



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

WHITE PAPER

Review of Higher Education Institutions

FOR CONSULTATION

This White Paper contains proposed policy and procedures for the cyclical quality review of higher education institutions.

Following publication and consideration of the outcomes of consultation, this paper will lead to a Draft Policy which will be proposed for adoption by the Board of QQI. Once adopted, QQI policy and procedures are developed and implemented accordingly.

QQI is seeking feedback from stakeholders on the proposed policy contained in this White Paper.

Submissions may be emailed to
consultation@QQI.ie

The closing date for submissions
is **Friday 16 October 2015**.

In your submission please clearly indicate:

1. *Your contact details.*
 2. *Whether you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.*
 3. *If you do not wish your submission to be published.*
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1 INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

This policy is about cyclical quality review of higher education providers at the level of the institution. It sets out the procedures for the cyclical aspect of review for relevant providers of higher education and the National University of Ireland (NUI) respectively as set out in Section 27(1) (b) and (d) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (the 2012 Act). It also sets out the procedures for reviews by Designated Awarding Bodies and the NUI described as *effectiveness review procedures* in Section 27 of the 2012 Act.

It also incorporates the mandatory cyclical reviews of authority to make awards delegated to providers by QQI outlined in Section 54(1a) and the review of implementation of procedures for access, transfer and progression outlined in 57(1a). It also incorporates, where reasonable and subject to timing, reviews of compliance with the code of practice for the International Education Mark (IEM) as set out in Section 63.

If a relevant provider offers both further and higher education and training awards a cyclical review of the entire scope of their provision will take place through the procedures described in this policy.

Though cyclical review can lead to directions, it is not linked to directions and outcomes that may change the status of QQI's approval of a provider's Quality Assurance Procedures. QQI intends to establish and describe further procedures for Section 27 (1) (b) relating to "for cause" reviews which may result ultimately in the withdrawal of quality assurance approval by QQI.

Cyclical review is an element of the broader quality frameworks for higher education. There are two frameworks in higher education: one for awarding bodies (Designated Awarding Bodies and bodies to whom awarding powers have been delegated) and one for voluntary providers. These are represented in Figures 1 and 2 below.

