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## Part II: Internal Quality Assurance and Enhancement of Taught Provision

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This document is Part II of the Technological Higher Education Quality Framework (THEQF). It sets out principles for the ongoing development of the internal quality assurance and enhancement (IQAE) system for the learning, teaching and assessment environments in technological higher education institutions (THEIs). The principles in this document are based on the eight high-level principles set out in Part I of the THEQF.

This document should be read and used in conjunction with Part I. For some purposes it should also be considered in conjunction with the Introduction to the THEQF; Parts III and IV; and the Appendices.

Section 2 of this document addresses the THEI approach to strategic planning for taught provision.

Section 3 sets out principles for the IQAE system in taught provision and links these to the high-level principles.

As with all public bodies,<sup>1</sup> THEIs undertake regular strategic planning exercises. The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*<sup>2</sup> sees these strategic plans as being “coherent” with objectives set for the entire higher education system.

## 2.1 Institutional Strategy

Strategic plans form the basis for the decisions, activities, policies and procedures which underpin the IQAE system among all activities across THEIs. THEI strategic plans include specific consideration (sometimes as integrated statements and sometimes as separate strategic documents) for learning, teaching and assessment.

In whatever way the learning, teaching and assessment strategy is formed and presented by THEIs – as one document or several, as part of corporate strategy or separate – it first of all exists; and secondly it forms a crucial part of the IQAE system.

## 2.2 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy

*Learning, teaching and assessment* are the activities that combine as the transformative process of transmitting knowledge, skill and competence to a learner through a curriculum and verifying that the learner can demonstrate these. In THEIs, these activities also encourage the development of confidence and understanding as well as the acquisition of *knowledge-in-use*<sup>G2</sup> (Introduction.3.1.a).

Influences from Europe, such as the *Bologna Process*<sup>G6</sup>, qualifications frameworks and the use of credit and learning outcomes, describe much of what constitutes *learning* and to some extent *teaching* and *assessment*. However, the environments where these take place are varied and locally contextualised - from laboratories and formal classes to conversations in cafeterias and everything in between.

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1 | Technological Universities Bill 2015; Institutes of Technology Act 2006; Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, *Statement of Strategy 2015 - 2017*, 2015.

2 | *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*, Department of Education and Skills, 2011.

The learning, teaching and assessment strategy sets the tone and direction for one of the THEI's core activities: taught provision. A well thought out strategy that is implemented throughout, and forms part of the organisation's culture can be expected to:

- + Link tightly with the research strategy (as described in [Part III](#))
- + Be informed and shaped by the THEI's engagements with stakeholders (as described in [Part IV](#))
- + Be informed and shaped by staff and students
- + Address the centrality of taught provision to the mission of the THEI
- + Outline an approach to measuring the impact of teaching activity.

Implementation of the strategy results in information about taught provision being generated and checked against internal standards and international benchmarks (internal quality assurance); and that information being fed back into the ongoing development of curricula and assessment mechanisms (quality enhancement).

### **2.2.a A note on strategy implementation**

Organisational culture and leadership are bigger determinants of success than strategic planning itself. THEIs ensure successful implementation of their learning, teaching and assessment strategies by clearly articulating the strategy across the institution and making it clear (from a management and governance perspective) where responsibility for the strategy's implementation lies.

This section outlines specific principles that underpin the IQAE system for taught provision in THE. They are based on the high-level principles outlined in Part I and divided into five themes:

- + Programme development, monitoring and review
- + The learning and teaching environment
- + Strong pedagogical theory and practice
- + Robust assessment approaches
- + Professionalism of academic staff.

The themes are based on effective practice in Irish THE and draw on developments in the Irish and European higher education policy landscapes, particularly the work of the *High-level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education*<sup>3</sup> and the ESG.<sup>4</sup>

### **3.1 Programme Development, Monitoring and Review**

The continuous and responsive process of planning provision of knowledge-in-use, skill and competence is one of the most resource intensive and complex activities in a THE. It is also a critical factor in the success of THE in Ireland.

