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## Part I: Principles of Internal Quality Assurance and Enhancement

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# 01

## Introduction

This document is Part I of the Technological Higher Education Quality Framework (THEQF). It is a set of high-level principles for the ongoing development of internal quality assurance and enhancement (IQAE) systems in technological higher education institutions (THEIs) and should (for some purposes) be read in conjunction with the Introduction to the THEQF; Parts II, III and IV, and the Appendices.

Below are the eight principles that underpin the internal quality assurance and enhancement system in technological higher education. They are based on established effective practice from the THE sector and are at the heart of the design of an IQAE system that supports the provision of programmes and education and research, and stakeholder engagement, by THEIs.

### 2.1 Principle 1: Academic and Student-centred Values

The pursuit of academic excellence is central to the mission of all THEIs. The IQAE system supports this pursuit by:

- a. Upholding the fundamental academic values and reputation of Irish higher education
- b. Prioritising the student perspective and keeping the holistic development of learners and researchers as a core objective of the IQAE system.

*This principle means that THEIs will link the value and reputation of Irish higher education (including the integrity of the National Framework of Qualifications) to the whole-student-experience<sup>G7</sup> that they provide, both within and beyond the immediate learning, teaching, assessment and research environments.*

### 2.2 Principle 2: Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom

THEIs are awarding bodies and all strive to enhance the standards of their own taught and research programmes. The autonomy of the institution and the protection of freedom of inquiry within disciplines are crucial to maintaining the unique position and value of THE in Irish education.

The IQAE system addresses these issues through setting approaches and comprehensive procedures for:

- a. The design, monitoring and approval of programmes of education and research
- b. Institutional transparency - IQAE processes should be available and disseminated to stakeholders

- c. The institutional approach to risk - With autonomy comes a responsibility to balance the need to innovate and be responsive with the shared need to protect the higher education system at large.

This principle reflects the THEI ownership of responsibility for quality and standards that accompanies autonomy and academic freedom. It acknowledges that as part of this responsibility, there is a need to be open and transparent about the processes that ensure quality and the need to manage the balance between promoting innovation and minimising risk to the system.

### **2.3 Principle 3: Quality Culture**

A crucial part of establishing an IQAE system is the creation of a culture of quality and enhancement and the integration of the IQAE system into the mission, values and functions of the THEI.

Through a clear articulation of the mission and values of the organisation, and the role of the senior management, the IQAE system will embed a culture that promotes:

- a. Respect for the role that students play as co-creators of the curriculum and the culture of the institution
- b. Involvement of all staff in the creation of a positive collegiate environment that underscores a commitment to quality
- c. A parallel expectation of engagement from students and staff with the IQAE system
- d. Continuous staff development, including discipline-specific and professional development.

*This principle recognises that successful IQAE depends upon more than the development of policies and procedures. It recognises the critical and shared role of the staff and students in embedding a quality culture, and acknowledges the need to value, respect and develop their contributions to that culture. The principle also reflects that, where a genuine quality culture exists, it enables formal policies and procedures for IQAE to function properly.*

### 2.4 Principle 4: Informed Practice and Stakeholder Engagement

The development of the IQAE system is grounded in reflective practice. It is expected that the institution will engage with students, staff and external partners to contribute to the development of the IQAE system. THEIs will ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms in place to enable this (Part IV).

The sustainable development of IQAE depends upon the depth, relevance and impact of dialogue and engagements with all internal and external stakeholders. This includes engagement in general and for the purposes of developing:

- a. Learning, teaching, assessment and research
- b. Educational collaboration
- c. Economic and regional development
- d. Civic and community objectives
- e. Internationalisation.

*Reflective practice is a continuous process. This principle reflects that a listening and responsive dialogue with industry, community and international partners is a critical distinguishing feature of THE.*

*This principle is intended to reflect the reality that the IQAE systems of Ireland's THEIs are based on their determination to engage with staff, students and external stakeholders. This inclusive approach is not an aspiration, but something central to the success of THE in Ireland.*

### 2.5 Principle 5: Proportional Implementation

IQAE processes are designed to be dynamic, flexible and responsive, much like THEIs themselves. Procedures are appropriately sized and proportionate to the individual context of the institution and its learner and researcher cohort.

This allows for timely identification of findings and implementation of recommendations arising from evaluations and other quality activities (such as external quality assurance reviews), while striving to keep administrative burdens as low as practical.

*This principle aims to ensure that IQAE processes are fit for the purposes for which they are designed. Processes are designed and implemented in a manner which avoids bureaucratic complexity, and which ensures that the internal administrative logic and requirements of the processes never supersede or impede the delivery of the quality outcomes that they are intended to support: namely, a high quality whole-student experience.*

## **2.6 Principle 6: Comprehensive, Transparent and Publicly Accountable Procedures**

The institution has IQAE processes that address all aspects of their education and research activity. These processes are documented and available to the staff and students of the institution and to the general public.

Beyond this, THEIs make public the strategic basis for their activities, and the IQAE processes and their outcomes that underpin the delivery of programmes of education and research and the awarding of qualifications.

THEIs are outward looking and open institutions and their administrative systems are transparent, and continually developed and embedded in the practice of the institution.

*This principle reflects the aim that the THE sector goes beyond the minimum requirement for information provision by public bodies and actively seeks to publicise their culture of quality.*

*This principle also includes a commitment to a high standard of transparency and accountability and extends to the communication of information on all aspects of the governance and activities of the organisation. This information is available with the public interest in mind, not the marketing needs of the institution or THE.*

### 2.7 Principle 7: Measurement

Successfully implementing IQAE systems depends on the ability to link success of the quality system to institutional strategy. THEIs generate high-quality information on the impact of their activity and use this information to plan, measure and manage institutional objectives, benchmarking them against international effective practice.

This gives the institution an effective tool for strategic development, and it also contributes to building a picture of the performance of the sector in meeting regional, national and European needs.

Data can be collected through metrics including, but not limited to:

- a. Student retention and progression
- b. Student engagement and satisfaction
- c. Graduate destinations (employment and continuing education)
- d. Learning resource and student service usage
- e. External engagement feedback
- f. International benchmarks.

*This principle recognises that institutional self-knowledge is a prerequisite for effective strategic planning and IQAE. It is also an important role that THEIs play in the development of higher education at large.*

*It is made possible by the systems that THEIs have to collect and analyse relevant information pertaining to their own activities, and to use this to inform ongoing development – if you don't measure it, you can't manage it!*



## 2.8 Principle 8: Consistency with Policy and International Effective Practice

THEIs have a spectrum of interaction with agencies and other institutions ranging from compliance to active cooperation. Where compliance is the case (with European and Irish regulation and law for example) THEIs have well developed relationships and a proven track record of success.

From a quality enhancement point of view, IQAE systems contribute to and strive to meet the standards of international effective practice. This is assured (outside of external QA) by regular peer review of the system by a body competent to make national and international comparisons.

*THEIs are full and committed members of the European Higher Education Area and, as such, benchmark their approach to quality assurance against the ESG and other comparable systems of international effective practice.*

*This principle, combined with the high degree of institutional self-knowledge, ensures that THEIs are confident in their role in their regulatory environment, and robust and active contributors to the discourse about quality assurance and enhancement internationally.*

*The practice of seeking independent critique of the effectiveness of their IQAE systems in the context of international benchmarks not only provides an opportunity for a rigorous and realistic assessment of these quality systems; but also adds an additional assurance to the wider public that each organisation is accountable and demonstrably transparent.*





