

4.4 Principles to Assist Providers in Developing Internal QA Procedures

Quality assurance in an education and training context is informed by overarching principles and internationally recognised effective practice.⁵ The following principles will permeate QQI QA guidelines and are intended to inform providers when establishing, further developing, renewing and/or reviewing their quality assurance procedures. They should underpin providers' approaches to quality assurance in education and training, research and related services.

1. The Provider-Owned QA Principle

The primary responsibility for quality and its assurance lies with education and training providers.

The quality of educational and related services offered is the responsibility of the provider. Assuring the quality of the education and training offered is also the responsibility of the provider. Quality assurance requires planning, resources and commitment.

4. The "National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030" and the "Further Education Strategy 2014 – 2019"

5. The "Common Principles for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training in the context of the European Qualifications Framework" may be a useful reference point.

It is crucial that management and staff of a provider understand and 'own' the quality assurance system to support a genuine culture of quality.

The quality assurance system should be organised based on the subsidiarity principle. Ultimate responsibility typically rests with the governing body (or equivalent), but all of a provider's staff should be involved in quality assurance. Specific responsibilities should be assigned based on the subsidiarity principle.

2. The QA Context Principle

Quality systems are context dependent i.e. the scale and scope of a provider's provision will impact on how it operates quality assurance. Providers should be able to demonstrate their quality publicly.

3. The QA Culture Principle

A quality culture is the outcome of individual staff and collective organisational commitment to continuous improvement. In such a culture, QA procedures are not viewed as a bureaucratic burden, but as tools to drive improvement and enhancement.

A quality culture is underpinned by a coherent, integrated and embedded quality system, which is:

- Closely linked to institutional strategies
- Grounded in effective internal decision-making processes and structures
- Context-sensitive and takes into account different organizational and disciplinary cultures
- Not punitive, but developmental. It reflects provider:
 - autonomy and self-confidence
 - commitment to staff and learners

4. The Learning Outcome Principle

Education and training exists principally for the purpose of enabling people to learn and, accordingly, programmes of education and training should be designed, implemented and evaluated with learning outcomes in mind.

Learning is understood here in the broadest sense and in the context of the National Framework of Qualifications.

5. Implementation Principle

Approved quality assurance procedures and those procedures which must have regard to QQI guidelines are fully implemented by providers and are monitored by providers for effectiveness.

6. The Externality Principle

A provider-owned quality assurance system makes appropriate use of external persons who are independent of the provider and who are expertly qualified to make relevant national and international comparisons.

Providers must exercise great care when selecting external persons or partners in provision to ensure that they gain the full benefit of objective, expert advice.

External examining and external authentication are examples of the application of this principle. Another is the use of independent external panels in a programme validation and programme re-validation (taught and research) training and other processes.

7. The Continuous Improvement Principle

Continuous improvement must be the goal of a quality assurance process. The quality of academic education and training and other programmes needs to be developed and improved for students and other beneficiaries of higher and further education and training.

8. The Transparency Principle

Quality assurance systems should enhance transparency. Processes should be developed through which education and training providers can demonstrate their accountability, including accountability for the investment of public and private money.

9. The Public Confidence Principle

The quality assurance system supports public confidence (only when this is deserved) in the provider and its capacity to provide programmes to agreed standards. Assuring the quality of provision and related services requires significant effort and resources on the part of the provider. Providers should actively promote their internal quality system and proactively develop it as a tangible resource and explicit part of the education and training infrastructure. **Public confidence is a key objective for provider owned QA. All outputs of the internal quality assurance system should be published.**