



lyit

Institiúid Teicneolaíochta Leitir Ceannainn
Letterkenny Institute of Technology

Section 2

Quality Assurance Policy

1. Introduction

Strategic Plan 2007-2013, published in December 2007, is the Institute's overall strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. This Quality Assurance Policy and the Institute's Quality Assurance Handbook are framed to address the seven quality assurance elements in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (2005).

2. Strategic Plan 2007-2013

2.1 *Strategic Plan 2007-2013* includes activity focused objectives grouped under the three interlinked strategic domains of *Teaching and Learning*; *Learner Experience*; and *Research, Innovation and Enterprise*. Achievement of these strategic objectives is dependent on adequate *Institute Capacity*. The final set of objectives relate to measures aimed at growing *Institute Capacity*. Annual operational plans were identified as important companion documents where SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely) goals are to be detailed.

2.2 *Teaching and Learning*: Objectives set out under Teaching and Learning encourage more flexible approaches to teaching and assessment, development of teaching materials, use of technology and further support for lecturers including pedagogical support. In addition, there are plans for a review of programme provision, improving programme delivery in light of learner feedback, utilising links with relevant external bodies to inform programme development and the further enhancement of language education.

2.3 *Learner Experience*: Learner Experience encompasses objectives that focus on providing good quality teaching and learning facilities and having appropriate learning support and Student Services in place to enable learners manage their own learning. Also included are the supports in place to facilitate the personal development of learners through social/cultural and sporting activities, provision of skill development opportunities and the recognition of academic and non-academic achievement.

2.4 *Research, Innovation and Enterprise*: This domain emphasises the need to formulate an ambitious research strategy to build on existing research groupings, encourage more academic staff to become research supervisors, strengthen research planning at School level and to develop quality assurance procedures to cover postgraduate research activity. Supporting innovation and enterprise is to be achieved by: meeting the needs of business and industry in the region, incorporating enterprise development elements on relevant programmes, further developing the BDC, and by leading initiatives in the region on workforce development.

2.5 *Institute Capacity*: Objectives listed in this domain relate to capturing additional funding, inter-institutional sharing of resources, examining resource allocation within the Institute and interfacing with the processes of the HEA. Additional aspects of capacity addressed include protecting the good name of the Institute, leading the region's response to relevant national policy objectives, providing for the proper integration of Tourism College Killybegs, aligning staff development with Institute strategy and promoting and protecting the heritage of the region.

2.6 The process for developing the plan encompassed identifying the likely drivers for change over the lifetime of the new plan. A review of current national policy documents and an examination of the strategic plans of other higher education providers were conducted to gain an insight into possible futures. Prominent

among these national policy documents were: *OECD Review of Higher Education 2004*; *HEA Plan 2007 – 2009*; *Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (SSTI) 2006 – 2013*; *National Development Plan 2007 – 2013*. This analysis was further supported by hosting a seminar on strategic planning and through research into possible future scenarios which elicited input from influential stakeholders and Institute staff. Other important contributions to this process included Institute commissioned analyses in the form of a brand audit and a review of the effectiveness of the Institute's previous strategic plan, *Strategic Plan 2006*.

3. European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance

Proposed revisions to the Quality Assurance Handbook were set out in the Institute's Institutional Review submission of December 2008 which included the Institute's Quality Assurance self-evaluation. This self-evaluation used a HETAC template developed from the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESGs). The seven elements in the ESGs are

- Element One - Policy and procedures for quality assurance
- Element Two - Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards
- Element Three - Assessment of students
- Element Four - Quality assurance of teaching staff
- Element Five - Learning resources and student support
- Element Six - Information Systems
- Element Seven - Public Information

4. Quality Assurance Policy

4.1 It is necessary that LYIT's quality assurance policy and quality assurance procedures must be subject to the same rigorous monitoring and review process as its educational and training programmes. The Institute is committed to self-study and peer review. These will play a pivotal role in monitoring the effectiveness of quality policy and procedures. The Academic Council will oversee the monitoring and review of the Quality Assurance Handbook and the associated quality assurance procedures.

The Institute through its Quality Assurance Policy sets out to establish a coherent framework for enhancing the quality of education and training provided and showing that standards are safeguarded. A great breadth of detailed procedures is required to implement quality policy on an Institute-wide basis.

The Quality Assurance Handbook permits the monitoring of mechanisms to ensure that the policy is delivered and learners' rights prioritised. Additional procedural documents on support services, management, human resources and the campus environment complete the set. The policy is set out with reference to the 15 areas: *Transparency, Learner Population, Learner Participation, Learning, Learner Support, Assessment, Teaching, Programmes, Lifelong Learning, Research, Management, Verifiable Data, Committee Structure, Human Resources, and Campus Environment*.

4.2 Transparency: The Institute will ensure that relevant information is accessible to stakeholders. A quality ethos must be embedded in a culture of openness and transparency. All relevant programme information e.g. syllabi, schedules and assessment requirements will be made accessible to learners. Greater

transparency will be achieved by using both Intranet and Internet to publish minutes, policy documents and procedures adopted.

4.3 Learner Population: The Institute needs to continue to attract a critical mass of suitably qualified learners to its new and existing fulltime programmes. In Strategic Plan 2007-2013 under the Learner Experience domain the Institute commits to: “Develop appropriate routes, including the further enhancement of systems for the recognition of prior learning (RPL), for those wishing to update their skills or knowledge through lifelong learning and continuing education provision utilising the National Framework of Qualifications.”

4.4 Learner Participation: Learner representatives will be included on all Institute committees identified with a role in quality assurance. The Institute will strive to develop systematic methods for gathering learner feedback on education programmes and support services. Fair and transparent mechanisms for processing complaints and appeals and a commitment to speedily and adequately address perceived weaknesses are prerequisites in guaranteeing learners’ rights.

