Pastoral Formation Institute (PFI)
Carried out between the 5th to 6th September 2016
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Abbreviations List

ECTS       Academic Programmes Quality and Resources Unit
EQAA       External Quality Audit
IQA        Internal Quality Audit
MQF        Malta Qualifications Framework
NCFHE      National Commission for Further and Higher Education.
PFI        Pastoral Formation Institute
1. Executive Summary

1.1 Section A: Background

1.1.1 The Peer Review Panel

The Peer Review Panel was composed of:

- Ms Ninette Sammut, EQA Peer Leader
- Ms Grace Izzo, EQA Peer Member
- Mr Matthew Catania, EQA Student Member
- Mr Adam Liwak, EQA Manager

1.1.2 Specific Terms of Reference and Main Lines of Inquiry

Following the Preliminary Provider Meeting carried out on the 8th August 2016 by the External Quality Assurance (EQA) audit Peer Leader and EQA Manager, upon consultation with the other members of EQA audit Peer Review Panel and the perusal of documentation presented by the Pastoral Formation Institute (PFI), the initial main lines of inquiry for this EQA audit were:

a) The consistency, effectiveness and impact of the internal quality assurance system of the PFI and how it fulfils the Standards outlined in the National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education;

b) The link between study and the career path irrespective of whether one will take up voluntary work or ameliorate one’s employment prospects.

1.2 Section B: Key Findings, Judgements and Recommendations

The key findings in relation to each of the eleven (11) Standards outlined in the National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education may be found in Part 3 of this EQA Report. These include assessment based on the documentation presented by the PFI Board for a desk-based analysis by the review panel and the on-site interviews during the EQA audit held between the 5th and 6th of September 2017. The current section includes only the judgments as well as the recommendations for each of the 11 Standards. The number of recommendations given for each Standard does not necessarily reflect the panel’s judgment vis-à-vis that Standard.
1.2.1 Standard 1 - Policy for Quality Assurance

Good Practice Identified
The verification of processes and procedures by the Pastoral Formation Institute’s (PFI) external verifier that takes place every three (3) years is an important factor in the internal quality assurance mechanism, together with the continuous mentoring process offered to each student. The latter was highly praised by both past and present students.

Judgment
PFI meets Standard 1.

Key Recommendations
- PFI should consider organising their strategy document with the involvement of their stakeholders which are listed on their website, covering a 3 to 5 year plan to establish a more solid grounding as a Further and Higher education institution;
- PFI should consider including students’ representatives in the PFI Board and individual Board of Studies, specifically for diploma courses;
- PFI should consider developing a formal written policy/procedure against intolerance and discrimination;
- PFI should consider amending the organisational chart to reflect the role of the Archbishop of Malta as chancellor of the PFI;
- PFI should provide the internal review report as part of their self-evaluation report in the next EQA audits.

1.2.2 Standard 2 - Institutional Probity

Good Practice Identified
The PFI has been able to maximise resources to be more effective with the least cost possible.

Judgment
PFI meets Standard 2.

Key Recommendations
- Strengthen the administration office by recruiting full-time administrators;
- Publish the processes involved to engage candidates for headship positions.

1.2.3 Standard 3 - Design and Approval of Programmes

Good Practice Identified
The review panel would like to point out that the PFI follows the same process to design and approve programmes, irrespective of whether the programmes would be pegged to the MQF and
thus accredited by the NCFHE, or not.

**Judgment**
PFI meets Standard 3.

**Key Recommendations**
- PFI should consider the design of programmes also with the intention to give the learner better employment opportunities.
- PFI should consider the inclusion of more practice in the course content.

**1.2.4 Standard 4 - Student-centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment**

**Good Practice Identified**
The individual, personalised and continuous support given by PFI staff to students is a valuable experience for enrolled students.

**Judgment**
PFI surpasses Standard 4.

**Key Recommendations**
- The Peer Review Panel believes that the possibility of online and blended learning should be considered by the PFI Board to offer flexibility to prospective learners.

**1.2.5 Standard 5 - Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification**

**Good Practice Identified**
Holding interviews to enable a prospective student to enter into the right course is commendable.

**Judgment**
PFI meets Standard 5

**Key Recommendations**
- PFI should consider publishing guidelines and regulations related to progression, recognition and certification.

**1.2.6 Standard 6 - Teaching Staff**

**Judgment**
PFI meets Standard 6.
### Key Recommendations

- **PFI should explore the possibility of funding to be specifically used for continuous professional development.**

### 1.2.7 Standard 7 - Learning Resources and Student Support

#### Good Practice Identified

- The continuous individual, personalised mentoring process practised by the Course Coordinators and the Director of the PFI.

#### Judgment

PFI meets Standard 7.

### Key Recommendations

- PFI has to ensure that the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is promoted properly among the students by the lecturers, who should in turn be encouraged to use it.

### 1.2.8 Standard 8 - Information Management

#### Judgment

PFI meets Standard 8.

#### Recommendation

- The PFI should consider writing a formal policy and procedure on data collection, analysis and monitoring.
- The PFI may consider having a procedure in place to use the analysed data for the benefit of the institution.

### 1.2.9 Standard 9 - Public Information

#### Judgment

PFI meets Standard 9.

### 1.2.10 Standard 10 - On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes

#### Judgment

PFI meets Standard 10.
1.2.11 Standard 11 - Cyclical External Quality Assurance

PFI has fulfilled this Standard by virtue of hosting the EQA referred to in this Report. This is the first EQA of the PFI.

