Údarás Náisiúnta
Cáilíochtaí na hÉireann

National Qualifications
Authority of Ireland

REVIEW OF THE PERFORMANCE BY THE HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING AWARDS COUNCIL OF ITS FUNCTIONS

REPORT OF THE EXPERT PANEL

HETAC

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. **Introduction**

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (hereafter referred to as the Authority) appointed a Panel Chaired by Professor William J Smyth, President Emeritus of the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, to review the performance of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) with particular reference to its principal statutory functions as contained in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. The Panel was also asked to consider the extent to which, in performing these functions, HETAC complied with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. The Panel's full Terms of Reference, Protocol and Membership are contained in Appendices 1 and 2.

2. **Review Process**

Panel members attended a briefing in the offices of the Authority on 7 March 2006. (The Chairman of the Panel and one Panel member joined by video conference link). The Chief Executive and representatives of the Authority and HETAC provided briefings on their respective organisations, as did the President of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Peter Williams. Following this, the Panel drew up a programme of on-site meetings involving almost 80 people including: the Chairman and members of the HETAC Board, the HETAC Chief Executive and a number of his staff; representatives of a range of higher education institutions served by HETAC; representatives of key stakeholders, including the Authority; a selection of reviewers (including student reviewers) used by HETAC; and learners in institutions which had been given delegated authority by HETAC to grant awards, or whose programmes had been approved by HETAC. These meetings were held in the Dublin offices of HETAC between 27 and 29 March 2006. (A full list of all those whom the panel met is contained in Appendix 3). The Panel was asked to report its findings in the first instance to HETAC.

3. Evidence

A key document considered by the Panel was the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) prepared by HETAC. This was made available to all Panel members in advance of their initial briefing meeting. In addition, HETAC provided substantial documentation in support of its SER and additional documentation in response to requests by the Panel during its on-site review. (A full list of the documents consulted by the Panel, including the SER, is attached as Appendix 4). The on-site visit provided oral evidence.

4. Findings

In the light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the Panel:

- is satisfied that the Higher Education and Training Awards Council has performed effectively its principal statutory functions since its establishment and has developed policies and procedures for each function which are being implemented and are being operated as appropriate;

- is satisfied that in the performance of these functions, HETAC complies with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*.

5. Recommendations

The Panel concurs broadly with HETAC's summary of notable features and areas for improvement as contained in its SER. In the development of a plan to implement the recommendations of this Report, as required under the Protocol for this Review, HETAC will wish, nevertheless, to note the Panel's views concerning HETAC's performance of some aspects of its statutory functions and some aspects of its compliance with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. Particular areas for consideration are summarised below.

6.   **The Panel recommends that HETAC:**

- gives urgent attention to the provision of initial and ongoing training to its reviewers, including the requirement that no-one should normally be a member of a review team unless they have undergone such training;

- reviews the qualifications, experience and expertise required of its reviewers, with the aim of enabling HETAC to take a more strategic as opposed to what appears currently to be a rather pragmatic approach to their selection and deployment.

7.   **In addition, the Panel recommends that HETAC:**

- reviews the longer-term sustainability of the level and quality of support currently given by staff considering individual programmes submitted for validation;

- considers how its current approach to validation might be varied, especially where a new programme, or a programme at a level not previously offered by provider, is involved;

- considers publishing all its reports as a matter of principle, and publicising its intention in this regard.

8.   **Acknowledgements**

The Review Panel wishes to place on record its gratitude to the officers and staff of HETAC and the Authority for the professional, practical and personal support given to Panel members in preparing them for the review and during their on-site visit, and to the Chair and members of HETAC's Board who met the Panel. In particular, the Panel is most appreciative of the information and insights provided during the initial briefing; the work done by HETAC staff to ensure the availability of people to meet the Panel during its on-site visit; the documentary evidence provided by

HETAC staff; and the logistical support provided by both HETAC and Authority staff. The Panel would also like to thank all those who met the Panel during the on-site visit; their input was invaluable.

Finally, on behalf of the Review Panel and myself as Chairman I would like to record appreciation for the professional and constructive support provided by the Secretary to the review process, Mr David Parry.

Professor W J Smyth
Review Panel Chairman
May 2006

Introduction

1.1   The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (hereafter referred to as the Authority) appointed a Panel Chaired by Professor William J Smyth, President Emeritus of the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, to review the performance of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) with particular reference to its principal statutory functions as contained in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. The Panel was also asked to consider the extent to which, in performing these functions, HETAC complied with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. The Panel's full Terms of Reference, Protocol and Membership are contained in Appendices 1 and 2.

Contexts

2.1   The higher education sector in Ireland includes a range of institutions - Universities (of which there are seven); Institutes of Technology (13); the Dublin Institute of Technology; Colleges of Higher Education (8); and a range of private and public higher education institutions. A more detailed description of the higher education sector in Ireland is contained in Appendix 5.

2.2   HETAC, which was established in 2001 under the provisions of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 as the successor body to the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA), is the qualifications awarding body for Institutes of Technology and other non-university higher education colleges and institutions, excluding the Dublin Institute of Technology. Under the provision of the Act, HETAC may also delegate the authority to make awards to recognised institutions.

2.3   Given the Panel's role in evaluating compliance with European requirements for quality assurance, it is worth noting the coincidental evolution of European bodies with responsibility for quality assurance in higher education at national level and the

enactment of significant higher education legislation in Ireland in the late 1990s.

HETAC's statutory functions

3.1 HETAC's main functions under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 may be summarised as including:

- making and promoting awards
- recognising other awards
- determining standards in higher education and training institutions
- validating programmes; and
- assuring the quality of programmes leading to a HETAC award.

3.2 Relevant sections of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 are contained in Appendix 6.

3.3 The extent to which, and the ways in which, HETAC has performed the above functions are considered separately (See Part Two below).

HETAC and the European guidelines for quality assurance

4.1 In the Berlin communiqué of 19 September 2003, the Ministers of the Bologna Process signatory states invited the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) 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. The response to this mandate was the publication by ENQA in February 2005 of its *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. The Standards and Guidelines recommended that European quality assurance agencies would be expected to submit

themselves to a cyclical review within five years. HETAC is one of the first agencies to undergo such a review.

4.2   The Standards and Guidelines document contains a list of European standards for quality assurance in higher education and accompanying guidelines. They focus on three areas, namely:

   • European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance
   • European standards for the external quality assurance of higher education
   • European standards for external quality assurance agencies

4.3   The standards and guidelines themselves are contained in Appendix 7.

4.4   The extent to which, and the ways in which, HETAC complies with these standards and guidelines are considered separately (See Part Three below). These paragraphs should, however, be read in conjunction with Part Two dealing with HETAC's performance of its statutory functions as these cover the majority of the criteria contained in the Standards and Guidelines.

4.5   It is, nevertheless, worth noting at this point the key role played by the Chief Executive of HETAC in ENQA (of which he is currently the Vice President), a role widely and positively acknowledged by many of those to whom the Panel spoke during its on-site visit. The Panel commends the role played by HETAC, and its Chief Executive in particular, in ENQA and the benefits that this has brought not only to HETAC but also more generally to higher education in Ireland.

4.6   HETAC has also been an active participant in the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), and now serves as its Secretariat, thereby placing the Chief Executive on the INQAAHE Board.

HETAC, FETAC and the Authority

5.1 HETAC does not operate in isolation.

5.2 The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 also established the Authority and the Further Education and Training and Awards Council (FETAC). The Authority was responsible for creating the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) which was launched in October 2003. The Framework is a structure of ten levels, accommodating awards in schools, the workplace, the community, training centres, colleges and universities, from primary to doctoral levels of learning and has defined an initial set of 15 major award types for the ten levels in the Framework. A summary of the awards in the Framework is contained in Appendix 8. FETAC was established to make or recognise further education and training awards within the Framework. HETAC makes awards in Levels 6 to 10 of the Qualifications Framework; FETAC in Levels 1 to 6.

5.3 The Chief Executive Officers of FETAC and HETAC are members of the other Council and both Council Chairs are members of the Authority; there is frequent contact between the Chief Executives of each organisation; and close co-operation between staff of FETAC and HETAC on day-to-day matters. The Panel formed the view that the three organisations work well together at both a strategic and operational level, based on mutual professional and personal respect, and on a clear and shared view of their respective functions. The Panel commends the positive working relationships between the three agencies established under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 and acknowledges the benefits that this has brought at both a strategic and operational level.

5.4 HETAC has also been involved actively in the Irish Higher Education Quality Network and has worked constructively with the Irish Universities Quality Board. This is another area where HETAC's leading role in European quality assurance developments is acknowledged to the benefit of Irish higher education more generally.

PART TWO Statutory functions

Introduction

6.1 A list of HETAC's current policies and procedures is given in Appendix 9. In considering HETAC's performance of its statutory functions and related policies and procedures, the Panel noted those Council policies most relevant to each function. They are indicated at the end of each sub-section below.

Making and promoting awards

7.1 The number of individual awards made by HETAC declined from 18,682 in 2001 to approximately 6,964 in 2005. It is projected to fall to about 4,400 in 2006. This is largely the result of delegating awarding powers to most of the Institutes of Technology. The Panel was advised that by June 2006 all Institutes were likely to have delegated authority to make awards to varying degrees up to Level 10 on the Framework. A key function of HETAC, namely to delegate to a recognised institution the authority to make awards (Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, section 29) is, almost by definition, likely to result in a decline in the number of awards made by HETAC itself. HETAC expects the number of individual awards to increase after 2006 as new providers, predominantly from the private sector, are agreed and learner numbers increase.

7.2 HETAC is actively considering ways in which it should promote its awards. Institutional representatives differed concerning the value of promoting HETAC's awards, especially if this was to be done by general advertising. Whilst acknowledging the importance of HETAC's current role as the public guarantor of standards, those Institutes of Technology with delegated authority indicated to the Panel that they were keen to promote their own distinctive brands and their own arrangements for assuring the standards of awards. Private providers, on the other hand, perhaps not surprisingly, welcomed the promotion of HETAC's awards. Both views might be accommodated by a targeted promotion of HETAC's awards aimed at, for example, School Guidance Counsellors and employers. A

number of professional bodies acknowledged the importance of the HETAC 'brand' to employers.

7.3 One matter which HETAC will wish to keep under review, in the light of the implementation of its quality assurance arrangements, concerns procedures it will adopt to evaluate programmes leading to HETAC awards, or institutions with delegated authority offering awards, outside Ireland.

7.4 A frequently expressed view concerned the importance and value of the establishment of the Framework. For many of those to whom the Panel spoke the Framework provides a coherent and easily understood awards framework and is perceived as more important than HETAC's role in the promotion of its awards. HETAC's positive contribution to debate about the establishment of the Framework was acknowledged.

7.5 In the view of the Panel, HETAC has effectively performed, and is continuing to perform its function of making and promoting awards. Policies and procedures of particular relevance to this function are:

  • 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12 [See Appendix 9]

Recognising other awards

8.1 HETAC recognises awards in at least two ways.

8.2 The first is by recognising the awards of external bodies, in particular professional bodies; the second is by recognising the work of individual learners. Thus far, the work of one individual learner has been recognised following detailed scrutiny, including a viva, by HETAC. Although HETAC continues to make this route available, its resource implications are potentially significant.

8.3 Education and training required as a pre-requisite for registration by some statutory bodies is now being recognised by HETAC. Work

is still required, however, to incorporate fully and appropriately the experiential and work-based elements of some of this education and training, for example clinical site evaluation in respect of nursing education. The role played by HETAC in enabling the award of one private provider to be recognised by the Department for Education and Science was warmly acknowledged. At least one significant professional body remains dissatisfied with the title which HETAC has decided will be used for one of the degree programmes in its area of expertise. The Panel commends the work of HETAC in establishing positive relationships with a range of professional and statutory bodies and incorporating their qualifications within the National Framework of Qualifications.

8.4   The Council has also played an important role in award recognition in a European context. It operates a system of credit for its awards that is based on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System in line with the Framework. It also promotes recognition through its support of the implementation of the European Diploma Supplement. All providers of HETAC awards have been required to issue the supplement from 2005 onwards. In these and other ways, HETAC's existence facilitates the recognition of international credentials thereby allowing their holders to fit more readily into the workplace.

8.5   In the view of the Panel, HETAC has effectively performed its function of recognising other awards. Policies and procedures of particular relevance to this function are:

• 12 [See Appendix 9]

Determining standards in higher education and training institutions

9.1   HETAC's responsibility for determining the standard of its awards is set within the generic standards of the Framework. In attempting to interpret these standards, HETAC has, according to its SER (page 15), sought to reconcile the requirements of rationalisation and

simplicity with the traditional understanding of various subject communities and stakeholder groups. With one exception, HETAC appears to the Panel to have struck an appropriate and acceptable balance in this matter. It recognises, nevertheless, that further work is required in this area, a view with which the Panel concurs.

9.2   A particular feature of the Framework, to which those to whom the Panel spoke made frequent reference, is the fact that new awards are based on learning outcomes defined in terms of standards of knowledge, skill and competence. In November 2003, HETAC adopted the generic award-type descriptors of the Framework as interim standards. Pilot standards for six broad fields of learning, covering the great majority of HETAC's awards, were subsequently developed and have been published by HETAC for awards at Levels 6 to 9. The pilot fields are:

| Art & Design | Business | Computing |
| Engineering | Nursing* | Science |

(* Awaiting final agreement with An Bord Altranais)

9.3   One area of overlap between HETAC and FETAC – sometimes referred to colloquially as 'co-habitation' – is at Level 6 of the National Framework of Qualifications where both HETAC and FETAC are empowered to make awards. The potential for ambiguity resulting from this overlap is acknowledged by both organisations but the Panel is satisfied that efforts are being made, also involving the Authority, to clarify this issue for the benefit of both learners and providers.

9.4   A contentious area involves awards at Levels 9 and 10, specifically research masters and doctoral degrees. Representatives of a number of institutions argued that, notwithstanding an early review of the criteria and procedures to be used in relation to the delegation of authority for these awards, involving both HETAC and the Authority, HETAC's current criteria for delegating the Research Register remain bureaucratic, confusing and unduly restrictive. Whilst the Panel would encourage HETAC to minimise

bureaucracy and ambiguity, given the resources required to create an appropriate doctoral supervisory environment, a cautious approach may be appropriate in this area at this stage, so long as this does not restrict the type of doctoral programmes that HETAC would be prepared to consider.

9.5 In the view of the Panel, HETAC has effectively performed its function of determining standards for awards. Policies and procedures of particular relevance to this function are:

- 1, 5, 15 & 16 [See Appendix 9]

Validating programmes

10.1 Until 2003, HETAC continued to accredit programmes using the validation criteria of its predecessor, the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA) under transitional provisions contained in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. With the establishment of generic standards for the awards of HETAC following the creation of the NFQ, HETAC embarked on an ambitious project involving the revalidation in a period of three months in early 2004 of more than one thousand programmes originally validated under NCEA arrangements against the standards of the new Framework award types.

10.2 The Panel probed with a range of participants the implications for the standard of the awards of such a large and speedy programme of re-validation and was reassured in part by the fact that the project did not involve any new programmes. This reassurance was reinforced by the views of a number of institutional representatives who told the Panel that, although the process had been demanding, it had performed a valuable, developmental function in generating debate on the matter of learning outcomes amongst academic staff, for some of whom the exercise required a new approach to assessment.

10.3 In addition, HETAC has accredited approximately 170 taught programmes and approximately 700 individual research degree programmes (SER, page 11).

10.4 The Panel probed HETAC's relationship with new providers, in particular those offering programmes not previously validated, or offering programmes in new discipline areas. Representatives from new providers attested to the helpfulness of HETAC staff in advising them of what was required, clarifying criteria when requested and commenting on draft submissions. Whilst the Panel would commend the approachability of HETAC staff and their willingness to assist demonstrated by this, it is important for such assistance to be given within a framework whose boundaries are clearly understood so as to avoid too 'cosy' a relationship developing with its attendant possibilities for misunderstanding when developmental support and summative judgement is delivered by the same organisation. The Panel was reassured by HETAC staff with whom it raised this matter that these boundaries are understood. HETAC will, no doubt, wish to consider how sustainable the level and quality of support currently given by staff considering individual programmes submitted for validation is in the longer term. This will be particularly important given the predicted increase in this area of HETAC's work.

10.5 The Panel noted what appeared to be a uniform approach to programme validation on the part of HETAC. Whilst a degree of consistency in the procedures used is clearly appropriate, the approach to validation might be varied, especially where, for example, a new programme, or a programme at a level not previously offered by a provider, is involved.

10.6 In the view of the Panel, HETAC has effectively performed its function of validating programmes. Policies and procedures of particular relevance to this function are:

- 7, 11, 12, 16 & 17 [See Appendix 9]

Assuring the quality of programmes leading to a HETAC award

11.1 The Act requires providers of higher education and training programmes validated by HETAC, or to which HETAC has delegated the power to make awards, to establish quality assurance procedures and to agree those procedures with HETAC. In 2002, HETAC published a document entitled, Guidelines and Criteria for Quality Assurance Procedures in Higher Education and Training. While pre-dating the publication of the *European Standards and Guidelines* they are, in the view of HETAC, consistent with those guidelines.

11.2 To date, 36 higher education institutions have had their quality assurance arrangements agreed, and HETAC advised that the remaining two current providers were expected to do so shortly. At the time of the review, a further 18 potential new providers are in discussion with HETAC about their quality assurance procedures.

