



QFI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann



Review of Reviews
Draft Terms of Reference
A Review of QFI Legacy Review Procedures

**Feedback Report following
Consultation Process**
June 2013

Introduction

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) was established in November 2012 and as part of its functions, QQI has assumed responsibility for the independent external quality assurance review of all higher education institutions (institutional review) associated with the legacy bodies. Prior to 2012, three distinct systems for institutional review were in place, as follows –

- The Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) operated the Institutional Review of Irish Universities (IRIU) process
- The Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) operated the Institutional Review Process for the Institutions of Technology and independent providers of higher education and training
- The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) had procedures in place for the review of the DIT and the RCSI

As a first step towards fulfilling its responsibilities with regard to the external quality assurance review aspect of the new legislation, QQI is conducting a review of the effectiveness of each of the legacy models stated above, and their impacts. This review, titled the Review of Reviews, will commence in August 2013. On 16 May 2013 QQI completed draft Terms of Reference for the Review of Reviews. The draft Terms of Reference were published on the QQI website www.QQI.ie and open for general consultation from 16th May 2013 until 7th June 2013. In addition, all of the forty one institutions which underwent reviews with the legacy bodies, as well as the relevant representative bodies of higher education (Institutes of Technology Ireland (IoTI) and the Irish Universities Association (IUA)) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA), were invited to provide feedback and comments on the draft Terms of Reference.

This report sets out a summary of the feedback received via the consultation process on the draft Terms of Reference and outlines the next steps in the Review of Reviews project.

1 Consultation responses

Respondents were encouraged to provide feedback in response to the questions in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Questions on the Terms of Reference provided to institutions

When you have completed reading this paper, we would welcome feedback regarding the following:

- Are the objectives comprehensive and relevant?*
- Are the criteria sufficient?*
- Is the indicative schedule appropriate?*
- Would you be willing to participate in the Review as it progresses (e.g. meet with the Review Team, provide feedback regarding the legacy review model which was associated with your institution, suggest enhancements for future review models etc.)?*

Additional comments are also welcome.

Feedback was received from fifteen higher education institutions, two representative bodies for higher education (Irish Universities Association and Institutes of Technology Ireland) and the Higher Education Authority (see Appendix 1 for a list for respondents). Sources of feedback ranged from very small, niche Higher Education institutions to the largest University in the state (UCD).

Feedback was summarised into key points from each respondent and this was then condensed into: 1) key feedback on the specific consultation questions; 2) general comments about review.

The key feedback on the specific consultation questions will be taken on board in finalising the Terms of Reference as indicated below and will be used to inform the review process.

The general comments about review will be passed on to the Review Team and will also be used to inform the development of the QQI White Paper on a Policy for Reviews.

2 Key feedback on the specific consultation questions

Responses to the Draft Terms were largely positive. All respondents expressed support for the purpose of the review. Almost all respondents were satisfied with the criteria. All respondents indicated a willingness to participate in the review.

Some respondents commented on the need for the context of legacy models to be explained to reviewers. One respondent indicated that there would be a need to define criteria more clearly for reviewers. QQI was requested to clarify further the outcomes of this review and the relationship between this review and the development of a QQI policy on reviews in the Terms of Reference.

Feedback indicated that aspects already included in the Terms of Reference require greater emphasis for the Review Team. These aspects included consideration of the effort involved in review versus the benefits accruing and identifying the benefits of legacy reviews for quality assurance practices, policies and procedures in institutions.

While the criteria for the review were generally considered appropriate, it was suggested that they should be augmented by the fundamental elements of enquiry that underpin any review i.e. mission; strategy; evaluation; enhancement. The Review Team should also be encouraged to take into consideration previous feedback on reviews. Some contributors noted the emergence of revised ESG criteria and suggested that these could be used to underpin this review.

Most respondents voiced a concern around the timelines for the review. The concern centred on two key elements:

- I. That there would be insufficient time for institutions to consult internally in providing feedback to reviewers.
- II. That the timing of the review in the July-September period was not conducive to the participation of higher education institutions, given the academic calendar, and it should be extended into October/November.