The development and assurance of taught programmes is governed by a significant suite of regulation and law.<sup>5</sup> The IQAE system within a THEI ensures that the institution remains cognisant of this, but more than that, it seeks to build quality and keep the THEI on course to carry out its mission ([Introduction 3.1.a](#)).

THEIs' IQAE processes for *programme development, monitoring and approval*:

- a. Reinforce the ongoing regional and broader responsiveness of THE and support the goal of generating *knowledge-in-use*
- b. Are formally documented, including the criteria against which programme proposals are assessed
- c. Promote flexible entry into and progression from programmes (ATP<sup>G3</sup>), lifelong learning<sup>G4</sup> and equality of educational opportunity, all to meet obligations to a diverse learner population

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3 | Mary McAleese and others, *Report to the European Commission on: Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Europe's Higher Education Institutions*, 2013, pp. 1–66.

4 | European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, 2nd edn, 2015.

5 | Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

- d. Allow for systematic engagement with stakeholders and peers to feed into curriculum design
- e. Generate rich information to use in reporting, marketing, assurance and enhancement
- f. Benchmark and evaluate the programme against national and international peers
- g. Consider the additional implications of programme development, monitoring and review for collaborative provision.

*The key high-level principle that governs the implementation of these ideas is [Principle 4: Informed Practice and Stakeholder Engagement \(Part 1.2.4\)](#).*

*The programme development, monitoring and review process in THE is above all a reflective practice aimed at ensuring that THEIs stay regionally responsive, meet broader national objectives, and design their curriculums to have a systematic focus on the preparation of graduates for complex professional roles in a changing technological world. As equality of educational opportunity is a key feature of THE, there is a responsibility for THEIs to stay engaged with and be cognisant of the diversity of their learners' backgrounds.*

*The tradition of responsiveness to skills policy and economic need has been a strength of THE in Ireland which this principle reflects.*

### **3.2 Co-creation of the Curriculum and Strong Pedagogical Theory and Practice**

The creation of the curriculum in THE is a shared process between staff, learners and other stakeholders. The learner perspective, in particular, is crucial to the development of programmes.

The specific method for the delivery of the curriculum is almost always a matter of discretion for teachers, provided they are able to accommodate a variety of learning approaches and disciplinary contexts.

## Principles for Internal Quality Assurance and Enhancement of Taught Provision

The success or failure of learner engagement with the curriculum is a function of the learning, teaching and assessment environment combined<sup>6</sup> with the *whole-student-experience*<sup>7</sup>.

THEIs have IQAE systems and processes and cultures that facilitate co-creation of the curriculum and strong pedagogical theory and practice, such as:

### **In general:**

- a. Fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect and collegiality between learners and their teachers to facilitate co-creation of the curriculum
- b. Promoting equality and inclusivity in both the curriculum and the whole-student-experience. Curriculum design and delivery (and support services) take account of learner ability, socio-economic background, nationality, stage of life and personal circumstances
- c. Encouraging and supporting staff development (particularly certified training) in building pedagogical skills and methodologies to suit the variety of learning styles and outcomes in THE.

### **In the learning, teaching and assessment environments:**

- d. Promoting student-centred learning<sup>68</sup>. THEIs emphasise learner responsibility for achieving learning outcomes
- e. Providing appropriate learning support services and training in the skills to use them
- f. Recognising effort, achievement and excellence.

### **In the whole-student-experience:**

- g. Paying particular attention to the experience of first year and new students through comprehensive induction into college life and their programme of study
- h. Fostering a vibrant college atmosphere which includes cultural, sporting and other extra-curricular opportunities as well as educational ones.

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6 | Higher Education Authority and others, *Report of the Working Group on Student Engagement in Irish Higher Education Institutions*, 2016.

