

HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING AWARDS COUNCIL

Comhairle na nDámhachtainí Ardoideachais agus Oiliúna

Guidelines and Criteria for Quality Assurance Procedures in Higher Education and Training

GUIDELINES AND CRITERIA FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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PART A

INTRODUCTION

1. Background

- 1.1 The Higher Education and Training Awards Council ("the Council") was established on 11 June 2001, under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 (No.26 of 1999), ("the Act"). The Council is the national qualifications awarding body for higher education and training outside the university sector in Ireland. The purpose of these Guidelines and Criteria is to assist providers of higher education and training programmes in designing quality assurance procedures, for academic purposes, in accordance with the provisions of the Act. The guidelines and criteria are issued for the purposes of *Section 28* of the Act, reproduced in Appendix 1.
- 1.2 The Act requires providers of higher education and training programmes validated by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council ("the Council"), or to which the Council has delegated the power to make awards, to establish quality assurance procedures and to agree those procedures with the Council. These guidelines and criteria are intended to assist providers in establishing, or maintaining and improving, quality assurance procedures which will meet the requirements of the Council. They are based on best international practice, including policies and procedures operated by national quality assurance agencies and higher education and training institutions in EU member states and other countries. They incorporate recommendations and requirements set out in a wide range of national, international and institutional publications, including the following:

EU Council Recommendation of 24 September 1998 on European co-operation in quality assurance in higher education (98/561/EC)

"The European Higher Education Area", Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education convened in Bologna on the 19th June 1999 (the "Bologna Declaration")

Communiqué of the meeting of European Ministers in charge of Higher Education in Prague on May 19th 2001

Descriptions of existing quality assurance procedures provided to the Council by recognised institutions and other providers, August/October 2001.

The guidelines and criteria also draw on the experience of the Council/NCEA and institutional experience of operating and monitoring quality assurance systems in the context of NCEA Institutional and Programmatic Reviews since 1988.

The range of providers required to obtain Council agreement of their quality assurance procedures is broad and diverse. Institutes of Technology are large multi-discipline institutions. Some commercial providers, with a more limited range of disciplines, approach the size of some of the Institutes of Technology. There are also several smaller specialised institutions whose programmes lie within a single discipline. Different statutory provisions

apply to the operation of some types of institution, e.g., the Regional Technical Colleges Acts, 1992 to 1994, the Garda Síochána Acts, 1923 to 1979 and various Defence Forces Acts and Regulations. These statutory provisions impinge on the structures and organisation of quality assurance procedures within the respective types of institution.

Because of these differences in the scale, scope and statutory basis of providers requiring Council agreement of their quality assurance procedures, the Council will adopt a flexible approach to the interpretation of the criteria and guidelines. Subject to all providers meeting required standards, application of the detailed requirements set out in this document will be tempered with a sense of the appropriate.

In summary, the guidelines and criteria are an attempt to ensure that the following questions are addressed:

- Does the provider have a quality ethos, together with procedures that embed that ethos, throughout the institution and in the programmes that it provides?
- Does the provider systematically monitor its progress towards achieving an appropriate range of quality goals and in particular, further improving and maintaining the quality of the educational provision?
- Are the findings from the quality assurance procedures used to improve the quality of the education and training provision and meet the needs of the learners?
- Does the provider monitor the effectiveness of the services provided to the learner?
- Is corrective action taken to remedy deficiencies identified by the quality assurance procedures?
- Is relevant information on institutional and programme quality given to stakeholders?

- 1.4 Quality assurance in higher education and training is a developing area of policy and procedural innovation. The Council expects that these guidelines and criteria will continue to develop and evolve in line with best international practice.
- 1.5 In developing, maintaining and implementing quality assurance procedures, it is important that quality assurance is not reduced to issues that can be easily measured, as this may divert attention from other important aspects of quality provision and delivery. It is highly desirable that the quality assurance procedures are shaped and implemented through full consultation and discussion with all participants. In addition, the systems should be integrated into the normal academic activities of providers, with a minimum of administrative requirements, which might be seen as bureaucratic. The pressure to comply with procedures must not simply become an end in itself and deflect attention and resources away from the pursuit of excellence and high academic standards.
- 1.6 *Section 28(4)-(5)* of the Act makes provision for the Council to review from time to time the effectiveness of the academic quality assurance procedures of providers. The results of such reviews will be published. This reporting is important in ensuring public confidence that quality and standards are being safeguarded. The Council will consult with providers and other stakeholders regarding these review arrangements. In general, the Council review will focus on the quality assurance policy and procedures themselves; it will not be concerned with evaluating programmes, facilities and services.

