



Institute of Technology Tallaght

Quality Assurance Procedures Manual

Approved by Academic Council

February 10th 2009

Rev	Reason for change	Effective from	Prepared date/by	Approved date/by	Description of change
A	-	Immediate	30/04/04 JV	4/05/04 CC	Initial Release
B	- New Section 3. - Changes due to obtaining Delegated Authority to make Awards - QA Manual to be used for FETAC awards.	December 06	18/12/06 JV	20/12/06 TC	- New Section 3 incorporating Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental Awards. - Procedures changed as a result of Delegated Authority. - QA Manual also to be used for FETAC awards
C	- To implement changes following internal audit - To comply with the ENQA guidelines - To integrate the Code of Practice for Research Degrees into the Quality System	February 09	02/01/09 MD	10/02/09 TC	- Changes following internal audit - Expansion in Book 2 Section 3 and 4 - Amendments to Book 2 Section 7 - Additional information on information provision Book 2 - Code of Practice for Research Degrees included in Book 3

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 Approved By:
 Date:

Preface

Quality assurance can be broadly defined as the “*process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provision fulfils expectations and measures up to threshold minimum requirements*” (Harvey, 2004-2007).¹ It encompasses multiple dimensions of inputs, processes and outcomes as well as the way these change over time. Therefore quality assurance principles are underpinned by accountability and continuous improvement.

The objectives of quality assurance as applied to teaching and learning in higher education are:

- a. To contribute, in conjunction with other mechanisms, to the promotion of high quality and standards in teaching and learning.
- b. To provide students, employers and others with reliable and consistent information about quality and standards at the institution.
- c. To ensure that educational programmes are identified where quality or standards are unsatisfactory, as a basis for ensuring rapid action to improve them.
- d. To provide one means of securing accountability for the use of public funds received by the institution.

These objectives are secured primarily through the internal quality assurance procedures and audit trail processes operated by the Institute.

Layout of the Quality Manual

The Institute strives to ensure an ethos of quality in all of its activities and to embed a culture of continuous improvement in the provision of services to students and to the wider community. Procedures for the design and monitoring of educational and training programmes takes cognisance of the standards for specific fields of learning set out by HETAC in determining the level of knowledge, skill and competence to be acquired by learners.² The quality manual provides detail on the internal quality procedures which underpin its activities. It has three distinct parts as follows:

BOOK 1 Institute Quality Assurance Structures

This describes the Institute’s approach to quality assurance and the systems set up to safeguard the quality and standards in the services provided.

BOOK 2 Taught Programme Quality Manual

This outlines the policies and procedures that relate to all educational and training programmes from Higher Certificate (Level 6) to Taught Masters (Level 9) inclusive. It includes policies and procedures for special purpose and minor awards and for the provision of services related to programmes. Procedures for the evaluating the effectiveness of our quality assurance procedures are also included. FETAC have adopted our Quality Assurance procedures as an educational provider.

BOOK 3 Research Degree Programme Quality Manual

This outlines the policy, regulations and procedures in respect of supervised research studies (Level 9/10) from admission through to final recommendation for award. It includes the Institute Code of conduct for the responsible practice of research along with disciplinary policy and procedures for dealing with allegations of misconduct. Processes and procedures for the management of ethics in research are also included.

¹ Chapter 5, Assuring and Improving Quality, *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society*, Volume 1, OECD, 2008.

² Awards Standards for the Development of Programmes on the National Framework of Qualifications on www.hetac.ie



Institute of Technology Tallaght
Institiúid Teicneolaíochta Tamhlacht

Quality Assurance Procedures Manual

BOOK 1

INSTITUTE QUALITY ASSURANCE STRUCTURES

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1. Context and Background

Quality assurance takes many forms and covers a wide spectrum of processes designed to monitor, maintain and enhance quality.³ These activities range from generic guidelines and guidance to internal processes of self-reviews and external reviews.