Judgment

PFI meets Standard 11.
2. About the External Quality Audit

2.1 Introduction

External Quality Assurance (EQA) is a tool for both development and accountability. The EQA audit shall ensure that the internal quality management system of the provider is:

- fit for purpose according to the provider’s courses and service users;
- compliant with standards and regulations 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 EQA audit of the PFI was undertaken between 5th and 6th September 2016. This was the first EQA audit of the PFI. The review panel would like to express its gratitude to Rev. Dr Mark Sultana, Director of the PFI, and Prof. Adrian Gellel, who acted as the Facilitator throughout the audit, for the organisation and hospitality offered to the panel both during the two days of the on-site visit as well as for their cooperation prior to visit.

2.2 Reviewers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation subject</th>
<th>PFI</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Panel Members</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>External Peers:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ms Ninette Sammut (Head of Peer Review Panel)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ms Grace Izzo (External Peer)</td>
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<td><strong>Student peer:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Mr Matthew Catania</td>
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<td><strong>EQA Manager - NCFHE representative:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Mr Adam Liwak</td>
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<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Milestone</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8th of August 2016</td>
<td>Preliminary meeting at the Pastoral Formation Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5th – 6th of September 2016</td>
<td>EQA audit on-site visit of the peer review panel at PFI</td>
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<td></td>
<td>21st of February 2017</td>
<td>Submission of draft EQA Report</td>
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2.3 Institutional Context

As described in the documents provided, the PFI was established in 2005 by Archbishop Joseph Mercieca in light of the decrees of the Diocesan Synod: the first Director who was appointed at the time was Rev. Dr Fabio Attard SDB. It was erected statutorily in September 2007 by Archbishop Paul Cremona OP in line with Canon Law 807 and 814. The members of the first Board constituted at that point in time were: Rev. Dr Fabio Attard SDB, DD., Sr Marie Scicluna RCSJ, MA, Rev. Dr Joe Galea Curmi S.Th.D.(Lat), Dr Adrian Gellel D.Sc.Ed.(UPS) and, Rev. Dr Mark Sultana S.Th.L.,
Ph.D.(Greg).

Through meetings with different institutes within the Church, namely with the Secretariats and Commissions of the Archdioceses, the Institutes of Spirituality led by the Religious Orders and the Faculty of Theology, the PFI’s role was established.

The current PFI Board was established in April 2008 with Rev. Dr Mark Sultana appointed as its Director. The other members of the new Board are: Sr Marie Scicluna RCSJ, MA, Rev. Dr Joe Galea Curmi S.Th.D.(Lat.), Dr Adrian Gellel D.Sc.Ed. (UPS), Ms Mariella Catania MA, Dr Nadia Delicata Ph.D. (Toronto), and Ms Deborah Meli BA (Hons), who is the Secretary to the Board.

The PFI’s mission is to offer lifelong learning opportunity to those who would like to enrich themselves in pastoral and personal formation and spiritual development. Therefore, PFI courses are not designed to link directly to job opportunities – a factor which had to be taken into consideration during the EQA audit of the entity.

The PFI offers 21 courses on a part-time basis. These courses differ in duration (one to four years long courses) and are not necessarily offered during the same academic year. Approximately 150 students enroll in the courses offered with very low drop-out rates – a maximum of 3.3% registered in academic year 2011-2012. There are 14 courses accredited as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>MQF level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Education Award in Evangelisation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Award in Christian Leadership</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Award in Catholic Social Teaching</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher Education Award in Adolescent and Youth Ministry</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Award in Theology</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma in Christian Leadership</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher Education Award in Family Ministry</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher Education Award in Liturgy</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Award in Evangelisation in a Digital Age</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Award in Parish Nursing</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Award in Catholic Religious Education</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diploma in Spiritual Accompaniment</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education Award in Youth Leadership</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Certificate in Youth Leadership</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
# 2.4 General Terms of Reference, Aims and Objectives of the EQA

Quality assurance in Malta is underpinned by six principles that determine the remit and function of the *National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education*, and the relationship between internal and external quality assurance to enhance learning outcomes.

i. The Framework is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and enriched by the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocation Education and Training (EQAVET) perspective.

ii. The Framework contributes to a National Culture of Quality through:
   - increased agency, satisfaction and number of service users,
   - enhancement of the international profile and credibility of providers in Malta,
   - the promotion of Malta as a regional provider of excellence in Further and Higher education.

iii. The Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) is fit for purpose.

iv. The External Quality Assurance (EQA) is a tool for both development and accountability. The EQA shall ensure that the internal quality management system of the provider is:
   - fit for purpose according to the provider's courses and service users;
   - compliant with Standards and regulations 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.

v. The Quality Improvement Cycle is at the heart of the Framework.

vi. The integrity and independence of the EQA process is guaranteed.

The EQA provides public assurance about the Standards of Higher education programmes and the quality of the learning experience of students. It presents an opportunity for providers to demonstrate that they adhere to the expectations of stakeholders with regard to the programmes of study that they offer and the achievements and capabilities of students. It also provides a focus for identifying good practice and for the implementation of institutional approaches to the continuous improvement in the quality of educational provision.

NCFHE has a responsibility to ensure that a comprehensive assessment is conducted for all Higher education providers in Malta. The EQA audit provides an opportunity to assess the Standards and quality of Higher education in Malta against the expectations and practices of provision across the European Higher Education Area and internationally.

The EQA examines how providers manage their own responsibilities for the quality and Standards of the programmes they offer. In particular, the following issues are addressed:

- The fitness for purpose and effectiveness of internal quality assurance processes, including an examination of the systems and procedures that have been implemented and the documentation that supports them.
- The compliance with the obligations of licence holders with established regulations and any conditions or restrictions imposed by NCFHE.
- The governance and financial sustainability of providers, including assurances about the legal status of the provider, the appropriateness of corporate structures and the competence of staff with senior management responsibilities.
The EQA benchmarks the QA system and procedures within an institution against eleven (11) Standards:

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 pre-defined 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 their 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. **On-going 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.