FIGURE 1

*Quality framework
for awarding bodies*

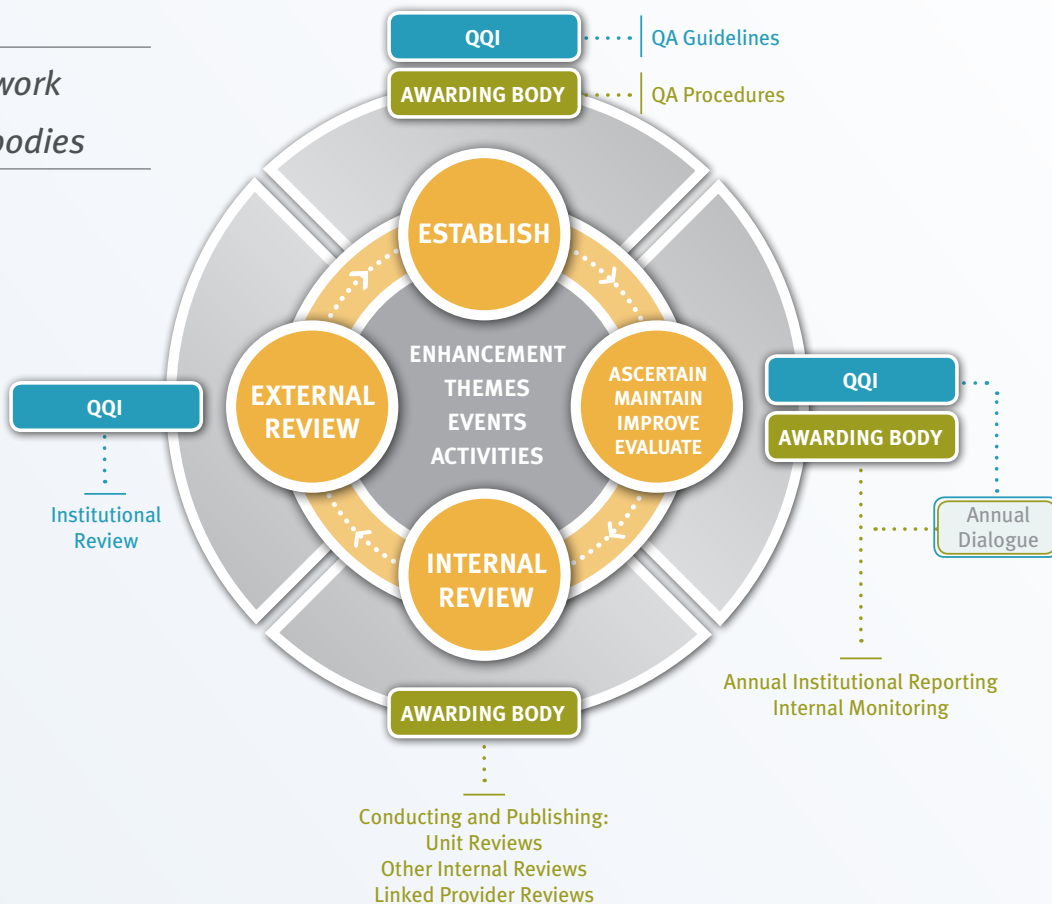
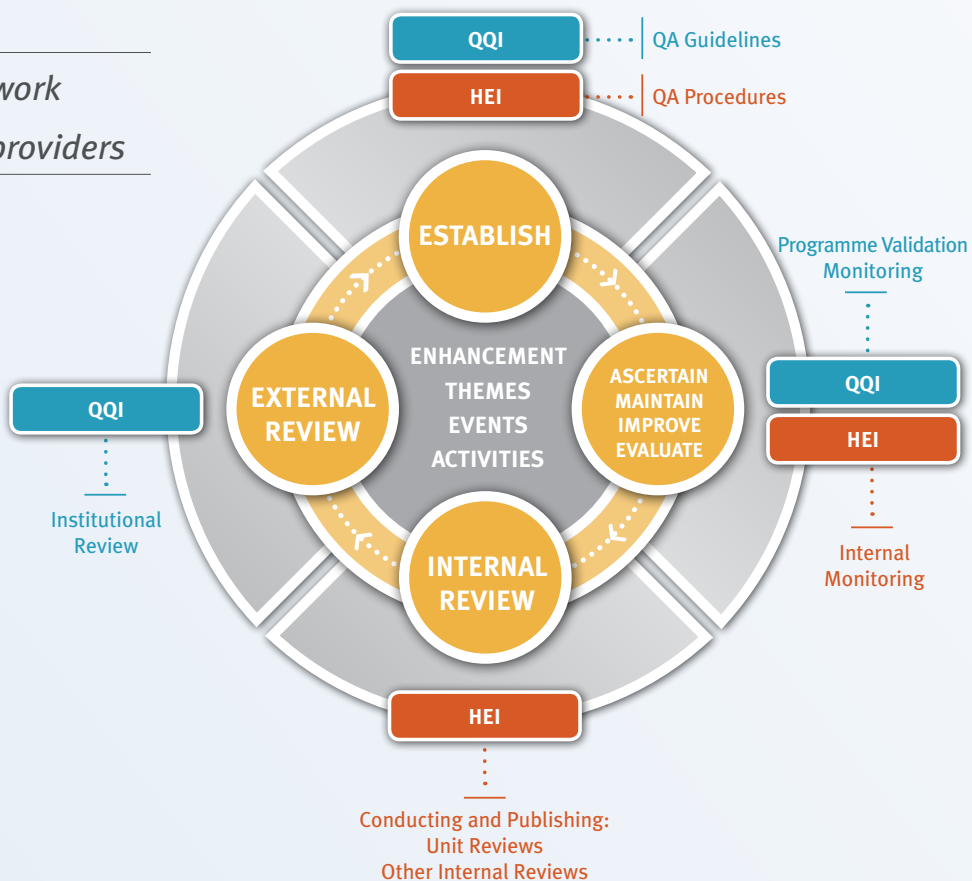