The Institute's approach to the assurance of quality and academic standards is based on adherence to the published Marks and Standards document; Schools ownership of programmes; highly qualified academic and support staff and management; ongoing training; learner initiatives; pedagogy updates; devolving responsibility for quality to staff; auditing of procedures and SOPs; internal and external reviews and the Quality Manual.

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 requires providers of higher education and training programmes validated by HETAC, or to which it has delegated the power to make awards, to establish quality assurance procedures and agree those procedures with HETAC.

The Institute's first Quality Assurance Manual was produced by the Senior Management Team to conform to the HETAC *Guidelines and Criteria for Quality Assurance Procedures in Higher Education and Training* (2002). The Quality Assurance Manual was submitted to HETAC and following review was accepted as meeting the requirements as specified in the HETAC guidelines. A Certificate of conformance was issued by HETAC and presented to the Institute in August 2004.

The Quality Manual describes the key structures, processes, policies, procedures, performance measures and quality assurance mechanisms that facilitate a systematic approach to embedding a quality improvement approach within the Institute. It has been revised in 2009 to take on board feedback from internal and external sources, including:

- Internal audit findings by the Quality Management Review Group
- Embed the 2008 Marks and Standards
- Include Plagiarism policy and procedures
- Include lifelong learning procedures
- Include placement procedures
- Formal integration of the 2006 Code of Practice into the Quality Manual
- Include procedures for the management of ethics in research
- Address the findings and recommendations of the Delegated Authority Panel, particularly in relation to follow-up procedures and overall monitoring of effectiveness.

The Institute Quality Assurance Manual has been written to comply with the requirements set out in the *HETAC Guidelines and Criteria of the Quality Assurance Procedures in Higher Education and Training 2002*. It also takes due cognisance of the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance 2005 (recently updated in 2007)*.

2. Institute Mission and Purpose

The Strategic Plan of the Institute of Technology Tallaght sets out the Mission of the Institute. Excellence and inclusiveness in teaching and learning is at the heart of the ITT Dublin's mission which is to:

³ D. Woodhouse *Quality and Internationalisation in Higher Education*, OECD, Paris, 1999.

Mission Statement

- provide learners with excellent flexible higher education opportunities.
- provide programmes which reflect current and emerging knowledge and practices relevant to the individual and our region.
- offer accessible programmes, delivered in a professional manner, in a friendly and supportive environment.
- foster graduates ready to undertake the roles, responsibilities and challenges available in business, industry, the professions, public service and society.
- be a major contributor to the social, cultural and economic life in South Dublin County and the surrounding region through teaching and learning, research and development, and providing support for innovation and enterprise.

The main function of the Institute is to provide educational and training programmes to meet the needs of students, society and the economy. The mission statement is publicly available in the Institute Prospectus (both full-time and part-time) and on the website. It reflects the Institute's responsibilities to the region that it serves and its commitment to be an integral part of the further development of the region.

Core Activities

The core activities of the Institute are teaching and learning, research and development and providing support for innovation and enterprise.

Values

The Institute places great emphasis on professionalism and excellence in all areas, in particular with respect to the quality of the services provided to its stakeholders. In the Institute of Technology Tallaght we are committed to:

- Excellence in teaching and a supportive learning environment
- Public service
- Supporting equality, diversity and inclusiveness
- Achieving the highest standards of governance and management
- Implementing and maintaining quality assurance policies and procedures
- Responding positively to individuals, organisations and communities
- Being respectful of individuals and supportive of their needs and aspirations
- Continuous development of the Institute itself and our staff
- Co-operating with other educational institutions and local, regional and national organisations

These values reflect the Institute's commitment to excellence in the provision of its educational and training programmes, to the enhancement of the student learning experience and to its support of local business and industry.