Peer-review panels essentially ask providers the following question about their arrangements for quality management:

*What systems and procedures are in place and what evidence is there that they are working effectively?*

The approach to quality assurance can be encapsulated in a number of key questions which providers should ask themselves about their management of quality.

- What are we trying to do?
- Why are we trying to do it?
- How are we trying to do it?
- Why are we doing it that way?
- Is this the best way of doing it?
- How do we know it works?
- Could it be done better?

Answers to these questions should form the basis of the provider's critical assessment of and response to the self-evaluation questionnaire.

The approach of EQA audits is not simply about checking whether providers adhere to the regulations; it examines how providers are developing their own systems in addressing the expectations of sound management of educational Standards and the quality of their learning and teaching provision. It does not involve the routine identification and confirmation of criteria -- a 'tick- box' approach -- but a mature and reflective dialogue with providers about the ways in
which they discharge their obligations for quality and the identification of existing good practice.

2.5 Specific Terms of Reference and Research Questions

Following the Preliminary Provider Meeting carried out by the EQA peer-review panel on the 8th August 2016, perusal of documentation presented by the Pastoral Formation Institute (PFI), the initial main lines of inquiry for this EQA were:

a) The consistency, effectiveness and impact of the internal quality assurance system of the PFI and how it fulfils the Standards outlined in the National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education;

b) The link between study and the career path irrespective of whether one will take up voluntary work or ameliorate one's employment prospects.
3. Analysis and Findings of Panel

3.1 Standard 1: Policy for Quality Assurance

Policy for quality assurance: entities shall have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management.

Main findings

The PFI has a quality assurance policy documented within the self-evaluation document submitted to NCFHE for the EQA purpose.

This self-evaluation report submitted by PFI mentions a number of mechanisms to ensure quality, such as the setting up of the various boards at the different levels of the organisational chart. The roles of the PFI Board and the various Boards of Studies include: the identification of the need for specific courses; the assurance that the courses acquire accreditation by the NCFHE; the implementation of the courses as accredited; mentoring of students throughout their courses to help them complete their studies successfully. Following a query by the panel it could be noted that there are no student representatives in the various Boards of Studies for none of the courses regardless of whether they are classified as short (award courses) or long (diploma courses).

During the audit, the review panel learnt that the PFI Board is steered by the Director who is first selected by the PFI Board itself and then endorsed by the Archbishop of Malta. The Archbishop, acting as the Chancellor of the PFI, endorses or otherwise, the proposals which would have been already approved by the PFI Board members. Given that he is designated as Chancellor of the PFI, the role of the Archbishop should perhaps be included in the organisational chart of the PFI which the entity provided in the self-assessment document.

As per the documentation submitted to the NCFHE for the preliminary desk-based analysis by the panel, and as declared by the Director of the PFI Board during the interview, the PFI Board commits itself to engage an external reviewer once every three (3) years to conduct an internal review of the institution as part of its internal quality assurance mechanism. The role of this external reviewer is to review the structures and academic policies of the PFI, to look into the study programmes and evaluate matters related to teaching methodologies.

The external reviewer was present during the EQA audit interview together with the PFI Board members. The panel asked the external reviewer to explain the process of the internal review conducted. The external reviewer explained that during this process he had access to all meeting minutes and any documentation held by the PFI and added that he had also the opportunity to interview members of the PFI Board, the staff involved in the design and implementation of the courses and the students attending the courses. The findings of the External Reviewer are presented to the PFI Board for their attention and necessary action. During the interview with the PFI Board, the panel learnt that the results of the internal review may have direct impact on the programmes being offered as well as on their implementation. The Director of the PFI explained that the report of the Internal Review, conducted in the academic year 2015/2016, is still not finalised and is intended to be for internal consultation only. The panel had therefore no access to
it. The panel also learnt that the internal review was undertaken for the first time.

During the interview with the programme coordinators, the panel learnt that the Boards of Studies for each of the various courses receive feedback directly because they are actually present for the lectures and transmit their feedback to the PFI Board. Through this feedback, the latter discusses with the stakeholders the feasibility of either opening the course again in the next academic year, whether the PFI should lightly alter the course (without changing the learning outcomes) or introduce new courses. Through this process the PFI is continuously checking whether the courses offered are beneficial to both the students and the needs of the Archdiocese community.

During the on-site visit at the PFI, the review panel learnt that the PFI does not have a written document which would clearly indicate how the PFI is going to reach the objectives set by the Board in the coming years. Yet, the PFI Board evolves its strategy yearly after evaluating the feedback provided and reacting to particular needs identified by the Church which would have been communicated by, for example, a magisterial document. Apart from its regular meetings, the board holds a yearly residential reflect-in for this very purpose.

During the interview the panel was informed that the PFI Board knows the lecturers through the academic lecturing platform at tertiary level. Therefore, lecturers are chosen without the need for an open call. Most of these lecturers are academics and know each other on the campus of the University of Malta. Hence, through their experience, they know each other’s strengths and weaknesses ensuring a highly collaborative team and an optimal service to their students. The PFI involves these lecturers in the process of course design and the evaluation process. Foreign lecturers are also sometimes asked to give lectures at this institution.

Although no specific information on procedures for against intolerance and discrimination are included in the Internal Quality Assurance document, the panel learnt during the EQA audit that any possible cases are dealt with immediately through the constant support provided to both the students and the lecturers by the course coordinators and the Director of PFI through their presence and interactions.

**Good Practice Identified**
The verification of processes and procedures by the external reviewer that should happen once every three (3) years is an important factor in the internal quality assurance mechanism.

Another good practice is the continuous mentoring process offered to each student. This was highly praised by both past and present students.

**Overall judgment for Standard**
PFI meets Standard 1.

**Recommendations for improvement**
- PFI should consider organising their strategy document with the involvement of their stakeholders which are listed on their website, covering a 3 to 5 year plan to establish a more solid grounding as a Further and Higher education institution
• PFI should consider including students’ representatives in the PFI Board and individual Board of Studies, specifically for the diploma courses
• PFI should consider developing a formal written policy/procedure against intolerance and discrimination
• PFI should consider amending the organisational chart to reflect the role of the Archbishop of Malta as chancellor of the PFI
• PFI should provide the internal review report as part of their self-evaluation report in the next EQA audits

3.2 Standard 2: Institutional Probity

Institutional and financial probity: entities shall ensure that they have appropriate measures and procedures in place to ensure institutional and financial probity.

Main findings
Prior to the EQA audit, the PFI submitted extensive financial documentation which indicates that the provider operates as an organisation which does not generate profit and the expenditure budget covers only marginal costs incurred purely in relation to the Institute’s operations. The PFI seeks to generate its own income from course fees which cover the venues and lecturers. During the audit, the Peer Review Panel was informed that, although all the lecturers work on a voluntary basis, they are still being paid honoraria. An academic and a financial report are communicated to the Archbishop every year as is an annual budget. Issues related to the administration of finances are regulated by the policies of the Curia’s Finance Unit. An annual audit of the PFI’s accounts is conducted in all sections of the Archbishop’s Curia which in turn, is externally audited by a reputable auditing firm. Any financial discrepancies are sustained by the Archdiocese.

During the interview, both the Director of the PFI as well as the external verifier, conducting an internal review process of the PFI on behalf of the provider, admitted that it would be beneficial to increase the number of administrative staff, but due to the specific character of the PFI, which does not generate profit and is financially dependent on the Archdiocese, this is not very easy to achieve as its financial and human resources are limited. During the EQA audit visit, the review panel could confirm that PFI Board members, including the Director of the PFI Board, as well as the lecturers and Course Co-ordinators, are selected by the PFI Board itself. All the above mentioned persons are selected in virtue of personal qualities and qualifications which make them suitable for their roles. The selected nominees are then presented to the Archbishop of Malta for his endorsement.

Overall judgment for Standard
PFI meets Standard 2.

Recommendations for improvement
• The PFI could try to strengthen the administration office by recruiting more full-time administrators. This should be done in cooperation with the Archdiocese which may provide essential financial support for the provider.
**3.3 Standard 3: Design and Approval of Programmes**

**Design and approval of programmes:** self-accrediting providers shall have appropriate processes for the design and approval of their programmes of study.

**Main findings**

All courses which are offered by PFI are on a part-time basis. The Pastoral Formation Institute is not a self-accrediting provider but seeks programme and provider accreditation by the NCFHE. As per the prospectus for 2016-2017 which was presented to the review panel, it is evident that PFI offers a choice of courses which may not necessarily be accredited. Through the presented documentation, as well as the separate interviews held with the PFI Board and Course Co-ordinators, the review panel learnt that the PFI Board together with the Boards of Studies start the design of the new courses by agreeing on a set of specific learning outcomes for a particular course. The stages involved in the design of a course were provided as per flow-chart below:

![Flowchart of the stages in the design of a course](image)

Fig. 1 – The stages in the design of a course

The proposal for a course is the responsibility of the Director and the Board member who is the expert on educational matters, together with the relevant stakeholders in the field. Together they write a proposal which highlights:

1. the needs for such a course;
2. the purpose and the intended route for progression for ongoing development;
3. the general Learning Outcomes;
4. a possible Course Coordinator and lecturing staff, and
5. possible modules (if more than one module is offered) and the number of contact hours;
6. mode/s of assessment;
7. the possible course structure and logistics;
8. course fee.

The above information was extracted from the documentation provided following queries raised during the desk-based analysis.

The PFI Board undertakes research together with the relevant stakeholders listed in their website and considers the feedback gathered through feedback forms at the end of an academic year from students who would have followed the courses. Through the interview held with the Director of the PFI Board, the review panel confirmed that the courses are only indirectly linked to the
provision of employment or career progression but are directly linked to the spiritual and pastoral needs in the Catholic community and local parishes.
The final learning outcomes of the level-rated courses are made official and public upon approval by the NCFHE.

During the interviews, the review panel could observe that some students expressed the wish to either include a practicum or increase the number of hours related to the practica existing in some of the courses offered.

It should be noted that, although career progression or employment is not within PFI’s mission statement, the review panel wishes to point out that a particular past student remarked that she would welcome the possibility of having the PFI courses linked to employment or other courses offered by other institutions for career progression. Other students were positive about this possibility and in particular one of them informed the Peer Review Panel about the difficulties encountered to have the qualification issued by the PFI accepted by the University of Malta, as part of the entry requirements for a course provided by the Faculty of Theology. The review panel brought up these issues during the stakeholders’ meeting with one of the PFI Board members who stated that these issues were being reviewed. It was also noted that there were various instances where the University of Malta did recognize certificates issued by the PFI.

Some of the students informed the review panel that courses at lower MQF levels should be offered by PFI leading to higher levels.

