



## ***Irish Higher Education Quality Network***

# **Common Principles for Follow-through on Quality Improvements identified through Quality Reviews**

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### **Introduction**

At a meeting of IHEQN it was agreed that it would be helpful to capture some high-level common principles around the elements of the process carried out by higher education institutions when following-through on findings and recommendations<sup>1</sup> arising from quality reviews. Institutions are subject to internal and external quality reviews at a number of levels, which are captured in national legislation<sup>2</sup> and are also central to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area<sup>3</sup>. The elements associated with quality reviews can be quite similar and the outputs normally include a self-evaluation report; an external panel report; a response to findings included in the panel report; and follow-up reporting on implementation of panel findings.

The following principles are primarily concerned with elements of the process that contribute to the development of a response to an external panel's findings and the manner in which ongoing monitoring is undertaken. It should also be noted that the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) all have formal policies and procedures in place which govern external quality reviews including follow-up on findings arising from such reviews. It is intended that the following principles will complement these procedures.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this document the word 'findings' is also taken to refer to commendations and recommendations

<sup>2</sup> The Universities Act 1997 and the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999

<sup>3</sup> Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, ENQA, 2005

## **Follow-through on Findings arising from Quality Reviews**

- Clear guidelines are widely available within an institution that assist in carrying out the appropriate steps in responding, through a quality improvement plan or equivalent, to findings arising from a quality review, including appropriate timescales, supports available, reporting procedures, ongoing monitoring etc.
- Institutions clearly identify the parties responsible for devising, for approving, and for the implementation of the quality improvement plan, or equivalent, in response to the external panel findings, including ensuring that the appropriate governance structures have been taken into account.
- Quality improvement plans are produced as soon as possible after the receipt of the findings in order to ensure that the context in which the findings were made remains current and the responses are appropriate.
- Notwithstanding the need for a timely response to the external panel's findings, due consultation is undertaken with relevant colleagues and stakeholders for agreement of the responses to the findings made by the external panel.
- Where a series of units within a larger unit have already been subject to review and improvement plans were developed, these findings and the associated responses are considered during the review of the larger unit.
- Likewise, the institution has a process in place, which enables it to identify commonly occurring issues in reviews that need to be addressed in a more systematic manner across the institution.

- The quality improvement plans contribute to the institution's strategic planning or other planning processes and are incorporated into future review activities.
- The quality improvement plan, or equivalent, is kept under ongoing review to ensure its continued currency, relevance and effectiveness.
- Any amendments to the quality improvement plan, or equivalent, are documented and communicated as appropriate.
- The agreed quality improvement plan, or equivalent and information on the ongoing progress made against the plan, are readily accessible and communicated to colleagues, learners and other interested parties.

#### **The Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN)**

The Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN) originated in a discussion amongst higher education and training stakeholders at a National Conference on the Bologna Process on 23 July 2003. During the conference, it was generally agreed that it would be helpful if the main organisations with a role or significant interest in quality assurance in higher education and training in Ireland were to meet to discuss quality in a national context, with a view to working towards the development of a common national position on key quality assurance issues and to inform the debate on those same issues at a European level. A meeting was held on 9 October 2003, at which it was agreed that it would be desirable for the group to become a formal network, with the designation the Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN).