



National Commission for
**Further and
Higher Education**
Malta

COVERING NOTE TO THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AUDIT REPORT PREPARED BY
THE NCFHE FOLLOWING A REVIEW OF

Future Focus

April 2019

INTRODUCTION

The NCFHE Board has received from the Quality Assurance Committee and has endorsed the attached report drafted by the external review panel which has been set up to carry out a quality audit of Future Focus in line with the requirements of the National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education. The audit process for Future Focus was triggered after a number of investigations by the NCFHE of different aspects of Future Focus's processes and operations. The review took place on the 27th and 28th March 2018 and the report reflects the findings as at that time.

All providers that undergo an NCFHE audit measured against the 11 Standards laid down in the Maltese National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education; these Standards are based on the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), which inform the quality assurance systems of all countries signatory to the European Higher Education Area, and are enriched by EQAVET.

The Board is determined that the Commission should carry out its regulatory responsibilities for standards in further and higher education independently, even-handedly, objectively and in a transparent manner. The Board notes that this is the first NCFHE quality assurance audit of Future Focus and has taken due account of the learning process which this has inevitably entailed. The response to the audit by Future Focus is included in the report.

The QA audit report informs the decision of the NCFHE Board with regards to the extension of the licence. The NCFHE Board concluded that the accreditation as a Further and Higher education institution is renewed with the following conditions:

- a. With immediate effect Future Focus is to stop enrolling new students for any of its MQF level 6 and level 7 programmes.

- b. To be able to start offering (both recognised and home grown) MQF level 6 and level 7 programmes again, Future Focus would need to undergo successfully an EQA audit that would focus specifically on Future Focus's ability to meet the QA standards as a fully-fledged Higher education institution.

ANALYSIS

The quality audit is a tool for both development and accountability; it has reviewed the internal quality assurance system of the Future Focus and assessed whether the system is:

- fit for purpose according to the Future Focus courses and service users;
- compliant with standards and regulations and contributing to the development of a national quality culture;
- contributing to the fulfilment of the broad goals of Malta's Education Strategy 2014-2024;
- implemented with effectiveness, comprehensiveness and sustainability.

The audit benchmarks the QA system and procedures within an institution against eleven Standards, namely:

1. Policy for quality assurance: entities shall have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management.
2. Institutional and financial probity: entities shall ensure that they have appropriate measures and procedures in place to ensure institutional and financial probity.
3. Design and approval of programmes: self-accrediting providers shall have appropriate processes for the design and approval of their programmes of study.
4. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment: entities shall ensure that programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in the learning process.
5. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification: entities shall consistently apply predefined and published regulations covering all phases of the student 'life-cycle'.
6. Teaching staff: entities shall assure the competence and effectiveness of their teaching staff.
7. Learning resources and student support: entities shall have appropriate funding for their learning and teaching activities and sufficient learning resources to fully support the students' learning experiences.
8. Information management: entities shall ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of the programmes and other activities.
9. Public information. entities shall publish information about their activities which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible.
10. Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes: entities shall implement the 'Quality Cycle' by monitoring and periodically reviewing their programmes to ensure their continuing fitness for purpose.
11. Cyclical external quality assurance: entities should undergo external quality assurance, approved by NCFHE, at least once every five years.

The main lines of inquiry were focused on securing a better understanding and triangulating the information on the following themes:

- practices with respect to progression from one course to another;
- policies with respect to cancellations and refunds.

FINDINGS

On the basis of the findings documented in the report, the panel has concluded that Future Focus meets standards 3, 8, 11, requires improvements to meet standards 1, 4, 5 and does not meet standards 2, 6, 7,9, and 10. The NCFHE Board requires that the following recommendations, as detailed in the QA audit report, are addressed within three (3) months from the publication of this note:

Key Recommendation 1: The institutional mission and vision shall be revised and translated into concrete institutional objectives and management targets. It should include a reference to the organisation's social responsibility.

Key Recommendation 2: The institution shall publish its quality assurance policy. Any exceptions to this recommendation should be duly justified.

Key Recommendation 12: The institution shall identify the position of a programme leader for each programme and a senior academic head of institution. These persons should be senior academics with appropriate qualifications and experience (in terms of research, publications, senior academic-chair positions etc) to level the programmes under their responsibility.

Conditional Recommendation 16: The institution shall provide access to an academic library containing a significant number of full-text academic publications, monographs and journals in each subject-matter being studied, to all students, as appropriate for their level of study. As a minimum, all materials on the reading lists of courses provided should be available in the library, and a specific budgetary allocation should be made to developing it further. No admissions should be allowed for any programme if this requirement is not fully met.

Key Recommendation 17: The Institution shall ensure that WIFI is provided to students.

FOLLOW-UP

In line with the External Quality Audit Manual of Procedures Future Focus will be asked to draw up an action plan inclusive of timeframes —that addresses all the recommendations made by the review panel. The NCFHE will be documenting and assessing the actions taken by Future Focus in a series of follow-ups to the audit. The first element of the follow-up will take place in a year's time and Future Focus will outline the take-up and implementation of all the recommendations put forward by the review panel in the report.