- 1.7 The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland ("the Authority") will establish, in consultation with the Council, procedures for the performance by the Council of its functions under the Act. The guidelines and criteria for quality assurance procedures, insofar as they are concerned with Council processes, are subject to this statutory provision.
- 1.8 A list of some terms used is appended as Appendix 2 to this document.

2. *Mission Statement and Strategic Objectives of the Council*

- 2.1 The Mission Statement of the Council expresses an intention 'to develop, promote and maintain higher education and training awards to the highest international standards and quality'.
- 2.2 Central to the Mission Statement and the policies and procedures outlined in this document, are the following strategic objectives:
- to determine and ensure compliance with appropriate standards of higher education and training;
 - to promote and support continuous improvement in the quality and standards of provision of higher education and training programmes, working in partnership and consultation with higher education and training stakeholders;
 - to promote provider ownership of quality assurance and learner assessment procedures;
 - to ensure that clear and accurate information is made publicly available about the quality and standards of higher education and training provision; and
 - to apply international best practice in evaluation and reviews of higher education and training.
- 2.3 The Council is conscious of the obligations and responsibilities, which recognised institutions and other providers have, to implement and maintain rigorous quality assurance procedures. It is also aware that there is no 'correct model' for quality assurance. It therefore intends that each provider would develop its own plan within the guidelines and criteria outlined in this document.

3. *The Context of Academic Quality Assurance*

- 3.1 Quality assurance refers to the mechanisms and procedures adopted by providers to assure a given quality, or the continued improvement of quality. It embodies planning, defining, encouraging, assessing and improving practice. It encompasses concepts such as standards, excellence, value for money, fitness for purpose and meeting stakeholders' needs. It is the process through which a provider assures itself and its stakeholders that it consistently reaches the highest standards possible, in all aspects of its activities.
- 3.2 In the context of accountability, quality assurance is used as a mechanism to monitor performance. High standards are being demanded from providers, by learners, graduates, employers and the public at large. Quality assurance is a key tool in the educational

processes of providers, ensuring that they fulfil the demands and needs of society. It also allows for the maintenance of an essential level of autonomy.

- 3.3 The rapid expansion of higher education provision, including the growth in the number of providers and learners and diversification in terms of types of providers, learners and programmes, has led to growing concern about the quality of higher educational provision. The growth of international competition and increased learner, staff and graduate mobility have increased the need in the market place for national and international equivalences of awards and curricula and a greater level of transparency. There is also a demand for transparency and accountability in the application of public funds.
- 3.4 A commitment to quality assurance implies a commitment to continuous improvement. It involves three basic activities - setting goals and standards, evaluating practice against these standards and improving practice.
- 3.5 External verification of the quality assurance policy and procedures of providers is necessary to provide some degree of accountability and transparency. It does not imply that there may be something wrong. Stakeholders require assurance that the quality is adequate.
- 3.6 The concept of quality applies to all of the activities that underpin the academic programmes - staff, facilities, content, management, etc.
- 3.7 An acceptable system of quality assurance in higher education and training rests on three pillars:
 - Self-evaluation
 - External review
 - Information to and from stakeholders.

A weakness in any of the three pillars threatens the stability of the structure.

4. *Communication*

- 4.1 The achievement of satisfactory quality in all of the activities and functions of a provider of programmes of higher education and training requires the maximum clarity of communication and transparency of procedures. The means of communication, or the mode of delivery of the communication, is a matter for the provider. However the mechanism must be effective. The mission of the provider together with all relevant regulations, etc., should be published and made available to staff, learners and all stakeholders. Handbooks, information packs and other publications, designed for different purposes should be prepared and disseminated. All such relevant information should also be available on the provider's website.
- 4.2 Providers should be proactive in making available, to all stakeholders, information about academic quality. Publication assists the accountability requirement and also promotes quality improvement.

