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Introduction

The Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN) was established in 2003. It provides a forum for the principal national stakeholders involved in the quality assurance of higher education to discuss quality in a national context, to work towards the development of a common national position on key quality assurance issues and to inform the debate on those same issues at a European level.

In October 2006, the IHEQN hosted its inaugural conference, which was titled *'And never the twain shall meet'? Exploring quality assurance and professional accreditation/ recognition in a changing world.*

The following short update paper provides an overview of the manner in which the IHEQN attempted to address the objectives of the conference, and makes reference to related developments that have taken place in the intervening year. The paper also invites suggestions from professional bodies and higher education institutions for further initiatives that could contribute to closer collaboration and improved communication.

The IHEQN
November 2007

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Addressing the Conference Objectives

1. Introduction

'*And Never the Twain Shall Meet'? Exploring Quality Assurance and Professional Accreditation / Recognition in a Changing World* was the first conference of the Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN), and was held in October 2006. The aims of the conference were identified by the Network as being:

- to foster better understanding of professional accreditation/recognition and higher education quality assurance processes
- to explore opportunities for the closer alignment of professional accreditation/ recognition and higher education quality assurance processes
- to identify further communication opportunities and vehicles for communication between higher education institutions and professional bodies.

These aims were established by the Network in the context of the significant and increasing interaction between professional bodies and higher education institutions in the delivery and accreditation / recognition of professional education and training, coupled with the national and European contexts within which they co-exist.

2. Addressing the Conference Objectives

The following section describes the manner in which the objectives of the IHEQN's conference were addressed during its conference. It also makes reference to further developments of relevance. A detailed overview of the conference presentations, workshops and concluding address are included in Appendix 1.

2.1 *Objective: to foster better understanding of professional accreditation / recognition and higher education quality assurance processes*

The IHEQN members considered it important for the representatives of professional bodies and higher education and training institutions attending the conference, to be provided with an overview of the environments in which each operates. As a result, members produced and circulated a 'Context Paper' prior to the event. In itself this was considered to have aided mutual understanding and its content was used as a reference point throughout the conference.

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The context paper is included in Appendix 2 of this document and is available on the IHEQN's website – www.iheqn.ie – as a permanent source of information. The Network invites those bodies and institutions circulated, to make the paper available to colleagues, where considered helpful.

The conference workshops aimed to develop the understanding of higher education institutions and professional bodies regarding issues of mutual interest, including the use of learning outcomes in programme design and development and, the centrality of quality assurance to the recognition of certain categories of professional awards through the National Framework of Qualifications.

2.2 *to explore opportunities for the closer alignment of professional accreditation/ recognition and higher education quality assurance processes*

A theme throughout the conference presentations and within its workshops was the issue of how closer alignment of professional accreditation / recognition and higher education quality assurance processes could be achieved. From a European policy perspective the possibility that professional qualifications could be put into what was termed the 'general system' and that alignment might be addressed through European Quality Assurance forums was suggested. The impact of regulation was highlighted as a national policy development which raises possibilities for the formulation of joint accreditation processes and common standards, consistent with the National Framework of Qualifications.

The important role of research in terms of informing the development of closer alignment between professional accreditation / regulation and higher education quality assurance was also emphasised. It was considered particularly useful in the context of influencing any emerging models of accreditation and benchmarking the processes of professional bodies and higher education institutions.

The conference case studies illustrated specific examples of collaboration between Irish and UK accreditation / recognition and quality assurance processes. These case studies made reference to matters such as the sequencing of reviews; the benefits which arose from closer collaboration and avoidance of duplicated processes; the impact of increased communication between professional bodies and higher education institutions; and, the role that information technology can play in aiding the closer alignment of processes. Within the workshops, further evidence of symbiosis was identified, whilst the differences in processes that exist were acknowledged. There was however broad agreement that professional bodies and education institutions should develop their practice in the context of European and indeed international developments.

As a further contribution to this topic, the IHEQN has appended its *General Principles of Good Practice and Principles of Good Practice for the conduct of Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement Reviews* (Appendix 3) which were drawn up collaboratively by members.

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The IHEQN would like to invite professional bodies to review these principles and to consider the extent to which they correspond with the purpose of, and practice underpinning, professional body reviews. Where there are similarities, a closer alignment of practice may be appropriate. Where there are differences, the principles at least provide an indication of the responsibilities that higher education institutions must address in the course of academic review.

2.3 *to identify further communication opportunities and vehicles for communication between higher education institutions and professional bodies*

The importance of fostering better communication between professional bodies and education institutions was a central topic for the conference. Again, the value that could be gained from reviewing examples of international good practice was emphasised, particularly within the workshop sessions. The apparent willingness of representatives from professional bodies and education institutions to engage in more effective communication was also noteworthy.

Two professional body representative organisations provided presentations at the IHEQN conference. The first is a national network, the Irish Inter-Professional Association (IIPA)[1], the second is a UK based international network, the Professional Associations Research Network (PARN)[2], which includes a number of Irish members. The IIPA was formed primarily to meet the information needs of a range of professional bodies in the light of ongoing legislative developments in Europe. PARN produces research on various aspects of the activities of professional bodies and holds workshops and conferences on an ongoing basis.

Despite the existence of these important networks there is a generally acknowledged lack of central representation of national professional bodies. This is perhaps primarily a consequence of the large number of professional bodies operating in the State across a wide spectrum of disciplines and interests. As a result, the IHEQN considers that opportunities for communication between these bodies and higher education institutions, other than in one to one circumstances, appear currently difficult to create.

In order to contribute to improved communication, the IHEQN has compiled a database of contacts in higher education institutions and professional bodies[3]. This listing is made up of registrars, directors and heads of quality assurance offices in higher education institutions. In the case of professional bodies, CEOs and directors, along with details of individuals responsible for education, have been listed. The purpose of the database is to provide an easy reference point for higher education institutions and professional bodies who wish to diversify and widen their range of contacts. The list is not definitive and the IHEQN would be pleased to receive any additions or amendments.

[1] For further information on the Irish Inter Professional Association, contact John Fish at johngeorgefish@eircom.net
[2] For further information on PARN, see their website, www.parn.org.uk
[3] This database is accessible on the IHEQN's website, www.iheqn.ie, under the HE / Professional Body Contacts section of the navigation bar

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3 . Conclusion

The Network hopes - considering the openness of participants to the stated objectives of the conference - that professional bodies and higher education institutions will become increasingly informed about each other's environments and seek to identify similarities in objectives. As a further development of this understanding, the IHEQN invites professional bodies and academic institutions to give consideration to how accreditation / recognition and quality assurance practices can be more closely aligned.