3. Institute Policy Framework

The Governing Body of The Institute has overall responsibility for the formulation of policies concerned with governance, academic matters and quality assurance. The Senior Management Team (SMT) has overall responsibility for the execution of policy as determined by Governing Body. This includes the design and implementation of quality assurance procedures. The

President approves procedures concerned with Institute quality assurance activities and the SMT member approves quality assurance procedures for his/her area of responsibility. The implementation of policy relies on the design of appropriate procedures which set out the method by which policy can be successfully realised. Hence, the Institute's policies and procedures form the basis of the Institute's Quality Assurance System, which has been established to provide stakeholders with an assurance that the design of educational programmes and associated standards has been planned and validated by a higher authority, in this case HETAC and the NOAI. Staff and other policies have also been developed to safeguard the interests of those who provide the educational services and support network. Hence, the policy framework is intrinsically linked with the Quality Assurance framework. The Institute policies and procedures are available at <http://staff-intranet/>

4. Institute Quality Assurance Policy

The Institute is committed to the provision of Higher Education of the highest quality, relevant to the needs of the individuals and organisations of our region, which is accessible and flexible and delivered in a professional manner, within a student centred supportive environment. The achievement of the highest quality requires us to have in place quality assurance and control procedures which enable us to make objective measurements, identify aspects of our work which may be improved and undertake the actions necessary to make these improvements. The Institute wishes to ensure an ethos of quality throughout our activities to enable continual improvement in our services to students and to the wider community. Our quality assurance policy requires us to be open and transparent to all stakeholders: Governing Body, students, graduates, academic, administrative and support staff, Department of Education and Science, NOAI, HETAC and FETAC, Professional Bodies, state and employer agencies, community groups. The values espoused by the Institute require us to respond positively to individuals, organisations and communities and to be respectful of each individual and responsive to his or her needs.

5. Institute Quality Assurance Structures

The Institute Quality Assurance Structures has been drawn up to ensure quality in the educational service provided to all learners and it also has mechanisms to encourage continuous improvement in the management of quality. Quality and its assurance is not maintained or enhanced through systems and controls alone but through professional commitment. Hence, Quality Assurance is applied at every level of the organisation.

The Quality Management framework (Figure 1) underpins the Institute's approach to realise its commitment to quality. Effective quality management is becoming increasingly important for the Institute, not only for improved outcomes but also because of an increasingly competitive environment and increased public interest in comparative quality data on Institutes of Technology and the Universities.

Academic staff are key players in the development and implementation of quality assurance in academic areas. Central services and student support services have their own quality assurance processes and play a vital role in enabling and supporting the Institute's core activities. Collective responsibility is achieved through involvement in Academic Council meetings, departmental meetings, programme boards and various other sub-committees and working groups within the different functional areas of the Institute and at School/Department level.