PART B

QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AND PROCEDURES

1. *Provider Quality Assurance Policy*

- 1.1 The quality assurance procedures of a provider must, under the Act, be established for the purpose of further improving and maintaining the quality of higher education and training. The Act requires the provider to agree its quality assurance procedures with the Council. The quality assurance policy should provide a framework for and drive the quality assurance procedures.
- 1.2 The quality assurance policy should reflect the provider's mission and values and relate closely to the relevant strategic management plans and operations. It should clearly set measurable quality objectives, at various functions and levels within the organisation. The procedures should provide opportunities for analysis and development of the mission statement, values and plans.
- 1.3 The quality assurance policy should cover all relevant aspects of the provider's functions and operations, which impact on the standard and quality of its higher education and training programmes, e.g., teaching, research, learner support, academic support, accommodation, equipment and facilities, management and administration, community service and collaboration with industry.
- 1.4 The quality assurance policy should focus on how well the provider is achieving the goals derived from the mission statement. A review of performance against targets is integral to such a policy. Learners' attainments of intended learning outcomes should be a major consideration. Further enhancement of programme quality should also be a major policy objective.
- 1.5 Responsibility for the formulation of quality assurance policy and for maintaining and improving institutional quality typically rests with the governing body of the provider. Should the governing body delegate responsibility for the design and implementation of the quality assurance policy and procedures, the body or person, to whom responsibility for implementation is delegated, must be clearly identified. That body or person should report directly to the governing body on quality matters and should be at an appropriate level in the structure of the organisation, to ensure adequate authority for implementation of the quality assurance policy and procedures.
- 1.6 The quality assurance policy should provide for the involvement of external experts in the review of the quality assurance policies and procedures. Ethical guidelines relating to the selection and participation of such external experts should also be provided. Independence and transparency are critical for this. The ethical guidelines should include a requirement that such experts must declare any personal, professional, academic or business interests that could conflict, or might appear to conflict, with their quality assurance responsibilities.
- 1.7 The quality assurance policy should include a commitment to the provision of adequate resources to enable the quality assurance procedures to be implemented satisfactorily.

2. *Overview of the Quality Assurance Procedures of the Provider*

- 2.1 A provider should have and maintain a Quality Assurance Manual containing a full statement of the quality assurance procedures. The manual should include an organisation chart, showing where responsibility for quality assurance lies, including the reporting lines and responsibilities. The quality assurance procedures should make provision for the specific nature of the provider and its aims in relation to the needs of society and of the labour market. The quality criteria should be related to the provider's objectives, whether at the level of the whole organisation, at the level of a school or department, or at the level of a single programme or group of programmes. The procedures should include, but not necessarily be limited to, those detailed in Section 3 below.
- 2.2 The quality assurance procedures should provide for evidence in the form of verifiable data concerning the quality objects being monitored. The quality objects should therefore be clearly defined, be consistent with the institutional and programme objectives and be identifiable and measurable. Systematic documentation of evidence is important for effective quality maintenance and improvement and is essential for a quality assurance review.
- 2.3 The procedures should also provide for systematic formal deliberative and decision-making procedures and executive action procedures, to ensure effective action as appropriate in response to findings from the quality monitoring. Systematic documentation of actions taken to maintain and improve quality is also a fundamental requirement.
- 2.4 Particular attention should be paid to aspects of quality performance which are less easily amenable to quantifiable monitoring. The provider should adopt appropriate policies and strategies to ensure that such aspects are not overlooked in the quality assurance procedures.
- 2.5 The quality assurance procedures, in relation to each programme/service concerned should focus on:
- the objectives of the programme/service;
 - evidence that the programme/service is meeting its objectives; and
 - effectiveness of procedures for correcting deficiencies and making improvements.

