



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

# **Common Principles for Student Involvement in Quality Assurance/Quality Enhancement**

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## **Introduction and Background**

Under national legislation, higher education and training institutions and quality assurance agencies operating in Ireland are required to establish quality assurance procedures for the purposes of further improving and maintaining the quality of education and training which is provided by higher education and training institutions. The involvement of students in the established quality assurance procedures is an essential element of such procedures. The requirement to involve students in quality assurance activities relating to programmes and awards is further stated in the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*.

Institutional and agency quality reviews which have taken place in higher education and training institutions over recent years have considered the issue of student involvement in quality assurance procedures. While such reviews have found that students are involved in most quality reviews undertaken in the Irish higher education system, the limited extent of student involvement at all stages of quality assurance procedures has been noted. A number of reports have recommended that Irish institutions need to ensure that students have the opportunity to provide regular feedback on all modules, programmes and services, that student bodies and students in general become progressively more aware of quality review processes and that they are involved systematically in quality assurance and enhancement initiatives.

## **Purpose**

An IHEQN Working Group was established in 2008 to consider the issues regarding student involvement in quality assurance and to develop Common Principles for Student Involvement in Quality Assurance/Quality Enhancement. The purpose of the principles is to provide a useful reference guide to both higher education institutions in developing or reviewing current arrangements for the involvement of students in quality assurance processes and to quality assurance agencies undertaking external quality assurance activities.

The principles have been divided into five sub-sections:

- First Principles relating to quality assurance
- Principles relating to internal quality assurance within higher education institutions
- Principles relating to external quality assurance of higher education institutions
- Principles relating to reviews of quality assurance agencies
- Selection, training and recognition of students involved in internal, external and agency quality reviews.

## **First Principles**

Members of the IHEQN:

- Affirm that involving students in quality assurance procedures in a coherent and systematic manner has the following benefits:
  - It promotes student engagement within the institution and contributes to quality enhancement
  - It emphasises the learner perspective during quality reviews, thus helping to focus the review team on the student learning experience
  - Participation in feedback and evaluation activity promotes overall student development, including the development of critical skills

## Common Principles for Student Involvement in Quality Assurance/Quality Enhancement

- It addresses regulatory requirements on the part of the institution and the agency regarding student involvement in quality assurance both at a national and a European level.
- Seek to identify and adhere to best practice in the area of student involvement in quality assurance.
- Recognise that mechanisms for student involvement are organic and should evolve and develop over time.
- Recognise the importance of pre-defining and making publicly available the processes, criteria and procedures for the involvement of students in institutions' reviews and reviews carried out by quality assurance agencies.

## **Principles for the involvement of students in internal quality assurance within higher education institutions**

### ***Quality Assurance Policy***

- The institution enshrines the value of student participation in quality assurance activities at module, programme, unit, department, school, faculty and institution level.
- The policy, associated procedures and calendar for reviews have formal status and are publicly available, actively communicated and known within the institution.
- The institution designs its student representation system to provide opportunities for student engagement in decision-making and quality management arrangements. These opportunities are enshrined and clearly set out in a Quality Assurance/Enhancement Handbook, Student Handbook or equivalent document and are actively communicated.
- As part of the institution's development and implementation of a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality, a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards have been established, setting out a role for students as partners in quality assurance.

### ***Quality Assurance Procedures***

- Students are represented at all fora that contribute to quality processes at the institution.
- In addition to formal feedback, informal feedback should also be sought and captured (e.g. feedback from individuals, focus groups etc.)
- Students participate in internal quality reviews at module, programme, unit, department, school, faculty and institution level as appropriate.

### ***Student Feedback on Modules, Programmes and Services***

- Coherent and systematic student feedback mechanisms are in place for all modules, programmes and services.
- Student feedback on modules, programmes and services is analysed and such feedback is an explicit input to the quality assurance process at the institution.
- Outcomes of student feedback are reported back to students along with an action plan to address any issues raised.

## **Principles for the involvement of students in external quality assurance of higher education institutions**

### ***External Quality Reviews***

- Students are invited to participate in external quality reviews to ensure that the review covers issues of primary concern to learners.
- The external panel of experts includes an individual who represents a learner perspective.

## **Principles for the involvement of students in reviews of quality assurance agencies**

- Students and/or student representative bodies are invited to participate in the key stages of reviews of quality assurance agencies.
- The external panel of experts includes persons with a learner perspective.

## **Selection, training and recognition of students involved in Internal, External and Agency Quality Reviews**

- The institution and quality assurance agencies work in partnership with student representative bodies to:
  - set out criteria for selecting students to participate in quality reviews. The criteria are clearly articulated and made publicly available.
  - put in place a transparent and fair process for selecting students.
  - provide appropriate training and support for students selected to participate in reviews.
  - recognise participation of students in quality assurance activities.

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