External QA Review of Independent and Private Providers

2 September 2025

QQI External QA Reviews

National and International context

QQI QA framework

Draft Terms of Reference

Draft Handbook

Q & A

National Context

QQI

o Statutory Agency for Quality and Qualifications

o Awarding Body that promotes, develops and maintains the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

o Regulation of providers through QA approval, monitoring and review

Institutional Review

Statutory (formal) process – s. 34 Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education & Training) Act 2012 [as amended]

International Context

➢ **Establishment of Bologna Process (1999)**
- o Creation of **European Higher Education Area (EHEA)**
- o **Recognition** and **mobility** of students, graduates and staff
- o Broader **access** to high-quality higher education

➢ **Alignment with European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)**
- o sets out standards and guidelines for internal and external QA (for institutions and QA agencies)
- o common framework for QA systems (European, national and institutional level)
- o provides assurance and improvement of quality

ESG: Standard 2.3
External QA Process
- self-assessment
- external assessment e.g. a site visit
- external assessment report
- consistent follow-up

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Overarching QA Framework

➢ **Quality Assurance Guidelines (informed by ESG 2015)**

➢ **The National Framework of Qualifications**

➢ **Provider's Statutory Quality Assurance Procedures**

➢ **QA Approval**

➢ **Programme Validation (independent/private providers)**

➢ **Annual Quality Reports (AQRs)**

➢ **Quality Dialogue Meetings with providers**

➢ **External QA Review – ToR and Handbook**

➢ **Enhancement focus**
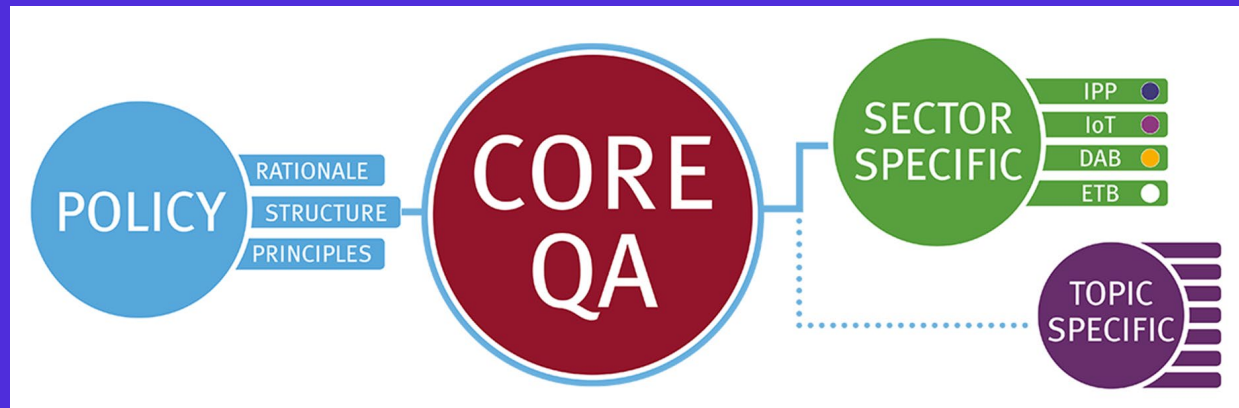
External QA review

Draft Terms of Reference

PART 1
- Background and context for review
- Purpose of review
- Due diligence

PART 2
- Objectives and criteria
- Areas for special consideration
- Review outcomes and post-review follow-up

PART 3
- The review process
- The review team
- Review timelines

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External QA Review

- "evaluates the *effectiveness* of the provider's quality assurance...establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of higher education, training and related services..."

- Provides an *external dimension* to a provider's own internal quality assurance and reviews

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External QA Review

Common purposes:

❑ Encourage a **QA culture and the enhancement** of the student learning environment and experience

❑ Provide feedback about

    (i)   **provider-wide quality**

    (ii)   **impact of mission, strategy, governance and management on quality**

    (iii)   **overall effectiveness of their QA processes**

❑ **Improve public confidence** in the quality of providers by promoting transparency and public awareness

❑ **Support systems-level improvement** of the quality of higher education

❑ Encourage **quality enhancement** by using evidence based, objective methods and advice

Due Diligence Evaluation

➢ Statutory assessment undertaken by QQI of a **provider's legal, financial, and governance capacity to deliver quality-assured programmes leading to NFQ awards**, as required under Section 29A of the 2012 Act (as amended).

➢ **<u>Purpose</u>**: is to give QQI reasonable assurance that providers have the capacity and capability to implement robust quality assurance procedures, and to provide coherent programmes of education and training that meet national quality standards.

➢ All independent and private providers will be required to demonstrate that they meet ministerial criteria through a <u>due diligence evaluation process</u>.

➢ This process incurs a separate fee.

Review Objectives – 4 key objectives

Governance and Quality Management	effectiveness and adequacy of the provider's QA governance, management and decision-making structures
Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP)	effectiveness of the implementation of procedures for ATP in relation to learners
Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA)	evaluate the arrangements to ensure the quality of TLA within the provider and a high-quality learning experience for all learners
Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review	evaluate the arrangements for the provider's education, training and related services and the QA system and procedures underpinning them

Governance and Quality Management

➢ A clear commitment and strategic approach to QA and its enhancement

➢ Adaptability of QA procedures and enhancement to align with mission and goals of provider

➢ Defined roles and responsibilities for QA at all levels of the organisation

➢ Transparent decision-making processes

➢ A documented approach to QA policies and procedures

➢ Effective procedures for programme design, approval, monitoring, and review

➢ Mechanisms for continuous improvement through internal monitoring and review

Access, Transfer and Progression

➢ Polices and procedures which ensure fair, transparent and consistent entry arrangements

➢ Pathways which support ATP

➢ Policies and procedures for RPL to include non-formal and informal learning

➢ Information provision to learners about each programme include ATP arrangements

➢ The enhancement of learner mobility through collaboration and cooperation across the tertiary education sector (if applicable)

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Teaching, Learning and Assessment

➢ Monitoring experiences, evaluating delivery methods, and fostering innovation in teaching and learning

➢ Assessment practices are secure, consistent, fair and transparent

➢ Effective and secure leaner record management through reliable digital systems

➢ Learner support services are planned and consistently available across all settings

Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

➢Comprehensive, evidence-based QA processes are implemented

➢Robust and inclusive mechanisms for programme review and revalidation, with consistent monitoring in all learning settings

➢Suitability and transparency of arrangements with external and collaborative partners through continuous monitoring and review of governance structures

Review Outcomes

Evaluate QA
- evaluate the **effectiveness of QA procedures** in relation to the quality of higher education, training, and related services.

Identify gaps
- **identify gaps** in IQA and consider the planned measures to address these.

Explore successes and innovations
- **Achievements and innovations** in QA and enhancement of TLA.

Future development of QA
- Guide **ongoing development** of QA and enhancement activities.

Review Outputs: REPORT

The review report will include specific and high-level qualitative statements:

⬇

➢ effectiveness of QA procedures and extent of their implementation and enhancement

➢ extent to which existing QA procedures adhere to QQI's QA guidelines and policies

➢ effectiveness of the procedures for ATP in relation to learners

➢ extent to which QA procedures support each stage of the programme lifecycle

➢ Identified effective practice and recommendations for further improvement

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Review Cost and Schedule

Review Cost - €20,000

➤ Costs have been determined on a cost recovery basis taking into consideration the significant reduced scale of the review.

SCHEDULE

➤ Reviews to be completed over course of 2026/27

➤ Reviews will be scheduled in phases with site visits to take place from Q2, 2026.

➤ Initial and draft scheduling will be based on completion of re-engagement evaluation and/or extended period since IAV.