4.5 Learning: The Institute will endeavour to create the environment in which learners can take responsibility for their own learning. In this context all relevant course information must be accessible and all appropriate library and IT facilities readily available. To provide opportunities for active learning, the Institute encourages the use of group and project work, fieldwork, reflective practice, work placements, dissertation writing, and the simulation of employment skills.

4.6 Learner Support: The Institute will strive to maintain and improve the academic and support services available to learners. LYIT is committed to providing a stimulating learning experience in a supportive environment. Good quality, accessible support services together with systems for evaluating them go hand in hand in a quality context.

4.7 Assessment: Having in place fair and consistent assessment practices that satisfy external standards is a fundamental quality objective. The Institute is determined to have an examination and assessment system which is fair, consistent and effective in measuring the extent to which learners achieve the stated learning outcomes. To protect the integrity of the grades learners must have available sufficient information on assessment requirements and all component elements of final grades.

LYIT will promote innovative coursework promoting situated learning and fostering transferable skills to ensure that assessable coursework prepares learners for the world of work.

4.8 Teaching: LYIT is committed to supporting innovative teaching methods by recognising and promulgating best teaching practice. Academic support of the learner begins with the teaching process. The provision of the necessary resources for effective teaching and learning must then be in place to give academic support to learners of varied abilities and backgrounds as must systems to monitor this support. The need to expose learners both to cutting-edge technologies and to an appropriate mix of learning modes e.g. lectures, seminars, tutorials, practicals is recognised. Regular progress feedback to learners together with timely and appropriate responses to coursework form a necessary backdrop to quality programme delivery.

4.9 Programmes: The Institute endeavours to offer a suite of relevant programmes of approved content and standard together with a systematic process for the monitoring, evaluation and continuous enhancement of these programmes. This endeavour is predicated on building quality criteria into new programmes and continuously monitoring existing programmes within the five-yearly review context.

The involvement of external specialists in the design, monitoring and review of programmes is critical and the Institute strongly believes in the benefits of engaging external expertise in other Institute processes, such as, Institutional Review and strategy development.

4.10 Lifelong Learning: The Institute will endeavour to offer a comprehensive continuing education programme aimed at developing and fostering lifelong learning and specialist training for industry. The continuing education programme encompasses both formal tuition offered through the continued education programme that it provides to the public and customised training that it provides to firms and community groups. The quality assurance procedures for these programmes will mirror, as far as possible, the systems in place for full-time programmes. The Institute will continue to respond to short and long term requests from the local and regional community and will regularly review and publicise its responses to these requests.

4.11 Research: LYIT's Research Strategy, published in December 2008, builds upon the objectives detailed in the *Research, Innovation and Enterprise* domain of *Strategic Plan 2007-2013* emphasising the need to build on existing research groupings, encourage more academic staff to become research supervisors, strengthen research planning at School level and to develop quality assurance procedures to cover postgraduate research activity.

The Research Strategy sets out the criteria for the selection of strategic research themes under the five headings: capability, capacity, national leadership, regional impact, and collaborative and interdisciplinary. Potential thematic areas identified within the strategy reflect existing strengths in Marine Biotechnology / Biodiscovery, Embedded Wireless Systems, Health and Social Sciences, Machine Vision / Creative Industries, Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation and Enterprise

4.12 Management: The Institute's Quality Assurance Handbook will be the repository for procedures facilitating a systematic approach to demonstrate and enhance quality. It is important that the systems put in place to manage quality grow out of the active involvement of relevant stakeholders.

The systems established must also lay out clear lines of authority showing where responsibility for quality lies. Senior management within the Institute have a particular responsibility to develop and maintain a quality culture. Management must create an environment conducive to participation, trust, teamwork, empowerment and pride in performance.

Fundamental to the Institute's quality pledge is that Executive Board Reports will be considered by the Academic Council. These reports will include quality indicators, reviews of previous reports, and planned initiatives.

4.13 Verifiable Data: The Institute will generate and collate all necessary data in order to monitor critical quality indicators e.g. entry points, continuous assessment results, examination results, completion rates,

learner feedback, extern examiners' reports, course board reports, external periodic reviews and graduate destination data.

Data will be considered by the most appropriate forum, planned interventions recorded and carried out and the effectiveness of these interventions evaluated.

4.14 *Committee Structure:* Operating a committee structure that will deal most effectively with maintaining and improving the quality of education provided is a key requirement. All committees with an input to quality assurance will have clearly outlined membership and terms of reference. These committees will operate under unambiguous standing orders with minutes recorded and retained.

4.15 *Human Resources:* Every effort will be made to recruit and retain the staff required to ensure the delivery of a quality education service. The Institute is committed to having a qualified, committed, teaching staff in sufficient numbers employing teaching and research methods geared to the requirements of programme delivery and learners' needs. In addition the Institute must employ sufficient, qualified and committed staff to support the educational mission of the Institute. The Institute will maintain a comprehensive staff development plan and facilitate the training of staff to improve the quality of education and training provided.

4.16 *Campus Environment:* The Institute must ensure that its premises, equipment and facilities meet the needs of a third level college community. . In *Strategic Plan 2007-2013* under the *Learner Experience* domain the Institute commits to: "Establish and implement procedures for the maintenance and development of teaching support infrastructure, library facilities and IT resources to ensure they remain fit for purpose." This envisages an efficient mechanism whereby staff and learners can regularly monitor this aspect of LYIT's learning environment and make recommendations where actions taken in response to these recommendations must be recorded and the effectiveness of these actions evaluated.