where, in that specific case, the University recognises its non-compliance and has in place a robust and timebound plan to ensure compliance within two years of the award of the TrustEd mark. The panel believes that the University is as compliant as possible at the moment and views the action plan as reasonable and feasible for the achievement of validation of DCU International Academy (DCUIA)'s the DCIU IFY by an Irish awarding body (QQI). It sets the stated condition in that context.

The University's international goals are in line with its mission of being a European University with a focus on transferable skills and placements and this is evidenced by targeted student recruitment in Europe and strategically managed TNE provision in Saudi Arabia and China. DCU's scale, maturity, and experience in managing international education are reflected in its strong compliance across the six HE Code principles (with the exception of 5.1.1 € and 5.5 (b) and (c) – see above). It demonstrates a clear understanding of its responsibilities toward international learners and has appropriate quality assurance, learner support, and risk mitigation measures in place. Coupled with

its compliance with the Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners, it is well-positioned to meet the expectations of the TrustEd Ireland Mark.

Recommended condition(s) for authorisation:

Condition 1

5.1.1 (e): The panel sets the condition that the University must publish the NFQ level of each programme on its website programme pages within 24 weeks of TrustEd Ireland authorisation.

5.5 (b) and (c): The University must ensure that the International Foundation Year programme leads to a Level 5 Special Purpose Award on the NQF within two years of TrustEd Ireland authorisation.

Commendations:

Commendation 1

5.1.2 (h): The panel commends the University's transparent and constructive engagement with agents, including performance monitoring, training, and feedback mechanisms, as a model of good practice.

Commendation 2

Section 5.4: The exemplary integration of international learner support services within institutional systems, offering well-structured, accessible, and responsive services throughout the learner lifecycle.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1

5.1.2 (g): The University could consider further strengthening the value of its training and monitoring of agents by publishing the rate of completion on the training platform.

Recommendation 2

5.2 (c): The University could consider updating its recognition policy and/or accompanying guidance to explicitly reference the Lisbon Recognition Convention and/or tools such as EAR-HEI, thereby strengthening transparency and international alignment.

Recommendation 3

5.3.1 (f): The visibility and accessibility of the refund policy and associated processes could be

improved through more direct presentation on the website and in pre-arrival materials.

Recommendation 4

5.3.2 (b): Information on cost-of-living expenses could be standardised and embedded as a consistent part of the pre-arrival pack.

Recommendation 5

5.5 (b) - (c): The University should provide more information in the English Language Policy Statement on the in-sessional English language supports available to international learners at DCU within 12 weeks of TrustEd Ireland authorisation.

Recommendation 6

5.6.2 (a): The University could consider strengthening the mechanisms by which international online learners are systematically included in programme-level feedback, class representation, and broader quality assurance processes.

Declarations of Assessment Panel

This report has been agreed by the Assessment Panel and is signed on their behalf by the Chairperson.

Assessment Panel Chairperson: Mark Rogers

Date: 6th October 2025

Signed:



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Bhaile Átha Cliath
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Dublin City University (DCU) is pleased to submit its provider response to the TrustEd Ireland Assessment Report for the Higher Education Pathway. We would like to express our appreciation to the Assessment Panel for their thorough and constructive engagement. We welcome the findings of the Panel, which provide valuable external validation of and guidance for the continuous enhancement of our international education provision. In particular, we are grateful for the Panel's commendations acknowledging our transparent and constructive engagement with recruitment agents and the exemplary integration of international learner support services within institutional systems. DCU is committed to maintaining and further enhancing existing areas of good practice while addressing all identified conditions of authorisation and recommendations as detailed below.

DCU has reviewed the Assessment Report for factual accuracy and confirms its general satisfaction with this. However, we do request one material change to ensure consistency. Specifically, DCU requests that the language in 'Section 7 Part B: Assessment Findings' (p. 20) be amended to align with the 'Summary of Assessment Outcomes' (p. 37) to reflect that the University recognises its non-compliance with Criteria 5.5 b) & 5.5 c) and has in place a robust and timebound plan to ensure compliance. This change will ensure the presentation of the Panel's findings is consistent across the Assessment Report. A separate Factual Accuracy Report has also been submitted to QQI detailing a small number of minor grammatical errors for correction prior to publication.

DCU confirms it will take the necessary actions to fully address the two conditions of authorisation and thereby achieve compliance with Criterion 5.1.1 (e) and Criteria 5.5 b) & c) within the specified timeframes. DCU also notes the six recommendations of the Assessment Panel in the context of further enhancing our international education provision and has already initiated actions to address several of these findings. Since receiving the Report, the Office of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs has engaged with relevant offices and units, resulting in the following:

- The [DCU Admissions Policies](#) webpage has been updated to include a direct reference to the Lisbon Recognition Convention in the context of the University's 'Admissions Principles' and to explain that DCU Admissions engages with industry-standard qualification recognition tools.
- The visibility of the [Procedure and Guidance for Refunding Student Fees Paid](#) has been improved by including a direct link in the international applicant offer letter and making the policy accessible via a drop-down menu on the [DCU Fees](#) website (Fee Processing).

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- The Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs/Registrar will continue to engage with relevant offices and units over the coming months to explore what further actions can be taken to address the remaining recommendations.

In conclusion, DCU confirms its agreement with the findings presented in the TrustEd Ireland Assessment Report and reaffirms its commitment to taking the necessary actions to address the two mandatory conditions of authorisation within the specified timeframes. DCU is also committed to addressing the recommendations of the Assessment Panel. We appreciate the rigour of the assessment process and look forward to continuing our work with QQI to ensure the highest standards of quality, transparency and integrity for all our international learners.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Looney', is positioned above a horizontal line.

Professor Lisa Looney

Vice President for Academic Affairs/Registrar