The IHEQN itself was developed not only to provide a forum in which higher education bodies involved in quality assurance could discuss developments, but also to provide a means for other organisations and networks to communicate with its members collectively. The development of a similar national forum for professional bodies, through the development of the networks mentioned above or through an alternative means, could greatly assist communication between professional bodies and higher education institutions and contribute to the advancement of the objectives included in this paper, along with other initiatives of mutual benefit.

The IHEQN very much welcomes feedback from professional bodies and higher education institutions, regarding how the objectives referred to above can be further met. All comments canbecommunicated to the IHEQN via its Secretary by emailing info@iheqn.ie.

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Appendix 1: Overview of Conference Presentations & Speaker Profiles

Morning Plenary Sessions

Opening Address

The Chair of the IHEQN, Dr Frank McMahon[4] , opened the conference and chaired the morning plenary sessions. In his opening he welcomed delegates and noted the diversity of professional bodies and higher education institutions and agencies that were represented. He provided a brief overview of the origins and functions of the IHEQN and of the aims of its first conference.

The Impact of European and National Developments on Professional Accreditation/Recognition and Higher Education Quality Assurance Processes

Mr Howard Davies, Senior Adviser to the European University Association spoke first on this topic and focussed primarily on European developments. He provided a summary of recent EU legislation. He spoke in detail about what he termed the three qualifications frameworks: the Bologna Process, the European Qualifications Framework and the Directive on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications 2005/36/EC. He explained to delegates the EU Commission's involvement in all of these areas and its agenda for future development in the professions and higher education and training. He concluded by identifying the manner in which he felt that the conference theme of 'the twain meeting' may be realised, through, for instance, the possibility that all professional qualifications would be put into the 'general system' in the future and that European Quality Assurance Forums may become the tool to address the alignment of professional qualifications with the Bologna Framework.

Dr Bryan Maguire, the Director of Academic Affairs in the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) set these European developments in a national context. He began by providing an overview of the academic and professional environments in Ireland. He indicated the changes which have impacted upon professional bodies and higher education institutions - for instance, the increased regulation of the professions and the introduction of the National Framework of Qualifications – and the manner in which they interact with each other. He considered the areas of commonality between professional accreditation / recognition and quality assurance processes and acknowledged that tensions can exist in their operation. He concluded by positing some key questions regarding the possibilities surrounding common standards and joint professional / academic accreditation processes.

[4] Dr Frank McMahon, Director of Academic Affairs in the Dublin Institute of Technology was Chair of the IHEQN in 2006. The Chair of the IHEQN is rotated amongst its member organisations on an annual basis.

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A Strategy for Improving Relations between Professional Bodies and Higher Education: Building on a Research Enriched Network

Professor Andy Friedman is the Managing Director of the Professional Associations Research Network (PARN) a UK based Network of professional bodies, which includes a number of Irish professional bodies amongst its members. He is also Professor of Management and Economics at the University of Bristol. Professor Friedman introduced PARN's activities, which include member conferences, workshops and information services. He informed delegates that PARN has conducted numerous research projects regarding professional body activities and he provided an overview of research information it had gathered during these projects on accreditation and on relations between professional bodies and higher education institutions. He considered that these relations could be the subject of further research that could address, for instance, the development of models of accreditation and the benchmarking of educational institutions as well as professional bodies.

Case Studies of Collaborative Practice between Professional Bodies and Higher Education Institutions

Case Study of Collaboration 1

Mr Denis McGrath the Registrar of Engineers Ireland and Professor Philip O'Kane, Professor of Civil Engineering and Environmental Engineering in UCC presented the first case study of collaborative practice. Mr McGrath described the introduction by Engineers Ireland of outcomes-based accreditation criteria, the process of implementation of the accreditation criteria developed, the manner in which a site visit to an educational institution is conducted and the production of the subsequent review report.

Professor O'Kane provided an understanding of the accreditation process from the higher education institution's perspective. He alluded to the accreditation visit that had taken place in 2001 in which the university had combined its higher education quality assurance requirements with its professional accreditation review. The university separated out these processes in 2005 - whilst holding them relatively closely together - in order to reduce any unnecessary duplication of activity and to provide each review with an appropriate environment in which to take place. Professor O'Kane illustrated some of the IT tools developed in the university to manage its review processes, including the tracking of the delivery of learning outcomes across the learning areas identified by Engineers Ireland. He concluded by identifying 'the dialectic of the universities' and his perceptions of the contradictions that exist within that dialectic.

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Case Study of Collaboration 2

Mr Michael Carpenter of the British Psychological Society (BPS) and Ms Patricia Le Rolland, formerly Assistant Director of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) jointly presented the second case study of collaboration.

Both speakers opened with an overview of the role and functions of their organisations. Ms Le Rolland informed delegates that the QAA was established in 1997 to provide an integrated quality assurance service for UK higher education. She described its function as being to safeguard the standards of higher education in the UK by 'reviewing standards and quality, and providing reference points that help to define clear and explicit standards'.

Mr Michael Carpenter indicated that the BPS was established in 1901 and has an extensive membership. He stated that accreditation is one of its key activities and that it currently accredits over 700 undergraduate programmes and over 100 postgraduate programmes.

The collaborative work undertaken by the QAA and the BPS led to the BPS contributing to the QAA Major Review process. The outputs of their collaboration were indicated as including the opportunity for the BPS to understand and inform the Major Review process and to identify common elements of review conducted by the QAA and the BPS. It was reported that universities were positive about the collaboration having taken place and that they acknowledged some reduction in the burden of review.

Afternoon Workshops

Workshop A: Higher education quality assurance and professional body accreditation / recognition processes: Principles for development arising out of case study presentations

Workshop A was facilitated by the speakers who presented the case studies i.e., Mr Denis McGrath, Professor Philip O'Kane, Mr Michael Carpenter and Ms Patricia Le Rolland. The session was chaired by Dr Tom Duff of the Dublin Institute of Technology and the Rapporteur was Ms Bernadette Farrell of the Union of Students in Ireland.

The following key discussion points from this session were recorded by the Rapporteur and reported back to the final plenary session.

