Erasmus+

STEP BY STEP GUIDE
TO
INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

ABBREVIATIONS:

IQA - Internal Quality Assurance

NCFHE - National Commission for Further and Higher Education

QA - Quality Assurance

KEY:

Policy Development Tip

National Commission for
Further and
Higher Education Malta

Erasmus+

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FOREWORD

The *Step-By-Step Guide to Internal Quality Assurance,* henceforth called *The Guide,* is one of the key deliverables of the *Erasmus+* project entitled *International Cooperation for VET Providers* which the NCFHE led between 2015 and 2017. Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) is the responsibility of licensed providers and, in the form of a policy or document, it is developed by addressing all the 11 Quality Assurance (QA) Standards that are outlined in the *National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education,* henceforth called *The Framework,* The *Framework* is based on European and International QA standards in education, specifically on part 1 of the *European Standards and Guidelines* (ESG) and is enriched by EQAVET. Together with the *External Quality Assurance: Provider Audit Manual of Procedures* that addresses specifically part 2 of the ESG, the *Framework* also outlines the standards and procedures that the NCFHE adopts when conducting provider quality audits as part of its commitment to External Quality Assurance; the *Framework* thus maps out concretely Malta's commitment to QA and to the promotion of a culture of quality in Further and Higher Education.

As part of the project mentioned above, the NCFHE's QA Unit delivered to licensed providers a number of one-day training seminars on the development of IQA policies and mechanisms; feedback gathered during these seminars is incorporated in this *Guide.*

This *Guide* is therefore aimed mainly at providers that are still developing their IQA policy and those individuals who, although not expert QA professionals, are entrusted with the development and upkeep of a licensed provider's IQA documentation. The *Guide* testifies to the fact that an IQA policy that is fit-for-purpose is achievable by all providers, no matter their size and resources. In fact, the *Guide* sets out the principles and concerns that all providers, in accordance with the education that they provide, need to focus on and address when developing their own policies for IQA.

Dr Manuel Vella
Head, Quality Assurance

INTRODUCTION

Quality Assurance is the sole domain of licensed providers; as licensed education providers by the NCFHE, all providers commit themselves to ensuring the quality of the education that they provide. They do this by addressing all the Quality Assurance (QA) Standards that are outlined in the *National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education.* Thus, a licensed provider's first official commitment with the NCFHE towards the adherence to, promotion and enhancement of a quality culture, takes the shape of an Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) document or policy. The IQA policy is submitted to the NCFHE for evaluation during which the NCFHE assesses its fitness-for-purpose in accordance with the specific education provision that the entity is currently or in the process of providing. An IQA policy that is fit-for-purpose ensures that the educational provision offered by the entity is of high quality and that the provider is concretely committed to continuous quality enhancement and accountability. As much as possible, providers need to show exactly how they involve students, staff and external stakeholders in the various QA processes that they develop to address all the QA Standards. The ultimate aim of the IQA policy – which needs to be made public and easily accessible to all – is to provide clear indication of the provider's commitment to offer education of high quality so that all those who wish to learn more about or are interested in pursuing courses or programmes offered by the entity get as clear a picture as possible of what to expect so as to be able to make an informed decision.

It is thus very important that every licensed provider develops an IQA policy that is fit-for-purpose. The aim of this *Guide* is to show that:

1. an IQA policy needs to be tailor-made to fit the specific requirements of a provider;

2. there is no *one size fits all* template that the NCFHE can distribute to every provider (thus disregarding differences in the size, mission, and scope of the education provided by different entities) to simply fill out;

3. every provider *can* come up with a document that testifies to *its very own* ways of addressing the QA standards so as to ensure that its commitment to quality is genuine, effective, sustainable and open to continuous enhancement.

THE MISSION STATEMENT & THE FITNESS-FOR-PURPOSE OF YOUR INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE (IQA) POLICY

How are the mission statement of your entity and the IQA policy linked?

Your mission statement gives you **direction** and **purpose**: it gives a precise indication of what your entity aims to achieve. The 'mission statement' gives you an opportunity to state and define who you are and to publicly determine the nature and scope of, as well as the reason for, the education that you provide or intend to provide. It should answer the question: *Why should one choose your entity instead of someone else's to further their studies?*

Thus, NCFHE cannot propose or write an IQA policy for you: you are responsible for developing an IQA policy that is based on your mission statement, is appropriate for the education that you provide and which confirms your commitment to the continuous enhancement of Quality Assurance and accountability.

The IQA policy should be public. In fact, your first commitment with the NCFHE and with the public to the promotion and fostering of culture of quality in the education sector is in the form of an IQA document.

Your IQA document should thus be fit-for-purpose in accordance with the mission statement of your entity and the education that it provides. Fitness-for-purpose of the IQA document is the result of policies to address all the 11 Standards outlined in the *National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education* in a way that is consistent with and proportional to the education that the entity provides. Every entity needs to understand that an IQA policy should be updated constantly while remaining work-in-progress, a manifesto of the entity's commitment to continuous enhancement and better accountability.

INSTITUTIONAL PROBITY

LEADING STAFF

Identify the people responsible for the leadership and management of the entity. How do they help you achieve your purpose and goals?

What are the minimum selection criteria for appointing a new Head of Institution or a person in a managerial position?

What qualifications and how many years of experience in the field must they have?

Also reflect upon the criteria you would look for in potential managerial staff should a change be required in the future.

FINANCE

Reflect on the people involved in ensuring financial stability and also on the different steps that are followed when developing budget plans for a period of 3 to 5 years.

How do you allocate funds for the different departments, staff and resources?

Do you get an annual turnover of more than €50,000?

YES	NO
You should have yearly audited accounts!	Annual financial statements suffice!

DESIGN AND APPROVAL OF PROGRAMMES

We suggest that you (or the person in charge of designing courses) make reference to the NCFHE application form for programme accreditation. The application form, which is available from the NCFHE website, will help you to indicate in the IQA document all the steps involved in the process of designing and approving a new course.

The questions below can also help you develop further your IQA process for design and approval of programmes:

- How do you identify the need to introduce a new course?
- How do you approve a new course? What are the steps involved in approving a new course?
- Do you take into consideration input from students and external stakeholders (including from the world-of-work/industry) when designing a new programme? How do you include them in the process?

Course Outline
Why?
What?
Objectives
Steps
Strategies

TEACHING STAFF

Now that you have designed the courses, you need to recruit suitable teachers!

What qualifications and work experience should teachers have? How are they in line with the direction of your entity?

What are the different steps involved in recruitment? How do you ensure that the processes are fair and transparent?

How do you ensure that teachers are up-to-date with-the latest teaching methodologies and developments in their areas?

In order to develop a policy on the recruitment of staff, you may wish to reflect on the different steps which recruitment entails (e.g. formulation of a job description, selection criteria, issue of a call for application, ensuring that minimum selection criteria are appropriate for the level-rating of the courses that the staff will be teaching, interviewing methods, induction for new employees, etc.). Where applicable, take into consideration the link between education and research or practice.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

Prospective students would like to apply for a new course but first they need to take a look at your available public information (website, brochures, adverts etc.). Public Information should thus be informative, clear and up-to-date.

- What public information is made available to prospective students and how is it made available?

- If the programmes are employment-oriented, what information is accompanied to suggest possible career paths for students?

- How do you ensure that public information is enough so that prospective students make an informed choice? What further steps are taken to ensure that prospective students are fully-aware of course details and policies?

- Who is responsible for publishing information on your entity and the programmes that you offer? How do you ensure that public information is up-to-date and accurate?

STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT & LEARNING RESOURCES AND STUDENT SUPPORT

You should reflect on the different steps that are entailed to ensure quality teaching, assessment and complaints processes that benefit you and the students. The following questions and tips can guide you to reflect upon and write the process that makes up the pedagogical processes:

These will be included in your application form for NCFHE programme accreditation.

1

Who is involved in teaching, delivery and assignments? What are their responsibilities?

What are the diverse teaching methods and methods of assessments that are used and that you promote? How do these take into consideration the diversity of students' needs?
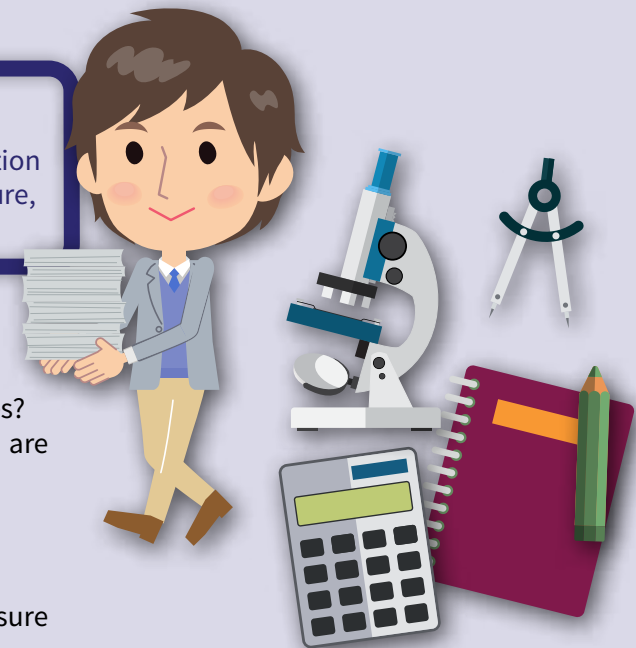
When allocating resources make sure to take into consideration the needs of different teachers and students, including mature, part-time, full-time and students with disabilities.

2

- What resources can students and academic staff use?
- How do you identify the need and allocate for new resources?
- Who is responsible for ensuring that adequate resources are available at the entity?

With regards to courses that involve online learning:

- Who is responsible for technical and media support?
- In case of failure of equipment or software, how do you ensure (automated) continuity of service?
- Do you have any back-up systems?

I'm not sure I've understood today's lesson! Who can I contact for support?

4

Take into consideration different processes for different modes of complaints, such as oral and formally written complaints.

How do you detect cheating and plagiarism? What actions will you take against students who cheat?

How do you assess and grade assignments and exams?

How can students complain against and appeal decisions by your entity?

Entities offering online-learning must also take into consideration procedures in place for the verification of the identity of students carrying out assessment and sitting for exams.
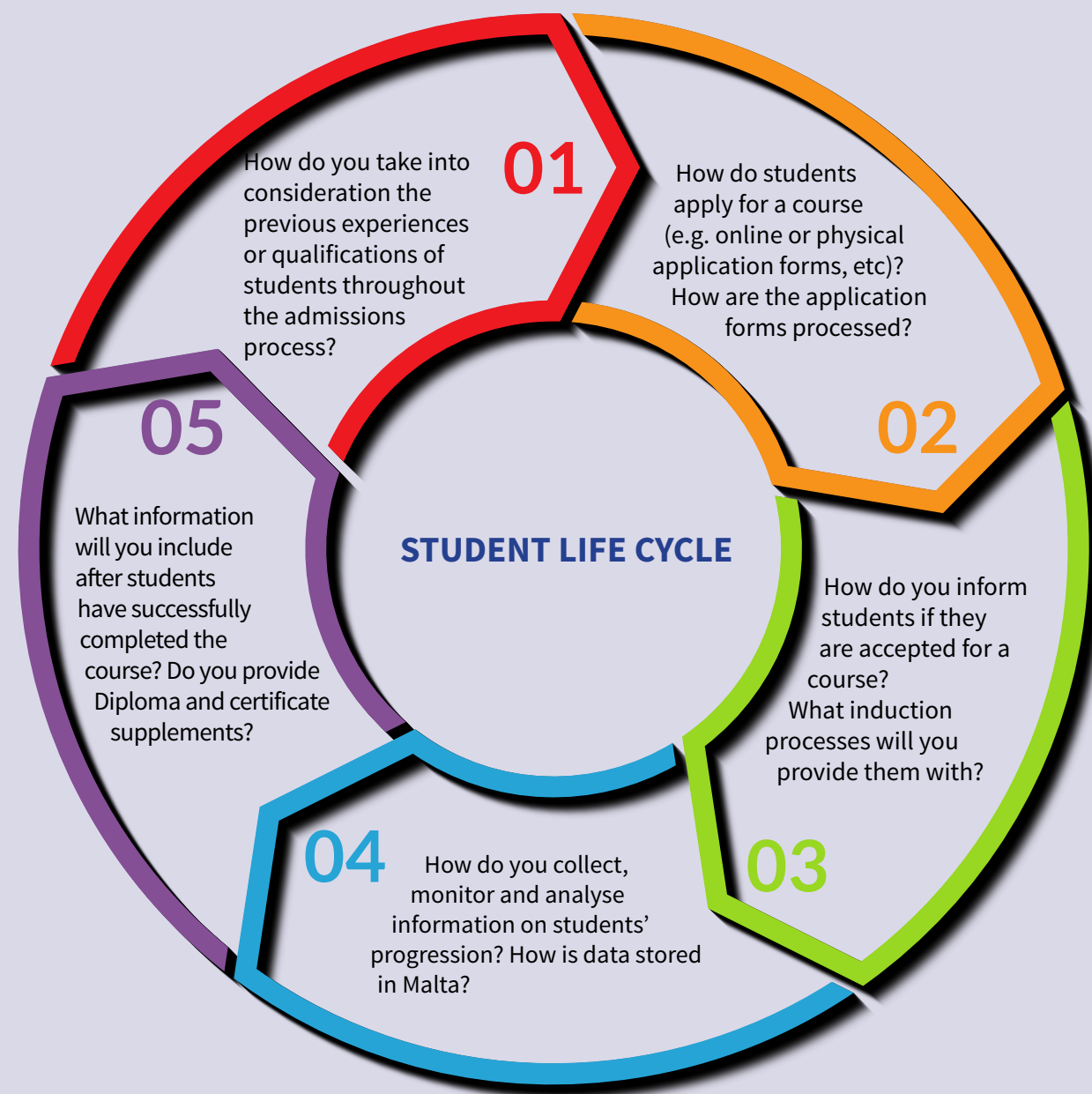
3

DO YOU NEED HELP?

You should also ensure that you provide your students with adequate support when they come across difficulties that can be both academic and non-academic.

- Do tutors provide students with support? If so, what support do students receive (e.g. one-to-one meetings, email, etc)?
- Do you offer other support to students (e.g. counselling, etc)?

# STUDENT ADMISSION, PROGRESSION, RECOGNITION AND CERTIFICATION

What are the different steps making up the student's educational life-cycle? The diagram below can help you develop your policies in this regard:

STUDENT LIFE CYCLE

01 How do students apply for a course (e.g. online or physical application forms, etc)? How are the application forms processed?

02 How do you inform students if they are accepted for a course? What induction processes will you provide them with?

03

04 How do you collect, monitor and analyse information on students' progression? How is data stored in Malta?

05 What information will you include after students have successfully completed the course? Do you provide Diploma and certificate supplements?

How do you take into consideration the previous experiences or qualifications of students throughout the admissions process?

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Your entity is obliged to collect and analyse data on the student population, course participation, retention and success rates, student satisfaction and employment rates and tracer studies. These are very important to ensure accountability and also to help you improve and enhance the quality of the education that you provide.

Methods of data collection may include feedback forms, attendance lists, etc.

- Student Profiles
- Student satisfaction and Career Paths
- Student Participation, Retention, Success Rates
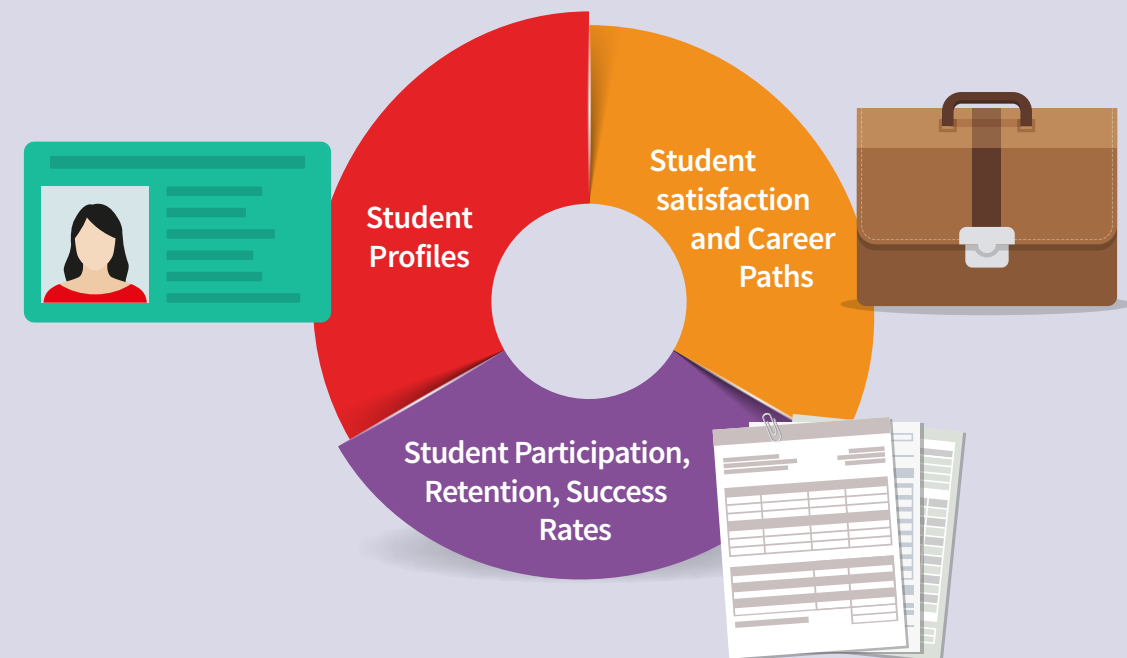
- How and when is the data collected, monitored and analysed?
- Who is responsible for the collection, monitoring and analysis of data?
- How are records stored in Malta? Where?
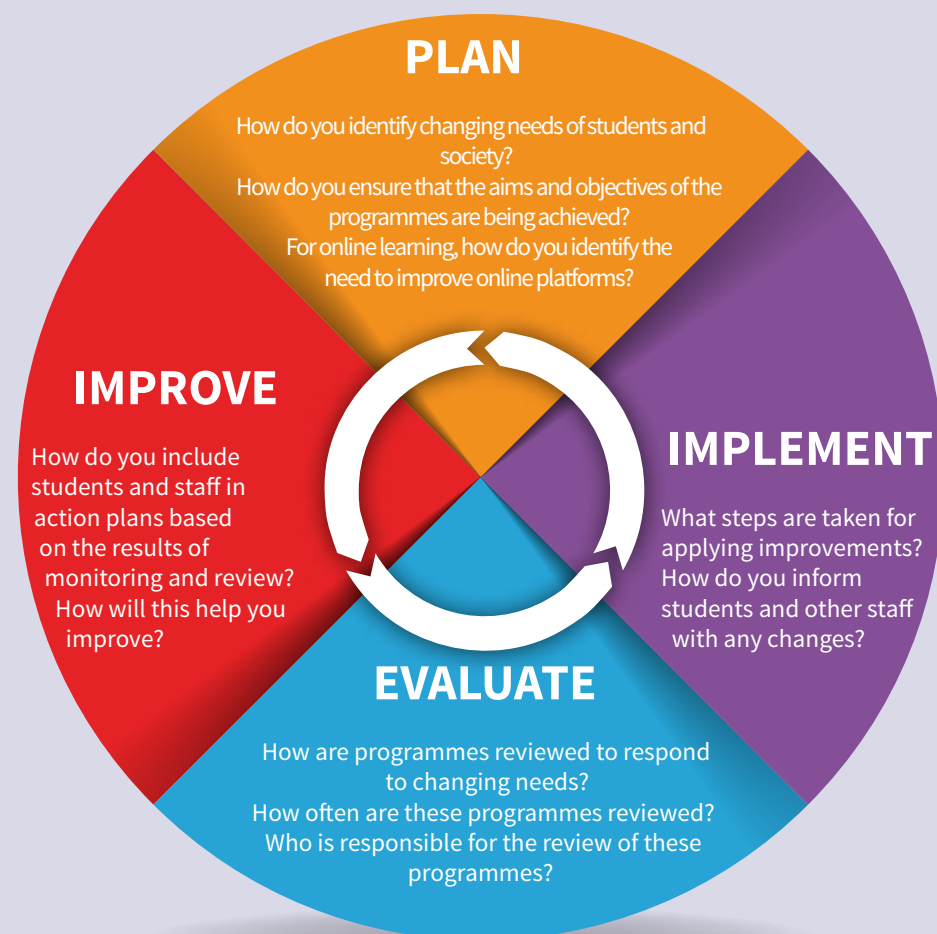- Who is responsible for the various processes included in data management?

If you offer employment-oriented courses, you need to take into consideration the collection and analysis of employment rates and career paths in order to ensure that your courses are in line with current market and labour needs.

- How do you use the information to improve your entity and the programmes that you offer in line with the purpose of the entity and to ensure effective management of programmes and other activities?

- Do you include students and staff in any action-plans based on the results of data collection?

ONGOING MONITORING AND REVIEW OF PROGRAMMES

PLAN
How do you identify changing needs of students and society?
How do you ensure that the aims and objectives of the programmes are being achieved?
For online learning, how do you identify the need to improve online platforms?

IMPLEMENT
What steps are taken for applying improvements?
How do you inform students and other staff with any changes?

EVALUATE
How are programmes reviewed to respond to changing needs?
How often are these programmes reviewed?
Who is responsible for the review of these programmes?

IMPROVE
How do you include students and staff in action plans based on the results of monitoring and review?
How will this help you improve?

Identify the people involved in monitoring and review of programmes, including people involved in the input of information such as teachers, students and world-of-work stakeholders.

Refer to *Information Management:* input of students through feedback on satisfaction with programmes.

POLICY FOR INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard 1 may seem especially difficult to address if you start off directly with it when building your IQA policy. You may find it helpful to approach Standard 1 at the end, that is after having developed policies and procedures that satisfactorily address Standards 2 to 10, rather than starting off with it directly. Compile your response to the other standards in such a way that you directly and synthetically address the points outlined in Standards 1 and develop these further to provide an introduction to the whole document by integrating it into single policy for Quality Assurance.

ORGANISATION OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Refer back to the other 9 Standards – you will notice that you have already identified all the roles making up the quality assurance system. For example, by identifying all the roles and responsibilities of departments, school faculties, leadership and staff members and list them in an organigram. Ask yourself 'how do all these roles help me to reach my mission statement?'

Take into consideration the below questions:

- Are some of the activities carried out by other parties or are they subcontracted? If so, what is their role in their QA system?

- Are you part of a franchise or a representative of a foreign provider? If so, what is the role of the parent provider/foreign provider in your internal quality assurance?

ETHICS

- How do you prevent plagiarism, cheating etc?

- In case of academic fraud, what are the steps involved in dealing with the case?

- Online-learning: How do you verify the identity of the students?

- How do you ensure against intolerance and discrimination against students and staff?

- In case of a claim of intolerance and discrimination, how do you address and deal with the case?

- How do you ensure that tutors are free to share facts without fear or repression?
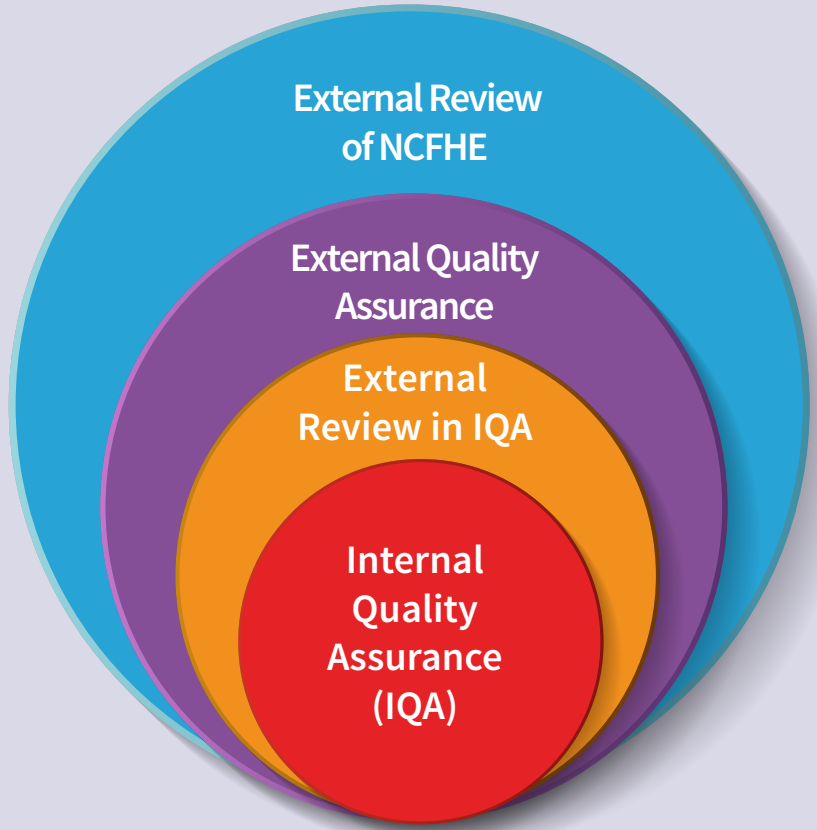
CYCLICAL EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Your commitment with the NCFHE towards the adherence to, promotion and enhancement of a quality culture is, first, through the submission of an IQA document. Being issued the license, your second commitment towards the enhancement of quality is then through an NCFHE QA audit every 5 years.

Following an audit by an independent group of peers, a report is compiled on your entity which is then made public on the NCFHE website. The Report includes good practices identified and recommendations indicated by the panel as well as action plans developed by you. You are expected to follow the action plan to make improvements in the entity and the programmes which you offer.

External Review of NCFHE

External Quality Assurance

External Review in IQA

Internal Quality Assurance (IQA)

ANNEX 1: THE 11 STANDARDS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard 1   Policy for internal quality assurance

Standard 2   Institutional probity

Standard 3   Design and approval of programmes

Standard 4   Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Standard 5   Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Standard 6   Teaching staff

Standard 7   Learning resources and student support

Standard 8   Information management

Standard 9   Public information

Standard 10   Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Standard 11   Cyclical external quality assurance

The updated version of the 11 Standards of Quality Assurance is available in Annex 1 of NCFHE Communication ACC-QA/01/2017.

For further information on Internal Quality Assurance, please refer to the *National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education* or contact the NCFHE Quality Assurance Unit:

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