FIGURE 2

*Quality framework
for voluntary providers*



2 POLICY

QQI commissioned an independent Team to conduct a Review of Reviews, to analyse the review processes of QQI's predecessor agencies and to make proposals on future approaches to institutional review. In their Report¹, the Review of Reviews Team set out twelve principles to underpin QQI higher education reviews. These principles also reflected the feedback received from institutions in consultation. QQI policy on reviews is set out in the context of these principles. For ease of communications some of these principles have been merged.

2.1 CLARITY, DEPTH AND QUALITY PERFORMANCE-FOCUS

THE TEAM RECOMMENDED THAT:

QQI should be explicit about both the reviews' purposes and how these will be achieved through the procedures used; the nature of the judgements they will make; and the status of the conditions and recommendations contained in the reports.

The reviews should contribute to a better understanding and valuing of quality culture at all levels and go beyond a superficial overview of the existence of quality procedures.

The reviews should examine the overall performance of institutions and their success in meeting their mission statements and objectives.

QQI has specific multi-dimensional purposes for its cyclical reviews. These purposes and the ways in which they are achieved are set out in *Appendix 1*. QQI conducts regular evaluations of the review model (at least every two years) to ensure that it remains in keeping with the stated purposes.

¹ The Report of the Review of Reviews Team is available on www.QQI.ie

Review evaluates the effectiveness of institution quality assurance procedures for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training, research and related services the institution provides.

Review measures institutional accountability for compliance with European standards for quality assurance, adherence to the expectations set out in the quality assurance guidelines or their equivalent and adherence to other relevant QQI policies and procedures as agreed in the provider lifecycle of engagement.

Review explores institution enhancement of quality in relation to impacts on teaching, learning and research at the level of the programme and/or the module, specific enhancement themes, institutional achievements and innovations, alignment to the institution's mission and strategy and the quality-related performance of the institution relative to quality indicators and benchmarks.

The standards, against which review findings are compared, are each institution's own mission and strategy and selected quality indicators and benchmarks, European and national standards for quality and awards, QQI QA guidelines and other relevant QQI policies set out in the lifecycle of engagement for each institution. The criteria for reviews centre around eleven key questions which are set out in the outline Terms of Reference in section 3.

Apart from the general benefits relating to transparency and accountability that accrue from external review, positive review outcomes result in greater degrees of institutional autonomy for matters relating to quality and quality assurance.

Findings of reviews can lead to QQI issuing directions to an institution. Though cyclical review can lead to directions, it is not linked to directions that may alter or reduce the status of QQI's approval of the institution's Quality Assurance Procedures. QQI intends to establish and describe further procedures for Section 27 (1) (b) relating to "for cause" reviews which may result ultimately in the withdrawal of quality assurance approval by QQI.

2.2 ECONOMY AND EFFICIENCY

THE TEAM RECOMMENDED THAT:

Care should be taken to ensure that time and money are always used to good effect by the review procedures adopted.

Irish higher education is subject to significant resource constraints. It is therefore important that the review process should include nothing in the process that cannot be shown to be necessary for the achievement of its purposes and objectives. It should also seek to use as little time and resources as are compatible with a useful and defensible outcome.

The review process is interdependent on and integrated with other QQI functions such as annual institutional reports, annual dialogue meetings, monitoring, programme validation.

Review is complementary and proportionately related to the specific lifecycle of engagement of the institution and other engagements between the institution and QQI.

The objectives of a review may be extended to include compliance with the code of practice for the IEM, delegation of authority to make awards and of implementation of procedures for access, transfer and progression.

Reviews do not revisit objectives that have been demonstrably met through other QQI engagements.

Institutions will be equipped with clear guidelines on the content and length of self-evaluation reports to ensure that they are analytical in focus and do not contain unnecessary information.

2.3 EFFECTIVENESS

THE TEAM RECOMMENDED THAT:

Quality assurance procedures at the system and institutional levels are means to an end and not ends in themselves; the review process should be designed to meet its stated aims and objectives, and should contain ways of verifying that this is, in practice, happening.

Review primarily exists to provide an independent external review of the institution's own internal reviews. This relationship is captured in *figures 1* and *2* above.

QQI adopts a comprehensive evidence-based approach to reviews that encompasses both the compliance and enhancement aspects of quality.

The balance between compliance and enhancement is determined by the extent to which compliance can be assured through an existing evidence-basis including outcomes of previous reviews and outcomes of other engagements with QQI, especially through monitoring, annual dialogue meetings and annual institutional reports. This is evaluated and, where possible, resolved by the Review Team at an initial planning visit to allow for a greater focus on enhancement during the subsequent site visit.

QQI evaluates at regular intervals, the effectiveness of the model in meeting its stated purposes and publishes such evaluations.

2.4 CONSISTENCY AND DIVERSITY

THE TEAM RECOMMENDED THAT:

Despite the differences that exist between the sub-sectors covered by QQI regulatory competence, there remains much that is common to all institutions; it will be important that the reviews enable as much comparability as possible and that all HEIs are subject to reliable and coherent procedures that are carried out to a common high standard.

The range of HEIs under QQI's supervision is very large and diverse; reviews should, therefore, be capable of accommodating that diversity and should not impede the enhancement of mission diversity and effectiveness.

Every review has the same purposes (*Appendix 1*) and follows the same general procedure set out in section 4 below.

Every review is underpinned by the same enhancement themes (for that period) for quality developed in collaboration with institutions and other stakeholders. The enhancement themes provide the institution and the review team with a topic, through which quality and quality assurance at the institution can be explored. Institutions may choose to focus only on the enhancement themes or to augment them with additional areas or themes for exploration.

The Terms of Reference clearly specify the objectives, criteria and outcomes of each review.

The Terms of Reference differ significantly between institutions where QQI directly validates the programmes and institutions that validate their own programmes.

Terms of Reference and review processes are similar for homologous institutions to allow for comparability and shared learning between institutions.

QQI provides template Terms of Reference for reviews according to the categories of institutions, established in the 2012 Act and reflected in the various lifecycles of engagement. These are:

- » a designated awarding body
- » a body to whom awarding powers have been delegated
- » a relevant provider that is not an awarding body and has previously undergone statutory review
- » a relevant provider that is not an awarding body and has not previously undergone statutory review.

The focus for initial review is on a thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of the institution's quality assurance procedures. Subsequent reviews build on the findings of previous reviews and provide for greater degrees of focus on enhancement, though compliance is always an objective.

Each institution is provided with an opportunity to identify standards and benchmarks for quality relevant to its own mission and context.

If information is uncovered during the review process that raises significant concern about an institution it may be necessary to call a halt to the cyclical review process and commence a "for cause" review.

2.5 INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

THE TEAM RECOMMENDED THAT:

The reviews should encourage and promote a continuation of the active participation of Irish higher education in an increasingly integrated higher education reality at the European level and beyond.

The review process is in keeping with Parts 2 and 3 of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*² (ESG). The orientation of QAI reviews is to provide an external dimension to institutions own internal quality assurance and reviews.

The standards against which reviews are evaluated include Part 1 of the ESG.

Review Teams will include at least one member with international expertise.

Each institution is provided with an opportunity to identify standards and benchmarks for quality relevant to their own mission and context. Institutions are encouraged to derive these from international sources.