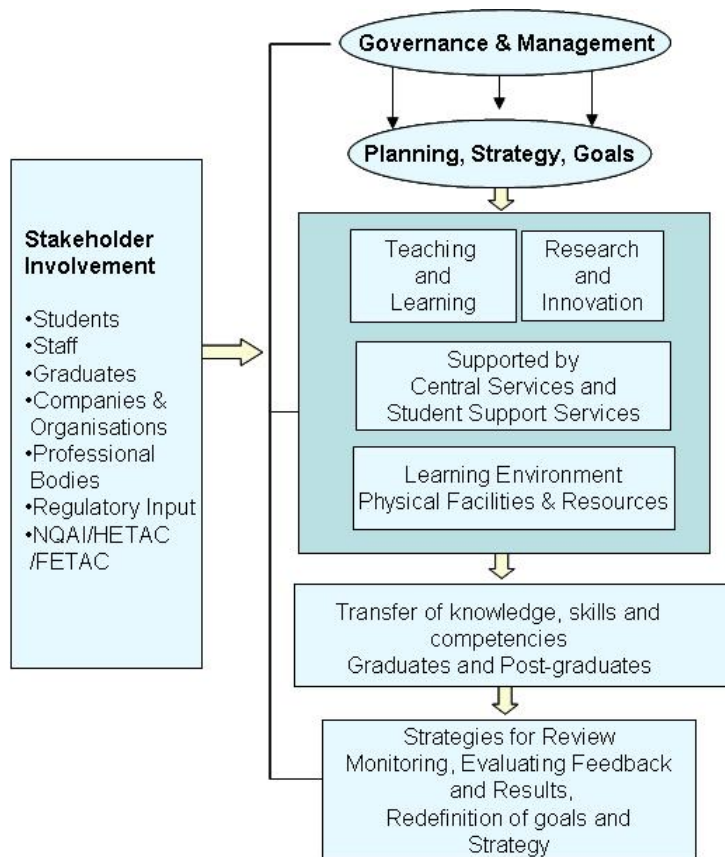


Figure 1 Institute Quality Assurance Framework

Students are represented on all fora that contribute to quality processes. The requirement to involve students in quality assurance activities relating to programmes and awards is reiterated in the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. The institute recognises that involving students in quality assurance procedures in a coherent and systematic manner has the following benefits:

- Promotes student engagement within the institution and contributes to quality enhancement mechanisms
- Emphasises the learner perspective during quality reviews, thus helping to focus the review team on the student learning experience

Students participate in all internal quality reviews at programme, departmental and institutional level.

Through a cycle of planning, implementing and review, a process of continuous improvement is established across all Institute academic activities. This process is an interactive and collective process that recognises the interdependence that exists among all stakeholders and recognises outcomes as the result of systemic interaction among all players. Quality improvement initiatives are based on the analysis of information, data and reports gained through a structured process of evaluation, monitoring and feedback from internal and external stakeholders, through the mechanisms of Institutional and Programmatic Reviews and other periodic evaluations conducted by the Institute and by Professional Bodies seeking to validate our programmes for accreditation.

The structures put in place for managing quality, are designed to improve the communication processes, co-operation and interaction among management teams, Academic Council and

individuals. Continuous improvement depends on the quality of interaction and lines of communication among the individuals and groups outlined in Figure 2.