11.3 The Panel discussed with HETAC staff and with providers what exactly 'agreeing' to the quality assurance arrangements of a particular provider had involved. It was advised that, thus far, the process has involved a desk-based scrutiny by review panels appointed by HETAC of documentation submitted by institutions describing their current quality assurance arrangements. The Panel was advised that virtually all initial submissions had been returned with requests for amendment prior to agreement by the appointed Panel and consideration and approval by the relevant HETAC committee. HETAC acknowledges in its SER that, since the scrutiny is a desk-based one, the implementation of the agreed policies has yet to be evaluated. In 2005 the HETAC Council adopted criteria and processes for reviewing the effectiveness of these arrangements and it is understood that the review cycle will commence later in 2006. In the view of the Panel this remains a significant task, the completion of which will ultimately define the success or otherwise of HETAC's impact and its effectiveness in discharging the full range of its statutory obligations.

11.4 In the view of the Panel, HETAC has made an effective start to the performance of its function of assuring the quality of programmes leading to a HETAC award. Much, nevertheless, remains to be done, in particular the planned review of arrangements referred to in the previous paragraph. Policies and procedures of particular relevance to this function are:

- 2, 3, 13, & 14 [See Appendix 9]

HETAC reviewers

12.1 Crucial to the credibility of HETAC's procedures for review and approval is the calibre, conduct and preparedness of the reviewers used by HETAC. Since its establishment HETAC has used some 500 reviewers on four different types of review panels, namely:

- Programme validation panels
- Delegated authority evaluation/review groups
- Research accreditation and approval panels
- Standards expert groups

12.2 A feature of the current arrangements is the use of students as reviewers, and the use of industrialists, members of professional bodies and international academics as reviewers.

12.3 The Panel discussed with reviewers to whom it spoke what general training and preparation they had received prior to undertaking review activities, feedback on their performance as reviewers and ongoing training for them in their role as reviewers. What emerged from these discussions was that training is limited, by and large, to the provision by HETAC, usually shortly before a specific review, of a written copy of the detailed criteria relevant to the type of review about to be undertaken. Review teams undertaking site visits usually meet on the evening prior to a visit when they discuss the criteria relevant to the review and the documentation submitted by the institution. The Panel concluded that this limited approach to the training of reviewers could in

turn limit, perhaps significantly, the effectiveness of the reviews undertaken by them.

12.4 This conclusion is not intended to reflect on the expertise or experience of those involved in review work for HETAC, many of whom are eminent in their chosen field. Nevertheless, reviewers with little or no current involvement in higher education, and even reviewers from within Irish higher education institutions, including students and those who have themselves been subject to a HETAC review of their institution, would benefit from more systematic initial and ongoing training in their roles as reviewers. They could also be a valuable resource in the training and preparation of the significant proportion of reviewers with little or no current experience of higher education or of higher education in Ireland.

12.5 The Panel recommends as a matter of priority that HETAC gives urgent attention to the provision of initial and ongoing training to its reviewers, including the requirement that no one should normally be a member of a review team unless they have undergone such training. An annual conference of reviewers could, for example, provide an opportunity for experienced reviewers to share their experiences as reviewers with each other and with new reviewers, and could provide important feedback to HETAC on its different review processes. The use of technology including, for example, Internet training, web seminars and video conferencing, could be considered together with the production of a handbook for reviewers. The Panel acknowledges the severe time pressure under which HETAC has had to operate since its establishment and the significance of its achievement. Nevertheless, as it moves into the next phase of its work, attention to the training of its reviewers must be a priority.

Learner protection, access, progression and transfer

13.1 The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act of 1999 (Section 43), places on HETAC a duty to ensure that provision is made for the protection of learners enrolled at private institutions intending

to operate programmes of education and training on a commercial and profit basis. 'Protection' in this context requires a private institution seeking HETAC's validation of a programme to undertake to guarantee, as a condition of validation, alternative provision in two named institutions in the event that the provider no longer runs the course, or a fee refund.

13.2　HETAC's publication, Policy, Procedures and Criteria for the Validation of Taught Programmes, published in 2004 confirms (paragraph 1.2.5) that HETAC requires that '… appropriate arrangements are in place for the protection of learners as stipulated in Section 43 of the Act …'. This policy document was replaced in 2005 by 'Taught and Research Programme Accreditation Policy, Criteria and Processes'. Validation documentation provided by HETAC demonstrated that this criterion is taken into account at all validation events. In the case of publicly funded institutions the reports of the validation panels involved acknowledge that this provision of the Act does not apply. In the case of private providers, two validation reports scrutinised by the Review Panel confirmed that the validation panel had been satisfied that this provision had been catered for by the providers involved.

13.3　More generally the Review Panel discussed with a range of participants their experience of HETAC's interest in and evaluation of the whole student experience. The criteria used by HETAC require validation panels to evaluate the human and physical resources available to support a proposed programme and reports scrutinised by the Review Panel demonstrated that this aspect of the student experience had been considered by the validation panels involved.

13.4　The Panel noted HETAC's strong support of the creation of a seamless, system of qualifications and its potential for facilitating student access, transfer and progression. In particular, HETAC contributed to the principles and operational guidelines for the implementation of a national approach to credit in Irish higher education and training adopted in 2004. The HETAC credit and

awards system is compatible with these guidelines. There was also evidence indicating that review panels have considered the matter of access, transfer and progression.

13.5 HETAC's SER confirmed that it intends to explore further with providers and other awarding bodies, how HETAC's experience of operating a national system can be built upon to enhance access, transfer and progression for learners. The Panel would encourage HETAC in this regard, including the importance of providing robust, statistical evidence of the effectiveness of its initiatives in this area of its work.

Cyclical review of quality assurance agencies

14.1 The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher
      Education (ENQA) provides a theoretical model for the cyclical
      review of quality assurance agencies (Appendix 7, pages 136 to
      143). This model contains three main elements as follows:

      • Terms of reference
      • Self-evaluation
      • Guidelines for the external review panel

14.2 It will be evident from Parts One and Two of this report that all
      three of these elements are reflected in the evaluation of HETAC.
      It is, nevertheless, worth highlighting briefly the extent to which
      the arrangements made complied with ENQA's review model.

14.3 The Panel was provided with comprehensive terms of reference
      which clearly identified the goals of the review. The terms of
      reference also provided protocols for the conduct of the review.
      The Panel had available to it an SER prepared by HETAC and
      supplementary documents which together provided:

      • details of the national higher education system
      • a history of HETAC
      • details of external quality assurance activities undertaken by
        HETAC
      • details of the various review models undertaken by HETAC
      • an analysis of HETAC's achievements and recommendations for
        improvement.

14.4 Significant additional supporting documentation amplifying the
      self-evaluation report was provided both before and during the
      on-site visit.

14.5 The review itself was preceded by a face-to-face briefing for Panel
      members by the agency (the Authority) formally commissioning the
      review. The briefing also included a presentation by the current
      President of ENQA. Panel members were given detailed

information of the general organisation of the review. The Panel itself drew up the programme for the three-day on-site visit and agreed arrangements for drafting the report containing its findings.

14.6 The Panel consisted of international quality assurance experts, a representative of national higher education institutions and representatives of student and other stakeholders' interests, from amongst whom a Chairman was appointed. An external Secretary, a higher education administrator with higher education quality agency and institutional experience, supported the Panel.

14.7 As noted earlier in this report, the ENQA publication, *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, contains a list of European standards for quality assurance in higher education and accompanying guidelines. The standards and guidelines focus on three areas, namely:

• European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance
• European standards for the external quality assurance of higher education
• European standards for external quality assurance agencies

14.8 The Panel reviewed HETAC's compliance with the last two elements above which focus on external standards, including those applicable to external quality assurance agencies. Many of the Panel's findings in respect of its evaluation of HETAC's performance of its statutory functions are, of course, directly relevant to the *European Standards and Guidelines*. Indeed, the Standards and Guidelines document acknowledges (below pages 127-8) that an external review will usually flow from national regulations and involve an evaluation of the fulfilment of the national mandate as well as the extent to which the agency involved conforms to the *European Standards and Guidelines*. The remainder of Part Three of the report will, therefore, summarise the Panel's findings in this regard without, however, repeating what has already been said in Parts One and Two. HETAC's own SER (pages 16 to 20) evaluates its

compliance with the *European Standards and Guidelines* and the Panel's findings broadly confirm HETAC's self-evaluation.

14.9 The Panel was conscious of the fact that, at the time of its review, no report on the compliance or otherwise of any other national agency with the Standards and Guidelines had been published. In evaluating HETAC's arrangements, Panel members were, therefore, guided by the Standards and Guidelines document; the briefing provided by the President of ENQA (see paragraph 14.5); and their own experience of the policies, procedures and practices of quality assurance agencies in at least four other countries.

European standards for the external quality assurance of higher education

The use of internal quality assurance processes [European Standard (ES) 2.1]

15.1 One of HETAC's key functions is the power to delegate to recognised institutions the authority to grant awards. The Panel was advised by HETAC that it had sought to exercise this power to the optimal extent. Indeed, by June 2006 all recognised institutions are expected to have varying degrees of delegated power to make awards up to Level 10 on the Framework, the culmination of a three-year process. The decision to grant delegated authority, which is for named levels of award, followed the re-validation by HETAC of all programmes in 2004 and a subsequent desk-based scrutiny of each institution's internal quality assurance processes. Continued delegation is subject to an on-site review within five years. Planned reviews of institutional quality assurance will assess the extent to which internal quality assurance is effective.

Development of external quality assurance processes [ES 2.2]

16.1 The overall objective of HETAC's quality assurance processes is to promote continuous improvement of the standards of provision of

higher education and training, thus encouraging access, transfer and progression, and ensuring learner protection. HETAC's Strategic Plan for 2006-2010, available publicly, describes the following as the principal drivers of its work during that period:

- the development of the community of learners
- the development of provider organisations
- the encouragement of increased confidence in HETAC's role amongst key stakeholders
- the review of the exercise of delegated authority
- an increased focus on quality assurance
- growth in the number and diversity of private providers [ES 2.2]

16.2 The processes used by HETAC to achieve these objectives were developed through consultation and research. HETAC acknowledges that it could have consulted more extensively or for longer than it did in some areas – a point made by a number of those to whom the Panel spoke – but felt itself to be under pressure to perform the functions laid down for it by national legislation within a limited time period. On balance, the Panel concluded that HETAC had consulted appropriately in the circumstances and was committed, in principle, to effective and appropriate consultation.

Criteria for decisions [ES 2.3]

17.1 HETAC has published a number of policies, procedures, guidelines and criteria which inform its approach to, and procedures for, review. These are listed in Appendix 9 and are available on HETAC's website. The relevance of particular policies and procedures to HETAC's statutory functions was considered in Part Two of this report.

Processes fit for purpose [ES 2.4]

18.1 HETAC has undertaken a number of different types of review since its establishment. These have included:

- Taught programme accreditation
- Delegated authority evaluation/review
- Research accreditation and approval

18.2 Published criteria and procedures, building substantially on the validation experience of the NCEA and specific to each type of review, are available.

18.3 HETAC has also published pilot standards for six broad fields of learning as noted elsewhere in this report.

Reporting [ES 2.5]

19.1 HETAC is committed to publishing reports. Reports of reviews for delegated authority and research accreditation have been published by HETAC and these were available for Panel members to scrutinise. Reports on the review of the operation of each institution's quality assurance policies will be published once the review programme has commenced. HETAC's current policy is to publish programme accreditation reports but it has not done so thus far in respect of taught programmes. The reason for this distinction was not clear to the Panel and HETAC may wish to consider publishing all reports as a matter of principle, and publicising its intention in this regard. HETAC is also subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act of 1997.

Follow-up procedures [ES 2.6]

20.1 As already noted (paragraph 10.5 above) the specific formats of the various reviews conducted by HETAC are usually the culmination of a process of dialogue between HETAC staff and

representatives of the institutions or programmes being reviewed. As a result, many of the more significant areas of concern are considered and resolved prior to review. Nevertheless, HETAC's review processes do make provision for review panels to make recommendations for action and Panel members saw evidence of this in their scrutiny of review panel reports.

20.2 A frequently expressed view amongst those to whom the Panel spoke, however, was that follow-up by, and feedback from HETAC could, on occasions, be more rigorous and more widely disseminated. In the view of the Panel, a distinction should be drawn between feedback to members of review panels and follow up with institutions themselves. In the case of the former, the work of panel members is complete once they have conducted their review; they need have no formal responsibility for follow up. In the case of the latter, follow up rests with HETAC itself.

20.3 The Council acknowledges, nevertheless, the need to be more assiduous in follow up. Its SER notes (page 17) that, now that the initial tranche of reviews has been completed, HETAC will give greater attention to the transparency and effectiveness of its mechanisms for follow up of recommendations from both programmatic and institutional reviews. The Panel would support this priority in terms both of accountability and enhancement.

Periodic reviews [ES 2.7]

21.1 There is provision for the review of each institution at periodic intervals. The initial agreement by HETAC of the quality assurance procedures of institutions will be followed by a review of their effectiveness within a period of not more than five years. HETAC has set a schedule for these reviews, the first of which will commence later this year (2006). In the case of Institutes of Technology with delegated authority, the review will be combined with a review of an Institute's exercise of delegated authority.

21.2 In the case of programmatic review, institutions with delegated authority will be required to report to HETAC the outcomes of

their own internal programme reviews. The Panel formed the view that many institutions were either using the programme review model used by HETAC itself when it conducted its review in 2004, or a model based on that approach. One common feature noted and commended by the Panel is the use of externals in these reviews. HETAC is actively considering a shorter review period for less experienced providers.

System-wide analyses [ES 2.8]

22.1 HETAC's emphasis since its establishment has, perhaps naturally, been on implementation. This should not, however, minimise the significance of the move from process to outcomes in programmatic reviews and from programmatic to institutional review which HETAC has overseen.

22.2 HETAC has established a Research and Policy Analysis unit and the Panel was able to talk to members of that unit. The unit was involved, inter alia, in providing background analysis relevant to the production of the SER. In addition, it has been involved in developing a higher education sector-wide code of practice for practice-based research in art and design which, as well as being of significance in its own right, could also provide a model for further sector-wide collaboration. The unit has also been active in providing information to enable HETAC to respond to a variety of consultations, a role which was warmly acknowledged by one of the external stakeholders to whom the Panel spoke.

22.3 In 2003 HETAC published an analysis of degrees, diplomas and certificates awarded in Ireland during the period 1998-2002 effectively establishing a benchmark against which the impact and effectiveness of its own activities can be evaluated. A review of award classifications was carried out in 2005 but, as the SER acknowledges (page 17), there is scope for further statistical analysis of the extensive records now held by HETAC, a review which the Panel would encourage. Given their significance, one area of review which the Panel would also encourage HETAC to

consider concerns the qualifications, experience and expertise of its reviewers, with the aim of enabling HETAC to take a more strategic as opposed to what appears currently to be a rather pragmatic approach to their selection and deployment.

Conclusion

22.4 In the view of the Panel, HETAC complies with the European standards for the external quality assurance of higher education whilst acknowledging the areas for development highlighted above.

European standards for external quality assurance agencies

Use of external quality assurance procedures [ES 3.1]

23.1 The extent to which HETAC has taken account of the presence and effectiveness of external quality assurance processes is considered in paragraphs 14.1 to 22.1 above.

Official status [ES 3.2]

24.1 HETAC is formally recognised as an agency with responsibility, inter alia, for external quality assurance under the provisions of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act of 1999.

Activities [ES 3.3]

25.1 As this report amply demonstrates, HETAC has undertaken, and will continue to undertake external quality assurance activities at both institutional and programme level on a regular basis.

Resources [ES 3.4]

26.1 HETAC receives a recurrent state grant through the Authority and is also financed by way of fee income from higher education and training providers in respect of awards and accreditation fees. In 2005, fee income accounted for some 31% of HETAC income, with the state grant accounting for 68% of income. HETAC has 33 staff. It acknowledges that, whilst the changing emphasis across the different functions has already required a considerable measure of redeployment and re-skilling since the transition from the NCEA, a changed mix of professional and administrative skills will be required, particularly in policy development and support of capacity building for quality enhancement in the higher education sector. This insight is one which the Panel would strongly endorse.

Mission statement [ES 3.5]

27.1 HETAC adopted an inaugural mission statement in 2002. This was reviewed as the transition period came to an end and a new Statement of Mission is contained in HETAC's Strategic Plan for 2006-2010. This statement, reproduced in full in Appendix 10, emphasises HETAC's role as a public body, accountable to the Irish government, which exists to benefit learners and potential learners in a variety of ways linked to its formal roles of setting standards, accrediting programmes and awarding qualifications.

Independence [ES 3.6]

28.1 HETAC enjoys a high degree of independence under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act of 1999. This is reflected in the membership of its governing body, in its procedures for review and in its publication of the findings of its various reviews. HETAC is also to be commended for making public its SER.

28.2 The Act makes provision for appeals to the Authority against decisions of HETAC, either to withdraw delegated authority from an institution or to refuse or withdraw validation of a programme. Thus far there have been no such appeals. The Panel did, however, probe this matter in some detail with representatives of the Authority.

28.3 HETAC and the Authority have considered this matter very carefully and, following consultation with institutions concerning the way in which appeals might be handled, are agreed that an appeal would only be considered on the grounds of what were described as 'reasonableness'. The Panel was advised that this would not include any attempt on the part of the Authority to second guess a decision made by HETAC; rather it would focus on consideration by the Authority of the process used by HETAC in arriving at a decision in terms of its congruence with its published procedures.

