



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

**COVERING NOTE TO THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AUDIT REPORT  
PREPARED BY THE NCFHE FOLLOWING A REVIEW OF  
ST MARTIN'S INSTITUTE OF HIGHER EDUCATION (SMI)**

JULY 2017

## **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 St Martin's Institute of Higher Education (SMI) in line with the requirements of the *National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education*. The review took place between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 2017 and the report reflects the findings as at that time.

All providers that undergo an NCFHE audit are 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 SMI and has taken due account of the learning process which this has inevitably entailed. The response to the audit by SMI is included in the report.

## **ANALYSIS**

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

- fit for purpose according to the PFI's 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 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. 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 for this audit were as follows:

- In interpreting its mandate, the review team determined that all activities performed by the University of London (henceforth UoL) as part of its relationship with St Martin's Institute of Higher Education (henceforth SMI) would be considered within the scope of the review, as if they were performed by structures within the institute itself.

Furthermore, the review team decided that, as part of an enhancement-led approach, it would issue recommendations linked to all parts of the operations of the institute. The report therefore distinguishes between *key recommendations* which we feel need to be

implemented expediently by the institute to address weaknesses, and *opportunities for improvement* which are merely suggestions based on our analysis and observations.

The audit intends to review the provider at a particular point in time and takes into consideration the procedures, practices and relevant documentation made available to the panel during the review.

## **FINDINGS**

On the basis of the findings documented in the report, the panel has concluded that SMI meets standards 2, 3, 5, 7, 8 and 10, requires improvement to meet standards 1, 6 and 9 and it surpasses requirements for standards 4 and 11. The recommendations in the Report are meant to improve the standards already in place and to enhance good practice.

## **FOLLOW-UP**

The Commission will be documenting the actions taken by SMI in a follow-up to this audit. The follow-up, which will take place in July 2018, will document SMI's take-up and implementation of *all* the recommendations put forward by the review panel in the report; the follow-up of 2018 will determine the follow-up procedures that the Commission shall agreed and adopt with SMI from then onwards.