➤ Schedule will be agreed in consultation with provider
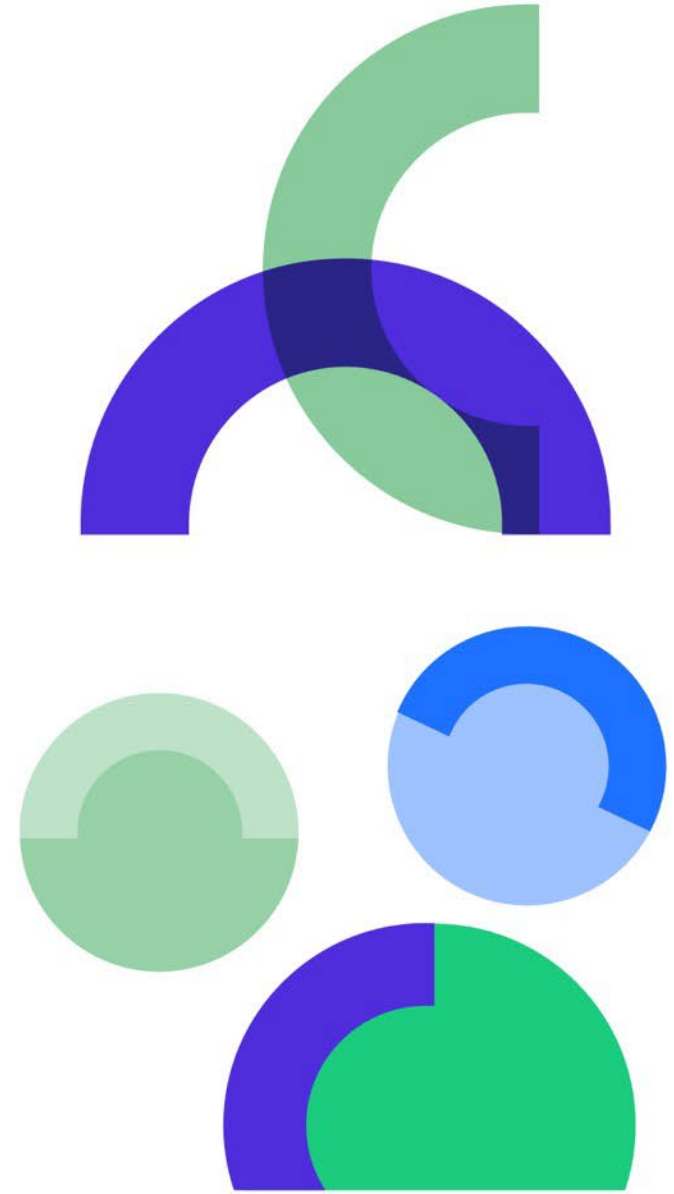
Phase 1: May 2026
Phase 2: October 2026
Phase 3: February 2027
Phase 4: May 2027

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External QA Review Process

The Review Process: Review Team Profile

Review Team

- QQI will appoint review team
- Review team composed of peers including learners, leaders in education, and/or QA and external reps
- Provider will have an opportunity to comment on the proposed review team to ensure no conflicts
- QQI will seek to ensure diversity within the review team