28.4 The Panel is satisfied that the opportunity for an appeal against a decision of HETAC does not itself undermine its independence in arriving at decisions concerning institutional quality assurance arrangements or programme approval. Rather, it was the Panel's view that, were it to be thought that the process used by HETAC in arriving at decisions concerning the withdrawal of delegation of authority and the refusal or withdrawal of validation of programmes was not 'reasonable', the likely consequence would not be to over-rule HETAC's decision, but rather to ask HETAC to review the evidence available to it, and the process used by it, in arriving at its decision. The careful consideration of this matter by HETAC and the Authority gave the Panel further reassurance, concerning both the current approach to considering an appeal and the practice established of monitoring this matter to avoid undermining HETAC's independence. HETAC and the Authority also reassured the Panel that this matter was the subject of ongoing review.

External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agency

29.1 The processes, criteria and procedures used by HETAC in undertaking its various review activities are pre-defined and publicly available. As already noted, Appendix 9 contains HETAC's current polices and procedures, all of which are available in hard copy and on HETAC's website. The review processes normally involve a self-assessment by the institution or programme managers which are the subject of review; consideration of the self-assessment by an independent panel of experts; the publication of a report; and procedures for following up the findings of such reports. The findings of the panel in respect of each of these aspects of the work of HETAC have been considered elsewhere in this report.

Accountability procedures

30.1 HETAC is subject to review under the provisions of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act of 1999, and this review is evidence of that formal accountability. In addition, HETAC took the initiative in asking for its compliance or otherwise with the *European Standards and Guidelines* for quality assurance to be considered by the Panel established to review the effectiveness of its performance of its statutory functions.

Conclusion

31.1 In the view of the Panel, HETAC complies with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies whilst acknowledging the areas for development highlighted above.

Findings

32.1 In the light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the Panel:

- is satisfied that the Higher Education and Training Awards Council has performed effectively its principal statutory functions since its establishment and has developed policies and procedures for each function which are being implemented and will be operated as appropriate;

- is satisfied that in the performance of these functions, HETAC complies with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*.

Recommendations

33.1 The Panel concurs broadly with HETAC's summary of notable features and areas for improvement as contained in its SER. In the development of a plan to implement the recommendations of this Report, as required under the Protocol for this Review, HETAC will wish, nevertheless, to note the Panel's views concerning HETAC's performance of some aspects of its statutory functions and some aspects of its compliance with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. Particular areas for consideration are summarised below.

33.2 The Panel recommends that HETAC:

- gives urgent attention to the provision of initial and ongoing training to its reviewers, including the requirement that no-one should normally be a member of a review team unless they have undergone such training [paragraph 12.4];

- reviews the qualifications, experience and expertise required of its reviewers, with the aim of enabling HETAC to take a more strategic as opposed to what appears currently to be a rather pragmatic approach to their selection and deployment [22.3].

33.3 In addition, the Panel recommends that HETAC:

- reviews the longer-term sustainability of the level and quality of support currently given by staff considering individual programmes submitted for validation [paragraph 10.4];

- considers how its current approach to validation might be varied, especially where a new programme, or a programme at a level not previously offered by a provider, is involved [paragraph 10.5];

- considers publishing all its reports as a matter of principle, and publicising its intention in this regard [paragraph 19.1].

Glossary of terms/acronyms

ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
FETAC	Further Education Training and Awards Council
HETAC	Higher Education Training and Awards Council
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
NCEA	National Council for Educational Awards
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
Authority	National Qualification Authority of Ireland
SER	Self Evaluation Report

APPENDIX ONE Review of the Performance by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council of its functions by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland - Terms of Reference and Protocol for the Review

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The review will evaluate

- how effectively the Higher Education and Training Awards Council has performed its principal statutory functions since its establishment and will have particular regard to the policies and procedures that the Council has developed for each function and how they are being implemented and operated
- the extent to which the Council in the performance of these functions complies with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*

The review will comprise

- Self-evaluation by the Council
- Evaluation by a panel of experts
- Consideration of the report of the panel by the Council and the development of a plan by the Council to implement the recommendations in the report
- Consideration of the review report and the Council's plans by the Authority

Background and Legislative Context

1. The Higher Education and Training Awards Council was established on 11 June 2001 pursuant to the provisions of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. The Council has functions in relation to making and recognising higher education and training awards; setting standards for higher education and training awards; promoting the higher education and training awards of the Council; delegating awarding powers to recognised institutions; validating higher education and training programmes; quality assurance in higher education institutions; the establishment by higher education institutions of student assessment procedures; ensuring that arrangements are in place in commercial education and training institutions to protect learners where programmes validated by the Council cease to be provided; ensuring that the procedures for access, transfer and progression determined by the Qualifications Authority are implemented by higher education institutions; and assisting the Qualifications Authority in carrying out its functions[1].

In Bergen in May 2005 the Ministers responsible for higher education in the Bologna signatory states adopted *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (hereafter cited as *European Standards and Guidelines*)[2]. The European Standards and Guidelines establish standards for external quality assurance agencies and require that individual agencies should conduct or be submitted to a cyclical external review of its processes and activities at no more that five-year intervals[3]. On foot of these developments, it was intended by the Council that an external review would be carried out in line with the *European Standards and Guidelines*. In addition, under section 9 of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland may from time to time review the performance by the Council of its functions. It was originally envisaged that such a review would take place in 2006-7. However, in September 2005, the Council requested that the Authority would undertake the review both in advance of the

[1] The principal statutory functions of the Council are set out in sections 23, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 43 and 44 of the Qualifications Act for which see Annex 1 [Appendix 6 of this document].
[2] For the European Standards and Guidelines see Annex 2 [Appendix 7 of this document].
[3] The standards are set out chapter 2 part 3 of the European Standards and Guidelines and the review system is set out in chapter 3, for which see Annex 2 [Appendix 7 of this document].
[4] See Annex 1 [Appendix 6 of this document].

projected 2006-7 timeline, and in line with the *European Standards and Guidelines*.

This document sets out the terms of reference and protocol for the review. It has been drafted following a series of consultative meetings with the Council executive and with the following stakeholders: the Department of Education and Science; the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; the Further Education and Training Awards Council; the Council of Directors of the Institutes of Technology; the Higher Education Colleges Association; the Union of Students of Ireland; the Higher Education Authority; the Irish Universities Association; the Irish Universities Quality Board and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. In addition, the document has also been drafted with reference to an overview of national and international practice drawn up by the Authority. The review will also be implemented with reference to this overview of national and international practice.

Purpose and Scope

2. The review will evaluate how effectively the Council has performed its principal statutory functions since its establishment in June 2001[5], and will have particular regard to the policies and procedures that the Council has developed for each function and how they are being implemented and operated. As such, the review will be primarily an exercise in quality assurance. This observation is significant. As members of the Irish Higher Education Quality Network, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education both the Council and Authority are guided by, and have subscribed to, shared principles with regard to the nature of quality assurance. At the heart of these is the core principle that quality assurance systems and processes are intended to promote quality improvement. To quote the *European Standards and Guidelines* 'Quality assurance is not principally about individual external scrutiny events: it [is] …

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5   For the Council's functions see section 1 above and Annex 1 [Appendix 6 of this document].

about continuously trying to do a better job'. The general approach of the review of the Council by the Authority will reflect this core principle. It will be developmental in intent, and aim to assist the Council in achieving its own quality enhancement goals and to further develop its own internal quality culture.

In this connection, the review process will be conducted in line with the *European Standards and Guidelines*. Eight European standards have been defined and are set out in Annex 2 [Appendix 7 of this document]. These standards will not only provide a key set of benchmarks for the evaluation of the performance by the Council of its functions, but will also ensure that the review will evaluate, and document in the final report, the extent to which the Council is in compliance with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies. In effect, this will be the first of a series of cyclical reviews to which the Council will be required to submit itself in order to demonstrate its compliance with the new *European Standards and Guidelines*. Compliance with these standards and guidelines is a requirement for membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

Also of relevance is section 8(2) (c) of the Qualifications Act[6]. This section sets out that the Authority shall establish procedures for the performance by the Council of its functions and shall review these procedures from time to time. The Authority has developed and revised these procedures in consultation with the Council. Transitional procedures were put in place for the Council during the early months of its existence (June 2001-December 2001). In December 2001, the Authority put in place more permanent procedures for the performance by the Council of its functions, and these have been revised on two occasions since then. The procedures currently in operation came into effect on 29 September 2005. The current and previous procedures are set out in Annex 3 of this document [Appendix 1]. The review will have regard to the procedures.

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6   See Annex 1 [Appendix 6 of this document].

Review Process

3.   The review process will consist of the following elements:

- Nomination and appointment of a panel of experts
- Self-evaluation by the Council, including preparation of a self-evaluation report
- Site-visit by the expert panel
- Preparation and completion of final evaluation report

Nomination and appointment of a panel of experts

3.1   The Authority executive has consulted with the Council executive and other stakeholders on the nature of the panel of experts, and how it should be constituted. The Review Panel will have the following make-up:

- Two Irish experts: these panellists will provide an Irish higher education and training perspective and/or a social partner/public sector perspective.
- An expert with a student/learner perspective
- Three international experts, including two European members and one North American. These panellists will provide perspectives on international quality assurance and accreditation, and on the non-university higher education sector.
- A secretary: the secretary will be independent of the Qualifications Authority.

One of the panel members will act as chairperson. The Qualifications Authority will appoint the Review Panel, the chairperson and the secretary. It will also organise briefing/training for the review panel ahead of the panel's site visit.

Self-evaluation by the Council, including preparation of a self-evaluation report

3.2   The Council will be responsible for designing its own self-evaluation process. It should encompass the following elements:

• Engagement with internal and external stakeholders: including staff; those involved on behalf of the Council in quality assurance processes; representatives of students/learners; the recognised institutions; other providers of education and training programmes leading to Council awards; the Further Education and Training Awards Council; other Irish higher education and training quality assurance and awarding bodies; social partners and other relevant stakeholders.

• The preparation of an analytical and reflective self-evaluation report: the report should identify strengths, areas for improvements, and opportunities and constraints in relation to the performance by the Council of its statutory functions. In so doing, the report should clearly demonstrate the extent to which the Council is in compliance with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies. In general, the report should be concise and to the point and will be submitted for distribution to the review panel at least four weeks before the site visit commences.

Site visit by expert panel

3.3   The Authority executive, in consultation with the Council executive and the chairperson and secretary of the expert panel, will prepare and publish a schedule of the site visit. This will include an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the expert panel during the site visit. The site visit will be two to three days in duration.   The expert panel will give an oral presentation of the main findings of the review in a debriefing meeting at the end of the site visit to the Chief Executive of the Council.

Preparation and completion of final evaluation report

3.4 The report of the expert panel will be drafted by the secretary in consultation with the expert review panel, and should address in an appropriate manner the purpose and scope of the the review as set out in section 2 above. It should also provide a clear rationale for its findings. The Authority will provide administrative support to the secretary as necessary.

A draft of the report will be submitted to the Council for comment within three weeks after the site visit. The Council will make comment, if any, within two weeks. Thereafter the expert panel will consider any comments of the Council, finalise the document and submit it to the Council and the Authority.

Follow-up process and publication of outcomes

4. The Council will consider the expert panel's report and will inform the Authority of its plans to implement the recommendations in the report. The review report and the Council's plans will then be considered by the Authority, following which the report and the Council's implementation plans will be published.

Indicative timetable of review

5. Agreement of terms of reference and protocol for review
End Nov 2005

Council commences self-evaluation
Early Dec 2005

Appointment of expert panel by Authority
Early Jan 2006

Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable
Mid-Jan 2006

Council self-evaluation completed
End Feb 2006

Training/Briefing for expert review panel
Early Mar 2006

Expert panel site visit
Late Mar 2006

Draft report to Council
24 Apr 2006

Submission of final report to Council and Authority
15 May 2006

Consideration of report by Council
Late May 2006

Consideration of report and response of Council by Authority
June/July 2006

Consideration of report by ENQA
July 2006

Publication of report and implementation plans
July/August 2006

Annex 1 – Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 – Sections relevant to the review of the performance by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council of its functions by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

See Appendix 6 of this document.

Annex 2 – Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

See Appendix 7 of this document.

ANNEX 3 Procedures established by the Authority for the performance by the Council of its functions and dates of application

The Authority established the following as procedures with immediate effect on 29 September, 2005:

- The Council will operate in all matters in accordance with the principles of best public service practice and in particular, in relation to openness, transparency and accountability.
- In conformity with the requirements of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, the Council will continue the development of its own policies, procedures and criteria under the Act.
- The Council will implement the principles, process guidelines, policies and criteria established by the Authority in relation to the further development, implementation and communication of the framework.
- The Council will implement the policies determined by the Authority in relation to access, transfer and progression, including the further articulation of these in relation to credit accumulation and transfer and the recognition of prior learning.
- In performing its functions the Council will continue to develop and implement open and responsive consultative processes with

  - Other higher education awarding bodies
  - Providers of higher education and training
  - The Further Education and Training Awards Council.
  - Learners
  - Other relevant stakeholders

and will continue to seek to gain their support for and confidence in the nature of the Council's policies, procedures and criteria and the arrangements for their implementation.

- The Council shall co-operate with the Further Education and Training Awards Council, as appropriate, in performing its functions.
- The Council will have regard to the role of providers of higher education and training which is set out in the Act and which provides, inter alia, for providers taking responsibility for their own assessment and quality assurance processes.

- The Council will have regard to the diversity of existing and emerging providers of higher education and training, ranging from State-funded bodies to independent providers and in-company training provision.
- The Council will facilitate the recognition of learning undertaken throughout life within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective.
- The Council will contribute to the national policy for the extension of bi-lingualism in Irish society.
- These procedures will apply to all of the functions of the Council.

Accordingly, the procedures set out above replace the procedures previously established by the Authority. The aim of the Authority is that the procedures will be updated following the review of the Council by the Authority under section 9 of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999.

Procedures for the Higher Education and Training Awards Council – from 16 April 2003 to 29 September 2005

The Authority established the following as procedures with immediate effect on 16 April, 2003:

- The Council will operate in all matters in accordance with the principles of best public service practice and in particular, in relation to openness, transparency and accountability.
- In conformity with the requirements of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, the Council will continue to use as much as it considers necessary of the processes and procedures of the National Council for Educational Awards (in relation to awards other than the National Foundation Certificate), until such time as processes and procedures have been established by the Council itself.
- The Council will implement the principles, process guidelines, policies and criteria established by the Authority in relation to the further development and implementation of the framework.

- The Council will implement the policies determined by the Authority in relation to access, transfer and progression.
- In performing its functions the Council will develop and implement open and responsive consultative processes with

  - Providers of higher education and training
  - The Further Education and Training Awards Council.
  - Learners
  - Other relevant stakeholders

- The Council shall co-operate with the Further Education and Training Awards Council, as appropriate, in performing its functions.
- The Council will have regard to the role of providers of higher education and training which is set out in the Act and which provides, inter alia, for providers taking responsibility for their own assessment and quality assurance processes.
- The Council will have regard to the diversity of existing and emerging providers of higher education and training, ranging from State-funded bodies to independent providers and in-company training provision.
- The Council will facilitate the recognition of learning undertaken throughout life within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective.
- The Council will contribute to the national policy for the extension of bi-lingualism in Irish society.
- These procedures will remain in place for a period which will not extend more than two years after their establishment.
- These procedures will apply to all of the functions of the Council.
- While these procedures are being established for a certain period, it may of course be necessary to modify the procedures, in consultation with the Council.

**Procedures for the Higher Education and Training Awards Council
– from 16 April 2003 to 29 September 2005**

The Authority established the following as procedures with
immediate effect on 16 April, 2003:

• The Council will operate in all matters in accordance with the
principles of best public service practice and in particular, in
relation to openness, transparency and accountability.
• In conformity with the requirements of the Qualifications
(Education and Training) Act, the Council will continue to use as
much as it considers necessary of the processes and procedures
of the National Council for Educational Awards (in relation to
awards other than the National Foundation Certificate), until
such time as processes and procedures have been established by
the Council itself.
• The Council will implement the principles, process guidelines,
policies and criteria established by the Authority in relation to
the further development and implementation of the
framework.
• The Council will implement the policies determined by the
Authority in relation to access, transfer and progression.
• In performing its functions the Council will develop and
implement open and responsive consultative processes with

  o Providers of higher education and training
  o The Further Education and Training Awards Council.
  o Learners
  o Other relevant stakeholders

• The Council shall co-operate with the Further Education and
Training Awards Council, as appropriate, in performing its
functions.
• The Council will have regard to the role of providers of higher
education and training which is set out in the Act and which
provides, inter alia, for providers taking responsibility for their
own assessment and quality assurance processes.

- The Council will have regard to the diversity of existing and emerging providers of higher education and training, ranging from State-funded bodies to independent providers and in-company training provision.
- The Council will facilitate the recognition of learning undertaken throughout life within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective.
- The Council will contribute to the national policy for the extension of bi-lingualism in Irish society.
- These procedures will remain in place for a period which will not extend more than two years after their establishment.
- These procedures will apply to all of the functions of the Council.
- While these procedures are being established for a certain period, it may of course be necessary to modify the procedures, in consultation with the Council.

Procedures for the Higher Education and Training Awards Council – from 3 December 2001 to 16 April 2003

The Authority established the following as procedures, subject in all matters to the provisions of the Qualifications (Education & Training) Act, with immediate effect on 3 December 2001:

- Governance - The Council will operate in all matters in accordance with the principles of best public service practice and in particular, in relation to openness, transparency and accountability. In respect of the Protection of Learners the Council will exercise due diligence in conformity with the requirements of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act and the report of the Department's Steering Committee.
- In performing its functions the Council will consult with

  - Providers of higher education and training
  - The Further Education and Training Awards Council.
  - Learners
  - Other relevant stakeholders.

- The Council will have regard to the role of providers of higher education and training which is set out in the Act and which provides, inter alia, for providers taking responsibility for their own assessment and quality assurance processes.
- The Council will have regard to the diversity of existing and emerging providers of higher education and training, ranging from State-funded bodies to independent providers and in-company training provision.
- Programme Validation and Certification Arrangements – The procedures previously operated by NCEA will be continued including titles of awards, submission of course proposals, recommendations of an expert/peer review group and deliberative processes agreed by the Council and in conformity with the requirements of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act and, as appropriate, the report of the Department's Steering Committee.
- Approval of Providers' Processes for Fairness and Consistency of Assessments – The procedures operated previously by NCEA will operate subject to modifications agreed by the Department of Education and Science Steering Committee for the purposes of conformity with the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act.
- Promotion of Awards – Recognising its obligations to promote its awards under the terms of the Act and recommendations of the Steering Committee the Council will seek to ensure the confidence of graduates in the awards of NCEA and the confidence of candidates for HETAC awards in the awards of the Council.
- In all other respects, to the extent that they are in conformity with the requirements of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, the policies and procedures of NCEA in force on 10 June 2001 will be continued during the transition period pending determination of new policies and procedures by the Authority in consultation with the Council.
- These procedures will apply to all of the functions of the Council other than under section 29 of the Act in relation to delegation of authority by the Council to make awards. Should the Council wish to consider a request for a review, it will then advise the Authority in relation to the procedures that are to be put in place by the Authority.

- These procedures should remain in place for a period, which will not extend more than three months after the Authority has initially established a framework of qualifications.
- While these procedures are being established for a certain period, it may of course, be necessary to modify the procedures, in the light of experience between now and three months after the Authority has initially established a framework of qualifications. The Council will advise the Authority of any instances where it appears that this would be necessary.

Accordingly, the procedures set out above replace the procedures previously established by the Authority.

Procedures for the Performance by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council of its Functions - From 14 June 2001 – 3 December 2001

The Authority has established following procedures to operate during an initial transitional period up to 31 December 2001 and pending development of more long-term procedures for the conduct of the Council's business to be determined by the Authority. While these procedures are being established for an initial period, it may of course be necessary to modify the procedures, in consultation with the Council, in the light of experience between now and 31 December 2001.

The procedures are as follows

Governance
The Council will operate in all matters in accordance with the principles of best public service practice and in particular, in relation to openness, transparency and accountability. In respect of the Protection of Learners the Council will exercise due diligence in conformity with the requirements of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act and the report of the Department's Steering Committee.

Programme Validation and Certification Arrangements

The procedures previously operated by NCEA will be continued including titles of awards, submission of course proposals, recommendations of an expert/peer review group and deliberative processes agreed by the Council and in conformity with the report of the Department's Steering Committee.

Approval of Providers' Processes for Fairness and Consistency of Assessments

The procedures operated previously by NCEA will operate subject to modifications agreed by the Department of Education and Science Steering Committee for the purposes of conformity with the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act.

Promotion of Awards

Recognising its obligations to promote its awards under the terms of the Act and recommendations of the Steering Committee the Council will seek to ensure the confidence of graduates in the awards of NCEA and the confidence of candidates for HETAC awards in the awards of the Council.

In all other respects the policies and procedures of NCEA in force on 10 June 2001 will be continued during the transition period pending determination of new policies and procedures by the Authority in consultation with the Council of HETAC.

APPENDIX TWO
Review Panel membership

Dr. Seamus Smyth
(Chair of Panel)
President Emeritus
National University of Ireland
Maynooth

David Parry
(Secretary to the Panel)
Former Assistant Principal &
Dean of the Academic Quality
and Standards Service
Southampton Solent University
England

Marion Coy
Director
Galway-Mayo Institute of
Technology

Dr Steven D. Crow
Executive Director
The Higher Learning
Commission of the North
Central Association of Colleges
and Schools
Chicago
Illinois
United States of America

Revd Darren McCallig
Former Education Officer
Union of Students in Ireland

Dr Angelika Schade
Chancellor
Fachhochschule im Deutschen
Roten Kreuz
Göttingen
Germany
and
Former Managing Director
German Accreditation Council

Norman Sharp
Director
Quality Assurance Agency for
Higher Education
Scotland

Monday 27 March 2006

Meeting	Time	Participants
	09:00	Review Panel orientation meeting
	10:45	*Break*
01	11:00	Chief Executive, HETAC
02	12:00	HETAC Senior Managers
		• Dr. Bryan Maguire, Director of Academic Affairs
		• Tadhg ÓhÉalaithe, Director of Corporate Services
		• Mary Sheridan, Recognition and Information Management
	13:00	*Lunch*
03	14:30	Athlone IT (Levels 6-9)
		• Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin, Director
		• Dr. Joseph Ryan, Registrar
		• Dr. Marian Fitzgibbon, Head of School of Humanities
		• Austin Hanley, School of Engineering
04/1	15:30	Limerick IT (Levels 6-9)
		• Dr. Maria Hinfelaar, Director
		• Pat Burke, former Quality Officer
		• Richard Ruth, Head of School of Art & Design
04/2	15:30	IT Tralee (Levels 6-9)
		• Dr. Oliver Murphy, Registrar
		• Dr. Noel Mulligan, Project Leader, Modularisation
		• Gerard O'Donnell, Lecturer, School of Business
		• David Hegarty, Lecturer, School of Engineering & Construction Studies

Meeting	Time	Participants
	16:15	*Break*
05	16:45	Cork IT (Levels 6-10) • Brendan Goggin, Registrar • Dr. Eamonn Cashel, Head of Science • Dr. Stephen Cassidy, Senior Lecturer, Mechanical Engineering • Dr. Helen O'Shea, Biology & Chair of the Postgraduate Study Board

Tuesday 28 March 2006

Meeting	Time	Participants
06	09:00 09:15	Review Panel meeting Higher Education Authority • Mary Kerr, Deputy Chief Executive • Fergal Costello, Head of Policy and Planning Department of Education & Science • Margaret Kelly, Principal Officer • Ruth Carmody, Principal Officer
07	10:30	Irish Universities Quality Board • Dr. Padraig Walsh, Chief Executive • Dr. Teresa Lee, Programme Manager
	11:15	*Break*
08	11:30	Professional Bodies • Dr. Tony White, Director, CIMA • Aidan Pender, Director of Enterprise & Skills Development, FÁILTE Ireland • Ann-Marie Ryan, Chief Education Officer, An Bord Altranais, (Nursing Board) • Anne Butler, President, Engineers Ireland • Ronan O'Loughlin, ICAI
09	12:30	FETAC • Stan McHugh, CE • Barbara Kelly, Director of Awards & Standards • Ultan Tuite, Director of Services
	13:15	*Lunch*

Meeting	Time	Participants
10	14:30	Garda College, Templemore • Superintendent Chris Gordon • Niamh O'Donoghue • Sergeant Niall Featherstone
11/1	15:30	Dublin Business School • Gerry Muldowney, Director • Phillip Ryan, Chair of Academic Board • Pat Daly, Acting Registrar • Mark Maguire, Arts School • Sinead O'Brien, School of Business
11/2	15:30	Hibernia College • Sara McDonnell, Director of Operations • Siobhan Kerr, HETAC Liaison 2001-2005 • Dr Patricia Moriarty, Registrar • Dr Antonia McManus, Academic Advisor, Department of Education and Science
	16:15	*Break*
12/1	16:45	HETAC Reviewers Meeting: • John Hayden, Chair Delegated Authority Panels, (former HEA, CE) • Vincent McCarthy, Chair, Quality Assurance Panels (former Director, Limerick IT) • Pat Scanlon, IT Sligo, Novice, Programme Accreditation Review • Professor Henry Rice, Trinity College Dublin, Research Panel Member • John Andy Bonar, Head of School of Business, Letterkenny IT (Chair, Accreditation Panel)

Tuesday 28 March 2006 (Continued)

Meeting	Time	Participants
12/2	16:45	HETAC Reviewers Meeting: Students • Kieran O'Malley, President, Students Union, Galway - Mayo, (IT Tallaght panel 2006) • Niall Callery, President, Students Union, Dundalk IT, (IADT Panel 2005) • Sharon Hughes, President, Students Union Welfare Officer, DIT (IT Tralee Panel 2004) • Patrick Reilly, President, Students Union, NUI Galway, (IT Carlow Panel 2006)
	17:30	Review Panel meeting
13	19:30	Meeting with Professor Ciaran Murphy, Chairperson, HETAC
14	20:00	Dinner with HETAC Board members • Professor Ciaran Murphy, Chairperson HETAC • Danny Brennan, Director, Letterkenny Institute of Technology • Richard Morrisroe, USI Education Officer

Wednesday 29 March 2006

Meeting	Time	Participants
15	09:00 09:30	Review Panel meeting Dr. Dermot Douglas, Senior Academic Executive, Council of Directors - Institutes of Technology, CDIT
16	10:15	Student representatives Hibernia College • Yvette Keelett, HD in Arts in Primary Education • Anne-Marie Clarke, HD in Arts in Primary Education IT Carlow • Anthony Friel, BA Communications & PR • Michael Hyland, BEng - Mechanical Cork IT • Donna Griffin, PhD (Electronic Engineering) • Grainne Lennon, PhD (Biological Sciences) Griffith College Dublin • Bing Liang Chen, BSc (Hons) Computing • Shauna Tilley, BA (Hons) Legal Studies with Business Athlone Institute of Technology • Sean Lyons, PhD (Engineering) • Salwan Barkwan (PhD (Science) Garda College • Garda Stephen Byrne, Howth Garda Station • Garda Maura Fitzgerald, Store Street Garda Station

Wednesday 29 March 2006 (Continued)

Meeting	Time	Participants
	11:00	*Break*
17	11:30	HETAC Staff Members: Heads of Function • Dr. Peter Cullen, Research and Policy Analysis • Donna Bell, Consultant • Joe Cox, QA Programmes • Des Carolan, QA Institutions • Renée Reece, Business Development • Ian McKenna, Capacity Building
18	12:30	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland • Seán Ó Foghlú, Chief Executive • Dr. Jim Murray, Development Project Leader • Claire Byrne, Director of Corporate Affairs
	13:15	*Lunch*
	14:30	Review Panel meeting
	16:30	Review Panel feedback session with HETAC CEO
	17:30	Review Panel departs

APPENDIX FOUR
List of Documentation

A   HETAC Policies and Procedures

A1   Folder Containing Policies and Procedures
       (as listed in Table of Contents)

A2   Awards Standards
       Art & design
       Business
       Computing
       Engineering
       Science

A3   HETAC Customer Charter

B   HETAC Council

B1   Terms of Reference

B2   Membership Composition

B3   Meeting Documentation
       27 February 2006
       06 February 2006
       28 November 2005

C   Programme Accreditation Committee

C1   Terms of Reference

C2   Meeting Documentation
       13 December 2005

D   Research Documentation

D1   HETAC / CODIT Research Quality Initiative

D2   Practice Based Research in the Arts

D3   Research Degree Programme Committee
      Terms of Reference
      Meeting Documentation
      24 May 2005
      01 February 2005
      08 December 2004

D4   Research Accreditation Process

E   Sample of Delegated Authority Reports

E1   Institute of Technology Sligo (November 2005)

E2   Institute of Technology Carlow (June 2005)

E3   Athlone Institute of Technology (June 2004)

**F   Programme Evaluation Process
      (sample of four applications)**

F1   Cork Institute of Technology
      Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Architectural Technology

F2   Institute of Technology Carlow
      Bachelor of Business (Honours) in Management

F3   Griffith College Dublin
      Bachelor of Science in Computing

F4   Hibernia College
      Master of Science in Pharmaceutical Medicine

G   Examiner's Reports

G1   Background Note

G2   Sample of External Examiners Reports
     Institute of Technology Tralee
     (BA Honours in Interactive Media)
     Holy Ghost College, Kimmage Manor
     (MA in Development Studies)

H   Stakeholder Interview and Meetings Reports

H1   A Student Perspective: Learner Interviews Report

H2   Meeting with Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology

H3   Meeting Chief Executive, FETAC

H4   Meeting with Chief Executive, Irish Universities Quality Board

**I   An Analysis of Degree, Diploma and Certificate Awards in
     Ireland, 1998 to 2002**

J   OECD Review of Higher Education in Ireland 2004

**K   HETAC Key Stakeholder Survey – Final Report May 2005
     (MORI Ireland)**

Additional Documentation

G   Examiner's Reports

G2   Sample of External Examiners Reports
The Garda College, Templemore
(BA in Police Management, BA in Police Studies, National
Diploma in Police Studies)
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown
(BA in Applied Social Studies in Social Care)

L   Self Evaluation Submissions Received

M Note on Selection of Panel Members

N Context of Higher Education

O Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA

P   Glossary of Terms

Q Collection of Press Cuttings

Introduction

The higher education or third-level sector in Ireland includes a range of Higher Education Institutions – Universities and Institutes of Technology as well as Colleges of Education, the National College of Art and Design, non-State aided private higher education colleges and other National institutions. The Universities and Colleges of Education are funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA). The Institutes of Technology and the Dublin Institute of Technology are funded directly by the Department of Education and Science (www.education.ie).

Ireland has a binary system of higher education designed to ensure maximum flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of students and to the wide variety of social and economic requirements. However, within each sector and between the two sectors, a diversity of institutions offer differing types and levels of courses. The Universities are essentially concerned with under-graduate and post-graduate programmes, together with basic and applied research. The main work of the Institutes of Technology is in under-graduate programmes, with a smaller number of post-graduate programmes and a growing involvement in regionally orientated applied research.

Government Agencies

The Higher Education Authority (www.hea,ie), which was established in 1971, is responsible for furthering the development of higher education and assisting in the co-ordination of State investment in higher education. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) (www.nqai.ie) was established in 2001 by the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 and is responsible for establishing and maintaining the National Framework of Qualifications. The Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) (www.hetac.ie), which was also established under the 1999 Act, is the qualifications awarding body for the Institutes of Technology and other non-university higher education colleges and institutions, excluding the Dublin Institute of Technology. HETAC may also delegate the authority to make awards to an Institute of Technology.

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[1] Written in October 2004 for National Diploma Supplement Template

Higher Education Institutions

There are seven universities recognised under the Universities Act, 1997 - University College Cork, University College Dublin, National University of Ireland Galway, National University of Ireland Maynooth, Trinity College Dublin, the University of Limerick and Dublin City University. The Universities validate and award their own qualifications, as well as those in institutions recognised by them including, for example, the Colleges of Education. The Universities have primary responsibility for their own quality assurance arrangements and have established the Irish Universities Quality Board to promote best practice in quality assurance throughout their sector. The Higher Education Authority also has a review role in relation to quality assurance procedures in Universities.

There are thirteen Institutes of Technology (IoTs), which are designated under the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1999. The institutions are Athlone IT, IT Blanchardstown, Cork IT, IT Carlow, Dundalk IT, Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Galway-Mayo IT, Letterkenny IT, Limerick IT, IT Sligo,IT Tallaght, IT Tralee and Waterford IT.

These conduct programmes leading to awards made by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council. In some cases, following a review process, the institutions have been or may be delegated authority by the Council to make awards themselves. In addition, while the institutions have primary responsibility for quality assurance themselves, the Council has a quality assurance monitoring and review role in relation to the institutions.

Other higher education institutions include National institutions, private colleges and higher education and training institutions. However, under recent legislation any provider of education and training regardless of the source of that provision, whether it is in an educational institution, the workplace or the community, can apply to the Higher Education and Training Awards Council for validation of a programme.

Finally, the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) (www.dit.ie)
makes its own awards following legislation which was passed in
1997. While the Institute has primary responsibility for quality
assurance itself, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
has a quality assurance review role in relation to these procedures.

National Framework of Qualifications
The National Framework of Qualifications (launched on 17 October
2003) sets the overall standards of the awards of the Higher
Education and Training Awards Council and the Dublin Institute of
Technology, as well as accommodating the awards of the
Universities. The Framework is the single, nationally and
internationally accepted entity, through which all learning
achievements may be measured and related to each other in a
coherent way and which defines the relationship between all
education and training awards. It is a 10-level framework with
higher education and training awards being made at levels 6 to 10.
The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland has defined an
initial set of 15 major award-types for each of the 10 levels as
follows:

Level	Major Award-Type
10	Doctoral Degree
9	Masters Degree and Post-graduate Diploma
8	Honours Bachelor Degree and Higher Diploma
7	Ordinary Bachelor Degree
6	Advanced Certificate and Higher Certificate
5	Level 5 Certificate
4/5	Leaving Certificate
4	Level 4 Certificate
3	Level 3 Certificate and Junior Certificate
2	Level 2 Certificate
1	Level 1 Certificate

Awards at Levels 7 to 10 are made by the Higher Education and
Training Awards Councils, the Dublin Institute of Technology and
the Universities. At Level 6, the Higher Certificate award is made
by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the
Dublin Institute of Technology.

Section 8: **Functions of Authority**

8. - **(1)** The functions of the Authority are to do all things necessary or expedient in accordance with this Act to further the objects of the Authority.

