

Annex 1

1. Standards for Internal Quality Assurance

Entities shall have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders shall develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders. The policy should take into account various methods of monitoring processes and outcomes, including those generated by learning analytics software. Such a policy should include:

- a. the organisation of the quality assurance system;
- b. the responsibilities of departments, schools, faculties, institutes and/or other organisational units as well as those of institutional leadership individual staff members and students with respect to quality assurance;
- c. reference to the relationship between research and learning & teaching, where applicable;
- d. procedures for ensuring academic integrity and freedom, where applicable;
- e. procedures for ensuring against academic fraud;
- f. procedures for ensuring the integrity, reliability, suitability and continuous availability of the technological infrastructure (incl. hardware and software);
- g. procedures for verifying the identity of all enrolled students;
- h. procedures for ensuring against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against the students or staff;
- i. the involvement of external stakeholders in quality assurance;
- j. procedures for the quality assurance of any elements of an entity's activities that are subcontracted to or carried out by other parties;
- k. in the case of local representatives or franchises of foreign providers, explicit reference to the quality assurance procedures of the parent provider and the role of the local representative or franchise in this.

2. Institutional probity

Entities shall ensure that they have appropriate measures and procedures in place to ensure financial probity. Universities, self-accrediting institutions and other entities with a turnover of more than €50,000 per annum shall have yearly audited accounts and regular budget plans. Other accredited entities shall have yearly financial statements and regular budget plans. Entities shall ensure that the members of the body corporate, the legal representative and the persons occupying a headship position are fit and proper persons to deliver further and/or higher education programmes.

The legal representative of the company running the institution must show effective residence in Malta.

3. Design and approval of programmes

Entities shall have processes for the design and approval of their programmes that have the following characteristics:

- a. they define the expected student workload in terms of ECTS or ECVET learning credits;
- b. they indicate the target audience, including any geographic/regional targeting, and the minimum eligibility and selection criteria, where applicable;
- c. they are learning outcome-based, distinguishing between knowledge, skills and competences;
- d. they indicate appropriate learning dynamics and a measure of tutor-learner and peer-learning interaction as is appropriate for the course level and content;
- e. they indicate appropriate resources and forms of assessment;
- f. they indicate the minimum requirements in terms of qualifications and competences for teaching staff;
- g. they indicate the person/s responsible for:
 - i. course design and content development;
 - ii. technical and media support;
 - iii. teaching course and interacting and supporting learners;
- h. they are in line with the MQF and the Malta Referencing Report 2012 and subsequent updates;
- i. the process of the identification of training/ programme needs involves the participation of external stakeholders who are likely to benefit from the outcomes of such provision;
- j. programmes that are employment-oriented involve stakeholders from the world of work in their design and review;
- k. they involve students in their design and review;
- l. they are designed so that they enable smooth student progression;
- m. they are subject to a formal institutional approval process.

4. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Entities shall ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach. The implementation of student-centred learning and teaching shall:

- a. respect and attend to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths;
- b. consider and use different modes of delivery, where appropriate;
- c. flexibly use a variety of pedagogical methods;
- d. regularly evaluate and adjust the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods;
- e. encourage a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and

- f. guarantee adequate support from the teacher/lecturer;
- g. promote mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship.

Quality assurance processes for assessment shall take into account the following:

- a. The person/s managing and/or responsible for managing the assessment is/are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and receive/s support to further develop competences in the field;
- b. The criteria for and method of assessment as well as criteria for marking are published in advance;
- c. The achieved learning outcomes are analysed in relation to the intended outcomes. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the learning process;
- d. Where possible and applicable, assessment is carried out by more than one examiner;
- e. The regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances;
- f. Assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures;
- g. procedures exist to verify the identity of all students carrying out the assessment and to protect against cheating;
- h. Records of the assessment process and grading are kept in Malta.
- i. A formal procedure for student complaints and appeals is in place.

5. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Entities shall consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student “life cycle”, e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification. In particular:

- a. Admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently and in a transparent manner;
- b. induction to the institution and the programme is provided;
- c. both processes and tools are in place to collect, monitor, manage and store in Malta information on student progression;
- d. while accredited entities retain the right to determine their own selection criteria, they have mechanisms in place to take into consideration relevant qualifications that are accredited or recognised by the NCFHE, and relevant periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning;
- e. on successful course completion, students receive documentation explaining the context, MQF level, amount of learning credit, content and status of the qualification gained, in line with NCFHE regulations. By 2017, locally accredited full qualifications at both further and higher education levels shall reference achieved learning outcomes.

6. Teaching Staff

Entities shall assure the competence of their staff. They shall apply clear, fair and transparent processes for the recruitment, conditions of employment and professional development of such staff. Entities shall promote innovation in teaching methods, and continuous professional development. Higher education institutions shall encourage scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research or practice, where applicable. In the case of part-time teaching staff providing limited and ad hoc services, entities shall ensure that such staff is constantly up-to-date with developments in their fields and with the methodological requirements of their programmes.

7. Learning resources and student support

Entities shall have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities. They should ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources are provided to assist student learning commensurate to the type and level of course/s. These resources may vary from physical or virtual libraries, learning equipment, study facilities and IT infrastructure to human support in the form of tutors, counsellors and/or other advisers.

Institutions that offer digital education shall ensure that their digital infrastructure has:

- a. Automated procedures to ensure continuity of service in case of failure of their equipment or software;
- b. Backup systems including: real-time mirroring of data, full/incremental backups on site and full/incremental backups offsite on physical data.

The needs of a diverse student population (such as mature, part-time, employed and international students as well as students with disabilities), and the shift towards student-centred learning should be taken into account when allocating, planning and providing the learning resources and student support.

All resources and services should be fit for purpose and accessible, and students should be informed about the services available to them. In delivering support services the role of support and administrative staff is crucial and therefore they need to be qualified and have opportunities to develop their competences.

8. Information management

Entities shall ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

Entities shall provide a description of how they maintain, retain and archive student records in Malta. Archives must give adequate assurance that their contents will be available for 40 years.

This information shall include:

- a. admission records, student details, proof of assessment
- b. Profile of the student population, including prevalence of vulnerable groups;
- c. Course participation, retention and success rates;
- d. Students' satisfaction with their programmes;
- e. Employment rates and career paths when the course states an orientation towards employment.

Various methods of collecting information may be used. Sources of such information may include the NCFHE yearly statistics for further and higher education, which will be reformulated to provide this service. Students and staff should be involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.

9. Public information

Entities shall publish information about their activities, including courses/programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.

The information should include:

- a. the selection criteria for the courses/ programmes;
- b. their intended learning outcomes;
- c. the qualifications they award, including information on the EQF/MQF level and ECTS/ECVET learning credits;
- d. the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used;
- e. the pass rates, and
- f. the further learning opportunities available to their students.
- g. information on possible career pathways available as a result of taking a course.

The information available shall be sufficient for prospective applicants to be able to make an informed choice in terms of the knowledge, skills and competences they are likely to acquire on successful completion of the programme.

10. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Entities shall implement the Quality Cycle by monitoring and periodically reviewing their programmes in terms of their IQA policy and standards. The objectives of this exercise shall be i) to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them; ii) to review the content of the programme in the light of latest research/practice in the sector to ensure that the programme is up to date; and iii) to respond to the changing needs of students and society.

Such reviews shall include input from students and, where applicable, input from EQA reports. They shall also include other stakeholders that are benefiting from the outcomes of the programme; in the case of employment-oriented programmes this includes stakeholders from the world of work. These reviews shall lead to continuous improvement of the programmes. Any action planned or taken as a result shall be communicated to all those concerned.

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 every five years.