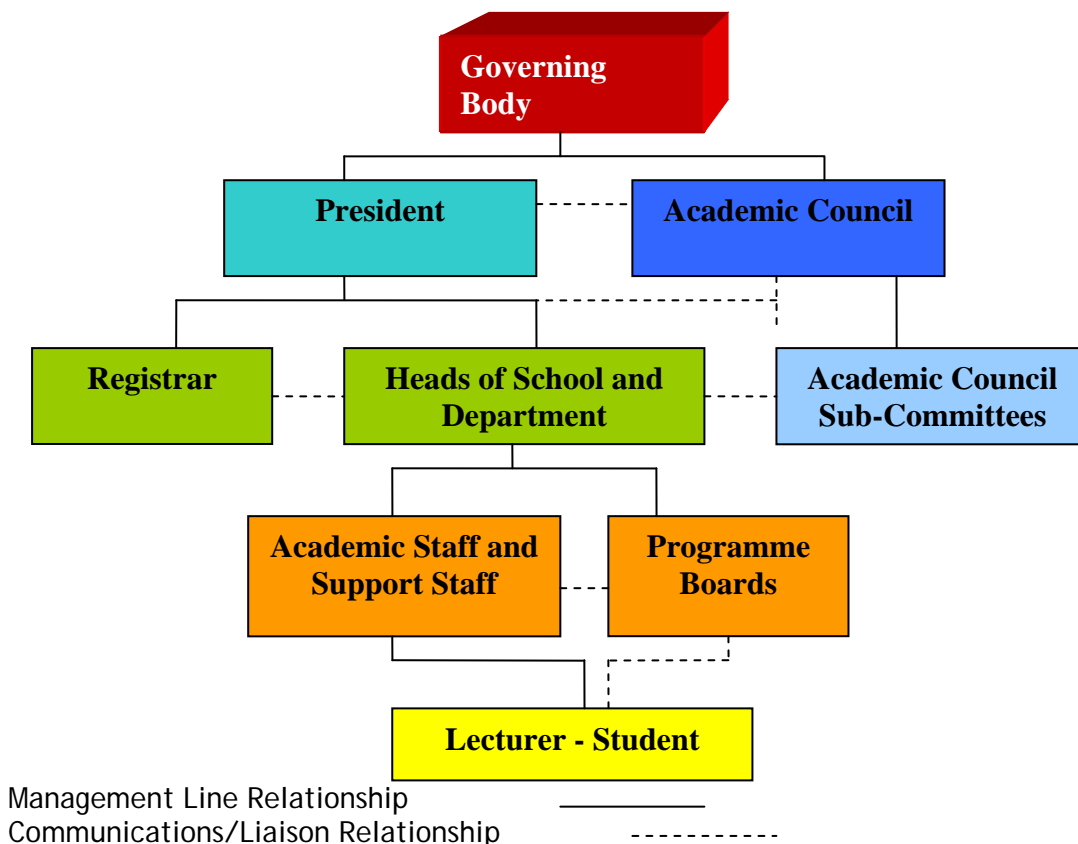


Figure 2 Lines of Communication in the Academic Quality System

The Institute’s core activities (teaching and learning, and research and innovation) are supported by central service departments (estates, HR, academic administration, lifelong learning, student services, library, finance, computing services) and by student support services (including careers, health services, counselling, chaplaincy, access and disability supports, sports and recreation activities, Centre for Learning and Teaching and other learning supports). The Institute’s management and governance structures provide leadership in the development and implementation of quality assurance throughout the Institute. However, all internal and external stakeholders provide input into the quality assurance process and are instrumental in achieving the Institute’s goals.

6. Quality Assurance Manual

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 requires providers of higher education and training programmes validated by HETAC, or to which it has delegated the power to make awards, to establish quality assurance procedures and agree those procedures with HETAC.

The Institute Quality Assurance Manual has been written to comply with the requirements set out in the *HETAC Guidelines and Criteria of the Quality Assurance Procedures in Higher Education and Training 2002*. It also takes due cognisance of the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance 2005 (recently updated in 2007)*.

The Quality Manual is the main document which describes all academic and functional operations in a structured format. It is supported by key the documents listed in Figure 3.