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1), the Authority shall -

(a) establish the policies and criteria on which the framework of qualifications shall be based,

(b) review the operation of the framework of qualifications having regard to the objects specified in section 7,

(c) establish, in consultation with the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, procedures for the performance by them of their functions and shall review those procedures from time to time,

(d) determine the procedures to be implemented by providers of programmes of education and training for access, transfer and progression and shall publish those procedures in such form and manner as the Authority thinks fit,

(e) ensure, in consultation with the Dublin Institute of Technology and universities established under section 9 of the Act of 1997, that the procedures referred to in paragraph (d) are being implemented by them,

(f) facilitate and advise universities in implementing the procedures referred to in paragraph (d) and from time to time and in any case not less than once in every five years, in consultation with An tÚdarás, review the implementation of those procedures by universities, and publish the outcomes of such a review in such form and manner as it thinks fit,

(g) consult with and advise the Minister or any other Minister, as the case may be, on such matters in respect of its functions as the Minister or any other Minister may request or as the Authority sees fit, and

(h) (i) liaise with bodies outside the State which make education and training awards for the purposes of facilitating the recognition in the State of education and training awards made by those bodies, and

(ii) facilitate recognition outside the State of education and training awards made in the State.

(3) The Authority, in the performance of its functions, shall -

(a) inform itself of the education, training, skills and qualifications requirements of industry, including agriculture, business, tourism, trade, the professions and the public service, including the level of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners and promote practices in education and training which meet those requirements,

(b) inform itself of practices outside the State in respect of matters relevant to its functions,

(c) give effect to the policies relating to education and training which from time to time are established, and notified in writing to the Authority, by the Minister, or by any other Minister with the agreement of the Minister, following consultation with the Authority, and

(d) consult, as it considers appropriate, with universities, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Dublin Institute of Technology, recognised institutions, An Foras, CERT, Teagasc, An Bord Iascaigh Mhara, educational or training institutions established by a vocational education committee, other providers of education and training, persons, or bodies of persons, who represent employees of providers of education and training or who represent learners, An tÚdarás, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and such other persons or bodies of persons as the Authority considers appropriate, and the Authority shall consider the views, if any, of those bodies for the purpose of determining the procedures referred to in subsection (2)(d).

Section 9: **Review by Authority**

9. - (1) The Authority may from time to time review the performance by the Further Education and Training Awards Council or the Higher Education and Training Awards Council of its functions and may make such recommendations to the Council concerned in respect of that performance, as the Authority thinks fit.

(2) The Further Education and Training Awards Council or the Higher Education and Training Awards Council shall implement recommendations, if any, made by the Authority under subsection (1).

(3) The Authority shall publish in such form and manner as it considers appropriate the results of a review under subsection (1).

Section 23: **Functions of Council**

23. - (1) The functions of the Council shall be as follows:

(a) to establish and publish, in such form and manner as it thinks fit, policies and criteria for:
  (i) the making of higher education and training awards, and
  (ii) the validation of programmes of higher education and training, and to review such policies and criteria not less than once in every five years;
(b) to determine standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners—
  (i) before a higher education and training award may be made by the Council or by a recognised institution to which authority to make awards has been delegated under section 29, or
  (ii) who request from the Council recognition of an award made by a body other than the Council or a recognised institution to which authority to make awards has been delegated under section 29;

(c) to make or recognise higher education and training awards given or to be given to persons who apply for those awards and who, in the opinion of the Council, have achieved the standard determined by the Council under paragraph (b);

(d) to monitor and evaluate the quality of programmes of education and training in respect of which awards are made or recognised under paragraph (c);

(e) to ensure that -

  (i) providers of programmes of education and training whose programmes are validated under section 25, and

  (ii) recognised institutions to which authority to make awards has been delegated under section 29, establish procedures for the assessment of learners which are fair and consistent and for the purpose of compliance with standards determined by the Council under paragraph (b);

(f) to promote the higher education and training awards of the Council;

(g) to facilitate and assist the Authority in carrying out its functions;

(h) to consult with and advise the Minister or any other Minister, as the case may be, on such matters in respect of its functions as the Minister or any other Minister may request or as the Council thinks fit, and to inform the Authority of any such consultation and advice, and

(i) to do all such acts or things as are necessary or expedient for the purpose of the exercise of its functions.

(2) The Council, in the performance of its functions, shall -

(a) consult, as it considers appropriate, with providers of higher education and training or other persons or bodies,

(b) following consultation with the Authority, inform itself of practices outside the State in respect of matters relevant to its functions,

(c) following consultation with the Authority, inform itself of the education, training, skills and qualifications requirements of industry, including agriculture, business, tourism, trade, the professions and the public service,

including the level of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners and promote practices in higher education and training which meet those requirements, and

    (d)   ensure that procedures for access, transfer and progression determined by the Authority under section 8(2)(d) are implemented by:

        (i)   providers of programmes of education and training whose programmes are validated under section 25, and

        (ii) recognised institutions to which authority to make awards has been delegated under section 29.

(3)   The Council may request -

    (a)   a provider of programmes of education and training whose programmes are validated under section 25, or

    (b)   a recognised institution to which authority to make awards has been delegated under section 29,
to assist the Council in forming an opinion as to whether a person has achieved the standard determined by the Council under paragraph (b) of subsection (1) for the purpose of making or recognising a higher education and training award under paragraph (c) of that subsection.

Section 25: Validation of programmes by Council

25. - (1)   Subject to subsections (2) and (3), a provider of a programme of education and training may apply to the Council for validation of that programme.

(2)   (a)   Subject to paragraphs (b) and (c) and subsection (3), recognised institutions, An Foras, CERT, Teagasc and An Bord Iascaigh Mhara shall apply under subsection (1) to the Council to have all programmes of higher education and training which they provide, organise or procure validated by the Council.

    (b)   Paragraph (a) shall not apply to a programme of higher education and training in respect of which a recognised

institution has authority delegated to it under section 29 to make an award.

(c) Where a recognised institution has entered into arrangements or made arrangements under section 5(1)(b) of the Act of 1992, subject to the agreement of the Council and the Authority, paragraph (a) shall not apply to a programme of higher education and training provided by such recognised institution for such period, not exceeding five years from the commencement of this Part, as may be determined by the Council with the agreement of the Authority.

(3) Where a programme of higher education and training is organised or procured, in whole or in part, by a provider ("the first mentioned provider") and is provided, in whole or in part, by another provider ("the second mentioned provider"), the first mentioned provider shall consult with the second mentioned provider before making an application for validation under subsection (1) or (2).

(4) The Council may, on receipt of an application under subsection (1) or (2) -

(a) subject to such conditions as it thinks fit, validate a programme of education and training where it is satisfied that the programme concerned meets the criteria determined by the Council under paragraph (a)(ii) of section 23(1), or

(b) refuse validation.

(5) The conditions referred to in subsection (4)(a) shall include, but not necessarily be limited to, conditions requiring the provider concerned to -

(a) co-operate with and assist the Council, and the Authority where appropriate, in the performance of their functions,

(b) establish the procedures referred to in section 23(1)(e),

(c) implement the procedures referred to in section 23(2)(d), and

(d) provide such information as the Council may from time to

time require for the purposes of the performance of the functions of the Council, including information in respect of completion rates.

Section 26: **Withdrawal of validation**

26. - (1) The Council may, at any time, review a programme of education and training validated under section 25.

(2) Following a review under subsection (1), where the Council is of the opinion -

(a) that a programme of education and training validated under section 25 no longer meets the criteria determined by the Council under paragraph (a)(ii) of section 23(1), or

(b) that the conditions specified by the Council under paragraph (a) of section 25(4) are not being complied with, or

(c) that there are other reasonable grounds for withdrawing its validation

the Council shall inform the provider of the programme concerned, by notice in writing, of its opinion and the reasons for that opinion and the notice shall state that the provider may make representations to the Council in relation to that opinion not later than one month after the receipt of the notice by the provider.

(3) Where, after the expiration of one month from the service of the notice referred to in subsection (2) and after consideration of any representations made to the Council, the Council remains of that opinion, it may withdraw its validation of the programme concerned, by notice in writing addressed to the provider, from such date as it considers appropriate and having regard to the interests of the learners concerned and until such time as it may be satisfied of whichever of the following is appropriate -

(a) that the programme concerned meets the criteria determined by the Council under paragraph (a)(ii) of section 23(1), or

(b) that the conditions specified by the Council under paragraph

(a) of section 25(4) are being complied with, or

(c)   that the grounds for withdrawing validation referred to in subsection (2)(c) no longer exist.

Section 28: Quality assurance

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

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

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

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

(2)   Without prejudice to the generally of subsection (1), the procedures established under that subsection shall include -

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

(b)   evaluation by learners of that programme, and

(c)   evaluation of services related to that programme, and shall provide for the publication in such form and manner as the Council thinks fit of findings arising out of the application of those procedures.

(3)   The Council shall consider the findings arising out of the application of procedures established under subsection (1) and may

make recommendations to the provider of the programme concerned which that provider shall implement.

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

(5) The Council shall -
(a)   report to the Authority on, and,
(b)   publish in such form and manner as the Authority thinks fit, the results of a review under subsection (4) and shall include in a report or publication the views, if any, of the provider of the programme concerned.

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

Section 29: **Delegation of authority to make awards**

29. - (1) Subject to subsection (2), a recognised institution may request the Council to delegate to it the authority to make higher education and training awards.

(2) Where a programme of higher education and training is organised or procured, in whole or in part, by a recognised institution and is provided, in whole or in part, by any other provider, the recognised institution shall consult with such other provider before

making a request under subsection (1) for delegation of authority to make awards in respect of that programme.

(3) Upon receipt of a request under subsection (1), the Council shall determine and publish, in such form and manner as it thinks fit, criteria for the purposes of this section and shall, in accordance with subsection (4), review -
(a) the operation and management of the recognised institution concerned in relation to programmes of higher education and training provided, organised or procured by that recognised institution, and
(b) those programmes.

(4) In carrying out a review under subsection (3), the Council shall implement the procedures agreed from time to time with the Authority which procedures shall include -
(a) evaluation by the recognised institution of—
  (i) the operation and management of the recognised institution concerned in relation to programmes of higher education and training provided, organised or procured by that institution, and
  (ii) those programmes,
(b) where the Council, with the agreement of the Authority, is satisfied with the result of the evaluation referred to in paragraph (a), subsequent evaluation by such persons who have a particular knowledge and experience related to higher education and training, as the Council considers appropriate, including persons with relevant international experience, and
(c) publication, in such form and manner as the Council thinks fit, of a report of the findings of those evaluations.

(5) Where the Council is satisfied, with the agreement of the Authority, following a review under subsection (3), that -
(a) the operation and management of a recognised institution in relation to programmes of higher education and training provided, organised or procured by the recognised institution, and

(b)   those programmes,

meet the criteria determined by the Council for the purposes of this section with the agreement of the Authority, then the Council may delegate to that recognised institution the authority to make such higher education and training awards, subject to such conditions as it thinks fit, as the Council specifies by notice in writing to the recognised institution concerned and the Authority.

(6)   The conditions referred to in subsection (5) shall include, but not necessarily be limited to, conditions requiring the recognised institution concerned to -
(a)   co-operate with and assist the Council, and the Authority where appropriate, in the performance of their functions,
(b)   establish the procedures referred to in section 23(1)(e),
(c)   implement the procedures referred to in section 23(2)(d), and
(d)   provide such information as the Council requires for the purposes of the performance of the functions of the Council, including information in respect of completion rates.

(7)   The Council shall, for the purpose of determining the conditions referred to in subsection (5), have regard, in particular, to programmes, if any, referred to in subsection (2).

(8)   A review which, at the commencement of this Part, has been or is being conducted on the direction of the Minister in relation to the delegation of authority to an institution established by or under section 3 of the Act of 1992 to make higher education and training awards, which following such commencement becomes a recognised institution, shall be a review for the purposes of this section where the Minister so determines and the Minister shall inform the Council, by notice in writing, of any such determination and may give such directions to the Council and the Authority, as he or she considers appropriate.

Section 30: **Review and withdrawal of delegated authority**

30. - **(1)** The Council shall from time to time as it thinks fit and in any case not less than once in every five years, or as directed from time to time by the Authority, review, in such manner as it thinks fit:

(a) the operation and management of a recognised institution, to which authority to make awards has been delegated under section 29, in relation to programmes of higher education and training provided, organised or procured by that institution, and

(b) those programmes.

(2) Where the Council, having carried out a review under subsection (1), is of the opinion -

(a)(i) that the operation or management of the recognised institution concerned in relation to programmes of higher education and training provided, organised or procured by that recognised institution, or

(ii) that those programmes, do not meet the criteria determined by the Council under section 29(5), or

(b) that the conditions specified by the Council under section 29(5) are not being complied with, or

(c) that there are other reasonable grounds for withdrawing the authority to make awards delegated to that recognised institution under section 29,

it shall inform the recognised institution concerned, by notice in writing, of its opinion and the reasons for that opinion and the notice shall state that the recognised institution may make representations to the Council in relation to that withdrawal not later than three months after the receipt of the notice by the institution.

(3) Where, after the expiration of three months from the service of the notice referred to in subsection (2) and after consideration of any representations made to the Council, the Council remains of that opinion it may withdraw the authority to make awards delegated to the recognised institution under section 29, by notice

in writing addressed to that recognised institution, from such date as it considers appropriate and until such time as it may be satisfied of whichever of the following is appropriate -

(a)(i) that the operation and management of the recognised institution concerned in relation to programmes of higher education and training provided, organised or procured by that recognised institution, or

(ii) that those programmes,

meet the criteria determined by the Council under section 29(5), or

(b)   that the conditions specified by the Council under section 29(5) are being complied with, or

(c)   that the grounds referred to in subsection (2)(c) for withdrawing the authority to make awards no longer exist.

(4)   A Review under subsection (1) shall be carried out in accordance with such procedures as may be determined from time to time by the Council with the agreement of the Authority and those procedures shall provide for an appeal to the Authority against a decision to withdraw the authority to make awards delegated under section 29.

Section 43: Arrangements for protection of learners

43. - (1)   The Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Further Education and Training Awards Council shall not -

(a)   validate a programme of education and training pursuant to section 15 or 25, as the case may be, or

(b)   make or recognise any award in respect of a programme of education and training,

being in either case a programme of a duration of three months or more, which is provided by a provider which intends to operate programmes of education and training on a commercial and profit-making basis, unless the Higher Education and Training Awards Council or the Further Education and Training Awards Council, as the case may be, is satisfied that the provider concerned has

arrangements in place which make provision for learners where that provider ceases to provide the programme concerned.

(2) In this Part "arrangements in place" means -
(a) that the provider of the programme concerned has arrangements in place with at least two other providers which provide that a learner may transfer to similar programmes provided by those other providers, or
(b) in the case of a provider who considers, subject to the agreement of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council or the Further Education and Training Awards Council, as the case may be, that it is not practicable to have arrangements in place as specified in paragraph (a), such provider has arrangements in place which enable that provider to refund to a learner, or to the person who paid the moneys concerned on behalf of the learner, the moneys most recently paid to the provider in respect of that programme.

(3) (a) The Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Further Education and Training Awards Council shall each maintain a register of programmes of education and training in respect of which there are arrangements in place in accordance with subsection (1).
(b) A register referred to in paragraph (a) shall be kept in such form and manner as the Authority may from time to time direct and the Authority shall publish, in such form and manner as the Authority considers appropriate, details of the register concerned.

(4) The requirement to provide information in accordance with section 15(5)(d) or 25(5)(d), as the case may be, may include information in respect of arrangements which a provider is required to have in place in accordance with this section.

(5) References in this Part to a provider ceasing to provide a programme of education and training include ceasing to provide

the programme concerned for whatever reason, including -

(a)   the insolvency of the provider, or

(b)   withdrawal of validation of the programme concerned by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council or the Further Education and Training Awards Council, as the case may be, before completion of that programme.

Section 44:   Assistance to find alternative programme

44. -   (1)   Where a provider of a programme of education and training to which section 43 applies ceases to provide the programme concerned, the relevant body shall make all reasonable efforts to assist the learners concerned to find an appropriate programme of education and training with another provider which will enable them to complete that education and training.

(2)   Subsection (1) applies without prejudice to the duties and obligations of the provider of a programme of education and training to the learners concerned.

(3)   In this section "relevant body" means whichever of the Further Education and Training Awards Council or the Higher Education and Training Awards Council made or recognised an award or was to make or recognise an award in respect of the programme of education and training concerned.

APPENDIX SEVEN Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

Foreword

In the Berlin communiqué of 19 September 2003 the Ministers of the Bologna Process signatory states invited the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) 'through its members, in cooperation with the EUA, EURASHE, and ESIB', 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'. The Ministers also asked ENQA to take due account 'of the expertise of other quality assurance associations and networks'.

This report forms the response to this mandate and comes with the endorsement of all the organisations named in that section of the communiqué. The achievement of such a joint understanding is a tribute to the spirit of co-operation and mutual respect that has characterised the discussions between all the players involved. I would therefore like to extend my thanks to the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB together with the ENQA member agencies for their constructive and most valuable input to the process.

This report is directed at the European Ministers of Education. However, we expect the report to achieve a wider circulation among those with an interest in quality assurance in higher education. These readers will hopefully find the report useful and inspirational.

It must be emphasised that the report is no more than a first step in what is likely to be a long and possibly arduous route to the establishment of a widely shared set of underpinning values, expectations and good practice in relation to quality and its assurance, by institutions and agencies across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). What has been set in motion by the Berlin mandate will need to be developed further if it is to provide the fully functioning European dimension of quality assurance for the EHEA. If this can be accomplished, then many of the ambitions of

the Bologna Process will also be achieved. All the participants in the work to date look forward to contributing to the success of that endeavour.

