

### 1.1 Governance

There is a system in place to oversee the education and training, research and related activity of the provider to ensure its quality. This governance structure enforces separation of responsibilities between those who produce/develop material and those who approve it. Included in the governance structure are groups or units which (i) make decisions and (ii) approve them. Some broad examples of areas overseen by governance structures include:

- Education, training and related activities (for example, programme development prior to approval and submission for evaluation or validation)
- Internal and, where appropriate, external programme approval (validation) procedures
- Learner results prior to submission for approval as qualifications/awards and for certification
- Self-evaluation findings and programme and related service improvement reports, including agreed follow-up actions

Groups or units responsible for the oversight of education and training, research and related activities are identified in the provider's documented procedures. The terms of reference for these groups or units are documented and published. Where a provider's scale is such that it cannot support internal committees, alternative arrangements are put in place to ensure objective oversight.

Quality assurance systems include procedures that ensure (as fit for context and purpose):

**a) *A system of governance where objectives are aligned with mission and strategy***

The quality assurance system focuses on how, and whether, the provider achieves its objectives and (periodically) on the suitability of the objectives in light of the provider's own mission and other criteria. Operational objectives are specified (at various levels) and are aligned with the provider's mission, strategy and obligations to external stakeholders (statutory, regulatory, professional or other).

**b) *The quality assurance system is owned by the provider***

The quality assurance system is embedded and maintained on a cross-organisational basis with involvement of all provider staff. This includes all levels of management, administration, teaching staff and learners.

**c) *A system of governance that protects the integrity of academic processes and standards***

Academic decision-making reflects the interests of learners and the maintenance of standards. It is independent of commercial considerations. Overall corporate decision-makers within the provider, whether trustees, owners, shareholders or others, do not exercise exclusive authority or undue influence over academic decision-making. Academic decision-makers are appropriately qualified and experienced; they are aware of available resources for programme delivery and ensure that standards are maintained.

**d) *A system of governance that considers risk***

There are procedures in place for the identification, assessment and management of risk. The system of governance has procedures in place to ensure that the provider is not engaged in activities or partnerships that might undermine the integrity of the education and training offered or the awards in the National Framework of Qualifications to which they lead, either in Ireland or abroad. Risk extends to the mode of provision, for example, alternative modes of delivery not embraced by the QA system. The consideration of risk also extends to:

- maintaining academic integrity
- the avoidance of academic or other fraud associated with provision and related services
- planning to ensure capacity to provide adequate services to the number and type of students recruited

**e) *A system of governance that considers the results of internal and external evaluation***

Consideration is given to the findings of internal and external evaluation and self-monitoring processes. Appropriate responses, including action plans, are developed in light of those findings and of past experience (including trends).

## 1.2 Management of quality assurance

Quality assurance procedures form part of a coherent system, which is central to the promotion of a quality assurance culture within the provider. The basic activities captured in the policies and procedures of the quality management system include, but are not limited to, the following:

- A description of processes.
- Identification of roles and positions responsible for the implementation of quality assurance policies and procedures, which are clearly described and designated.
- Self-monitoring of processes. Indicators are developed and data is collected which can be used to measure the effectiveness of policies and procedures.
- Systematic analysis of QA findings following self-evaluation involving stakeholders. Layers of moderating and supervisory processes, as appropriate, are in place to enable strategic and co-ordinated analysis of information at appropriate levels.
- Clear decision-making and follow-up. Systematic formal decision-making procedures are built into a provider's various evaluative mechanisms, including the procedures for oversight of such mechanisms by the governance system or equivalent. Management acts on the self-evaluation findings.
- A resource base which is sufficient to ensure sustainability. The corporate infrastructure, including financial solvency of the business, supports the sustainability of the teaching and learning environment and underpinning quality assurance system. The provider is adequately resourced to undertake and complete the education and training or research programmes proposed. Continuity planning procedures are developed to understand and anticipate events that could threaten the provider and to ensure that the provider remains viable.

Some examples of areas to be included in a provider's QA system include:

- The organisation's **Mission** to clarify its role as a provider of education and training programmes.
- **Policies** showing full understanding of the legislative obligations of the provider. The policies will inform:
  - management and staff as to the general approaches to follow in their work
  - learners and other stakeholders as to what they can expect of the provider
- The **procedures** designed to implement the policies.
- An **internal self-monitoring system** which will regularly check the effectiveness of the procedures and act as an early warning system in areas of provision requiring improvement. This includes the use of data collected and compared against indicators, for example, completion and progression rates for learners.
- A **self-evaluation system** through which the provider will review and report on the quality of its own programmes and related services. Each such evaluation will include the views of learners and independent evaluators who can make comparisons with other similar programmes offered elsewhere.
- A system for responding to the findings of self-monitoring and review which will address areas for **improvement** and build on areas of strength. The provider uses indicators/benchmarks against which programme data can be compared.

### 1.3 Embedding a quality culture

A positive, quality culture is embedded – the totality of a provider's teaching and learning community is working in a coherent and cohesive way towards implementing the quality agenda. The provider is committed to the active development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, quality assurance, quality improvement and enhancement. To support the development of a quality culture, the provider develops a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality in all activities and measures the achievement of the objectives set, as in the case of other corporate or organisation planning strategies, plans and goals. Some features of such quality strategies include:

- A provider-owned quality system where all of a provider's staff and learners are involved in quality assurance, and in which quality is accepted as a responsibility for all to improve upon. There is a willingness amongst staff to improve quality and an acceptance that all staff have a part to play in that improvement.
- The assignment of specific quality assurance responsibilities based on the subsidiarity principle. Policy and procedures are designed in consultation with all those involved in their implementation, as well as with key stakeholders.
- Procedures that include illustrations describing and explaining the quality assurance feed-back and feed-forward paths.

- A holistic approach towards quality assurance where continuous improvement is key. Procedures are integrated into the normal activities of the provider, with minimum unnecessary administrative requirements.
- A commitment to the provision of adequate resources to enable and facilitate the implementation of the quality assurance procedures, the consistent application of these and quality improvement plans.
- A balanced, organisation-wide approach to the implementation of quality assurance procedures to ensure that:
  - the burden of procedures does not obscure the purpose of establishing a quality culture
  - a standardised approach does not obscure the ownership and primary focus on quality improvement