The PFI Board does not directly involve the students in the design process of new programmes, however, the students’ feedback, either collected by the Course Co-ordinators or through students’ surveys, is used by the PFI Board in the process of reviewing the programmes.

**Good practice identified**
The review panel would like to point out that the PFI follows the same process to design programmes irrespective of whether the programmes would be pegged to the MQF and thus accredited by the NCFHE or not.

**Overall judgment for Standard**
PFI meets Standard 3.

**Recommendations for improvement**
- PFI should consider the design of programmes also with the intention to give the learner better employment opportunities.
- PFI should consider the inclusion of more practice in the course content

**3.4 Standard 4: Student-centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment**

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.
Main findings

As already stated, all courses provided by PFI are offered on a part-time basis; this is to suit the commitments of adult learners. A variety of learning resources are used according to the specific course and the target audience. The review panel was able to confirm the above during the interviews with the Course co-ordinators. One important task of the Course Co-ordinator is to provide support and encourage communication with the students, particularly during coffee breaks and one-to-one interviews. The Course Co-ordinators are present throughout many of the lectures, so as to keep in touch with the students, regularly acting as tutors for on-site queries related to the students in their academic and spiritual needs. Individual tutors may also be assigned to the students, alongside with mentoring and support by the Course Co-ordinator and the Director of the PFI Board. The Peer Review Panel was informed that such practices strengthen the bond between the lecturers and the students as well between the students themselves.

At times, the facilities of the Archbishop Seminary at Tal-Virtu' in Rabat (Malta), Mount St Joseph in Mosta (Malta) or Porziuncola Retreat House in Bahar iċ-Ċagħaq (Malta) are used for lecturing and for seminars/weekend sessions. As explained by the Director of the PFI Board, these facilities are convenient, especially, when they have Gozitan students who would like to stay overnight in Malta rather than travel during the late hours and/or in a bad weather, back to Gozo.

The students are encouraged to take an active role by participating in the surveys undertaken by the PFI Board, in order to assess and comment with regards to lecturers, assignments and course content.

Progress and improvement of students is regularly monitored through both summative and formative assessment methods, which include group discussions, day seminars, examinations and assignments.

The Peer Review Panel was informed that the students are reminded of the examination regulations by PFI lecturers and Course Co-ordinators, as well as making them aware of examination standards. The lecturers make sure that all the students understand such regulations, especially in terms of students’ absence, illness and other specific circumstances. As indicated by the Director of the PFI, the students are able to re-sit an examination.

During the desk-based analysis the Peer Review Panel noted that weighted assessment criteria are used as part of the assessment process – for instance, courses have different assessment methods including assignments and examinations – but along with these criteria, the PFI does not always further use weighted sub-criteria which would aid the examiner to reduce elements of subjectivity whilst assessing the students: for instance sub-criteria for an assignment could include percentage mark allocated for knowledge of content, presentation, reference list, etc. This has been verified during the interview with the Director. The Panel believes the use of such sub-criteria would further enhance PFI’s good work to ensure transparency.

During the interview, alumni declared that their experience at the PFI was a positive one, especially due to the continuous support given by the Course Co-ordinator, the Director of the PFI and the respective tutor/s. It was explained to the Peer Review Panel that the tension one may experience in following any course offered is lessened through the continuous support rendered by the PFI staff on a one-to-one basis. During the interview, students noted that their e-mails are replied to within 24 hours. However, on the other hand, the students admitted that there was no
induction process in place for new students without previous educational experience in a Further and/or Higher education institution. Furthermore, the students also expressed their interest in the possibility of participating in a variety of student exchanges. The Director of the PFI Board informed the Peer Review Panel that there was an attempt of utilising EU funding for this purpose, however, the application submitted by the PFI Board was rejected due to the lack of an international office at the PFI responsible for the absorption of EU funds.

The Peer Review Panel questioned both students and the PFI staff about the inclusion of blended learning as a family friendly measure. In both instances the interviewees were reluctant to explore this possibility. Yet, there may be a possibility in the future for a cohort of learners to be able to benefit from this mode of learning. PFI must ensure that good practices established by the various Course Co-ordinators are shared and practised by all Course Co-ordinators; maybe through the creation of a board overseeing all Boards of Studies.

**Good practice identified**
The individual, personalised, continuous support given by the PFI staff to students is a valuable experience for students enrolled in their courses.

**Overall judgment for Standard**
PFI meets Standard 4.

**Recommendations for improvement**
- The Peer Review Panel believes that the possibility of online and blended learning should be considered by the PFI Board to offer flexibility to prospective learners.

### 3.5 Standard 5: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification

**Student admission, progression, recognition and certification:** entities shall consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student 'life-cycle'.

**Main findings**
The Peer Review Panel noticed that course regulations are published on the PFI website, together with the prospectus. The latter is also provided as a hard copy in the form of leaflets. Information is further elaborated for each course through a hyperlink to a pdf document on the PFI website or printed on the leaflets. In most cases, course details include: the MQF level, number of ECTS, special Entry Requirements and proposed Additional Requirements. However, as already indicated in the main findings for Standard 9, the information in the Prospectus was not always in conformity with the parameters of Communication no. 01/2013 issued by the NCFHE. The panel deems it necessary that the PFI publishes information that is fully in line with NCFHE communications and the PFI board has communicated that it is doing so in the forthcoming prospectus currently being printed.

Reviewing the PFI website, one finds information related to admission, progression, recognition and certification. This information is however not supported by detailed regulations and by-laws.
Regulations and by-laws are mentioned in the website, but ultimately this information is not published in this same portal. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification is administered by the Secretary to the Board who is the only full-time employee at the PFI.