Christian Thune
President of ENQA
February 2005

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Executive Summary

This report has been drafted by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)[1], through its members, in consultation and co-operation with the EUA, ESIB and EURASHE and in discussion with various relevant networks. It forms the response to the twin mandates given to ENQA in the Berlin Communiqué of September 2003 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'.

The report consists of four chapters. After the introductory chapter on context, aims and principles, there follow chapters on standards and guidelines for quality assurance[2]; a peer review system for quality assurance agencies; and future perspectives and challenges.

The main results and recommendations of the report are:

• There will be European standards for internal and external quality assurance, and for external quality assurance agencies.
• European quality assurance agencies will be expected to submit themselves to a cyclical review within five years.
• There will be an emphasis on subsidiarity, with reviews being undertaken nationally where possible.
• A European register of quality assurance agencies will be produced.
• A European Register Committee will act as a gatekeeper for the inclusion of agencies in the register.
• A European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education will be established.

When the recommendations are implemented:

• The consistency of quality assurance across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) will be improved by the use of agreed standards and guidelines.

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[1] ENQA's General Assembly confirmed on 4 November 2004 the change of the former European Network into the European Association.
[2] The term " quality assurance in this report includes processes such as evaluation, accreditation and audit.

- Higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies across the EHEA will be able to use common reference points for quality assurance.
- The register will make it easier to identify professional and credible agencies.
- Procedures for the recognition of qualifications will be strengthened.
- The credibility of the work of quality assurance agencies will be enhanced.
- The exchange of viewpoints and experiences amongst agencies and other key stakeholders (including higher education institutions, students and labour market representatives) will be enhanced through the work of the European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
- The mutual trust among institutions and agencies will grow.
- The move toward mutual recognition will be assisted.

Summary list of European standards for quality assurance

This summary list of European standards for quality assurance in higher education is drawn from Chapter 2 of the report and is placed here for ease of reference. It omits the accompanying guidelines. The standards are in three parts covering internal quality assurance of higher education institutions, external quality assurance of higher education, and quality assurance of external quality assurance agencies.

Part 1: European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions

1.1 **Policy and procedures for quality assurance:** Institutions should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should

develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.

1.2 **Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards:** Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.

1.3 **Assessment of students:** Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.

1.4 **Quality assurance of teaching staff:** Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so. They should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports.

1.5 **Learning resources and student support:** Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered.

1.6 **Information systems:** Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities.

1.7 **Public information:** Institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering.

Part 2: European standards for the external quality assurance of higher education

2.1 **Use of internal quality assurance procedures:** External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of

the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

2.2 **Development of external quality assurance processes:** The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

2.3 **Criteria for decisions:** Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

2.4 **Processes fit for purpose:** All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

2.5 **Reporting:** Reports should be published and should be written in a style, which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

2.6 **Follow-up procedures:** Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

2.7 **Periodic reviews:** External quality assurance/of institutions and.or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

2.8 **System-wide analyses:** Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

Part 3: European standards for external quality assurance agencies

3.1 **Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education:** The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

3.2 **Official status:** Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

3.3 **Activities:** Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

3.4 **Resources:** Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

3.5 **Mission statement:** Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

3.6 **Independence:** Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

3.7 **External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies:** The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
- an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
- publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

3.8 **Accountability procedures:** Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

CHAPTER ONE Context, Aims and Principles

In the Berlin communiqué of 19 September 2003 the Ministers of the Bologna Process signatory states invited ENQA 'through its members, in cooperation with the EUA, EURASHE, and ESIB', 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'. The Ministers also asked ENQA to take due account 'of the expertise of other quality assurance associations and networks'.

ENQA welcomed this opportunity to make a major contribution to the development of the European dimension in quality assurance and, thereby, to further the aims of the Bologna Process.

The work has involved many different organisations and interest groups. First, ENQA members have been extensively involved in the process. Members have participated in working groups, and draft reports have been important elements in the agenda of the ENQA General Assemblies in June and November 2004. Secondly, the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) and the European Commission have participated through regular meetings in the 'E4 Group'. Thirdly, the contacts with and contributions from other networks, such as the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) and the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (CEE Network), have been particularly valuable in the drafting process. Finally, ENQA and its partners have made good use of their individual international contacts and experiences and in this way ensured that relevant international perspectives were brought into the process.

Quality assurance in higher education is by no means only a European concern. All over the world there is an increasing interest in quality and standards, reflecting both the rapid growth of higher education and its cost to the public and the private purse. Accordingly, if Europe is to achieve its aspiration to be the most

dynamic and knowledge-based economy in the world (Lisbon Strategy), then European higher education will need to demonstrate that it takes the quality of its programmes and awards seriously and is willing to put into place the means of assuring and demonstrating that quality. The initiatives and demands, which are springing up both inside and outside Europe in the face of this internationalisation of higher education, demand a response. The commitment of all those involved in the production of these proposals augurs well for the fulfilment of a truly European dimension to quality assurance with which to reinforce the attractiveness of the EHEA's higher education offering.

The proposals contained in this report are underpinned by a number of principles which are described in more detail in the two chapters which cover the two parts of the Berlin mandate. However, some fundamental principles should permeate the whole work:

• the interests of students as well as employers and the society more generally in good quality higher education;
• the central importance of institutional autonomy, tempered by a recognition that this brings with it heavy responsibilities;
• the need for external quality assurance to be fit for its purpose and to place only an appropriate and necessary burden on institutions for the achievement of its objectives.

The EHEA with its 40 states is characterised by its diversity of political systems, higher education systems, socio-cultural and educational traditions, languages, aspirations and expectations. This makes a single monolithic approach to quality, standards and quality assurance in higher education inappropriate. In the light of this diversity and variety, generally acknowledged as being one of the glories of Europe, the report sets its face against a narrow, prescriptive and highly formulated approach to standards. In both the standards and the guidelines, the report prefers the generic principle to the specific requirement. It does this because it believes that this approach is more likely to lead to broad

acceptance in the first instance and because it will provide a more robust basis for the coming together of the different higher education communities across the EHEA. The generic standards ought to find a general resonance at the national[3] level of most signatory states. However, one consequence of the generic principle is that the standards and guidelines focus more on what should be done than how they should be achieved. Thus, the report does include procedural matters, but it has given a priority to standards and guidelines, especially in Chapter 2.

Finally, it must be emphasised that reaching agreement for this report is not the same thing as fulfilling the Bologna goal of a quality assurance dimension for the EHEA. Ahead lies more work to implement the recommendations of the report and secure the implied quality culture among both the higher education institutions and the external quality assurance agencies.

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[3] Throughout the report, the term "national" also includes the regional context with regard to quality assurance agencies, national contexts and authorities etc.

CHAPTER TWO
European Standards and Guidelines

The Ministers' mandate to develop 'an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance' raised a number of important questions. 'Quality assurance' is a generic term in higher education which lends itself to many interpretations: It is not possible to use one definition to cover all circumstances. Similarly, the word 'standards' is employed in a variety of ways across Europe, ranging from statements of narrowly defined regulatory requirements to more generalised descriptions of good practice. The words also have very different meanings in the local contexts of national higher education systems.

Moreover, the drafting process itself has made evident that, within the quality assurance community itself, there are some quite fundamental differences of view of the appropriate relationship that should be established between higher education institutions and their external evaluators. Some, mainly from agencies which accredit programmes or institutions, take the view that external quality assurance is essentially a matter of 'consumer protection', requiring a clear distance to be established between the quality assurance agency and the higher education institutions whose work they assess, while other agencies see the principal purpose of external quality assurance to be the provision of advice and guidance in pursuit of improvements in the standards and quality of programmes of study and associated qualifications. In the latter case a close relationship between the evaluators and the evaluated is a requirement. Yet others wish to adopt a position somewhere between the two, seeking to balance accountability and improvement.

Nor is it just the quality assurance agencies that have different views on these matters. The interests of the higher education institutions and student representative bodies are not always the same, the former seeking a high level of autonomy with a minimum of external regulation or evaluation (and that at the level of the whole institution), the latter wanting institutions to be publicly accountable through frequent inspection at the level of the programme or qualification.

Finally, the standards and guidelines relate only to the three cycles of higher education described in the Bologna Declaration and are not intended to cover the area of research or general institutional management.

Background of the standards and guidelines

This section of the report contains a set of proposed standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the EHEA. The standards and guidelines are designed to be applicable to all higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies in Europe, irrespective of their structure, function and size, and the national system in which they are located. As mentioned earlier, it has not been considered appropriate to include detailed 'procedures' in the recommendations of this chapter of the report, since institutional and agency procedures are an important part of their autonomy. It will be for the institutions and agencies themselves, co-operating within their individual national contexts, to decide the procedural consequences of adopting the standards contained in this report.

As their starting point, the standards and guidelines endorse the spirit of the 'July 2003 Graz Declaration' of the European University Association (EUA) which states that 'the purpose of a European dimension to quality assurance is to promote mutual trust and improve transparency while respecting the diversity of national contexts and subject areas'. Consonant with the Graz declaration, the standards and guidelines contained in this report recognise the primacy of national systems of higher education, the importance of institutional and agency autonomy within those national systems, and the particular requirements of different academic subjects. In addition, the standards and guidelines owe much to the experience gained during the ENQA-coordinated pilot project 'Transnational European Evaluation Project' (TEEP), which investigated, in three disciplines, the operational implications of a European transnational quality evaluation process.

The standards and guidelines also take into account the quality convergence study published by ENQA in March 2005, which examined the reasons for differences between different national approaches to external quality assurance and constraints on their convergence. Further, they reflect the statement of Ministers in the Berlin communiqué that 'consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework'. In these standards and guidelines, therefore, an appropriate balance has been sought between the creation and development of internal quality cultures, and the role which external quality assurance procedures may play.

In addition, the standards and guidelines have also benefited particularly from the 'Code of Good Practice' published in December 2004 by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) and other perspectives included in ESIB's 'Statement on agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines at a European level' (April 2004) and 'Statement on peer review of quality assurance and accreditation agencies' (April 2004), EUA's 'QA policy position in the context of the Berlin Communiqué' (April 2004) and the EURASHE 'Policy Statement on the Bologna Process' (June 2004). Finally, an international perspective has been included by comparing the standards on external quality assurance with the "Guidelines for good practice" being implemented by the international network INQAAHE.

European Standards and Guidelines for Internal and External Quality Assurance of Higher Education

The standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance, which follow, have been developed for the use of higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies working in the EHEA, covering cover key areas relating to quality and standards.

The purpose of these standards and guidelines is to provide a source of assistance and guidance to both higher education institutions in developing their own quality assurance systems and agencies undertaking external quality assurance, as well as to contribute to a common frame of reference, which can be used by institutions and agencies alike. It is not the intention that these standards and guidelines should dictate practice or be interpreted as prescriptive or unchangeable.

In some countries of the EHEA the ministry of education or an equivalent organisation has the responsibility for some of the areas covered by the standards and guidelines. Where this is the case, that ministry or organisation should ensure that appropriate quality assurance mechanisms are in place and subject to independent reviews.

Basic principles

The standards and guidelines are based on a number of basic principles about quality assurance, both internal in and external to higher education in the EHEA. These include:

- providers of higher education have the primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;

- the interests of society in the quality and standards of higher education need to be safeguarded;

- the quality of academic programmes need to be developed and improved for students and other beneficiaries of higher education across the EHEA;

- there need to be efficient and effective organisational structures within which those academic programmes can be provided and supported;

- transparency and the use of external expertise in quality assurance processes are important;

- there should be encouragement of a culture of quality within higher education institutions;

- processes should be developed through which higher education institutions can demonstrate their accountability, including accountability for the investment of public and private money;

- quality assurance for accountability purposes is fully compatible with quality assurance for enhancement purposes;

- institutions should be able to demonstrate their quality at home and internationally;

- processes used should not stifle diversity and innovation.

Purposes of the standards and guidelines

The purposes of the standards and guidelines are:

- to improve the education available to students in higher education institutions in the EHEA;

- to assist higher education institutions in managing and enhancing their quality and, thereby, to help to justify their institutional autonomy;

- to form a background for quality assurance agencies in their work;

- to make external quality assurance more transparent and simpler to understand for everybody involved.

Objectives of the standards and guidelines

The objectives of the standards and guidelines are:

- to encourage the development of higher education institutions which foster vibrant intellectual and educational achievement;

- to provide a source of assistance and guidance to higher education institutions and other relevant agencies in developing their own culture of quality assurance;

- to inform and raise the expectations of higher education institutions, students, employers and other stakeholders about the processes and outcomes of higher education;

- to contribute to a common frame of reference for the provision of higher education and the assurance of quality within the EHEA.

External quality assurance

The standards and guidelines proposed in this report envisage an important role for external quality assurance. The form of this varies from system to system and can include institutional evaluations of different types; subject or programme evaluations; accreditation at subject, programme and institutional levels; and combinations of these. Such external evaluations largely depend for their full effectiveness on there being an explicit internal quality assurance strategy, with specific objectives, and on the use, within institutions, of mechanisms and methods aimed at achieving those objectives.

Quality assurance can be undertaken by external agencies for a number of purposes, including:

• safeguarding of national academic standards for higher education;

• accreditation of programmes and/or institutions;

• user protection;

• public provision of independently-verified information (quantitative and qualitative) about programmes or institutions;

• improvement and enhancement of quality.

The activities of European quality assurance agencies will reflect the legal, social and cultural requirements of the jurisdictions and environments in which they operate. European standards relating to the quality assurance of quality assurance agencies themselves are contained in Part 3 of this chapter.

The processes carried out by quality assurance agencies will properly depend upon their purposes and the outcomes they are intended to achieve. The procedures adopted by those agencies that are concerned to emphasise principally the enhancement of quality may be quite different from those whose function is first to provide strong 'consumer protection'. The standards that follow reflect basic good practice across Europe in external quality assurance, but do not attempt to provide detailed guidance about what should be examined or how assurance activities should be conducted. Those are matters of national autonomy, although the exchange of information amongst agencies and authorities is already leading to the emergence of convergent elements.

There are, however, already some general principles of good practice in external quality assurance processes:

• institutional autonomy should be respected;
• the interests of students and other stakeholders such as labour

market representatives should be at the forefront of external quality assurance processes;

- use should be made, wherever possible, of the results of institutions' own internal quality assurance activities.

The 'guidelines' provide additional information about good practice and in some cases explain in more detail the meaning and importance of the standards. Although the guidelines are not part of the standards themselves, the standards should be considered in conjunction with them.

PART ONE European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions

1.1 Policy and procedures for quality assurance

Standard:

Institutions should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality.

The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.

Guidelines:

Formal policies and procedures provide a framework within which higher education institutions can develop and monitor the effectiveness of their quality assurance systems. They also help to provide public confidence in institutional autonomy. Policies contain the statements of intentions and the principal means by which these will be achieved. Procedural guidance can give more detailed information about the ways in which the policy is implemented and provides a useful reference point for those who need to know about the practical aspects of carrying out the procedures.

The policy statement is expected to include:

- the relationship between teaching and research in the institution;
- the institution's strategy for quality and standards;
- the organisation of the quality assurance system;
- the responsibilities of departments, schools, faculties and other organisational units and individuals for the assurance of quality;
- the involvement of students in quality assurance;

- the ways in which the policy is implemented, monitored and revised.

The realisation of the EHEA depends crucially on a commitment at all levels of an institution to ensuring that its programmes have clear and explicit intended outcomes; that its staff are ready, willing and able to provide teaching and learner support that will help its students achieve those outcomes; and that there is full, timely and tangible recognition of the contribution to its work by those of its staff who demonstrate particular excellence, expertise and dedication. All higher education institutions should aspire to improve and enhance the education they offer their students.

1.2 Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards

Standard:

Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.

Guidelines:

The confidence of students and other stakeholders in higher education is more likely to be established and maintained through effective quality assurance activities which ensure that programmes are well-designed, regularly monitored and periodically reviewed, thereby securing their continuing relevance and currency.

The quality assurance of programmes and awards are expected to include:

- development and publication of explicit intended learning outcomes;
- careful attention to curriculum and programme design and content;

- specific needs of different modes of delivery (e.g. full time, part-time, distance-learning, e-learning) and types of higher education (e.g. academic, vocational, professional);
- availability of appropriate learning resources;
- formal programme approval procedures by a body other than that teaching the programme;
- monitoring of the progress and achievements of students;
- regular periodic reviews of programmes (including external panel members);
- regular feedback from employers, labour market representatives and other relevant organisations;
- participation of students in quality assurance activities.

1.3 Assessment of students

Standard:

Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.

Guidelines:

The assessment of students is one of the most important elements of higher education. The outcomes of assessment have a profound effect on students' future careers. It is therefore important that assessment is carried out professionally at all times and takes into account the extensive knowledge which exists about testing and examination processes. Assessment also provides valuable information for institutions about the effectiveness of teaching and learners' support.

Student assessment procedures are expected to:

- be designed to measure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes and other programme objectives;
- be appropriate for their purpose, whether diagnostic, formative or summative;

- have clear and published criteria for marking;
- be undertaken by people who understand the role of assessment in the progression of students towards the achievement of the knowledge and skills associated with their intended qualification;
- where possible, not rely on the judgements of single examiners;
- take account of all the possible consequences of examination regulations;
- have clear regulations covering student absence, illness and other mitigating circumstances;
- ensure that assessments are conducted securely in accordance with the institution's stated procedures;
- be subject to administrative verification checks to ensure the accuracy of the procedures.

In addition, students should be clearly informed about the assessment strategy being used for their programme, what examinations or other assessment methods they will be subject to, what will be expected of them, and the criteria that will be applied to the assessment of their performance.

1.4 Quality assurance of teaching staff

Standard:

Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so. They should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports.