7 | Mary McAleese and others, *Report to the European Commission on: Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Europe's Higher Education Institutions*, 2013; QQI, *Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013*, 2013

*The key high-level principles that govern the implementation of these ideas are [Principle 1: Academic and Student-centred Values \(I.3.1\)](#) and [Principle 3: Quality Culture \(I.3.3\)](#).*

*Facilitating student-centredness and academic excellence has as much to do with creating an environment conducive to a positive experience, as it is about encouraging engagement with the curriculum. This principle reflects the centrality of the student experience in Irish THE, and the importance of the systems that build capacity for THEIs to teach well and in a variety of ways.*

### 3.3 Robust Assessment Approaches

As with pedagogy, the use of a *variety* of assessment approaches is important.<sup>7</sup> Whether assessments are formative, summative or self-assessed, THEIs strive to ensure that IQAE processes for assessment (from test creation to exam boards) are:

- a. *Credible* – that the results are a true reflection of the achievement of learning outcomes
- b. *Reliable* – that the assessment process is linked to the learning outcomes for the award sought
- c. *Fair* – that approaches used do not prevent any learner (or group) from demonstrating their knowledge, skill and competence. This includes the development and dissemination of marking schemes, timetables and workloads as well as the assessment itself
- d. *Consistent* – that from assessment to assessment, results are comparable and equally credible and reliable
- e. *Valid* – that assessment processes are externally checked against effective practice (through external examiners for example)
- f. *Cognisant* of the learner’s right to appeal and challenge assessment outcomes.
- g. Secure and confidential
- h. Inclusive of constructive learner feedback.

*The key principles that govern the implementation of these are [Principle 1: Academic Excellence and Student-centred Values \(Part I.3.1\)](#) and [Principle 8: Consistency with Policy and International Effective Practice \(Part I.3.8\)](#).*

*This principle reflects a robust commitment to academic standards by THEIs as awarding bodies in Ireland. Institutions provide scope for using a variety of appropriate assessment approaches and ensure that staff are competent to use them. The validity, outlined in point e above, relies on the institutional ability to make good use of international effective practice and external perspectives.*

### 3.4 Professional Academic Development

The quality of taught provision depends to a large extent on the teachers delivering the curriculum. The performance of academic staff is a function of their pedagogical skills and disciplinary knowledge; and the attitudes and conditions under which they work.<sup>8</sup>

The IQAE system ensures that professional academic staff are competent to teach appropriate disciplinary knowledge and do so in a conducive environment. They are capable of using a variety of pedagogical and assessment approaches, which are supported or guaranteed by:

- a. CPD<sup>89</sup> opportunities for teaching staff to develop their pedagogical and assessment skills and disciplinary knowledge
- b. Recruitment and promotion of academic staff on the basis of their teaching competence (among other considerations)
- c. Recognition and rewarding of teaching excellence
- d. Encouragement of a strong interface between teaching and research
- e. Providing opportunities for professional staff networking
- f. Evaluation of the teaching performance of academic staff through peer evaluation and student feedback.

*The key principles that govern the implementation of these are [Principle 3: Quality Culture \(Part I.3.3\)](#) and [Principle 4: Practice Informed and Stakeholder Engaged \(Part I.3.4\)](#).*

*THEIs do not require every tutor on every programme to have an NFQ level 10 qualification in order to be considered competent to teach. It is however assumed that, in support of the ongoing enhancement activity within a quality culture, academic staff are developed alongside the development of the curriculum.*

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<sup>8</sup> | Timothy Shanahan, Maureen Meehan and Stephen Mogge, *The Professionalization of the Teacher in Adult Literacy Education*, National Centre on Adult Literacy, 1994; R.M. Ingersoll and E. Merrill, 'The Status of Teaching as a Profession', in *Schools and Society: A Sociological Approach to Education*, 4th edn, California Pine Forge Press, 2011, pp. 185–98