As part of the admission process PFI conducts interviews. The panel learnt that these interviews serve a dual purpose: (i) to assess an applicant's entry credentials to a specific course and (ii) to guide applicants towards courses that best fit their background and objectives as learnt following an interview with one of the alumni. It is stated on the website that equal opportunities to be admitted into a course are given by admitting someone who possesses qualifications which fall short of those required, which shortfall is deemed by the Board to have been due to a physical or learning disability which would have made it difficult for the applicant to obtain the required entry qualification. Students may re-sit a failed assessment. Some students are allowed to follow a course without undertaking the assessment. In this case, the PFI issues a certificate of attendance to the student.

**Good practice identified**
Holding interviews to enable a prospective student to enter into the right course is commendable.

**Overall judgment for Standard**
PFI meets Standard 5.

**Recommendations for improvement**
- PFI should consider publishing guidelines and regulations related to progression, recognition and certification.

### 3.6 Standard 6: Teaching Staff

**Teaching staff:** entities shall assure the competence and effectiveness of their teaching staff.

**Main findings**
All lecturers are part-timers. The eligibility requirements to lecture in the different modules are listed in the final course description accredited by the NCFHE and the PFI makes sure that all lecturing staff have, as a minimum, at least a Master's Degree level of education in a relevant subject matter. Lecturers are appointed directly by the PFI Board after their appointment is endorsed by the Archbishop of Malta; lecturers work on a part-time basis. The Archbishop can object to the choice of a lecturer ‘for reasons pertaining to the faith, to moral conduct or to ecclesiastical discipline’.

During the interviews the panel was able to confirm that PFI lecturers do in fact possess at least a Masters Level of education, are reading for a doctorate or are in fact in possession of a doctorate in an area of study relevant to the course delivered. PFI lecturers are mostly lecturing staff from the Faculty of Theology of the University of Malta.

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Lecturers at PFI have the possibility to use a ‘virtual learning environment’ however they do not necessarily use it since students prefer to use other means of communication. It is rather the use of e-mail that prevails as a means of communication throughout the course. In addition the students highlighted that communication by e-mail was very efficient.

According to documents submitted by the PFI Board and further confirmed during the interviews, the part-time lecturers are kept updated on the policies approved by the PFI Board through a meeting which is organised at least once a year. During this meeting, the lecturers follow a lecture on issues related to pedagogy and/or content.

The Peer Review Panel could verify that lecturers at PFI are up-to-date in the area that they teach because they are experts in their specific field. There is a yearly meeting which is not intended to be continuous professional development but includes “a spiritual session, an update on the policies approved by the Board as well as a lecture on an issue related to pedagogy and/or content”. Although all the lecturing staff at PFI are experts in their field, not all are necessarily academics. It is therefore suggested that the PFI provides other means to ensure professional development.

The Peer Review Panel learnt that either the Course Co-ordinator or the Director of the PFI follows the lectures and socialises with the students to gather their feedback about their learning experience, including about the delivery of the lectures. In this manner, the Course Co-ordinator and the Director of the PFI are able to give feedback back to the lecturers and discuss possibilities to ameliorate their teaching methodology.

During the interviews with the lecturers and the Course Co-ordinators, the Peer Review Panel learned that, when the Course Co-ordinator is also the lecturer of the same course, the Director follows the lecture for peer reviewing.

**Overall judgment for Standard**
PFI meets Standard 6.

**Recommendations for improvement**
- PFI should explore the possibility of funding to be specifically used for continuous professional development.

**3.7 Standard 7: Learning Resources and Student Support**

Learningresourcesandstudentsupport:entitiesshallhaveappropriatelyfundingfortheirlearning andteachingactivitiesandsufficientlearningresourcesoffullysupportthestudents’learning experiences.

**Main findings**
As per documentation provided by the PFI Board, the PFI is a non-profit making education institution. The funding for the learning and teaching activities is covered primarily by course fees
and when the PFI Board exceeds the allocated budget the Curia covers the deficit.

The PFI offers ‘Moodle’, a VLE which, as explained by the Director of the PFI Board, is mostly used by those students following higher education courses. The Panel learnt that this VLE is used as the platform by the lecturers to share articles, Power Point presentations and other course work with the students. Upon enquiry, the Director of the PFI Board stated that the VLE is now offering the possibility to students to screen their assignments for plagiarism before these are submitted for assessment. The use of such mechanism is intended to support students.

During the interviews, the Peer Review Panel found out that the PFI relies on the learning resources of those stakeholders that are education institutions, such as the Archbishop’s Seminary, where, besides having equipped lecture rooms, also has a well-stocked library which is kept adjourned for the needs of the students undertaking studies in theology. During the EQA audit, the Panel noticed that this library is fully accessible for persons with special needs and that the WiFi network was being modernised.

Through a student survey undertaken by the PFI Board and analysed by the Peer Review Panel during the desk-based analysis, it was highlighted that the library needs to be updated without identifying which library. However, the student questionnaire distributed on behalf of the NCFHE as well as during the actual on-site visit confirmed otherwise. The Panel, however, noted that the library of the Secretariat of Catechesis at the Catholic Institute in Floriana is not accessible to persons with special needs. However, the Director of the PFI assured that this issue will be addressed when, in a couple of years, the said library will be moving to new premises; there the premises will be fully accessible for persons with special needs. The Director of the PFI explained that the students are encouraged to make use of all of these libraries during their studies.

During the interviews, the review panel could confirm that the PFI provides personalised tutorials for those who are finding it difficult to cope with the course content. Also, the Peer Review Panel appreciated that the bond created between the students during their course through coffee breaks and the mentoring by the Course Co-ordinators led to a more fulfilling learning experience and enabled students to support and help one another.