3. *Principal Quality Assurance Procedures*

- 3.1 *Procedures for design and approval of new programmes, subjects and modules*
- 3.1.1 Procedures for the design and approval of new programmes, subjects and modules, should include clear and comprehensive provision for the presentation and structured consideration of evidence that the following issues have been satisfactorily addressed:
- Philosophy and aims of the programme;
 - Relevance of the programme to the mission and strategic plan of the provider;
 - Objectives of the programme, subject and modules;
 - Learning outcomes for each subject and module;

- How the programme meets its stated objectives, particularly as regards intended learning outcomes;
 - Mode of delivery;
 - Pedagogy relevant to the programme;
 - Relationship to other programmes offered by the provider;
 - Industrial or other links, including possible work placement;
 - Programme management arrangements;
 - Relevance of the programme to the Irish, European and international labour markets;
 - Human resources implications of providing the programme;
 - Information system resources needed for the programme;
 - Impact of the programme on the physical resources and support facilities of the provider;
 - Financial implications of offering the programme;
 - Environmental scan of similar or related programmes offered by other providers;
 - Learner demand for programme;
 - Consultation on the programme with relevant stakeholders and peers;
 - Fair, consistent and standards-compliant assessment of learners on the programme;
 - Provision, where required by law, for the protection of learners in the event of the provider ceasing to provide the programme; and
 - Satisfactory provision for learner access, transfer and progression in the context of the national framework of qualifications.
- 3.1.2 In the case of programmes that the provider intends to submit for validation by the Council, or for delegated authority to make awards, the programme design and approval process should include satisfactory procedures for compliance with all Council requirements, including compatibility with the national framework of qualifications. To the extent that these requirements are met by the provider's internal procedures, the Council's validation processes can be reduced in scale and extent. The Council would welcome development towards a situation where the provider's internal processes were adequate to meet the Council's validation requirements. The process of formal agreement by the Council of a provider's quality assurance procedures may, if the provider so wishes, address the issue of progress towards this objective.

3.2 *Procedures for the assessment of learners*

Section 23(e) of the Act requires the Council to ensure that providers establish procedures for the assessment of learners, which are fair and consistent and for the purpose of compliance with standards determined by the Council. The provider should also have, as part of its quality assurance procedures, systematic arrangements for evaluating the effectiveness of the

learner assessment procedures, to ensure that they are in practice fair, consistent and in compliance with Council standards, in the context of the national framework of qualifications.

3.3 *Procedures for ongoing monitoring of programmes*

3.3.1 Ongoing monitoring of programmes is essential to ensure that quality and standards are being maintained. The provider should have a detailed procedure in this regard. Providers should monitor the success of their programmes:

- to ensure that programmes remain current and valid in the light of developing knowledge in the discipline and practice in its application;
- to evaluate the extent to which intended outcomes are being attained by learners; and
- to evaluate the appropriateness of the curriculum and assessment, in relation to the outcomes.

3.3.2 An appropriate structure of committees, or equivalent, should be established, with clear delineation of responsibilities. This should ensure that each programme is monitored on an ongoing basis, deviations from intended outcomes are identified, corrective action taken, and systematic evaluation undertaken of the effectiveness of the corrective action.

3.3.3 The quality assurance procedures must include provision for regular ongoing systematic monitoring of programme quality by those most closely involved in the delivery of the programme. This will normally include provision for a programme board consisting of the academic staff, learner representatives and others with close involvement in the programme. The programme board, or equivalent, should usually meet at least once in each term or semester. Effective arrangements should be in place to ensure that the programme board receives timely data and information regarding the operation of the programme. The proceedings of the programme board should be recorded and made available to interested parties. The programme board's terms of reference should include provision for the referral of appropriate matters to a more senior management forum, including the Academic Council, or an equivalent body.

3.4 *Procedures for evaluation of each programme at regular intervals*

3.4.1 Periodic formal evaluation of programmes is an important means of ensuring, among other things, that (a) quality improvements are made to programmes of higher education and training and (b) programmes remain relevant to learner needs, including academic and labour market needs. The provider should have a detailed procedure for this purpose. This procedure should provide for regular evaluation of each programme, at least once every five years, or as the Council may direct from time to time.

3.4.2 A periodic programme evaluation may be carried out on an individual programme, or on a group of related programmes. For example, there may be a combined evaluation of all programmes in a department, or in a school or faculty of the provider. Such an evaluation should be undertaken in two phases - an internal phase and an external phase.

3.4.3 The internal phase of a periodic evaluation should commence with a self-evaluation of the unit concerned (e.g., programme, group of programmes, department, school, etc.). This

should be conducted in accordance with established international best practice regarding self-evaluation in higher education and training institutions. This internal phase of the periodic evaluation should consist of a self-study undertaken by all academic staff involved in the programme, learner representatives, graduates of the programme and others with close involvement in the programme. This would include those involved in the provision of support services, such as library and information services and counselling services. Provider staff not directly involved in the programme(s) may also participate in the self-evaluation. Consultations with outside stakeholders and any necessary market research and review of recent research findings in the discipline concerned should form part of the self-study. Self-evaluation must include an assessment of the learning and an evaluation of the services related to the programme(s), (see Sections 3.6 and 3.7 below). The Council will, in due course, provide further guidelines and offer training for providers regarding self-evaluation.