- While professional body accreditation / recognition and higher education quality assurance processes are seen as separate and with different objectives, there is a symbiosis
- More harmonising of (i) the timing of review events and (ii) the documentation for review visits would be beneficial

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- It is important to take on board international good practice and to have this inform any proposed closer alignment of professional body accreditation / recognition and higher education quality assurance processes
- There is a need to emphasise the *improvements* that arise out of review processes in order to reinforce the importance of undertaking these measures.

Workshop B: The impact of the introduction of 'learning outcomes' on programme design and accreditation / recognition processes

Workshop B was facilitated by Dr Anne-Marie Ryan, Chief Education Officer of An Bord Altranais and Dr Gary Brown, Head of Department of Nursing and Health Care Studies at the Institute of Technology Tralee. The session was chaired by Mr Diarmuid Hegarty of the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) and the Rapporteur was Dr Jim Murray of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.

The following key discussion points from this session were recorded by the Rapporteur and reported back to the final plenary session.

- Learning outcomes provide clarity for the learner about what is expected of them to enter a certain profession
- They open up possibilities for flexible learning paths
- Learning outcomes make it easier to design programmes
- There is tension between subject specific and generic outcomes; does this result in lack of space for creativity or learning for life?
- The design of effective learning outcomes is a skill or science. If the design is wrong, there is no benefit
- An ideal model is to have agreed standards between academic and professional 'guilds' and to develop co-accreditation
- Learning outcomes are more difficult to use than inputs
- Learning outcomes have huge implications in terms of developing new and suitable assessment and teaching strategies (it was noted that teaching is often left out of debate).
- Learning outcomes help learners to take control of their own learning; but guidance/teaching is needed for this
- Learning outcomes put more focus on the issue of transferable skills than was the case in the past.

Workshop C: Strengthening communication between professional bodies and higher education institutions

Workshop C was facilitated by Mr John Fish, Secretary of the Irish Inter-Professional Association (IPA). The session was chaired by Dr Diarmuid O'Callaghan of the Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology[5] and the Rapporteur was Dr Padraig Walsh,

[5] The Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology changed its name to the Institutes of Technology Ireland in June 2007.

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Chief Executive of the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB).

The following key discussion points from this session were recorded by the Rapporteur and reported back to the final plenary session:

- There are a large number of professional bodies operating in the State with little coordinated communication
- Benefits exist in increasing communication between professional bodies themselves and between professional bodies and higher education institutions
- An openness to increased communication was perceived on the part of both professional bodies and higher education institutions
- The continuous professional development agenda is critical to the development of professional bodies and is an area of potential increased communication
- The development of a database of contacts in professional and academic organisations was considered crucial to the development of increased communication.

Workshop D: The processes and quality assurance requirements associated with the inclusion in / alignment of professional qualifications with the National Framework of Qualifications

Workshop D was facilitated by Mr Ronan O'Loughlin, Director of Education and Training in the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland (ICAI) and Ms Mary Sheridan, Head of Recognition and Information Management in the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC). The session was chaired by Mr Lewis Purser and the Rapporteur was Mr John O'Connor of the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA).

The following key discussion points from this session were recorded by the Rapporteur and reported back to the final plenary session.

- There was recognition of the significant opportunity for professional bodies resulting from the policies of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland on inclusion in or alignment of professional qualifications with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)
- The ICAI and other professional bodies present, identified recognition and transparency of their awards and improved international mobility for their members as important advantages of having their awards aligned with the NFQ
- The flexibility of the assessment procedure used by HETAC in considering applications from a diverse range of professional bodies was welcomed. Equally, it was recognised by all that quality assurance procedures, and their effectiveness in terms of securing standards of the awards, were central to achieving and maintaining inclusion/alignment of awards in the NFQ.
- There was a suggestion that clarity was necessary when considering 'aligned' awards for the purposes of access, transfer and progression. While the consensus was that recognition of an award was not affected by whether an award was included in or aligned with the NFQ, some further direction was considered necessary.

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Afternoon Plenary Session

Summary of Conference Outcomes

The conference was concluded by Dr Anthony Walsh, Chief Executive of the Institute of Bankers in Ireland (IBI) since 1999. Prior to joining the IBI Dr Walsh was Professor of Accounting and Dean of the Business School in DCU. His links with higher education institutions have recently extended to UCD as, in 2006 it was announced that the IBI would establish a School of Professional Finance, which UCD will designate as the first external school that it recognises.

Dr Walsh commenced by articulating the opportunities and threats that a professional body operating in Ireland today is exposed to, and the great benefits that can be experienced when the correct strategic decisions are made. He discussed the IBI within this context, indicating that whilst it has doubled its membership in the last five years and trebled its student body, it equally experiences the challenges that face all professional bodies. The remarkable growth of the IBI was, he stated, the result of the exceptional growth in the economy leading to a demand for professional manpower; the increase in the 20 to 50 age group who are more likely to combine work and study; the relative lack of part-time provision in higher education institutions; and, the ongoing need for new specialisms within the knowledge economy.

Dr Walsh continued by indicating some of the challenges that he had referred to earlier in his talk. The European model for the professions is based on public sector regulation which could lead to the end of self-regulating professions in Ireland. He went on to identify further challenges as being the internationalisation of the professions and the globalisation of education itself. He stated that excellent quality assurance and the development of national frameworks were essential elements in order to compete globally in this environment. In the light of this he welcomed the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland's recent policy document on the inclusion in or alignment of the awards of certain professional bodies with the National Framework of Qualifications.

The following excerpt is taken from Dr Walsh's concluding talk, in which he states the great benefits which he believes Ireland has in addressing the challenges he outlined and the key points for follow-up which he identified during the course of the day's proceedings:

We in the professional sector sometimes take for granted the range of resources underpinning higher, professional and further education in Ireland:

- *We have a national qualification authority that is a leader in its field*
- *We have a higher education sector with a formidable international reputation and a track record of working with professional bodies*

- *And, we have HETAC and FETAC, whose achievements are the envy of Europe and who support validation and accreditation of professional education, in a way that does not happen in many other counties.*

But I can assure you that the value of these resources comes into sharp focus when you step on to the international arena.