Guidelines:

Teachers are the single most important learning resource available to most students. It is important that those who teach have a full knowledge and understanding of the subject they are teaching, have the necessary skills and experience to transmit their knowledge and understanding effectively to students in a range of teaching contexts, and can access feedback on their own

performance. Institutions should ensure that their staff recruitment and appointment procedures include a means of making certain that all new staff have at least the minimum necessary level of competence. Teaching staff should be given opportunities to develop and extend their teaching capacity and should be encouraged to value their skills. Institutions should provide poor teachers with opportunities to improve their skills to an acceptable level and should have the means to remove them from their teaching duties if they continue to be demonstrably ineffective.

1.5 Learning resources and student support

Standard:

Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered.

Guidelines:

In addition to their teachers, students rely on a range of resources to assist their learning. These vary from physical resources such as libraries or computing facilities to human support in the form of tutors, counsellors, and other advisers. Learning resources and other support mechanisms should be readily accessible to students, designed with their needs in mind and responsive to feedback from those who use the services provided. Institutions should routinely monitor, review and improve the effectiveness of the support services available to their students.

1.6 Information systems

Standard:

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities.

Guidelines:

Institutional self-knowledge is the starting point for effective quality assurance. It is important that institutions have the means of collecting and analysing information about their own activities. Without this they will not know what is working well and what needs attention, or the results of innovatory practices.

The quality-related information systems required by individual institutions will depend to some extent on local circumstances, but it is at least expected to cover:

- student progression and success rates;
- employability of graduates;
- students' satisfaction with their programmes;
- effectiveness of teachers;
- profile of the student population;
- learning resources available and their costs;
- the institution's own key performance indicators.

There is also value in institutions comparing themselves with other similar organisations within the EHEA and beyond. This allows them to extend the range of their self-knowledge and to access possible ways of improving their own performance.

1.7 Public information

Standard:

Institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering.

Guidelines:

In fulfilment of their public role, higher education institutions have a responsibility to provide information about the programmes they

are offering, the intended learning outcomes of these, the qualifications they award, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, and the learning opportunities available to their students. Published information might also include the views and employment destinations of past students and the profile of the current student population. This information should be accurate, impartial, objective and readily accessible and should not be used simply as a marketing opportunity. The institution should verify that it meets its own expectations in respect of impartiality and objectivity.

2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures

Standard:

External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

Guidelines:

The standards for internal quality assurance contained in Part 1 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. It is important that the institutions' own internal policies and procedures are carefully evaluated in the course of external procedures, to determine the extent to which the standards are being met.

If higher education institutions are to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance processes, and if those processes properly assure quality and standards, then external processes might be less intensive than otherwise.

2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes

Standard:

The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

Guidelines:

In order to ensure clarity of purpose and transparency of procedures, external quality assurance methods should be designed and developed through a process involving key stakeholders, including higher education institutions. The procedures that are finally agreed should be published and should contain explicit

statements of the aims and objectives of the processes as well as a description of the procedures to be used.

As external quality assurance makes demands on the institutions involved, a preliminary impact assessment should be undertaken to ensure that the procedures to be adopted are appropriate and do not interfere more than necessary with the normal work of higher education institutions.

2.3 Criteria for decisions

Standard:

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

Guidelines:

Formal decisions made by quality assurance agencies have a significant impact on the institutions and programmes that are judged. In the interests of equity and reliability, decisions should be based on published criteria and interpreted in a consistent manner. Conclusions should be based on recorded evidence and agencies should have in place ways of moderating conclusions, if necessary.

2.4 Processes fit for purpose

Standard:

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

Guidelines:

Quality assurance agencies within the EHEA undertake different external processes for different purposes and in different ways. It is of the first importance that agencies should operate procedures which are fit for their own defined and published purposes. Experience has shown, however, that there are some widely-used elements of external review processes which not only help to ensure their validity, reliability and usefulness, but also provide a basis for the European dimension to quality assurance.

Amongst these elements the following are particularly noteworthy:

• insistence that the experts undertaking the external quality assurance activity have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task;
• the exercise of care in the selection of experts;
• the provision of appropriate briefing or training for experts;
• the use of international experts;
• participation of students;
• ensuring that the review procedures used are sufficient to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached;
• the use of the self-evaluation/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up model of review;
• recognition of the importance of institutional improvement and enhancement policies as a fundamental element in the assurance of quality.

2.5   Reporting

Standard:

Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

Guidelines:

In order to ensure maximum benefit from external quality assurance processes, it is important that reports should meet the identified needs of the intended readership. Reports are sometimes intended for different readership groups and this will require careful attention to structure, content, style and tone.

In general, reports should be structured to cover description, analysis (including relevant evidence), conclusions, commendations, and recommendations. There should be sufficient preliminary explanation to enable a lay reader to understand the purposes of the review, its form, and the criteria used in making decisions. Key findings, conclusions and recommendations should be easily locatable by readers.

Reports should be published in a readily accessible form and there should be opportunities for readers and users of the reports (both within the relevant institution and outside it) to comment on their usefulness.

2.6   Follow-up procedures

Standard:

Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

Guidelines:

Quality assurance is not principally about individual external scrutiny events: It should be about continuously trying to do a better job. External quality assurance does not end with the publication of the report and should include a structured follow-up procedure to ensure that recommendations are dealt with

appropriately and any required action plans drawn up and implemented. This may involve further meetings with institutional or programme representatives. The objective is to ensure that areas identified for improvement are dealt with speedily and that further enhancement is encouraged.

2.7 Periodic reviews

Standard :

External quality assurance processes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

Guidelines:

Quality assurance is not a static but a dynamic process. It should be continuous and not "once in a lifetime". It does not end with the first review or with the completion of the formal follow-up procedure. It has to be periodically renewed. Subsequent external reviews should take into account progress that has been made since the previous event. The process to be used in all external reviews should be clearly defined by the external quality assurance agency and its demands on institutions should not be greater than are necessary for the achievement of its objectives.

2.8 System-wide analyses

Standard:

Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

Guidelines:

All external quality assurance agencies collect a wealth of information about individual programmes and/or institutions and this provides material for structured analyses across whole higher education systems. Such analyses can provide very useful information about developments, trends, emerging good practice and areas of persistent difficulty or weakness and can become useful tools for policy development and quality enhancement. Agencies should consider including a research and development function within their activities, to help them extract maximum benefit from their work.

INTRODUCTION to part three

European Standards and guidelines for External Quality Assurance Agencies

The growth of European external quality assurance agencies has been expansive since the early 1990's. At the same time cooperation and sharing of best practices among agencies have been an integrated element in this development. Already in 1994/95 the so-called European Pilot Projects initiated by the European Commission resulted in the mutual recognition by agencies of the basic methodology of quality assurance: independent agencies, self-evaluations, external site visits and public reporting. The creation of ENQA in 2000 was therefore a natural formalisation of this development in cooperation, and ENQA has been able to build on the state-of-the-art consensus arrived at during the 1990's.

The European standards for external quality assurance agencies, which follow, have been developed on the premises of this development in the young history of European external quality assurance. Moreover it is the conscious ambition that the standards should be neither too detailed nor too prescriptive. They must not reduce the freedom of European quality assurance agencies to reflect in their organisations and processes the experiences and expectations of their nation or region. The standards must, though, ensure that the professionalism, credibility and integrity of the agencies are visible and transparent to their stakeholders and must permit comparability to be observable among the agencies and allow the necessary European dimension.

It should be added that in this way the standards do also contribute naturally to the work being done towards mutual recognition of agencies and the results of agency evaluations or accreditations. This work has been explored in the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (NOQA) and is part of the 'Code of Good Practise' by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA).

Several 'guidelines' have been added to provide additional information about good practice and in some cases explain in more detail the meaning and importance of the standards. Although the guidelines are not part of the standards themselves, the standards should be considered in conjunction with them.

PART THREE European standards for external quality assurance agencies

3.1 **Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education**

Standard:

The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

Guidelines:

The standards for external quality assurance contained in Part 2 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. The standards reflect best practices and experiences gained through the development of external quality assurance in Europe since the early 1990's. It is therefore important that these standards are integrated into the processes applied by external quality assurance agencies towards the higher education institutions.

The standards for external quality assurance should together with the standards for external quality assurance agencies constitute the basis for professional and credible external quality assurance of higher education institutions.

3.2 **Official status**

Standard:

Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

3.3   Activities

Standard:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

Guidelines:

These may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the agency.

3.4   Resources

Standard:

Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

3.5   Mission statement

Standard:

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

Guidelines:

These statements should describe the goals and objectives of agencies' quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of

their work. The statements should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the agency and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statements are translated into a clear policy and management plan.

3.6   Independence

Standard:

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

Guidelines:

An agency will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as:

- Its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts).

- The definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence.

- While relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

3.7 **External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies**

Standard:

The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available.

These processes will normally be expected to include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;

- an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;

- publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;

- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

Guidelines:

Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes.

Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people.

Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.

3.8 Accountability procedures

Standard:

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

Guidelines:

These procedures are expected to include the following:

1. A published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website;

2. Documentation which demonstrates that:

- the agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance;

- the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts;

- the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties;

- the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and evaluated institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.

3. A mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years.

CHAPTER THREE Peer Review
System for Quality Assurance Agencies

In Berlin the Ministers called 'upon ENQA, through its members, in cooperation with the EUA, EURASHE, and ESIB, to ... explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies'.

ENQA and its partners have met this call by building on the interpretation of the mandate that a system of peer review of agencies must include not only the peer review process itself, but also a careful consideration of the quality standards on which a review could build. Further, there has been agreement in the process that peer review of agencies should be interpreted as basically the means to achieve the goal of transparency, visibility and comparability of quality of agencies.

Therefore, this report has as a major proposal the creation of a register of recognised external quality assurance agencies operating in higher education within Europe. This proposal is in essence a response to expectations that there is likely soon to be an increase of quality assurance bodies keen to make a profit from the value of a recognition or accreditation label. Experience elsewhere has shown that it is difficult to control such enterprises, but Europe has a possibly unique opportunity to exercise practical management of this new market, not in order to protect the interests of already established agencies, but to make sure that the benefits of quality assurance are not diminished by the activities of disreputable practitioners.

The work on these proposals has principally taken into consideration the European context and demands. At the same time there has been awareness in the process that similar experiences and processes are developing internationally. This chapter therefore opens with a brief analysis of the international experiences and initiatives relevant for the drafting of this part of the report. It then outlines the proposed peer review system based on the subsidiarity principle and the European standards for external quality assurance agencies. This outline leads to a presentation of the recommended register of external quality assurance agencies operating in Europe. The peer reviews and the

agencies' compliance with the European standards play a crucial role in the composition of the register. Finally, a European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is proposed.

International Context

Europe is not the only area where dynamic developments in the field of higher education quality assurance are currently taking place. This section describes some of the experiences and initiatives of organisations such as the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP), the Council for Higher Education Accreditation in the United States (CHEA), OECD and UNESCO. The work of these organisations in relation to quality assurance have been found useful during the drafting of this report. Even though these international experiences have not been directly included in the specific recommendations, some key international elements are presented below in a manner that relates to the recommendations in this chapter.

The identification of good quality and good practices of external quality assurance agencies has also been on the international agenda for several years. INQAAHE discussed in 1999 and onwards a quality label for external quality assurance agencies, an idea originally initiated by the IAUP, in order to meet the need for higher education institutions to identify which agencies are qualified to fulfil the external quality assurance role. The quality label met widespread opposition and instead INQAAHE has focused on formulating good practice criteria for agencies. The result is a set of principles that presents common denominators of good practice while at the same time recognising the international diversity of agencies in terms of purposes and historical-cultural contexts.

In terms of the recommendations on peer review of agencies, the work done by CHEA is relevant. CHEA is a non-governmental organisation functioning as an umbrella body for the US regional, specialised, national and professional accreditation agencies. Accrediting organisations that seek recognition by CHEA must demonstrate that they meet CHEA recognition standards. Accrediting organisations will be expected to advance academic quality, demonstrate accountability, encourage improvement, employ appropriate procedures, continually reassess accreditation practices and possess sufficient resources. CHEA will demand that members undergo so-called recognition reviews every six years. There are basic similarities and compatibility between the CHEA approach and the proposals of this report, for instance in terms of cyclical reviews. However, this report has given a priority to a distinct focus on the quality assurance of agencies.

A separate initiative has been taken jointly by OECD and UNESCO to elaborate guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education. The OECD-UNESCO guidelines will be finalised in 2005, but the drafting process has identified the contrast between the need to regulate the internationalisation of higher education and the fact that existing national quality assurance capacity often focuses exclusively on domestic delivery by domestic institutions. Therefore, it is posed as a challenge for the current quality assurance systems to develop appropriate methodologies and mechanisms to cover foreign providers and programmes in addition to national providers and programmes in order to maximise the benefits and limit the potential disadvantages of the internationalisation of higher education.

The proposed OECD-UNESCO guidelines recommend that external quality assurance agencies ensure that their quality assurance arrangements include foreign and for-profit institutions/providers as well as distance education delivery and other non-traditional modes of educational delivery. However, the drafting process of the guidelines also recognises that the inclusion of foreign providers in the remit of national agencies will in most cases require changes in national legislation and administrative procedures.

This report recognises the importance and implications of internationalisation for the quality assurance of higher education institutions. Although it has been considered too early to include a reference to this in the proposed European standards for external quality assurance, the proposal for a European register does explicitly include agencies from outside Europe operating here as well as European agencies with cross-border operations.

It should also be recognised that the continuing European process fully meets the OECD-UNESCO recommendation that agencies should sustain and strengthen the existing regional and international networks.

Cyclical Reviews of Agencies

The field of external quality assurance of higher education in Europe is relatively young. However, it may be considered an element of growing maturity among agencies that recent years have evidenced an interest in enhancing credibility of agency work by focusing on internal and external quality assurance of agencies themselves. An ENQA workshop in February 2003 in Sitges, Spain, had quality assurance of agencies as its theme. The participants discussed existing experiences of external evaluation of agencies and one conclusion of the workshop was a recommendation that ENQA should work towards making cyclical external reviews of member agencies. Accordingly, ENQA received the Berlin mandate at a time when discussion of external reviews of agencies had already begun in ENQA and been an element in E4 meetings.

This report recommends that any European agency should at no more than five-year intervals conduct or be submitted to a cyclical external review of its processes and activities. The results should be documented in a report which states the extent to which the agency is in compliance with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies (see Chapter 2, Part 3).

In the EHEA the map of providers and operators in external quality assurance of higher education will no doubt be more complicated in the future. Therefore, it is important that non-ENQA members

are included in considerations on quality assurance of agencies. And it is even more important that agencies from outside Europe have an open opportunity, if they want it, to measure themselves against the recommended European standards. Therefore, the report does not wish to confine the focus of this recommendation to nationally recognised European agencies and thus by implication only actual or potential ENQA members. On the contrary, agencies from outside Europe, but operating in Europe, or European agencies that are not nationally recognised, must also be allowed to opt for a review that assesses its compliance with the European standards.

The general principles for cyclical reviews are proposed to be as follows:

• External quality assurance agencies established and officially recognised as national agencies by a Bologna signatory state should normally be reviewed on a national basis, thus respecting the subsidiarity principle – even if they also operate beyond national borders. These European national agencies may on the other hand also opt for reviews organised by ENQA rather than internal nationally based reviews. The reviews of agencies should include an assessment of whether the agencies are in compliance with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.

• Agencies not established and officially recognised in a Bologna signatory state may on their own initiative opt to be reviewed against the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.

• The reviews should follow the process comprising a self-evaluation, an independent panel of experts and a published report.

An external review will typically be initiated at the national or agency level. It is therefore expected that reviews of agencies will usually follow from national regulations or from the internal

quality assurance processes in place in the agency. This report wishes strongly to emphasise the importance of respecting the subsidiarity principle, and it is therefore proposed that ENQA, in respect of its own members, takes the initiative toward an agency only in the case where after five years no initiative has been taken nationally or by the agency itself. In case the agency is a non-ENQA member and after five years no initiative has been taken nationally or by the agency itself, the European Register Committee is responsible for initiating the review.

When national authorities initiate reviews, the purpose could obviously be quite broad and include the agency's fulfilment of the national mandate, e.g. However, it is a core element in this proposal that reviews – regardless of whether they are initiated at a national, agency or ENQA level – must always explicitly consider the extent to which the agency conforms with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies. The ENQA General Assembly decided at its meeting in November 2004 that the membership criteria of ENQA should conform with the proposed European standards for external quality assurance agencies. Accordingly, the review of an agency will not only make evident the level of conformity with the European standards, but also at the same time indicate the level of compliance with ENQA membership criteria.

Finally, the report stresses that the involvement of international experts with appropriate expertise and experience will provide substantial benefit to the review process.

The follow-up of a cyclical review will first and foremost be the responsibility of the national authorities or owners of the agency and, of course, of the agency itself. ENQA will have a role in the follow-up only in the case of member agencies where ENQA must certify the degree to which the member agency meets the European standards for external quality assurance agencies according to the review. ENQA regulations will specify the consequences if this is not the case.

An illustrative outline of an exemplary process of external review of an agency is shown in the annex to this report.

Register of External Quality Assurance Agencies Operating in Europe

ENQA committed itself before the Berlin ministerial meeting of 2003 to develop in cooperation with the relevant stakeholders a European register of quality assurance agencies, covering public, private, and thematic agencies, operating or planning to operate in Europe.