- 3.4.4 The self-evaluation will culminate in a Self Evaluation Report, setting out the findings of the self-evaluation, including an evaluation of the programme strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The provider should send a copy of this internal, self-evaluation report to the Council.
- 3.4.5 Following the self-evaluation, the provider should arrange to have an external evaluation conducted by a group of experts from outside the institution, including stakeholders and persons competent to make national and international comparisons in relation to the programme(s). The external evaluation should be conducted in accordance with established international best practice regarding external quality evaluation in higher education and training institutions. The external expert group should review the Self Evaluation Report and conduct its own evaluation of the programme(s). The external evaluation element should be a process of co-operation, consultation and advice between the independent experts from outside and the relevant players from within. In addition to academic peers, external experts may be drawn from the social partners, professional associations, learners and alumni of the provider. Personnel from the Council will not normally be involved as participants in the external group. The roles and responsibilities of the external experts, together with criteria for their selection and protocols to be followed should be clearly documented.
- 3.4.6 The external evaluation will culminate in an External Evaluation Report setting out the findings of the external evaluation review group. The provider should be given an opportunity to comment on the final draft of the External Evaluation Report, before the report is formally submitted for consideration and action by the provider. The provider should forward a copy of the final report to the Council for consideration. The Council may make recommendations to the provider arising from the Self-evaluation Report, the External Evaluation Report, or both. The provider shall implement these recommendations.
- 3.4.7 The provider must have a formal procedure for considering and acting upon the findings of the self-evaluation and the external evaluation, together with a formal procedure for monitoring the implementation of the changes adopted as a result of the findings. The Council and the provider shall agree a timeframe for the implementation of the findings.
- 3.4.8 The provider should have a detailed schedule for the evaluation of all programmes of higher education and training provided.

3.5 *Procedures for selection, appointment, appraisal and development of staff*

The provider should review the effectiveness of its human resources policies and procedures regularly. This will in particular relate to the procedures for selection, appointment, appraisal and development of staff involved at any level in the delivery or support of a programme. A programme for staff development, with appropriate resources allocated to it, should be a priority.

3.6 *Procedures for evaluating premises, equipment and facilities*

The provider should regularly review the effectiveness of its premises, equipment and facilities, to ensure their continuing adequacy and effectiveness in relation to the programmes of higher education and training provided. This review should focus on their contribution to successful learning by learners on the programmes.

3.7 *Procedures for evaluating services related to programmes of higher education and training*

The provider should regularly review the effectiveness of all academic and other support services related to its programmes of higher education and training. The support services to be included in these procedures should include, but not necessarily be limited to:

- library, information and computing services;
- learner support services (both academic and non-academic);
- administrative services;
- technical services;
- premises servicing and maintenance services; and
- services aimed at communicating the provider's mission and operations to learners, potential learners, other institutions, employers, professional bodies and the general public.

This review should focus on the contribution of each of the identified services and facilities to successful learning by learners on the programme. In the case of each of the services and facilities the questions to be addressed are, “How do we know the service or facility is effective?” and “How could we improve it to make it more effective?”

3.8 *Procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures*

The provider should have in place a systematic mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness of its quality assurance procedures. This should include, but not necessarily be limited to, provision for periodic reviews by the Council under *Section 28(4)* of the Act.