**Good practice identified**
The continuous individual, personalised mentoring process practised by the Course Co-ordinators and the Director of the PFI.

**Overall judgment for Standard**
PFI meets Standard 7.

**Recommendations for improvement**
PFI has to ensure that the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is promoted properly among the students by the lecturers, who should in turn be encouraged to use it.

### 3.8 Standard 8: Information Management

**Information management** entities shall ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.
Main findings
Through the desk-based analysis, the Peer Review Panel found that data collection consists of personal details and contact details. The data collected about students enables the PFI Board to analyse the following:
  - retention and success rates;
  - classify the students by age;
  - the number of the participants attending each PFI course;
  - the demographic distribution of the participants;
  - the gender of the participants attending the courses over the years, as well as per course.

Overall judgment for Standard
PFI meets Standard 8.

Recommendations for improvement
- The PFI should consider writing a formal policy and procedure on data collection, analysis and monitoring.
- The PFI may consider having a procedure in place to use the analysed data for the benefit of the institution.

3.9 Standard 9: Public Information

Public information: entities shall publish information about their activities which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible.

Main findings
A prospectus is published both as a hard copy, in the form of leaflets, as well as on the PFI website. Accredited courses are not always easily distinguished from those which are not. The courses are provided in a standalone format.

With respect to social media, the PFI makes use of Facebook as one of its outreach mechanisms. Additionally, information about the PFI's courses is disseminated by word of mouth through several parishes by parish priests and the 'Parish Formation Coordinators'. The review panel was informed that, apart from spreading information through the Church magazine 'Flimkien' which is distributed freely to virtually every household in Malta, the PFI sometimes also participates in TV and radio programmes to create awareness about the Institute.

Overall judgment for Standard
PFI meets Standard 9.
Main findings
At the PFI, ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes is achieved through meetings with stakeholders, meetings of lecturers with students and surveys given to students.

Through the desk-based analysis and the interviews, the Panel confirmed that the Course Co-ordinators present the proposed changes to the Director of the PFI; this is part of their work as members of the Boards of Studies. The latter is composed of the Course Co-ordinator and a number of lecturers of the respective course and PFI confirmed that these do not include a students' representative mainly because the courses are short. The Director of the PFI discusses the proposals with the PFI Board and it is then up to the PFI Board to authorise any changes and/or additions going through the same design process specified in Standard 3.

All meetings of the various boards are recorded in the form of meeting minutes and subsequently filed by the Secretary of the Board. Various copies of these meeting minutes were submitted as part of the documentation for the desk-based analysis.

Another source of information to aid the ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes is the feedback surveys completed by students at the end of the courses. These are given due consideration by the PFI to assure quality in the learning experience offered. In these surveys students are given the chance to assess, comment and criticise the delivery of the courses, the course content and the modes of assessment. A report of the findings is compiled and in particular any negative feedback is evaluated and considered by the Board members and the lecturing staff.

Overall judgment for Standard
PFI meets Standard 10.
### 3.11 Standard 11: Cyclical External Quality Assurance

| Entities should undergo external quality assurance by, or with the approval of, the NCFHE on a cyclical basis, according to NCFHE guidelines, once very five years. |

**Main findings**

PFI has fulfilled this Standard by virtue of hosting the EQA referred to in this Report. This is the first EQA of PFI.

**Overall judgment for Standard**

PFI meets Standard 11.
4. Response by the Provider

1. Preamble

The PFI Board would like to thank the NCFHE and the Peer Review Panel for what has been a positive external audit experience, which served as a fruitful process of self-critical discernment by the Pastoral Formation Institute and which involved not only its governing board and the various boards of studies but also the various interrelated formal and informal structures which compose it, and where the review process took into account the views of various stakeholders it seeks to consult and to serve.

With reference to the draft report on the EQA, the PFI board feels that the assessment made is generally true and fair and reflects well upon the practices of the Pastoral Formation Institute. The comments made in the responses beneath are somewhat exceptions to this general observation.

The PFI board would also like to thank the NCFHE for waiving the fees involved in such an external quality audit process. The PFI would like to stress that it is a not for profit organisation which depends almost entirely on student fees for its existence.

2. Response to comments and proposals made by the Peer Review Panel in connection with Standards where the judgment was “Standard met or surpassed”

With reference to the first paragraph on page 8, regarding the VLE, the PFI is working on a document to be distributed to the lecturing staff in order to encourage them to make use of the VLE rather than send their notes via email. This should be made available to the lecturing staff in summer 2017 together with an updated version of the PFI’s ethos.

With reference to the third paragraph on page 10, Ms Stephanie Falzon should be replaced by Ms Deborah Meli as the current Secretary of the Board.

With reference to the fourth paragraph on page 10, where the report speaks of the PFI’s mission, we would need to point out that the lifelong learning opportunity is offered, not only to those who would like to enrich themselves in personal formation but also to those who want pastoral formation. This is important for us since we want to insist that formation is not merely for oneself but is also for others.

With reference to the second paragraph on page 15 (under Standard 1), it should be pointed out that the PFI does have various strategy documents which are renewed every year. In fact, the PFI board has a residential reflect-in held once yearly whose purpose is precisely to reflect on and to propose strategies for the forthcoming year. Every PFI board meeting is an exercise in continuous discernment which takes into account, the vision, the realities, the needs communicated by various stakeholders and the possibilities.