Outcome/Changes to Terms of Reference:

- QQI will extend the timelines of the Review. The key consultation and fact finding period of the review will move from the planned September date to November.
- The Terms of Reference will make explicit reference to the intended outcomes for the Review. The existing statement on the relationship between the Review and the development of QQI policy will be expanded to clarify further the relationship.

Additional changes:

- QQI will provide the Review Team with detailed information and briefing on the contextual basis for legacy reviews including: legacy organisation operational contexts and functions; legacy legislative functions; HE institutional constructs and contexts.
- The criteria will be expanded on and explained to the Review Team at a briefing session. Inquiry based on the fundamental questions (mission; strategy; evaluation; enhancement) will be emphasised to the Review Team. The revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, if published in time, will be referred to by the Review Team in considering their findings, as will any other updates.
- The Review Team will be required to give institutions sufficient time and information to consult internally before providing feedback. QQI will ensure that the Review Team gives provider representatives adequate time to consult with colleagues. This will be supported by the adoption of a blended methodology for research and consultation by the Review Team.

- The following items were already set out in the Draft Terms of Reference: the Review Team will be encouraged to pay particular attention to the feedback already provided by institutions; in conducting the review the Team will pay attention to identifying the benefits of legacy reviews for quality assurance practices, policies and procedures in institutions; subsequently, in drawing up their findings and conclusions, the Review Team will be encouraged to give consideration to the effort involved in review versus the benefits accruing. Several contributors emphasised them in feedback and this emphasis will be carried forward:

3 Feedback provided about reviews in general

Aside from commenting specifically on the Terms of Reference, some respondents broadened their commentary to include suggestions for future QQI review policy and practices.

It was suggested that, in developing policy, the quality assurance mechanisms implemented in other jurisdictions and in other sectors should be examined.

A concern about QQI implementing a 'one size fits all' model for reviews was expressed by several respondents. One respondent suggested two review models – one for Designated Awarding Bodies, one for institutions that already have Delegated Authority to make their own awards at particular levels. Other respondents expanded on this to say that there is a need to recognise the different quality assurance bases and autonomy contexts for Universities, Institutes of Technology and Further Education institutions and that review objectives must be based on this separation.

QQI were encouraged to consider the value added aspects of reviews and provide a clear rationale for reviews and an indication of the outcomes and value for the organisation in participating in the review process. Financial costs for future QQI reviews should not be onerous.

More specific terms of reference with explicit outcomes allied with an enhancement focus for review were identified as important considerations. The need to retain the distinction between external quality review and internal quality assurance activities was highlighted, as was the need for a new review method focussed on research, teaching and support services for the university sector.

One respondent commented on the need for more intensive QQI mentoring of smaller institutions and a need for greater consistency in panel decisions and wording of findings.

It was suggested that QQI must carry forward practices which ensure that panel decisions will be evidence-based. It was also emphasised that QQI must ensure that the expertise, knowledge and personal style of review panel members is of a high level to ensure a combined group of high quality.

The HEA outlined the need to consider the relationship between QQI reviews and HEA performance funding developments.

These comments have been recorded and will be passed on to the Review Team. More importantly, they will also be used to inform the development of the QQI White Paper on Reviews.

4 Next Steps

- QQI will finalise the Terms of Reference for the Review of Reviews in June 2013, taking on board the consultation feedback in the manner outlined above.
- QQI will appoint a Review Team in June 2013. The Review Team will be fully briefed and provided with detailed documentation on legacy reviews. The Review Team will carry out the review in line with the finalised Terms of Reference between June 2013 and December 2013.

Appendix 1 List of Respondents (in order of receipt of feedback)

Name	Legacy Review Process
Clanwilliam Institute	HETAC
NUI Galway	IRIU
Institute of Physical Therapy & Applied Science Ltd	HETAC
Athlone Institute of Technology	HETAC
University College Dublin	IRIU
SQT Training Ltd.	HETAC
Dublin Institute of Technology	NQAI
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	NQAI
University College Cork	IRIU
Newpark Music Centre	HETAC
Letterkenny Institute of Technology	HETAC
Kimmage Development Studies Centre	HETAC
Institute of Technology Carlow	HETAC
Hibernia College	HETAC
Dublin City University	IRIU
Higher Education Authority	n/a
Irish Universities Association	IRIU
Institutes of Technology Ireland	HETAC

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