These resources, combined with July's policy document, create an opportunity for professional bodies, the higher education institutions and awarding bodies to work together for the public good. That's why today's conference, which brings us all together to discuss issues of mutual interest, is so valuable. But, to exploit its full value, we need to follow-up on a number of areas:

- *It is very clear that enhanced co-operation between the higher education sector and the professional sector would best be explored in the context of European developments in accreditation, qualification frameworks and quality assurance. However, this may not be as simple as it appears, given the discontinuities in the developments already highlighted today. And we should not be blind to developments in the wider world, especially in the US and Asia*

- *In the next few years, co-operation is likely to focus particularly on inclusion and alignment of awards of professional bodies to the National Framework of Qualifications*

- *Separation of educational awards and professional designations is the preferred model and we began to understand some of the implications of this today*

- *We also gained insight into practical models and general principles applicable to:*
  - Alignment/ inclusion of professional qualifications in the NFQ
  - Accreditation of academic awards by professional bodies and
  - Innovative approaches to aligning AQA and professional accreditation.

- *We also learned more about PARN's research on how professions and academic institutions regard each other, barriers to their co-operation and practical ideas for overcoming these barriers*

- *A research project on professional body accreditation practices and the formulation of an ideal model was suggested*

- *The final example of follow-up action I will highlight is the proposal for a more broadly-based forum for professional bodies. One advantage of such a forum would be to facilitate communications between the awarding bodies, the higher education sector and the professional sector.*

I have no doubt that, if we are diligent in following up these and other issues raised today, we will have begun a process that will greatly strengthen the relationship between the higher education sector and professional bodies to the benefit of both. There is, in my opinion, a real opportunity to make Ireland an international hub for professional education and we should work together to bring this about and in the process further stimulate both Ireland's economic well-being and the health of its civil society.

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Conference Speaker Profiles[6]

Frank McMahon

Dr Frank McMahon, a Dubliner by birth, graduated from UCD where he obtained the degrees of BComm and MBA. Thereafter he studied at the University of Sheffield where he obtained a Doctorate in Education. He has worked for DIT for almost 30 years and is currently its Director of Academic Affairs. In addition, Frank has served on the Board of the CAO for the past seven years and he is currently Chairman of the International Education Board of Ireland.

Howard Davies

Mr Howard Davies is head of European development at London Metropolitan University. Since 2002 he has worked in Brussels representing the University's interests to the Commission, Council of Ministers and Parliament. He is a Senior Adviser to the European University Association (EUA) and a UK Bologna Promoter.

Bryan Maguire

Dr Bryan Maguire is Director of Academic Affairs at the Higher Education and Training Awards Council of Ireland (HETAC). A graduate of University College Dublin and the University of California, San Francisco, Bryan was formerly a lecturer in psychology at the University of Wales Bangor, and Head of School of Creative Technologies at Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Ireland. A Chartered Psychologist, he is an Associate Fellow of the Psychological Society of Ireland and of the British Psychological Society. He is also a member of the Chartered Management Institute.

Andy Friedman

Professor Andy Friedman is the managing director of the Professional Associations Research Network (PARN). He is also Professor of Management and Economics in the Department of Management at the University of Bristol. Through PARN, he has carried out research projects leading to PARN books on continuing professional development, governance, member services, ethical codes and routes to membership.

Patricia Le Rolland

Ms Patricia Le Rolland has worked in the public sector for more than 30 years. She joined the Postgraduate Medical Education and Training Board (PMETB) in September 2006 from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), a UK-wide body

[6] The following speaker profiles were compiled in October 2006 and were accurate at that time.

responsible for promoting the standards and quality of higher education. As Assistant Director, Patricia led a team which organised external peer reviews of NHS-funded provision in England. She also liaised with external organisations, including professional bodies, in relation to health services and social care for the QAA.

Patricia's role in PMETB is to lead the development of a quality assurance framework. This framework is to assure and improve standards and quality of all postgraduate medical education in the UK.

Michael Carpenter

Mr Michael Carpenter is currently Membership and Qualifications Directorate Manager at the British Psychological Society (BPS), with responsibility for all matters relating to standards, including professional accreditation, examinations, membership and CPD. He is also responsible for leading the Society's work to achieve the statutory regulation of psychologists in the UK. Prior to working for the BPS he was Director of Qualifications for the Institution of Chemical Engineers - a UK based professional body that was responsible for accrediting engineering degree courses internationally.

Denis McGrath

Mr Denis McGrath, Chartered Engineer, Fellow of the Institution of Engineers of Ireland, graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering degree in Agricultural Engineering from UCD in 1967 and an MLitt (by research) on engineering education, from Trinity College Dublin in 1995. After graduation, Denis worked as a Research Officer with the Agricultural Institute in Ireland before becoming Head of the Agricultural Engineering Dept at the then Tralee Technical College in 1972. Denis was appointed Assistant Registrar for Engineering at the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA) in 1975. During his years at the NCEA he oversaw the validation of the engineering National Certificate, Diploma and Degree programmes in the Regional Technical Colleges in Ireland. He joined Engineers Ireland as Registrar in March 2000.

Philip O'Kane

Professor Philip O'Kane is a Professor of Civil Engineering and Head of Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering in University College Cork (UCC). He is a former Dean of the Faculty of Engineering in UCC and NUI.

Philip is a former Section President of the European Geophysical Society - one of largest scientific societies in Europe. He is also a visiting Professor at UNESCO-IHE in Delft where he lectures each year.

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Anne-Marie Ryan

Dr Anne-Marie Ryan, was appointed Chief Education Officer to An Bord Altranais in 2001. She trained as a general nurse at St. Laurence's Hospital (Richmond) Dublin and specialised in oncological and surgical nursing for twelve years prior to developing an interest in nurse education.

On completing a degree in nurse education Anne-Marie was a Nurse Tutor and Principal Nurse Tutor in Beaumont Hospital, Dublin and has also held lecturer and course leader positions in University College Dublin and the University of Dublin, Trinity College Dublin. She recently obtained a doctoral degree from the School of Education Studies at Dublin City University.

Gary Brown

Dr Gary Brown is an experienced clinical nurse, nurse manager, academic and academic manager and is therefore in a position to view the accreditation debate from both the academic and professional perspectives. He has worked in a variety of clinical settings and in nurse management positions to Director of Nursing and corporate level. He has also participated in nurse education since becoming a nurse tutor in 1982 and is currently Head of the Department of Nursing and Health Care Studies at the Institute of Technology, Tralee.

John Fish

Mr John Fish is a solicitor and retired partner of Arthur Cox. He is currently acting as a consultant and is the Secretary of the Irish Inter Professional Association (IIPA).

John is a former Council member of the Law Society of Ireland and continues to be involved in a variety of committees within the Law Society of Ireland. He is also a former President of the Council of the Bars and Law Societies of the European Union (CCBE).