² The ESG is available on www.enqa.eu

2.6 INCLUSIVITY

THE TEAM RECOMMENDED THAT:

Quality assurance matters to everyone with a stake in Irish higher education; QQI reviews should therefore engage all relevant participants in the process, including students, academics, and representatives of relevant business, professional, and societal groups.

Terms of Reference for reviews are confirmed with institutions and published in advance of the review visits.

Review Teams are composed of peer reviewers who are students and staff from similar institutions as well as external stakeholders. The size of the Team and the duration of their visit varies depending on the size of the institution.

The composition of the Review Team is balanced to ensure that it includes an international reviewer, an Irish reviewer, a student representative and a representative of external stakeholders.

2.7 PROFESSIONALISM

THE TEAM RECOMMENDED THAT:

Quality assurance is a complex matter that requires particular professional knowledge, skills, continuous reflection and updating; the reviews should be supported by wide opportunities for training for both the pool of reviewers, the institutions taking part in the reviews, and the QQI staff managing them.

The Review Team is composed of peer reviewers that are students and staff from similar institutions and stakeholder representatives. Each Review Team includes a Chairperson and Coordinating Reviewer.

QQI appoints the Review Team, following consultation with the institution to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest. QQI has final approval over the composition of each Review Team.

Each member of the Team receives training on the Irish higher education context, the review procedure and their role within the Review Team.

2.8 MULTI-DIMENSIONS

THE TEAM RECOMMENDED THAT:

Ideally, the potential of the review process should not be limited to audit or inspectorial approaches, but should be explored using other techniques, such as disciplinary or thematic reviews and by the development of meta-analyses of the outcomes at the sub-sector and system levels.

QQI publishes biennial meta-analyses of the outcomes of institutional reviews at the sub-sector and system levels highlighting developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulty.

Each review is underpinned by national themes for quality developed in collaboration with institutions and other stakeholders. These themes are used by institutions in shaping their internal reviews and self-evaluation and used by review teams in guiding lines of inquiry and evidence generation during the review process, particularly in relation to enhancement.

In situations where common specific review objectives occur across a range of institutions, QQI may opt to take a common, thematic approach to reviews across a range of institutions (e.g. a whole country review for transnational provision), to complement the institutional review process.

3 OUTLINE CONTENTS OF REVIEW TERMS OF REFERENCE

The following are the outline contents of review Terms of Reference. These will be further elaborated in the templates for the Terms of Reference.

Context

A QQI institutional information profile including a description of the specific lifecycle of engagement for the institution.

A list of the QQI guidelines and policies relevant to the institution.

A list of the European and national guidelines, policies and codes of practice relevant to the institution.

(Derived from other sources: A brief description of the institution; the current HEA institutional profile if appropriate).

Purpose and Objectives

A statement of the purposes of the review (see *Appendix 1*)

The objectives of the review including:

- » a statement about the relative emphasis to be given by the Review Team to compliance and enhancement in the review
- » the inclusion, if appropriate, of objectives pertaining to the review of compliance with the code of

practice for the IEM, review of delegated authority to make awards and review of implementation of procedures for access, transfer and progression

- » the aspects of compliance to be measured by the review
- » the aspects of enhancement to be explored in the review
- » the indicators and benchmarks for quality appropriate for the institution

Criteria

The overarching standards against which review is conducted are:

- » the institution's own mission and strategy and selected quality indicators and benchmarks
- » European and national standards for quality and awards
- » QQI QA guidelines and other relevant QQI policies set out in the life-cycle of engagement for each institution.

The key questions and lines of enquiry to be addressed by review are:

- » How have quality assurance procedures and reviews been implemented within the institution?
- » How effective are the internal quality assurance procedures and reviews of the institution?
- » Are the quality assurance procedures compliant with European Standards and Guidelines?
- » Are the quality assurance procedures in keeping with QQI policy and guidelines, or their equivalent?
- » Who takes responsibility for quality and quality assurance across the institution?
- » How transparent and accessible is reporting on quality assurance and quality?
- » How is quality promoted and enhanced?
- » Are there effective innovations that can be identified?
- » Are achievements in quality and quality assurance aligned to the institution's own stated mission and strategy?
- » Is the student experience in keeping with the institution's own stated mission and strategy?
- » How do achievements in quality and quality assurance measure up against benchmarks and quality indicators?

Timeline

An overall timeline for the review from the publication of Terms of Reference through to the publication of the one-year follow-up report.

4 REVIEW PROCEDURES

QQI publishes a 5-year review cycle for higher education (*Appendix 2*). The sequence is determined by previous review cycles, re-engagement and causes for concern. The new landscape for higher education has been incorporated into the schedule.

The review procedure is based on the internationally accepted and recognised principles for reviews, i.e.:

- i. the publication of Terms of Reference
- ii. an institutional self-evaluation report,
- iii. an external assessment and site visit by a Team of reviewers ,
- iv. the publication of a review report including findings and recommendations and
- v. a follow-up procedure to review actions taken.

4.1 INSTITUTIONAL REVIEWS PROCEDURE

STEP	ACTION	OUTCOME
Terms of Reference	Completion of an institutional information profile by QQI Confirm Terms of Reference with institution and HEA	Published Terms of Reference
Preparation	Consultation with the institution on conflict of interest Appointment of an expert Review Team	Review Team appointed
Self-evaluation	Preparation of an institutional self-evaluation report	Published self-evaluation report

STEP	ACTION	OUTCOME
Visits	<p>A 2-part visit of the Team to the institution consisting of a planning visit and a main review visit.</p> <p>The purpose of the planning visit is to review the self-evaluation report and additional evidence, plan for the main review visit and, if possible, establish findings with respect to compliance at this stage in the process.</p> <p>The purpose of the main review visit, unless otherwise determined, is to focus on exploring quality enhancement through questioning and dialogue with the institution.</p>	A short preliminary oral report to the institution
Reports	<p>Preparation of a draft report by the Team</p> <p>Factual accuracy checking of the draft report by the institution</p> <p>Preparation of a final report by the Team</p> <p>Editing of the final report by QQI</p> <p>Preparation of an institutional response</p>	<p>Published:</p> <p>QQI review report</p> <p>Institutional response</p>
Outcomes	<p>Consideration of the review report and findings by QQI together with the institutional response and the plan for implementation</p>	<p>Formal decision about the effectiveness of QA procedures</p> <p>QQI quality profile</p> <p><i>In some cases, directions to the institution and a schedule for their implementation.</i></p>
Follow-up	<p>Preparation of an institutional implementation plan</p> <p>One-year follow-up report to QQI for noting. This and subsequent follow-up may be integrated into annual reports to QQI.</p> <p>Continuous reporting and dialogue on follow-up through the annual institutional reporting and dialogue process</p>	<p>Publication of the institutional implementation plan by the institution</p> <p>Publication of the follow-up report by QQI and the institution</p> <p>Annual Institutional Report</p> <p>Annual Dialogue Meeting notes</p>

4.2 OUTCOMES

The Report of the Review Team sets out its findings in relation to each of the objectives of the review. As well as specific findings, it provides a general statement regarding the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of the institution and their implementation. These findings are approved by QQI and published in the Quality Profile.

If the Review Team identifies what it considers to be significant areas for development, particularly in relation to the institution's fulfilment of relevant statutory requirements, these are clearly identified in the report for consideration by QQI. Following consideration, QQI may set out directions to the institution.

QQI consults with the institution to agree an immediate action plan with specific QQI recommendations to address the directions, including the timeframe in which the issues pertaining to the directions will be addressed. If directions are given then the institution reports to QQI every six months on progress against the action plan for the duration of the plan.