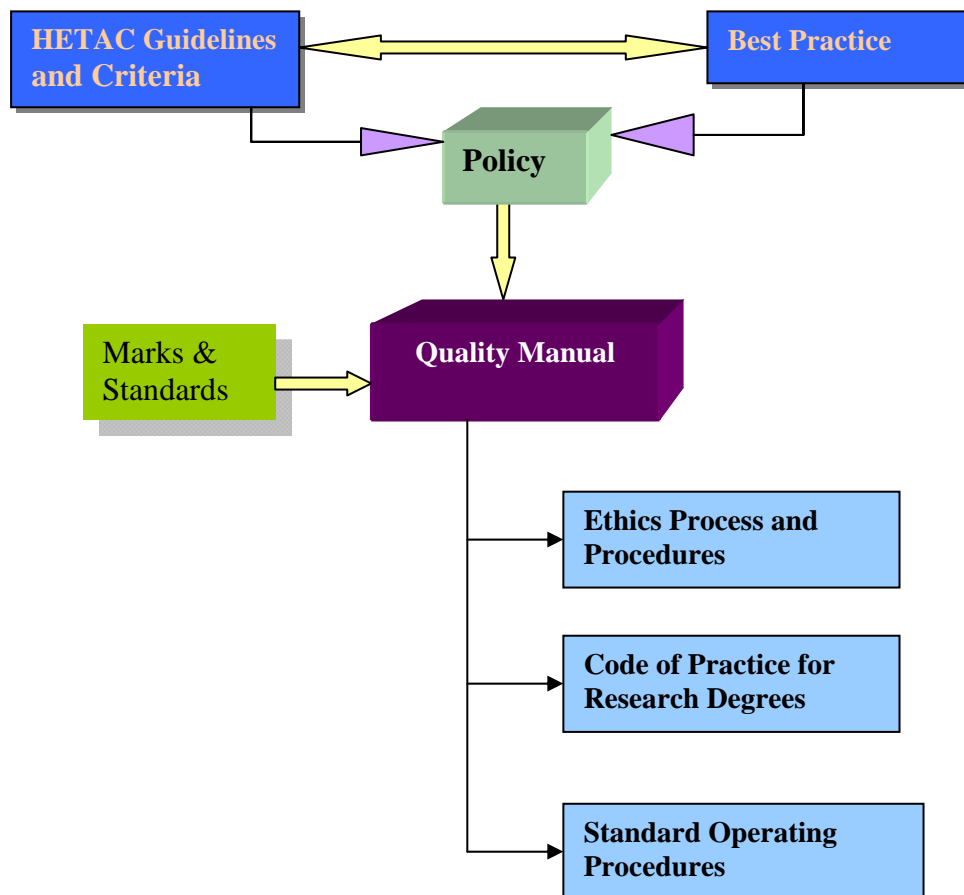


Figure 3 Quality Assurance Documents

The Institute’s Quality Assurance Manual was produced by the Senior Management Team to conform to the HETAC and ENQA guidelines. It describes the key structures, processes, policies, procedures, performance measures and quality assurance mechanisms that facilitate a systematic approach to embedding a quality improvement approach within the Institute. Validation establishes documented evidence which provides a high degree of assurance that a specific course will consistently meet its predetermined goals and quality characteristics. Hence, the QA Manual includes detailed procedures for the validation of new programmes. The QA Manual includes procedures for the efficient monitoring, evaluation and review of programmes, a key strength in any QA process. It is available to all staff on the intranet and is available to students through the Registrar’s Office, library and the main website for the Institute. Figure 4 lists the key areas addressed in the Quality Manual for taught programmes [Book 2].

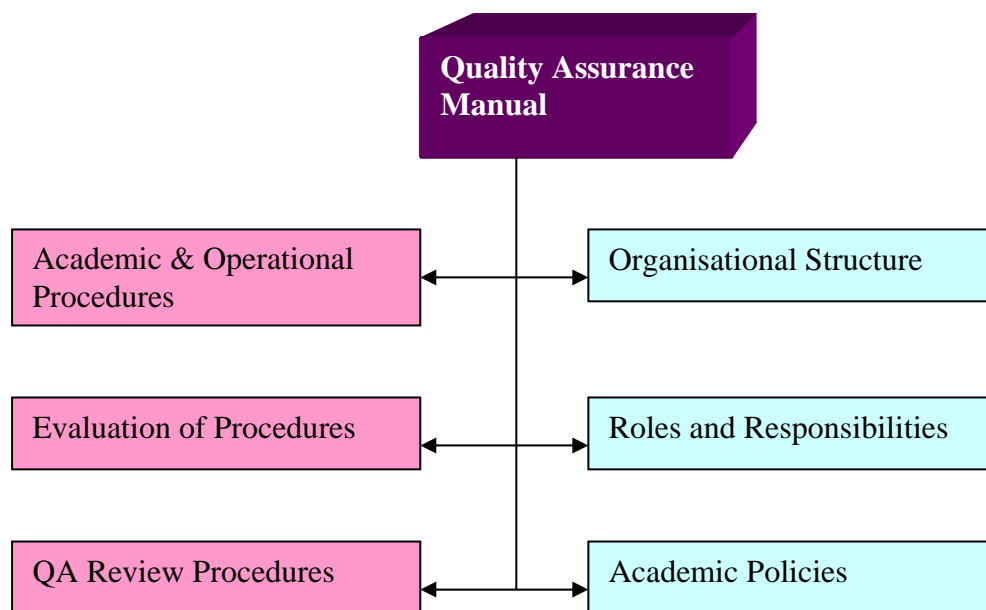


Figure 4 Key areas addressed in the Quality Manual

In 2006, a Code of Practice for research Degree Programmes was drawn up to augment and streamline the quality systems for the operation of supervised research studies. This has been formally integrated into the Quality Assurance Framework [Book 3]. In 2007 the Institute drew up comprehensive procedures for managing ethics in research. These are also presented in Book 3.