With reference to the first paragraph on page 18 (under Standard 3), it should be pointed out that the courses are directly linked not only to the spiritual needs of the Catholic community and parishes, but also to their pastoral needs (which are very concrete: one can mention parish nursing, youth ministry family ministry, spiritual companionship, social justice, group leadership, liturgy planning, animation of the liturgy, use of media for evangelisation etc).

With reference to the penultimate paragraph on page 18, it should be pointed out that PFI qualifications have, on several occasions, been taken into account as entry requirements by
various Faculties at the University of Malta including the same Faculty of Theology. Indeed we are aware that the University’s Admissions Board upon recommendation of the Faculty of Theology took into consideration a PFI qualification obtained by a person who applied for the MA in Youth Ministry. We want to work in this direction so that such practices may be developed and formalised. There appear to be some windows of opportunity presenting themselves.

With reference to the third paragraph on page 20 (under Standard 4), it should be noted that the PFI has all the infrastructure necessary for blended learning in place and believes in doing so in order to promote flexibility and family-friendly measures. Hence, there is no reluctance in principle towards such initiative on the part of the PFI board members. The only reluctance expressed in the review had to do with online courses (i.e. courses which are offered wholly online). The reason is that the PFI believes that a proportion of the learning should be conducted through contact hours for formative purposes.

With reference to the first paragraph on page 21 (under Standard 5), it should be noted that the forthcoming prospectus, which is currently being prepared, is in line with Communication No. 01/2013 issued by the NCFHE. We are liaising with the NCFHE to ensure that this is the case.

With reference to the third paragraph on page 21 under the same standard (standard 5), we want to point out that the regulations have been amended to include different disabilities and to outline a procedure to be followed in such cases.

The PFI board has already decided to offer the Methodology Seminar in November in order to guide students with no academic background, not only on how to conduct research and write their assignments, but also on how to take notes. Also, from this year the PFI has provided a Welcome Document to all students with various aids intended for their guidance. These documents are at hand and can readily be supplied to the NCFHE.

With reference to the second paragraph on page 23 (under Standard 7), it should be pointed out that a plagiarism checker application is included in the new website commissioned by the PFI in Summer 2016. This will allow for assignments to be screened for plagiarism prior to assessment.

With reference to the last paragraph on page 23 (also under Standard 7) it should be noted that students at the PFI have access to several libraries, of which the library housed at the Archbishop’s Seminary is the largest. The full list of libraries is in the documentation given to the NCFHE.
Annex: Review Panel Bio Notes

In the setting up of the review panel for the Pastoral Formation Institute, the NCFHE sought to maintain a high degree of diligence in the process of selection of the members of Peer Review Panel. The Panel sought to be composed of specialists in quality assurance to act as External Peers, professionals and practitioners of quality assurance frameworks, as well as students who, prior to the audits, attended professional Training Seminars organised by the NCFHE. The following bio notes present the profiles of the members of Peer Review Panel. The bio notes are correct as at the time of when the EQA audit was carried out (5th to 6th September 2016).

The following bio notes present the profiles of the members of Peer Review Panel. The bio notes are correct as at the time of when the EQA review was carried out (5th – 6th September 2016).

Head of Review Panel/External Peer: Ms Ninette Sammut

Ms Sammut is the Acting Head of the Accreditation Unit at the Directorate of Quality and Standards in Education (Ministry for Education and Employment). From 2013-2015 (3 years) she was also in charge of the accreditation process for programmes at different MQF levels of the Directorate for Lifelong Learning & Early School Leavers where she also advised on quality assurance of programmes and participated in the development of an internal quality assurance policy. Previously, Ms Sammut was Manager Education at Heritage Malta heading the Education Programmes Department and earlier the Institute for Conservation and Management of Cultural Heritage (ICMCH), leading a European Social Fund project on four educational programmes at MQF Level 1, 3, 6 and 7.

External Peer: Ms Grace Izzo

Ms Izzo is the Head of the Centre for Child Development, Education and Care Studies which is a course in Childcare licensed and accredited by the NCFHE. After a career in Early Childhood in the U.K. on returning to Malta, she was appointed by the British Council as their consultant on E.C. E. Later she set-up and co-ordinated the kindergarten course for the Department of Education at the “Pre-school Education Centre”, after which she wrote and set up a Course for Childcare-workers, was a Trainer and Co-ordinator for tutors and the Practicum at the then Employment and Training Corporation. Ms Izzo regularly supervises and examines Bachelor of Education Students and ECEC students during their teaching Practicum at the Faculty of Education, University of Malta; she was also appointed consultant for the British Council in Early Childhood Education at the English Resource Unit until the Centre was handed over to the Department of Education.

Student Peer: Mr Matthew Catania

Mr Catania is reading for Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Built Environment Studies at University of Malta. He also obtained BTEC Level 5 Higher National Diploma in Construction and the Built Environment (Civil Engineering). In addition to this, Mr Catania is a Playworker at Foundation for Educational Services responsible for organising and managing activities designed on specific weekly themes for children’s classes. These include Integrating arts and crafts, creative thinking and physical education into fun packed activities. Mr Catania holds the national record as the fastest individual on the island to trek the circumference of Malta in under 15
hours and 30 minutes.

**NCFHE Staff Member: Mr Adam Liwak**

Mr Liwak is the officer within the Research & Policy Unit at the NCFHE with previous experience in the Quality Assurance Unit. Before joining the NCFHE, he coordinated data collection and analysis for a Teaching Programme Review at the Department of Public Policy, University of Malta, that was undertaken at the Senate's request, under the direction of the Departmental Steering Committee. Moreover Mr Liwak gained wide experience at the Department of European Funds and Regional Development in the Capital City of Warsaw, Poland as well as at the Ministry of Infrastructure, Poland.