PART C

OBTAINING COUNCIL AGREEMENT FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

1. *Process for Obtaining Council Agreement of Provider Quality Assurance Procedures*

- 1.1 The Act requires providers to establish procedures for quality assurance as soon as practicable after the commencement of the relevant part of the Act (11 June, 2001). This requirement applies equally to providers where the Council has validated one or more programmes and to providers to whom authority to make awards has been delegated. The procedures to be established under the Act must have regard to existing procedures, if any. The Act provides that the provider shall agree its quality assurance procedures with the Council.
- 1.2 Providers intending to submit their programmes to the Council for validation are advised to submit details of their quality assurance policy and procedures, in advance of their first submission for programme validation. The Quality Assurance Procedures Submission should address all matters referred to in Part B of this document. It should include a quality assurance manual and such other documentation as is required to demonstrate compliance with Council requirements, in particular in relation to the experience of the operation of the quality assurance procedures. A summary statement of intentions will not be sufficient.
- 1.3 Six hard copies of the Quality Assurance Procedures Submission should be submitted to the Council, together with an electronic copy in industry standard format. Providers are requested to consult Council staff in relation to compatible formats.
- 1.4 On receipt of a Quality Assurance Procedures Submission, the Council will evaluate the documentation and will conduct a review of the effectiveness of the procedures. The Quality Assurance Procedures Effectiveness Review will include a meeting with the provider, to discuss the procedures with appropriate personnel and to verify from provider records the effective operation of the procedures. The Council will issue further information relating to this process in due course.
- 1.5 Cases may arise where a provider seeks validation of a programme, or delegated authority to make awards, before it is practicable for the provider to establish formal quality assurance procedures and agree them with the Council. In such cases, the Council may, at the time of programme validation or delegation of authority, as the case may be, determine the time-scale for agreeing the procedures. In the interim period preceding agreement, validation of programmes, or delegation of authority to make awards, will be on a conditional basis, pending Council agreement in relation to the quality assurance procedures. In the event of the provider not establishing agreed procedures before any deadline that the Council has specified, the Council will consider if it will initiate a review under *Section 26* or *Section 30* of the Act, in order to review the validation or delegation of authority concerned, with a view to withdrawal thereof.
- 1.6 Conditional validation, or conditional delegated authority to make awards, in advance of formal agreement on quality assurance procedures, will be granted only in the case of providers who provided courses standing approved by NCEA at the time of its dissolution,

11 June 2001. Other providers, not providing such approved courses at that time, must agree their quality assurance procedures before submitting a programme for Council validation.

- 1.7 The Council expects a provider to have a general set of quality assurance procedures applying to all academic activities. At the time of an initial application for validation or delegation, the Council will evaluate, as a discrete process, the general quality assurance procedures. Some adaptation or elaboration of the general set may be appropriate in the case of individual programmes submitted for validation, or for the grant of delegated authority to make a particular award or set of awards. These variations from the general set of procedures will be evaluated by the Council as part of the process of its consideration of the programme concerned for validation, or for the grant of delegated authority in relation to the programme, as the case may be.
- 1.8 The following sequence and schedule of processes is suggested for agreeing quality assurance procedures with the Council.

| Type of Provider | Target date for applying for Council agreement | Comments |
|--|---|---|
| Recognised institution | Immediately following first validation of a programme under Section 25 of the Act | Earlier application is encouraged. |
| Recognised institution with delegated authority | Immediate | Required to be done as soon “as practicable” (Section 28(1)(b) of the Act). |
| Recognised institution intending to make an early application for delegated authority | Either: (a) immediately following first validation of a programme under Section 25 of the Act <i>or</i> (b) as part of delegated authority application | Agreement of QA procedures can form part of delegated authority evaluation. However, if programmes require Council validation before delegation of authority is granted, agreement of QA procedures should be secured separately, as soon as the first programme is validated. |
| Recognised institution intending to apply for delegated authority, but wishing to have programmes validated by Council in the meantime | Immediately following first validation of a programme under Section 25 of the Act | Earlier application is encouraged. |
| Other provider already approved for HETAC awards under Section 21(4) of the Act | Immediately following first validation of a programme under Section 25 of the Act | Earlier application is encouraged. |
| New provider | Before submission of first programme for validation | Council evaluation of QA and learner assessment procedures will precede acceptance of first application for validation |

APPENDIX 1

Section 28 of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 (No.26 of 1999)

28. —(1) Subject to *subsection (6)*, as soon as practicable after the commencement of this Part and at such other times as the Council after consultation with the provider concerned thinks fit—

(a) a provider of a programme of education and training whose programme has been validated by the Council under *section 25*, or

(b) a recognised institution to which authority has been delegated under *section 29* to make awards in respect of a programme of higher education and training,

shall, having regard to existing procedures, if any, establish procedures for quality assurance for the purpose of further improving and maintaining the quality of education and training which is provided, organised or procured by that provider as part of the programme concerned and shall agree those procedures with the Council.