7. Standard Operating Procedures

The overarching quality assurance procedures are set out in the Institute Quality Assurance Manual. The detailed steps involved in the implementation of these procedures are described in individual and specific Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), which can be drawn up by staff, primarily management and must be approved by the Total Management Team (TMT), before sign off by the appropriate SMT member or the President. It is the policy of the Institute that all Standard Operating procedures (SOP's) have the same format, as far as possible. The standard format for SOPs has five headings: policy, purpose, organisational units affected, definitions, responsibility and description of the procedure. Where appropriate, procedures conform to this template. A specific SOP template (procedure no: E2001) is used when generating a new procedure. A full list of SOPs for the Institute is available from the Freedom of Information Office. SOPs are continually being developed and revised to improve the operations of the Institute.

8. Evaluating the Effectiveness of Quality Assurance Procedures

The 2008 OECD Report *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society* points out that there are three main approaches to quality assurance, namely - accreditation, assessment and audit.⁴ Table 1 summarises the key features of each approach in terms of the questions asked to determine effectiveness, the emphasis of the quality investigation and the type of output it

⁴ Chapter 5, Assuring and Improving Quality, *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society*, Volume 1, OECD, 2008.

produces. It also shows how these approaches work at Institute level in the operation of its quality assurance procedures.

Table 1 Quality Assurance Activities and Evaluation Mechanisms

Activity	Question	Emphasis	Outcomes	Mechanism
Accreditation	Are we good enough to be approved?	Comprehensive (mission, resources, processes)	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegated Authority • Research Accreditation • Professional Body Accreditation
Assessment (Evaluation)	How good are our outputs	Outputs	Positive recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional Review • Programmatic Reviews • Validation of New Programmes
Audit (Review)	Are we achieving our own objectives? Are our processes effective?	Process	Decision on compliance or not	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management QA Review • Internal Peer Audits • Audits by Consultant Auditors • Audit sub-Committee of Governing Body • Institutional Reviews

9. Institute Commitments on Quality

Management

The Institute will maintain this Quality Assurance Procedures Manual as our clearly stated set of policies and procedures for the delivery of quality services and for the assessment and review of the delivery of those services and of the policies and procedures. Roles and responsibilities for each individual and formal group will continue to be refined. The Institute will implement cycles of planning, implementation and review. The Institute will welcome and encourage the participation of the stakeholders in the evaluation and planning stages. Senior Management has a particular responsibility to lead the continuing development and renewal of the quality ethos and provision of the highest quality services.

Equality

The Institute is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusiveness and its Quality Assurance policies and procedures will reflect this commitment. Staff and students will be made aware of their responsibilities in relation to Equality. Training will be provided as appropriate to both staff and students. The Equality policies and procedures will be continuously developed in line with best practice. The Institute will regularly review all our quality policies and procedures to ensure that our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusiveness is inherent and visible.

Transparency

The Institute is committed to openness and transparency in all of its activities. It has a record of publication of reports going back to our first Institutional self study and review. It will ensure that useful reports are provided to the stakeholders in a timely fashion. It is Institute policy to publish information as widely as possible so as to ensure that our students, staff, quality agencies and other Stakeholders are satisfied that we meet their needs.

Learner Population

The Institute is committed to making our programmes as widely accessible as possible. It currently offers many of its programmes in both full and part time modes. There are also a number of flexible modes of delivery, including Accumulation of Credits and Certification of Subjects (ACCS) modes. The Institute strives to increase participation and has special links with

schools in disadvantaged areas for the purpose of increasing their pupils' progression to Higher Education. It will continue to maintain a range of entry levels to ensure a widening access to our programmes. It is recognised that this will have an impact on teaching and learning strategies. The Institute will continue to participate in international exchange student and staff exchange programmes to foster understanding and appreciation of programmes, systems and services in other countries.