The register would meet the interest of higher education institutions and governments in being able to identify professional and credible quality assurance agencies operating in Europe. This interest has firstly its basis in the complicated area of recognition of non-national degrees. Recognition procedures would be strengthened if it were transparent to what extent providers were themselves quality assured or accredited by recognised agencies. Secondly, it is increasingly possible for higher education institutions to seek quality assurance from agencies across national borders. Higher education institutions would of course be helped in this process by being able to identify professional agencies from a reliable register.

The most valuable asset of the register would thus be its informative value to institutions and other stakeholders, and the register could in itself become a very useful instrument for achieving transparency and comparability of external quality assurance of higher education institutions.

The register must make evident the level of compliance of entrants with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies. However, it is important to stress that this report does not aim at proposing the register as a ranking instrument.

The register should be open for applications from all agencies providing services within Europe, including those operating from

countries outside Europe or those with a transnational or international basis. The agencies will be placed into different sections of the register depending on whether they are peer reviewed or not, whether they comply with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies or not, and whether they operate strictly nationally or across borders.

A possible structure for the register is therefore:

Section 1. Peer reviewed agencies, divided into the following categories:

- European national agencies that have been reviewed and fulfil all the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.

- European national agencies that have been reviewed, but do not fulfil all the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.

- Non-national and extra-European agencies that operate in Europe, have been reviewed and fulfil all the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.

- Non-national and extra-European agencies that operate in Europe and have been reviewed, but do not fulfil all the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.

Section 2. Non-reviewed agencies

- European national agencies, non-national agencies and extra-European agencies that have not been reviewed and are therefore listed according to information gained from their application for inclusion in the register.

Presented in a grid, the structure of the register is this:

PROPOSED REGISTER STRUCTURE		Reviewed		Not reviewed
		Compliance with European Standards	Non-compliance with European Standards	
European National agencies	National operators			
	Cross-border operators			
European non-national agencies				
Extra-European agencies operating in Europe				

A European Register Committee will decide on admissions to the European register. The committee will use the agency's compliance with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies as identified in the cyclical review as one criterion for placement in the register. Other criteria should be developed which will take account of the diversity of the higher education systems.

The committee will be a light, non-bureaucratic construction with nine members nominated by EURASHE, ESIB, EUA, ENQA and organisations representing European employers, unions and professional organisations plus government representatives. These members will act in an individual capacity and not as mandated representatives of the nominating organisations. ENQA will perform the secretarial duties for the committee which will meet at least on a semi-annual basis.

The European Register Committee will as one of its first implementation tasks formalise the ownership of the register.

Another immediate task for the European Register Committee must be to establish an independent and credible appeals system to secure the rights of those that have been refused or that cannot accept their placement in the register. This appeals system should be an element in the protocol to be drafted by the committee soon after it has become operational.

3.4 European consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Since the Prague meeting in 2001 the E4 group, consisting of ENQA, EUA, ESIB and EURASHE, has met on a regular basis to discuss respective views on the Bologna Process and European quality in higher education. Since the Berlin meeting in 2003 the E4 meetings have had as their major focus the implementation of the mandate of the Ministers on quality assurance in higher education.

This cooperation at the European level has proved constructive. The four organisations have therefore agreed that a European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education will continue to exist building from the E4 group. The foundation of such a forum would in practical terms establish the current cooperation between ENQA, EUA, EURASHE and ESIB on a more permanent basis. The Forum would function primarily as a consultative and advisory forum for the major European stakeholders and it would resemble the current arrangements where the four respective organisations finance their own expenses and participation without the creation of a new administrative structure. In the longer term the forum should also include labour market representatives.

CHAPTER FOUR
Future Perspectives and Challenges

This report contains proposals and recommendations that have been developed and endorsed by the key European players in the world of quality assurance in higher education. The very existence of the report is a testimony to the achievement of a joint understanding in a field where such an understanding might be thought inherently unlikely, given the different interests in play. The proposals offer increased transparency, security and information about higher education for students and society more generally. They equally offer higher education institutions recognition and credibility and opportunities to demonstrate their dedication to high quality in an increasingly competitive and sceptical environment. For the quality assurance agencies the proposals enhance their own quality and credibility and connect them more productively to their wider European professional fraternity.

The proposals will remain no more than proposals, however, if they are not accompanied by an effective implementation strategy. If approved by the Ministers in Bergen, immediate steps will be taken to begin to introduce some of the key elements of this report. The register of quality assurance agencies should be envisaged as being started during the latter half of 2005 and to be ready to go on-line in 2006. The ENQA secretariat has made provision for the extra resources that will be necessary for this purpose. Following the ministerial meeting, ENQA will take the necessary concrete initiatives towards establishing the European Register Committee. The committee will begin its work with formalising the ownership of the register and drafting a protocol based on the preliminary work done by ENQA in the spring of 2005. The first of the cyclical reviews should be expected to take place during 2005.

The European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education will also be an early initiative. Thus, the outcomes of the Bergen Ministerial meeting, and the establishment of the forum will be the main theme of the next meeting between ENQA and its E4 partners in June 2005. In addition, the future cooperation with other key stakeholders such as labour market representatives will

be subject to discussions. ENQA has also arranged a meeting with the other European quality assurance networks prior to the next ENQA General Assembly in September 2005.

The possibility of rapid implementation of certain of the proposals of this report should not be taken to mean that the task of embedding the rest of them will be easy. It will take longer for the internal and external quality assurance standards to be widely adopted by institutions and agencies, because their acceptance will depend on a willingness to change and develop on the part of signatory states with long-established and powerful higher education systems. What is proposed in the internal quality assurance standards will be challenging for some higher education institutions, especially where there is a new and developing tradition of quality assurance or where the focus on students' needs and their preparation to enter the employment market is not embedded in the institutional culture. Similarly, the standards for external quality assurance and for quality assurance agencies themselves will require all participants, and especially the agencies, to look very carefully at themselves and to measure their practices against the European expectation. The new cyclical review procedure will provide a timely focus for this purpose. It will only be when the benefits of adoption of the standards are seen that there is likely to be general acceptance of them.

The EHEA operates on the basis of individual national responsibility for higher education and this implies autonomy in matters of external quality assurance. Because of this the report is not and cannot be regulatory but makes its recommendations and proposals in a spirit of mutual respect among professionals; experts drawn from higher education institutions including students; ministries; and quality assurance agencies. Some signatory states may want to enshrine the standards and review process in their legislative or administrative frameworks. Others may wish to take a longer view of the appropriateness of doing so, weighing the advantages of change against the strengths of the status quo. The proposed European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education should prove a useful place in which to discuss,

debate and learn about new thinking, the experiences of other systems and the similarities and dissimilarities of national experiences.

All in all, there will be a considerable and challenging workload for ENQA, its E4 partners and other key stakeholders to get to grips with in the coming years. The report therefore makes it clear that completion of this report is not the same thing as fulfilling the Bologna goal of a quality assurance dimension for the EHEA. Ahead lies more work to implement the recommendations of the report and secure the implied quality culture among both the higher education institutions and the external quality assurance agencies. What has been set in motion by the Berlin mandate will need continuing maintenance and coaxing if it is to provide the fully functioning European dimension of quality assurance for the EHEA.

A European higher education area with strong, autonomous and effective higher education institutions, a keen sense of the importance of quality and standards, good peer reviews, credible quality assurance agencies, an effective register and increased co-operation with other stakeholders, such as employers, is now possible and the proposals contained in this report will go a long way towards making that vision a reality.

ANNEX Cyclical Review of quality Assurance Agencies[4] - A Theoretical Model

The model presented below is a proposed indicative outline for a process of external review of an external quality assurance agency. It is presented as an example of a credible process suited to identifying compliance with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies. However, note must be taken that the purpose is instructive and illustrative. Therefore, the level of detail is high and most likely higher than what will be perceived as needed in individual peer reviews of agencies. It follows from this that in no way must the process presented here be considered as a standard in itself. Further, it should be noted that in the presented example the term "evaluation" is applied to cover objectives and processes. Terms, such as "accreditation" or "audit", might as well be applied.

The process covers the following elements:

- formulating terms of reference and protocol for the review;
- nomination and appointment of panel of experts;
- self-evaluation by the agency;
- site visit;
- reporting.

1 Terms of reference

The terms of reference must identify the goals of the review in terms of the perspectives and interests of authorities, stakeholders and the agency itself. All the main tasks and operations of the agency must be covered and in such a manner that it is evident that no hidden agendas are present.

2 Self-evaluation

2.1 Background information required from agency as basis of review

Relevant background information is necessary to understand the context in which the agency is working. The section is expected to include:

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[4] The structure of the annex approximates the one documented recently in a manual of a project on mutual recognition of quality assurance agencies in the Nordic countries.

2.1.1 A brief outline of the national higher education system, including:

- degree structure;
- institutional structure;
- procedures and involved parties in establishing new subjects, programmes and institutions;
- other quality assurance procedures;
- status of higher education institutions in relation to the government.

2.1.2 A brief account of the history of the particular agency and of the evaluation of higher education in general:

- mission statement;
- establishment of the agency (government, higher education institutions, others);
- description of the legal framework and other formal regulations concerning the agency (e.g. parliamentary laws, ministerial orders or decrees);
- the financing of the agency;
- placement of the right to initiate evaluations;
- internal organisation of the agency; including procedures for appointment and composition of board/council;
- other responsibilities of the agency than the evaluation of higher education;
- international activities of the agency, including formal agreements as well as other activities, e.g. participation in conferences, working groups and staff exchange;
- role of the agency in follow-up on evaluations: consequences and sanctions.

2.2   External quality assurance undertaken by the agency

Evidence should be produced indicating that the agency undertakes on a regular basis external quality assurance of higher education institutions or programmes. This quality assurance should involve either evaluation, accreditation, review, audit or assessment, and these are part of the core functions of the agency.

By 'regular' it is understood that evaluations are planned on the basis of a systematic procedure and that several quality assessments have been conducted over the last two years.

This evidence should include:

- a description of the methodological scope of the agency;
- an account of the number of quality assessments conducted and the number of units evaluated.

2.3 Evaluation method applied by the agency

2.3.1 Background information

An account of the overall planning of an evaluation and other fundamental issues is needed to be able to determine if the agency is working on the basis of transparent methodological procedures.

This account should include:

- the procedures for briefing of and communication with the evaluated institutions;
- the agency strategy for student participation;
- the procedures related to establishing the terms of reference/project plan of the individual assessment;
- the reference(s) for evaluation (predefined criteria, legal documents, subject benchmarks, professional standards, the stated goals of the evaluated institution);
- the extent to which the methodological elements are modified to specific reviews.

2.3.2 Elements of methodology

An account giving evidence that the methodology the agency is working on is pre-defined and public and that review results are public.

The methodology includes:

- self-evaluation or equivalent procedure of the given object of evaluation;
- external evaluation by a group of experts and site visits as decided by the agency;
- publication of a report with public results.

The agency can also work out and apply other methodologies fit for special purposes.

The agency's decisions and reports are consistent in terms of principles and requirements, even if different groups form the judgements.

If the agency makes evaluation decisions, there is an appeals system. This methodology is applied to the needs of the agencies.

If the agency is to make recommendations and/or conditional resolutions, it has a follow-up procedure to check on the results.

2.3.3 An account of the role of the external expert group

The account on the role of the external expert group should include:

- procedures for nomination and appointment of experts, including criteria for use of international experts, representatives of stakeholders such as employers and students;
- methods of briefing and training of experts;
- meetings between experts: number, scope and time schedule in relation to the overall evaluation process;
- division of labour between agency and experts;
- role of the agency's staff in the evaluations;
- identification and appointment of the member(s) of staff at the agency to be responsible for the evaluation.

2.3.4 Documentation

Several accounts of the agency's procedures for collecting documentation are needed to determine the procedures related to the self-evaluation of the agency and site visits:

2.3.4.1 An account of the procedures related to self-evaluation

This account should include:

- specification of content in the guidelines provided by the agency;
- procedural advice provided by the agency;
- requirements for composition of self-evaluation teams, including the role of students;
- training/information of self-evaluation teams;
- time available for conducting the self-evaluation.

2.3.4.2 An account of the procedures related to the site visit

This account should include:

- questionnaires/interviewing protocols;
- principles for selection of participants/informants (categories and specific participants);
- principles for the length of the visit;
- number of meetings and average length;
- documentation of the meetings (internal/external, minutes, transcriptions etc.);
- working methods of the external expert group.

2.3.4.3 The reports

The documentation should include the following information on the reports:

- purpose of the report;
- drafting of the report (agency staff or experts);

- format of report (design and length);
- content of report (documentation or only analysis/recommendations);
- principles for feedback from the evaluated parties on the draft report;
- publication procedures and policy (e.g. handling of the media);
- immediate follow-up (e.g. seminars and conferences);
- long-term follow-up activities (e.g. follow-up evaluation or visit).

2.3.5 System of appeal

The agency documents a method for appeals against its decisions and how this methodology is applied to the needs of the agency. It must be evident from the documentation to what extent the appeals system is based on a hearing process through which the agency can provide those under evaluation a means to comment on and question the outcomes of the evaluation.

Basically, the agency must provide evidence that the appeals system provides for those under evaluation an opportunity to express opinions about evaluation outcomes.

2.4 Additional documentation

This additional documentation should provide an account of the use of surveys, statistical material or other kinds of documentation not mentioned elsewhere. This material should be public.

2.5 Procedures for a quality system for agencies

The agency must document that it has in place internal quality assurance mechanisms that conform to those stipulated in the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.

2.6 Final reflections

An analysis of the agency's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats is needed in order to give an account of the capacity

of the agency to adapt to new demands and trends and to permanently improve its actions while maintaining a solid and credible methodological framework and governance model.

3 Guidelines for the external review panel

These guidelines describe the expectations to the external review panel. They comprise guidance on:

- appointment and general organisation;
- site visit;
- drafting of the report.

As described above, the agency under review should provide a self-evaluation report according to the provided guidelines. The self-study should be sent to the external review panel no later than a month before the visit.

3.1 Appointment of the external review panel

This section concerns the appointment of the experts that should conduct the review.

The external expert group should consist of the following experts:

- one or two quality assurance experts (international);
- representative of higher education institutions (national);
- student member (national);
- stakeholder member (for instance an employer, national).

One of these experts should be elected Chair of the external review panel.

It is also recommended that the panel should be supplemented with a person who, in an independent capacity from the agency, would act as a secretary.

Nominations of the experts may come from the agencies, stakeholders or local authorities but in order to ensure that the

review is credible and trustworthy, it is essential that the task of appointing the experts be given to a third party outside the agency involved. This third party could for instance be ENQA or an agency not involved in the process. The basis for the recognition of the experts should be declarations of their independence. However, the agency under review should have the possibility to comment on the final composition of the panel.

3.2 Site visit

A protocol must be available for the site visit along lines such as the following:

The visit is recommended to have a duration of two-three days, including preparation and follow-up, depending on the external review panel's prior knowledge of the agency under review and its context. The day before the visit the panel will meet and agree on relevant themes for the visit. The purpose of the site visit is to validate the self-study. Interview guides should be drafted with this perspective in mind.

The visit could include separate meetings with members from the agency board, management, staff, experts, owners/key stakeholders and representatives from evaluated institutions at management level as well as members from the internal self-evaluation committees.

3.3 Preparation of the report

Apart from fulfilling the general terms of reference the report must focus in a precise manner on compliance with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies as specified in the self-study protocol, as well as with possibilities for and recommendations on future improvements.

After the visit the external review panel assisted by the secretary will draft a report. The final version should be sent to the agency under review for comments on factual errors.

APPENDIX EIGHT Summary of Awards
in the National Framework of Qualifications

Please see insert in back cover.

APPENDIX NINE
HETAC Policies and Procedures

1. National Framework of Qualifications

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

3. Criteria and Process for Reviewing the Effectiveness of Quality Assurance Procedures in Higher Education and Training

4. Policy & Criteria for Making Joint Awards, Joint Accreditation & Accreditation of Jointly Provided Programmes & Quality Assurance of Consortium Providers

5. Taught & Research Programmes Accreditation Policy, Criteria & Processes

6. Supplementary Guidelines for the Accreditation of Taught Programmes and Research Degree Programmes

7. Validation Process, Policy & Criteria for the Accreditation of Providers to Maintain a Register for a Specified Research Degree in a Specified Discipline Area

8. Criteria & Procedures for the Delegation & Review of Delegation of Authority to Make Awards

9. Policy & Criteria for the Making of Higher Education & Training Awards

10. HETAC Supplementary Guidelines for the Delegation & Review of Delegation of Authority to Make Awards

11. Course Schedule Guidelines

12. Policies on Articulation, Transfer & Progression

13. Administrative Protocol for Exchange Programmes

14. Policy on Extension Courses

15.   External Examiners – Nomination & Appointment for 2000 –
       2001 Academic Year

16.   Marks & Standards 2001

17.   Prior Experiential Learning – Policy Document

APPENDIX TEN
HETAC Statement of Mission

HETAC adopted an inaugural mission statement in 2002. This was reviewed as the transition period came to an end and a new statement of mission, vision and values was published in January 2006. The mission statement reads as follows:

HETAC is a public body, accountable to the Irish government and the Oireachtas, which exists to benefit learners and potential learners by:

- Setting standards, accrediting programmes and awarding qualifications at all levels of higher education and training

- Providing assurance to the public that programmes of higher education and training are above an acceptable threshold level of quality and that objective quality assurance processes are in place to meet the expectations of Irish Society and the International Community

- Delivering a quality improvement service to accredited educational providers so as to contribute to raising standards to increasingly higher levels

Source: HETAC Self-Evaluation Report (March 2006), page 19

NOTES