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of *subsection (1)*, the procedures established under that subsection shall include—

(a) evaluation at regular intervals and as directed from time to time by the Council of the programme of education and training concerned, including evaluation by persons who are competent to make national and international comparisons in that respect,

(b) evaluation by learners of that programme, and

(c) evaluation of services related to that programme,

and shall provide for the publication in such form and manner as the Council thinks fit of findings arising out of the application of those procedures.

(3) The Council shall consider the findings arising out of the application of procedures established under *subsection (1)* and may make recommendations to the provider of the programme concerned, which that provider shall implement.

(4) The Council shall, from time to time and as directed from time to time by the Authority, in consultation with the provider of a programme of education and training, review the effectiveness of the procedures established under *subsection (1)* and the implementation by the provider concerned of the findings arising out of the application of those procedures.

(5) The Council shall—

(a) report to the Authority on, and

(b) publish in such form and manner as the Authority thinks fit,

the results of a review under *subsection (4)* and shall include in a report or publication the views, if any, of the provider of the programme concerned.

(6) Where a programme of higher education and training is organised or procured, in whole or in part, by a provider (“the first mentioned provider”) and is provided, in whole or in part, by another provider (“the second mentioned provider”), the first mentioned provider shall, in addition to the requirements specified in *subsection 1*), in so far as the procedures to be established under that subsection relate to that part of the programme provided by the second mentioned provider, agree those procedures with the second mentioned provider.

APPENDIX 2

Glossary

Access - the process by which learners may commence a programme of education and training, having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence acquired.

Assessment - the total range of written, oral and practical tests, to include projects and portfolios, used to decide on the learner's progress in a programme unit, or module.

Assessment Criteria - descriptions of what the learner is expected to do, in order to demonstrate that a learning outcome has been achieved.

Authorised Award - an award made by a recognised institution under authority delegated by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council.

Award - that conferred, granted or given by an awarding body and which records that a learner has acquired a standard of knowledge, skill or competence.

Awarding Body - a body that makes awards.

Continuous Assessment - tests taken within the normal academic period as part of the final assessment.

Delegated Authority - power given to a provider to make awards, under *section 19* of the Act, in respect of specified programmes.

Governing Body - this includes a board of directors and any other equivalent body of the provider. It may also refer to a sole trader.

Higher Education and Training - education and training, other than primary or post-primary education and training, which is determined by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland under *section 10* of the Act to be higher education and training.

Learner - a person who is acquiring, or who has acquired knowledge, skill or competence.

Learning Outcomes - statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning. Learning outcomes are distinct from the aims of learning in that they are concerned with the achievements of the learner rather than the overall intentions of the teacher. Learning outcomes should be accompanied by appropriate assessment criteria, which can be used to judge that the expected learning outcomes have been achieved. Learning outcomes, together with assessment criteria, specify the minimum requirements for the award of credit, while marking is based on attainment above or below the minimum requirements for the award of credit. Credit accumulation and transfer is facilitated if clear learning outcomes are available to indicate with precision the achievements for which the credit will be awarded.

Module - a self-contained, formally structured learning experience with a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

National Framework of Qualifications - the single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between all education and training awards.

NCEA - the National Council for Educational Awards, (1972-2001). The Council is the legal successor to this body.

Programme - is any process by which learners may acquire knowledge, skill or competence and includes courses of study.

Progression - the process by which learners may transfer from one programme of education and training to another programme where each programme is of a higher level than the preceding programme.

Provider - a person who, or body which, provides, organises or procures a programme of education and training.

Recognised Institutions - the Institutes of Technology governed by the Regional Technical Colleges Act, 1992.

Stakeholder - any person or party who has an interest in the Council, including learners, parents, graduates, staff members, the broader academic and professional community, government, business and industrial organisations, local and national communities.

The Act - the Qualification (Education and Training) Act, 1999

The Authority - the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.

The Council - the Higher Education and Training Awards Council.

Transfer - the process by which learners may transfer from one programme of education and training to another programme, having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence acquired.

Validation - this is a process by which an awarding body shall satisfy itself that a learner may attain knowledge, skill or competence for the purpose of an award made by the awarding body.