Review Team Profile

- Chair
- Coordinating Reviewer
- Learner Representative

Additional reviewers may be appointed, as appropriate, in consultation with the provider. QQI executive may also act as a reviewer and/or fill the role of coordinating reviewer.
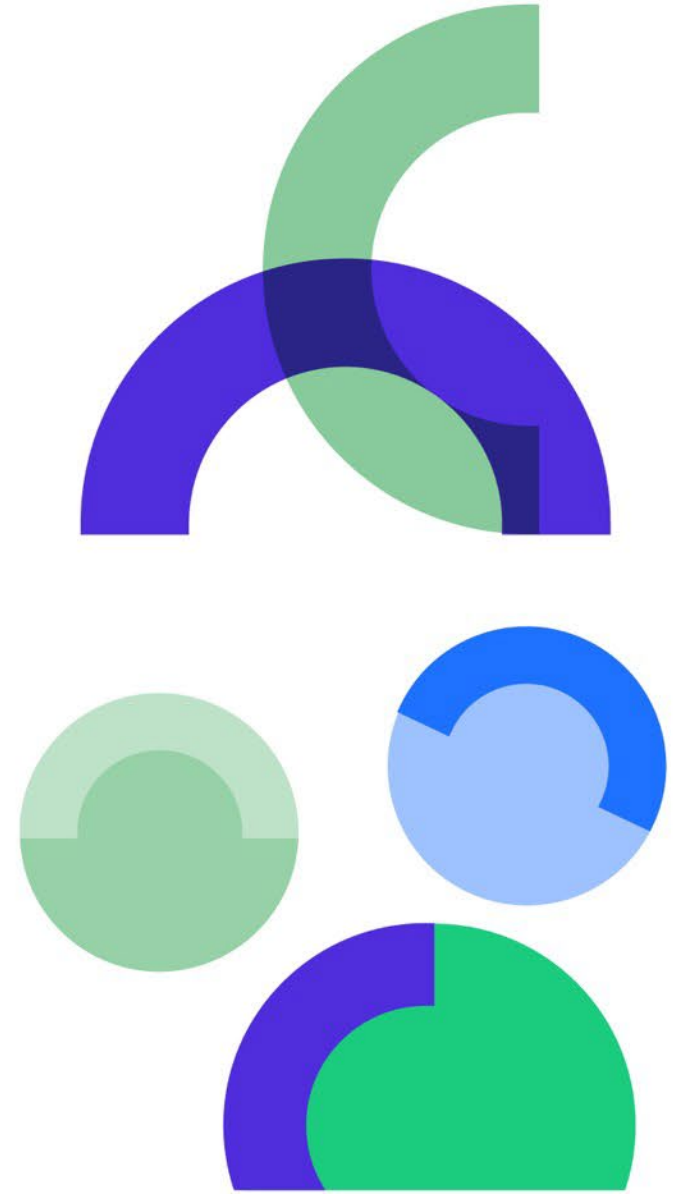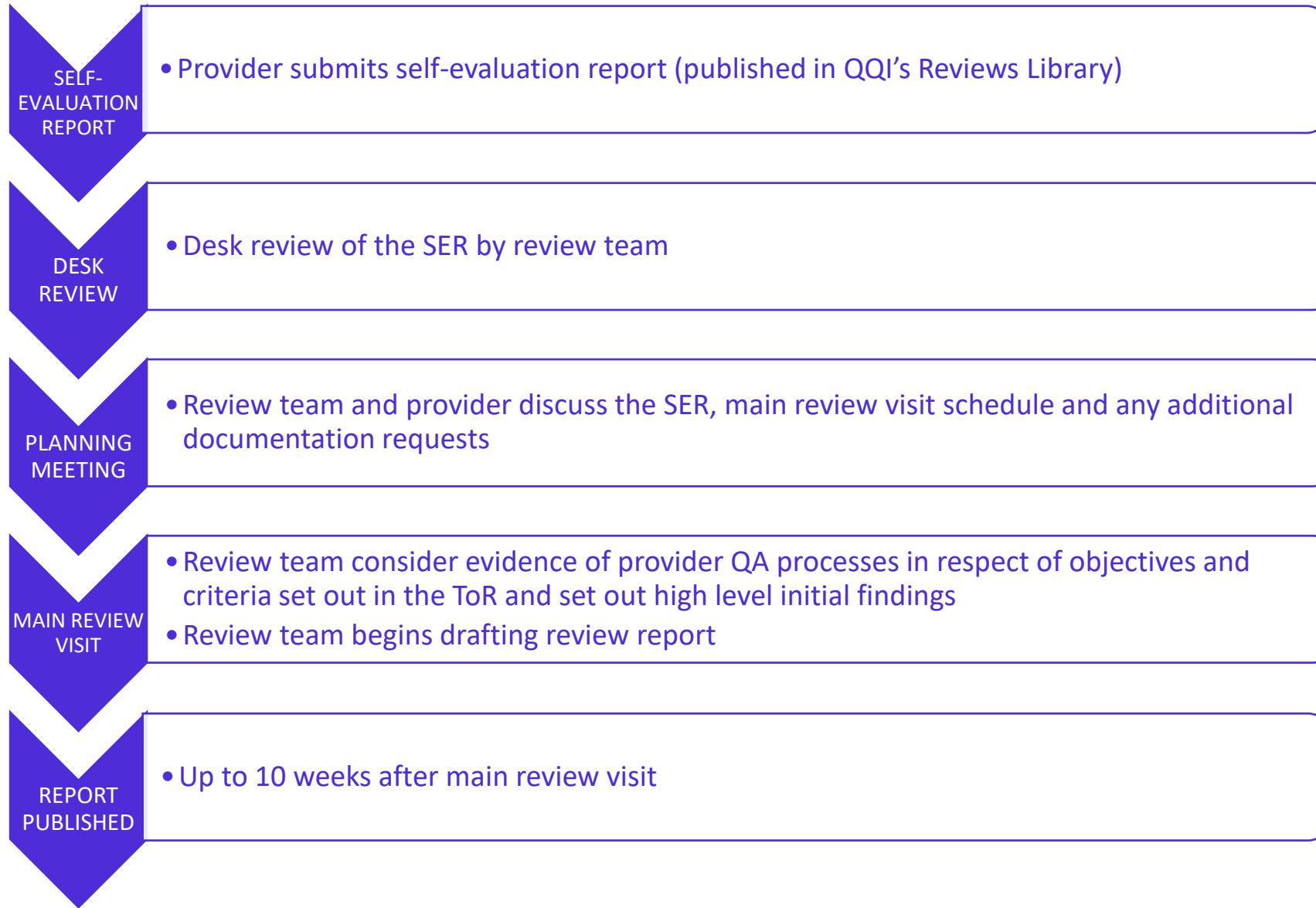
External QA Review: Key Documents
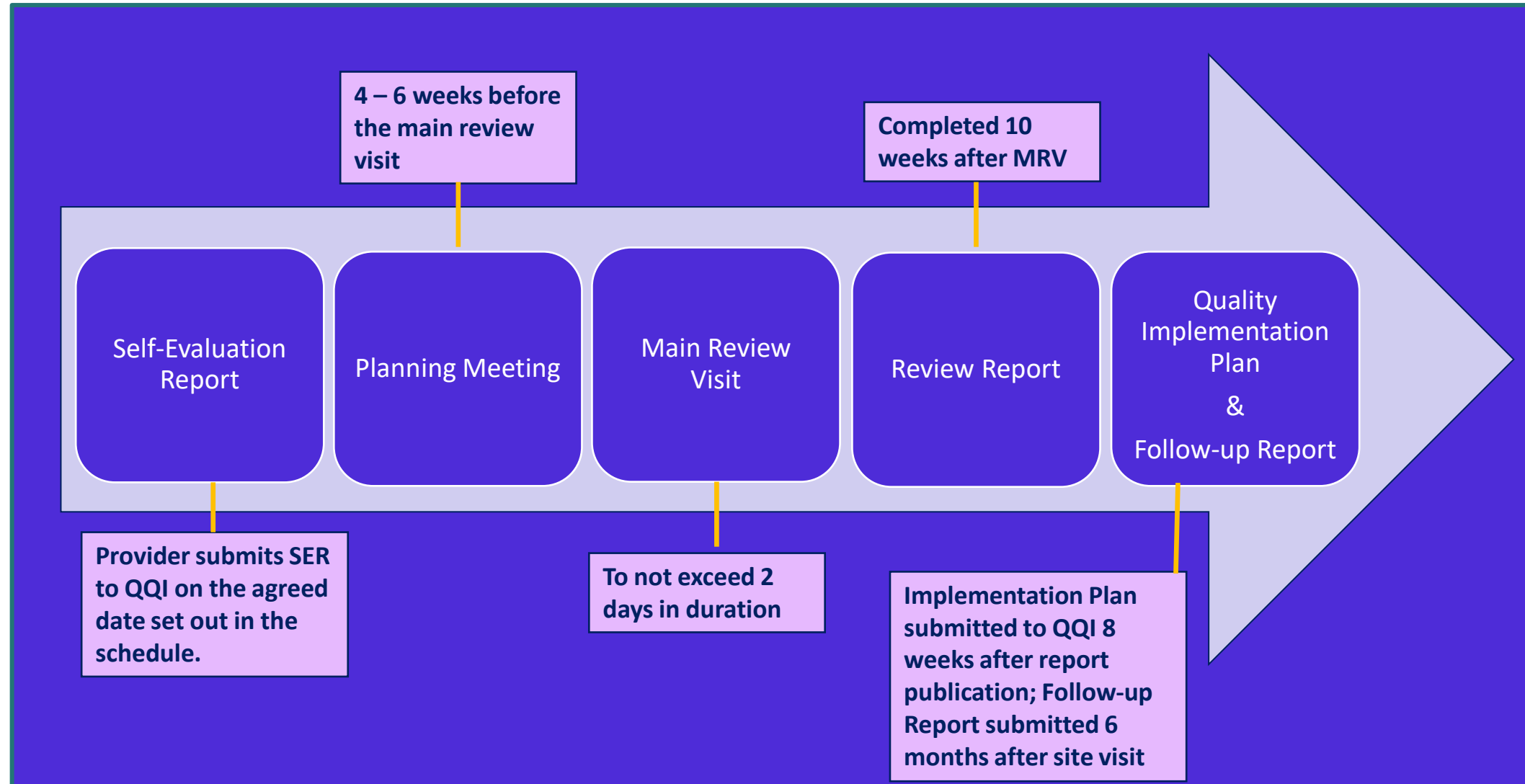
To be submitted by the Provider:

- ✓ **Self-Evaluation Report** *(submission date agreed - published)*

- ✓ [**Review Report** (*timeline agreed*) – *factual accuracy check and provider response*]

- ✓ **Implementation Plan** (*8 weeks after publication of report - published*)

- ✓ **Follow-up Report** (*6 months after main review visit*)

- ✓ Continuous reporting and engagement through quality reporting and dialogue processes

External QA Review – Key Stages

SELF-EVALUATION REPORT
- Provider submits self-evaluation report (published in QQI's Reviews Library)

DESK REVIEW
- Desk review of the SER by review team

PLANNING MEETING
- Review team and provider discuss the SER, main review visit schedule and any additional documentation requests

MAIN REVIEW VISIT
- Review team consider evidence of provider QA processes in respect of objectives and criteria set out in the ToR and set out high level initial findings
- Review team begins drafting review report

REPORT PUBLISHED
- Up to 10 weeks after main review visit

Review Timeline

Next steps

➢ Finalise the terms of reference and accompanying handbook – published on QQI website

➢ QQI will facilitate a series of peer learning/ topic-specific briefing sessions (via MS Teams)

Thank you