Ronan O'Loughlin

Ronan O'Loughlin has been Director of Education and Training at ICAI since 2003. He qualified as a chartered accountant with Stokes Kennedy Crowley (now KPMG) in 1981 and spent many years working overseas in various accounting education projects. He joined ICAI from the Irish Taxation Institute where he was Director of Education. During 2005 Ronan was responsible for managing the ICAI accreditation process with HETAC which resulted in the ACA qualification being accredited by HETAC at Level 9 in the National Framework of Qualifications. Ronan is a fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland and an associate member of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants.

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Mary Sheridan

Ms Mary Sheridan is Head of Recognition with the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC). Amongst her responsibilities is the recognition of awards of professional bodies. She previously held the role of Head of Standards Management in HETAC and oversaw the development of standards in a number of fields of learning.

Prior to joining HETAC, she worked in the area of tax consultancy with KPMG and PWC. She is a fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants and a member of the Irish Taxation Institute.

Anthony Walsh

Dr Anthony Walsh has been Chief Executive of the Institute of Bankers in Ireland since 1999. Before that, he spent almost 20 years at Dublin City University (DCU), where he was Professor of Accounting and Dean of the Business School. He is a fellow of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA, London) and holds an MSc in Administrative Sciences and a PhD from City University London.

Anthony is/has been an external examiner and QA assessor for many UK and Irish universities, colleges and professional bodies. He has also been a member of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA). He is a member of the Qualified Financial Adviser Board and the Confederation of Financial Services Institutes in Ireland. He was a founding member of the Association of Compliance Officers in Ireland.

In 2006, it was announced that the Institute of Bankers in Ireland will establish a School of Professional Finance which UCD will designate as the first external school to be recognised by the University.

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Appendix 2: Conference Context Paper[7]

1. Executive Summary

The Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN) was established in 2003. It provides a forum for the principal national stakeholders involved in the quality assurance of higher education and training to discuss quality in a national and international context, to work towards the development of a common national position on key quality assurance issues and to inform the debate on those same issues at a European level. It includes representation from all of the awarding bodies and agencies involved in quality assurance and the Department of Education and Science (DES), the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology (CDIT) and higher education and training providers. The Network also provides the opportunity to work with the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) to develop the input of students into quality assurance processes.

'And Never the Twain Shall Meet'? Exploring Quality Assurance and Professional Accreditation/Recognition in a Changing World is the first conference of the IHEQN. The conference aims to:

- foster better understanding of professional accreditation/recognition and higher education quality assurance processes
- explore opportunities for the closer alignment of professional accreditation/ recognition and higher education quality assurance processes
- identify further communication opportunities and vehicles for communication between higher education institutions and professional bodies

Much of the education and training for the professions in Ireland is carried out within the higher education environment. This has led to long-standing relationships between professional bodies and higher education institutions, centred on the needs and requirements both for practice and for the delivery and award of qualifications. Recent developments at a national and European level – including the introduction of the National Framework of Qualifications and the impact of European legislation, mainly through EU Directives – have raised issues relating to the processes and practices of quality assurance and professional accreditation that are of interest to both higher education and training institutions, to professional organisations and to public bodies. These issues will be the focus of presentations, case studies and workshops at the forthcoming conference.

The purpose of this short context paper is to provide an overview for conference delegates of how higher education and training organisations and professional bodies operate (particularly in terms of quality assurance and accreditation/recognition processes), to outline the national and European developments impacting upon them and to identify some of the themes that will feature in the IHEQN's inaugural conference.

[7] This context paper was first published in October 2006 and was accurate at that time.

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2. Conference Themes

This section draws out some of the possible areas of common interest to professional bodies and higher education and training institutions which are likely to feature amongst the topics for debate in the forthcoming conference.

Research carried out by the UK based Professional Associations Research Network (PARN) in 2004[8] indicates that of those professional bodies who participated in the study, 52% developed and designed their own initial training syllabus, 76% accredited qualifications offered by others and 32% accepted specific qualifications offered by others but did not design or accredit them. This research helps to quantify the level of activity between professional bodies and higher education and training institutions and provides a context for the following themes which will feature at the forthcoming conference:

- Where quality assurance and accreditation/recognition processes co-exist there is a real risk of unnecessary duplication of effort to meet the needs of the two processes which in many ways are similar but which by their very nature differ in their functions. A key part of this conference is to review examples of how higher education and professional bodies have acknowledged this risk and attempted to address it and to discuss how and whether these examples have general applicability.

- The introduction of the National Framework of Qualifications is increasingly impacting upon higher education and training awarding bodies and providers and professional bodies alike. It has made quality assurance a pre-requisite for inclusion or alignment with the Framework and placed learning outcomes at the centre of education and training. This has created an education and training environment in which all those participating are, by their nature, inter-related and open to comparison. As these developments remain relatively new, it appears an opportune time for greater communication on this topic between higher education and training institutions and professional bodies.

- The focus on learning outcomes presents interesting opportunities for both professional bodies and higher education and training providers involved in programme design. The nature of professional programmes appears to lend itself to the practical aspects of learning outcomes which necessitate the identification of types and levels of knowledge, skill and competence

- One of the core reasons for the establishment of the IHEQN was to increase communication between the key organisations involved in quality assurance in higher education and training in Ireland. The Network also provides a basis for others to communicate with its members. The manner in which professional bodies can increase their inter-communication, and be communicated with, is a

[8] Friedman, A. & Mason, J. 2004, *Professional Associations in Ireland: A Comparative Study with the UK*, (PARN) pg. 75. The responses of 25 professional bodies were recorded as part of the study.

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matter worthy of consideration. In the light of the rapid developments alluded to above, opportunities for sharing information and experience between professional bodies and higher education organisations would appear highly advantageous.

Existing differences between professional bodies and higher education and training institutions are the product of legislative and individual responsibilities rather than any fundamental differences in understanding regarding the aims, design and delivery of professional programmes. Any notion remaining of academic ivory towers has been gradually eroded as mass higher education, the increasing relevance of higher education and training to all aspects of modern society, legislation, market forces and quality assurance processes have led to the increased involvement of stakeholders in all aspects of education and training programmes.

National and European legislation and developments, the increasing importance of learner and worker mobility, as well as the role of market forces, are dominating the landscape of higher education and the professions. In this context, national differences and interests come second to adapting to these developments and being associated with quality, and excellence of provision and practice, in a European and international setting. It is this joint endeavour that underlines the themes running through this conference and which it is hoped will lead not only to discussion and debate but also to the prospect of concrete proposals for increased collaboration and communication in the future.