Learner Participation

Learner representatives will be encouraged to participate meaningfully in the various groups dealing with quality assurance, including subcommittees of Academic Council and programme boards. The Institute employs course and programme surveys to gain student feedback. Student feedback will also be sought on a regular basis on existing and potential support services. Students participate in self evaluation processes and often participate in external reviews of the Institute's activities. The Institute has in place procedures for handling examination re-checks reviews and appeals.

Learner Support

The Institute provides a range of academic and other supports for learners. These include additional tutorials, mentoring by course leaders and class and group tutors. It also provides text book and computer loan schemes, financial aid, counselling, career guidance and job seeking advice, a health service, a chaplaincy and sports and culture development. The Access and Disability Officers provide specific supports for learners. The Centre for Learning and Teaching provides supports for students including tools for the diagnosis of learning problems and is evaluating further interventions. The Institute will continue to review the effectiveness and range of our services.

Assessment

The Institute is committed to the use of a range of tools to assess student achievement with a balance between in-course measurement and final examination appropriate to each Programme. The in-course assessment schedule is agreed at Programme Boards and advised to students at the start of each semester. Results of such assessments are provided in a timely fashion to students to enable them to better understand their performance. Assessment techniques are fair, consistent and effective in measuring the extent to which students achieve the stated learning outcomes. Assessment techniques and their application are subject to external peer review.

Teaching

The Institute is committed to supporting the development of teaching methods by encouraging innovation and the promulgation of best practices. Training Programmes and supports are in place for new lecturers. Academic Departments and Programme Boards deliberate on appropriate teaching strategies. The Institute ensures a variety of teaching approaches within each programme including lecturers, seminars, case study, tutorials and practicals. The quality and the mix of methods will be subject to student survey to enable ongoing improvement and suitability of method.

Programmes of Study

We are committed to the provision of a range of programmes relevant to the needs of individuals, industry, business and organisations in our region. The design and development of programmes includes inputs from representatives of external organisations, agencies and appropriate professional bodies. Programmes are reviewed on a regular basis, every five years at a minimum, to ensure ongoing relevance to applicants and the target activity area of graduates. They are subject to external peer review.

Lifelong Learning

The Institute has been committed to the promotion and delivery of lifelong learning opportunities since its inception. This is particularly achieved through our Continuing Higher and Professional Education Programmes which provide opportunities for part-time study, mostly at evening but also by day release in employment areas, where shift work is typical. The Institute participates in a HETAC Scheme to accredit prior learning (APL). This scheme allows students to claim an exemption from modules on their programme when they can demonstrate institute-level learning from their work, life or leisure experience. The Continuing Higher Education Programme replicates many of our full-time awards and is subject to the same quality assurance procedures. Programmes are offered via credit accumulation to ensure flexibility. The close match between our full and part-time programmes enables learners to choose between these modes of study. Through the Workplace Development Centre on campus, we deliver accredited company-specific programmes and tailored technology transfer training.

Research, Development and Innovation

We are committed to the strategic development of research as a scholarly pursuit which informs lecturers in their fields of expertise, enriches their teaching and also develops the graduate students to progressively higher levels of skills and knowledge. We also promote and support enterprise development, especially that which relates to our areas of expertise and fosters innovation and new enterprises. The learning programmes for postgraduate students are subject to quality assurance policies and procedures.

Measurable and Verifiable Data

The Institute will gather and collate all necessary data to form the basis for the systematic monitoring of admissions, assessment and results, retention and progression outcomes, learner feedback, external examiner reports, programme board reports and graduate destination reports.

Human Resources

The Institute seeks to attract, recruit and retain committed staff of the highest calibre to deliver and support our programmes and services to learners. We will employ teaching and support staff with the necessary qualifications and experience required to deliver our programmes, providing and managing learning opportunities matched to the outcomes of the programmes. The Institute will support the ongoing development of staff through a Performance Management and Staff Development programme.

Campus Environment

The Institute will ensure that our lands, premises, facilities and equipment meet the requirements of students and staff of an institution of Higher Education. We are committed to the implementation of the Campus Development Plan to further enhance our services and facilities. We will introduce appropriate mechanisms to monitor and improve the Institute's learning environment.