Where QQI considers that progress in implementing the action plan is inadequate, QQI may, in consultation with the institution, intervene to secure a revision or acceleration of the plan, or move to establishing a 'for cause' review.

APPENDIX 1

THE PURPOSES OF QQI REVIEWS

PURPOSE	ACHIEVED THROUGH:
<p>To encourage a QA culture and the enhancement of the student learning environment and experience within institutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> piloting a new thematic review methodology emphasising the student and the student learning experience in reviews providing a source of evidence of areas for improvement and areas for revision of policy and change and basing follow-up upon them exploring innovative and effective practices and procedures exploring quality as well as quality assurance within the institution
<p>To provide feedback to institutions about institution-wide quality and the impact of mission, strategy, governance and management on quality and the overall effectiveness of their quality assurance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> emphasising the ownership of quality and quality assurance at the level of the institution pitching the review at a comprehensive institution-wide level evaluating compliance with legislation, policy and standards evaluating relative equivalence with well-functioning quality assurance systems emphasising the improvement of quality assurance procedures
<p>To improve public confidence in the quality of institutions by promoting transparency and public awareness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> adhering to purposes, criteria and outcomes that are clear and transparent publishing a periodic review cycle publishing Terms of Reference publishing the reports and outcomes of reviews in accessible locations and formats for different audiences publishing brief, easy to read institutional quality profiles evaluating, as part of the review, institutional reporting on quality and quality assurance, to ensure that it is transparent and accessible

PURPOSE	ACHIEVED THROUGH:
To support systems-level improvement of the quality of higher education	publication of periodic synoptic reports ensuring that there is sufficient consistency in approach between similar institutions to allow for comparability and shared learning publishing institutional quality profiles
To encourage quality by using evidence-based, objective methods and advice	Using the expertise of international, national and student peer reviewers who are independent of the institution Ensuring that findings are based on stated evidence Facilitating institutions to identify standards and benchmarks for quality relevant to their own mission and context Promoting the identification and dissemination of examples of good practice and innovation

APPENDIX 2

QQI REVIEWS SCHEDULE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

This schedule is based primarily on previous review dates, taking into consideration the revised landscape for higher education. For institutions that have not undergone previous review, the date of re-engagement will determine subsequent review dates. Previous review dates are included in parentheses.

ACADEMIC YEAR	DAB	IOT	OTHER PREVIOUSLY REVIEWED
September 2016- June 2017	Maynooth University (2009)	Institute of Technology, Sligo (2008) Letterkenny Institute of Technology (2009)	Open Training College (2009) Griffith College Dublin (2009)
September 2017- June 2018	Dublin City University (2010) National University of Ireland, Galway (2010)	Dundalk Institute of Technology (2009) Institute of Technology Tralee (2009)	Hibernia College (2009) American College Dublin (2009) National College of Ireland (2010)
September 2018- June 2019	University College Dublin (2011) University of Limerick (2011) National University of Ireland	Waterford Institute of Technology (2010) Institute of Technology Carlow (2010)	Kimmage Development Studies Centre (2010) Dublin Business School (2010) St Nicholas Montessori College (2010)
September 2019- June 2020	Dublin Institute of Technology (2011) Trinity College Dublin (2012)	Institute of Technology, Tallaght (2009) Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (2011) Limerick Institute of Technology (2010)	The Institute of Physical Therapy and Applied Science (IPTAS) (2011) Irish College of Humanities and Applied Sciences (ICHAS) (2011)

ACADEMIC YEAR	DAB	IOT	OTHER PREVIOUSLY REVIEWED
September 2020- June 2021	University College Cork (2012)	Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (2010) Cork Institute of Technology (2010)	Newpark Music Centre (2011) Carlow College (2012) IBAT College Dublin (2012)
September 2021- June 2022	Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (2013)	Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (2011) Athlone Institute of Technology (2011)	SQT Training Ltd. (2012) Setanta College (2012) Clanwilliam Institute (2012)

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