3. Setting the Context at the National and European Level

The following section provides an overview of the range and type of higher education institutions and professional bodies that are currently operating in Ireland. It also refers to the legislative basis, or otherwise, for their adoption of quality assurance and accreditation/recognition processes.

3.1 Higher Education and Training Providers / Awarding Bodies

- Undergraduate and graduate higher education and training in Ireland is provided by Universities, Institutes of Technology, the Dublin Institute of Technology, Colleges of Education, other state aided colleges and colleges within the independent sector.

- The authority to make higher education and training awards is set out in national legislation. Those bodies with a statutory right to make awards in Ireland include the universities - University College Dublin, University College Cork, the National University of Ireland, National University of Ireland Galway, National University of Ireland Maynooth, the University of Dublin (Trinity College), Dublin City University and the University of Limerick - the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC). HETAC is the awarding body for the Institutes of Technology and other non-university

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higher education colleges and institutions. It may also delegate the authority to make awards to an Institute of Technology. Currently, authority has been delegated by HETAC to each of the thirteen Institutes of Technology to make awards to at least level 8 in the National Framework of Qualifications.

3.2 Quality Assurance - National Developments

- The principal legislation underpinning quality assurance in higher education and training in Ireland is the Universities Act 1997 (**www.irishstatutebook.ie/1997_24.html**) and the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 (**www.irishstatutebook.ie/ZZA26Y1999.html**).

- The Universities Act 1997 sets out the requirement for each university to establish procedures for quality assurance 'aimed at improving the quality of education and related services provided by the university'[9], to carry out evaluations of departments, faculties and services at regular intervals and to review the effectiveness of its quality assurance procedures and the implementation of the findings which have arisen through the application of these procedures.

- The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 sets out the requirements for each provider whose programmes lead to HETAC awards, or which has delegated authority, to establish quality assurance procedures 'for the purposes of further improving and maintaining the quality of education and training which is provided, organised or procured by that provider'[10] and to evaluate at regular intervals each programme of education and training and the services related to each programme. The Act also sets out the general quality assurance arrangements for the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT).

3.3 Quality Assurance - European Developments

- Recent quality assurance developments in European higher education and training have largely been driven by the Bologna Declaration. The ultimate aim of the Bologna Declaration is to establish a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. The adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, the establishment of a transferable credit system, the promotion of mobility and the promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance were amongst the mechanisms identified as being required to achieve the EHEA.

- A Bologna Follow-Up Group was established at a European level to meet twice a year to chart the progress of the signatory countries towards realising this aim. It provides information for the meetings of European Ministers responsible for higher education, which take place every two years and issue Communiqués based on their discussions.

[9] Universities Act, 1997 Section 35 (1).

[10] Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 Section 28 (1).

- The importance of quality assurance to achieving the EHEA was prioritised at the Berlin summit of Ministers in 2003. The Berlin Communiqué gave a mandate to the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) 'through its members, in cooperation with the EUA[11], EURASHE[12] and ESIB[13]' also known as the E4, to develop 'an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance' and to 'explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies, and to report back through the Bologna Follow-Up Group to Ministers in 2005'[14]. In response to this mandate, ENQA published its report, *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. The report set out the standards for internal and external quality assurance arrangements for higher education institutions and the internal quality assurance standards for quality assurance agencies. It also proposed the establishment of a system of cyclical review of national quality assurance agencies and a European register of quality assurance agencies.

- The *European Standards and Guidelines* (ESG), as they have come to be called, were adopted at the Bergen summit in 2005 and thereby entered the national quality assurance arena. It is envisaged that National agencies wishing to feature in the proposed register of quality assurance agencies will be reviewed against these European criteria.

- In order to become a full member of ENQA, applicant agencies must comply with the *European Standards and Guidelines*. In July 2006, HETAC was the first organisation in Europe to be successfully reviewed under these criteria.

3.4 Quality Assurance – National Organisations

- There are a number of national organisations involved in reviewing quality assurance procedures and the effectiveness of these procedures in Ireland: the Higher Education Authority (HEA), HETAC, the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI).

- The HEA was established in 1972. It is responsible for furthering the development and assisting in the co-ordination of State investment in higher education. The HEA has a statutory function to assist universities in achieving their quality assurance objectives, to review and report on the quality assurance procedures developed by the universities and to be consulted by the universities in their review of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures.

- HETAC was established under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. Its functions include the agreement of quality assurance procedures with providers delivering programmes that lead to HETAC awards, as stipulated under

[11] European University Association – represents universities and national associations of universities at European level.
[12] European Association of Institutions in Higher Education – represents the equivalent of Institutes of Technology at European Level.
[13] National Unions of Students in Europe – represents national students' unions at European level.
[14] *'Realising the European Higher Education Area* Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers for higher education in Berlin on 19 September 2003'.

section 28 (1) of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. HETAC is also responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of provider quality assurance procedures and the implementation of the findings which have arisen through the application of these procedures.

- The IUQB was established by the seven Irish universities in 2002 to increase the level of inter-university co-operation in developing their quality assurance procedures and processes. It was delegated authority by the governing authorities of each university to organise the periodic review of the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures in place in the universities, as required under Section 35(4) of the Universities Act 1997, IUQB also plays a key role in working with the universities on the implementation of the findings from these reviews. IUQB was established as an independent body in February 2006.

- The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland was established under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. In terms of quality assurance the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland's key responsibilities are the review of the Awards Councils' performance of their functions (i.e. HETAC and FETAC[15]) and the review of the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of the DIT.

3.5 Professional Bodies and Accreditation/Recognition

- There are over one hundred professional bodies operating in Ireland with membership numbers ranging from less than one hundred to several thousand. There are currently no grounds set by the State regarding the basis upon which professional bodies can be established or recognised.

- The role and functions of professional bodies can include the regulation of a profession or of the use of a professional title, representing and promoting the advancement of a profession, providing opportunities for the continuous professional development of members and protecting the public interest by setting standards and ensuring that members perform in accordance with these standards.

- There are relatively few regulated professions in Ireland. For those professions that are regulated, a competent authority is assigned to determine the eligibility or otherwise of applicants seeking to work within that field. The role of the competent authority in this context is to maintain a register of persons whose qualifications are recognised for the purpose of working in the profession and to review and make decisions on qualifications presented from abroad, in accordance with the relevant EU Directives. A number of other professions have informal or voluntary systems of registration organised by the respective professional body.

- The accreditation/recognition processes in place for reviewing the provision of professional education and training in higher education and training institutions

[15] The Further Education and Training Awards Council

varies from body to body and often depends upon the basis under which the professional body was established. Professional bodies can be established by statute or Charter and their memberships and/or their qualifications can also be recognised by statute or Charter. These professional bodies award qualifications that may lead to membership and/or registration. Some professional bodies that are not based in statute or Charter have, nevertheless, strong public recognition for their membership and/or their qualifications.

- Some professional bodies, do not make awards themselves, but provide membership or registration based on the achievement of the awards of other awarding bodies (predominantly in the higher education and training sector) or other criteria not administered by the professional or registration body. Other professional bodies provide for membership or registration following an assessment process similar to that used for the award of qualifications in higher education and training, again often subject to additional criteria.

- Accreditation/recognition processes carried out by professional bodies range from full institutional reviews to the review of a syllabus submitted by a higher education and training institutions.

3.6 Professional Bodies - National Developments

- Examples of two areas within the professional environment which have recently received particular attention from national legislators are health and building. The Health and Social Care Professionals Act (2005) which, at the present time, has been enacted into law but is not yet implemented and the Building Control Bill (2005), which has reached Committee stage.

- The HSCP Act has essentially introduced a framework for the statutory, as opposed to voluntary, registration of twelve health and social care professionals. It will be accompanied by other forthcoming legislation in the healthcare arena. A registration council will be established to implement the Act, its responsibilities will include protecting the public 'by promoting high standards of professional conduct and professional education, training and competence among registrants of the designated professions'.[16]

- The Building Control Bill (2005) seeks to regulate the use of certain titles and makes a direct reference to the implementation of certain provisions of Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the recognition of professional qualifications (see section 3.7).

[16] http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie/S/0178/S.0178.200411090005.html.

3.7 Professional Bodies - European Developments

- European developments have impacted upon higher education and professional bodies as specific Directives have been proposed by the EU Commission and adopted by the European Parliament and Council regarding the mobility of services, providers and the recognition of qualifications.

- The proposed Directive on Services in the Internal Market aims to increase competition by eliminating restrictions on market access for service providers and by removing obstacles to the cross-border provision of services within the EU. The Directive's 'country of origin' principle allows service providers to operate their businesses on a temporary basis according to the laws of the country of origin of the service rather than those of the country where the service is being provided.

- EU Directive 2005/36 was adopted in September 2005. It consolidates fifteen existing directives and will come into effect on 20 October 2007. Its purposes include ensuring greater liberalisation of the provision of professional services and securing more automatic recognition of qualifications. In principle the Directive sets out that qualifications which are recognised for a profession in one member state must be equally recognised in another. However, where a qualification is, on comparison, deemed to be of a lower standard, recognition can be refused, subject to conditions relating to the administration of compensation measures in particular instances.

- As well as EU Directives, there exist a number of voluntary initiatives which facilitate the recognition of accreditation decisions on an international basis. For example, quality assurance and accreditation agencies in higher education have formed the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) and professional bodies have established agreements such as the Washington Accord[17].

4.0 National and International Developments in Relation to the Transparency and Recognition of Qualifications

The following section describes national and international developments relating to the transparency and recognition of qualifications and the mobility of the learner. It also refers to the impact that these developments have on quality assurance and accreditation/recognition processes.

4.1 The National Framework of Qualifications

- The primary responsibility of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland has been the development and maintenance of the National Framework of Qualifications. The Framework was introduced in October 2003 as a ten level

[17] The Washington Accord was signed in 1989. It is an agreement which provides a mechanism for mutual recognition between signatory bodies of engineering education accreditation processes.

construct, designed to incorporate awards made for all kinds and sizes of learning, regardless of the context in which it takes place. Higher education and training awards are designated levels 6-10 on the Framework[18].

- The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland published 'level indicators' to accompany the Framework which indicated the standard of knowledge, skill and competence associated with each level. This solidified the movement in higher education and training in Ireland away from learning inputs and towards learning outcomes and has had a fundamental impact upon the manner in which programmes are designed.

- The awarding bodies recognised for the purposes of having their qualifications included in the Framework are those with statutory power to make awards. The awarding bodies making these awards and the providers delivering them are all subject to statutory quality assurance arrangements.

- A limited number of professional bodies are also awarding bodies under Statute. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland recently published its policies and criteria for the inclusion of these awards in the Framework and the alignment of the awards of certain Irish bodies which 'do not make awards on a statutory basis but which recognise the attainment by learners of learning outcomes in a formal way associated with the legal regulation of the operation of a profession or of a professional title by such bodies'[19]. It also makes provision for the alignment of the awards of certain bodies from outside the State which make awards in Ireland. The policies and criteria document goes on to describe the manner in which these categories of professional body can, as appropriate and as part of a voluntary process, be included in, or aligned with the Framework. Apart from inclusion or alignment, a professional body can also choose to submit programmes for validation to one of the awarding councils or to another State awarding body.

- The introduction of the Framework provides a means of comparing and contrasting national qualifications. The need to order the qualifications system and to ensure that the awards included in the Framework are quality assured has been driven by national, European and international requirements.

4.2 Meta-European Frameworks

- The Bologna Process was initiated in 1999 and there are now 45 countries in Europe working towards the realisation of a common European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In 2003 Ministers of Education called on each of these countries to establish national frameworks of qualifications and for an overarching framework for qualifications to be developed. This overarching framework - the Bologna Framework – was adopted by ministers in Bergen in 2005 and is based on the first, second and third cycles identified in the Bologna Process.

[18] Level 6 is shared with further education and training

[19] Policies and Criteria for the Inclusion in, or Alignment with, the National Framework of Qualifications of the Awards of Certain Awarding Bodies National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, July 2006, pg 5

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- The rationale for the Bologna Framework is to provide a mechanism to relate national frameworks of qualifications to each other and to enable international transparency, international recognition of qualifications and international mobility of learners and graduates. Following the Bergen meeting of Ministers, Ireland responded to an invitation to undertake a pilot project of the self-certification of the compatibility of the National Framework of Qualifications with the Bologna Framework. A Steering Committee comprising representatives of HETAC, the DIT, the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and two co-opted international experts, is coordinating this work, which is expected to be completed in October 2006. The draft report of the Steering Committee was published in June 2006 (www.nqai.ie/en/International/Bologna/).

- Parallel to these developments and a further extension of the rapid movement towards transparency, cooperation, transferability and mobility in European higher education is the proposed European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The European Commission published a consultative document on the EQF in 2005 and consultation and development work have continued on this proposal since that time. The EQF has been described as acting as a 'translation device' that is 'intended to facilitate citizens' mobility for work and study alongside, for example, Erasmus, the European Credit Transfer System and Europass'[20]. The proposed structure for the EQF will contain 8 levels and will relate to all education and training awards in Europe. It will be fully compatible with the Bologna Framework. The manner in which 'sectoral awards' – often trans-national professionally oriented awards - can be facilitated through the EQF is a matter for current debate. One suggestion is that sectoral awards, due to their often pan-European and/or international nature, should be linked directly to the EQF at a European level. This approach may be inconsistent with the EQF's nature and role as a meta-framework, conflicting in particular with a key feature of the proposed model: that qualifications relate in the first instance to national structures and through these to the EQF.

[20] European Qualifications Framework. Retrieved, 25 August, 2006 from http://ec.europa.eu/education /policies/educ/eqf /index_en.html.

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Appendix 3: IHEQN Principles of Good Practice

Introduction

The IHEQN has reviewed the legislative requirements and procedures for quality assurance for the different institutions in the Irish higher education sector and has identified a set of common underpinning principles of good practice.

The following principles are agreed by the Network as consonant with the legislative arrangements that govern quality assurance in the Irish higher education sector, and as conforming to the principles outlined in the Berlin Communiqué, and to the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*.

I. General Principles of Good Practice

- The goal of quality assurance is quality improvement including the enhancement of the student experience, and quality assurance procedures reflect this
- The ownership and main responsibility of the quality assurance process resides with the provider – this is an essential condition for promoting internal quality cultures within higher education and training institutions
- All providers are responsible for the establishment of quality assurance procedures that are clear and transparent to all their stakeholders, including staff, students, external stakeholders and the general public, and which provide for the continuing evaluation of all academic and service departments and their activities
- Quality assurance procedures conform to international best practice and include self-evaluation, followed by review by persons who are competent to make national and international comparisons
- Students, staff and other stakeholders must be involved in the quality assurance process
- Quality assurance procedures include appropriate measures to protect the integrity of the overall quality assurance process
- Quality assurance procedures ensure public accountability and transparency through the publication of the outcomes of the evaluations
- The quality assurance process facilitates continuous improvement through the implementation of findings of evaluations within the resources of higher education institutions

- Quality assurance procedures and their effectiveness are reviewed on a cyclical basis by independent experts and the outcomes of such reviews are published

II. Principles of Good Practice for the conduct of Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement reviews

Review Cycles

- The cycle length of quality reviews – whether they are programme-based, department/unit-based, or institution-based – may vary according to disciplinary or institutional needs. In general, there is a tendency internationally to maintain a quinquennial review cycle.

- Bodies[21] responsible for the activation and administration of quality reviews publish a schedule in advance of the commencement of any cycle of reviews. In developing the schedule they adopt a flexible approach, consult with the institutions/entities that are to be reviewed and ensure that the latter are given reasonable notice of an impending review.

- Bodies responsible for the activation and administration of quality reviews publish clear and transparent procedures regarding the postponement or cancellation of scheduled reviews.

Self-Assessment

- Bodies responsible for the activation and administration of reviews publish clear and transparent guidelines for the conduct of the self-evaluation process in quality reviews. These guidelines are sufficiently flexible to allow for the range and diversity of the review activities and ensure that creative and innovative approaches to self-evaluation are not discouraged.

- The self-evaluation process in quality reviews engages a wide-range of stakeholders including students, and review guidelines provide clear guidance on how this might be achieved.

- Self-assessment reports :
  - are analytical and reflective;
  - identify strengths, areas for improvements, opportunities and constraints;
  - are concise and to the point.

- In line with current international practice, self-assessment reports are not published.

[21] Such bodies would include quality assurance agencies and the offices of the Registrar or equivalent or the quality offices of higher education institutions.

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Composition of Peer Review Groups

- Peer Review Groups always count amongst their number independent, external experts who possess appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task, including, where appropriate, persons who are competent to make national and international comparisons. Where internal experts are included - in the case of some programme-based and department/unit based reviews - they are not closely associated with the programme or department/unit under review. In the case of reviews of effectiveness of an institution's quality assurance procedures, all Peer Review Group members are external experts.

- Bodies responsible for the activation and administration of reviews publish clear and transparent guidelines regarding the selection of reviewers. These guidelines set out the criteria and process for selecting relevant experts. The process for selecting reviewers guarantees their independence.

- Bodies responsible for the activation and administration of reviews publish clear and transparent guidelines regarding the responsibilities and duties of Peer Review Group members, and ensure that the latter are adequately briefed on these responsibilities and duties and about the contexts (including relevant legislation) in which the reviews are being undertaken.

- Where there are internal members on a Peer Review Group, they are comparable in standing to the external experts.

- Peer Review Group members are contacted only by the bodies responsible for the activation and administration of reviews during the review process, and never by the institution, department/unit or programme provider under review.

Site Visits

- The bodies responsible for the activation and administration of reviews publish schedules for review visits, including indicative timetables.

- The bodies responsible for the activation and administration of reviews publish criteria regarding the selection of staff, students and stakeholders with whom the Peer Review Group will meet, and information about the mechanisms for selection of such staff, students and stakeholders. The selection and composition of staff, student and stakeholder groups is such so as to ensure that the discussions proceed with candour and frankness. The review process is at all times independent, impartial, rigorous, thorough, fair and consistent.

- The review procedures used during a site visit are sufficient to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached.

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- When the Peer Review Groups meet with students and stakeholders, no employees of the entity under review are present.

Publication of Outcomes and Follow-up

- Bodies responsible for the activation and administration of reviews publish the outcomes of all reviews. Reports are written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to the intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports are easy for a reader to find.

- Predetermined follow-up procedures exist for acting upon reports, implementing recommendations for action, or developing an action plan. These follow-up procedures are implemented consistently and are publicly available.

Legislation underpinning quality assurance in Irish higher education and training

A matrix setting out the statutory roles and responsibilities – as provided under the Universities Act, 1997 and the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 - of the institutions and the awarding, funding and supervisory bodies, in relation to quality assurance in Irish higher education and training is available on the IHEQN website at the following link: **www.iheqn.ie/legislation/default.asp?NCID=182**.

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Notes