

South East Technological University (SETU) Quality Framework

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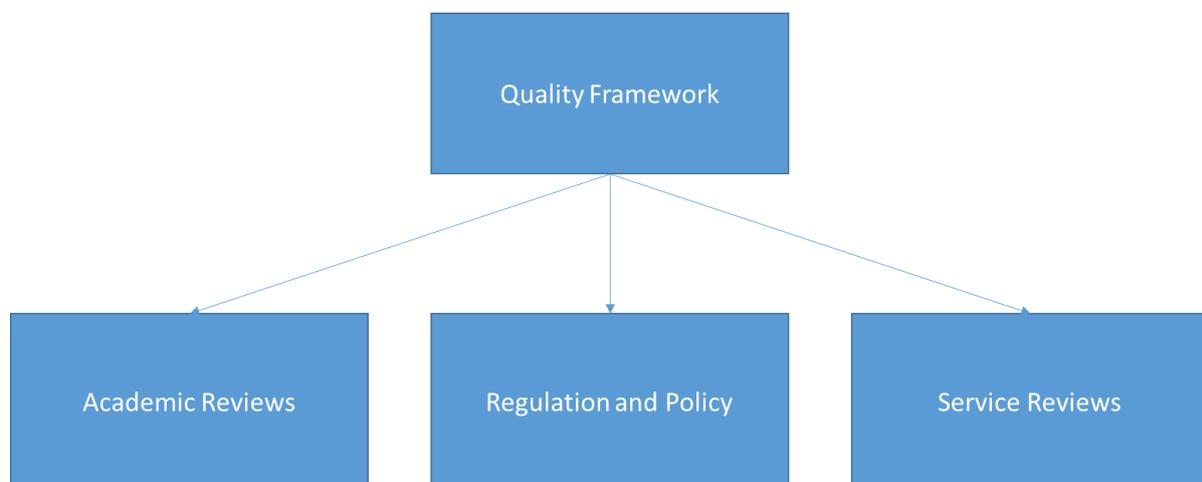
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South East Technological University (SETU) Quality Framework

1. Introduction and Context

This document sets out the SETU Quality Framework. This represents an overarching Quality Framework that encompasses the whole of SETU and which covers all activities of the university across all units, areas and functions. Under this Quality Framework exist three core elements – Academic Reviews, Service Reviews and Regulation and Policy – and the relationship between these elements and the Quality Framework, in the context of embedding, evaluating and enhancing quality, is depicted in Diagram 1 below.

Diagram 1: The SETU Quality Framework and Core Elements



The SETU Quality Framework establishes the principles, philosophy and context that guides the university’s quality assurance and quality enhancement activities. The framework presents the quality ethos of the university, underpins public faith in our standards and challenges the university to continuously strive for improvement. The framework is informed by and draws from the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) 2015¹, the Technological Higher Education Quality Framework (THEQF)², and is informed by the statutory and regulatory environment in which Irish education operates, including the application of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) policies.

¹ Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (2015). Brussels, Belgium. Available at: https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf

² THEQF Principles of Internal Quality Assurance and Enhancement. Available at: http://www.thea.ie/contentfiles/1B_v2.pdf

Embedding a positive culture is key to the delivery of the university's mission, and the adoption by all stakeholders of the regulations, policies, procedures and administrative systems that make up the university's internal quality assurance and quality enhancement systems and their engagement with and in relevant periodic review processes, is fundamental to achieving this. This requires a collective effort from all stakeholders, who each have an individual and a shared responsibility with others for quality outcomes within and by the university. In turn, this facilitates excellent governance, confirms public confidence in the university and helps to ensure that contemporary fitness for purpose is a key priority throughout the organisation. Achieving this positive culture and quality outcomes requires the adoption and implementation of a robust quality framework, which is embedded in and drives the necessary activities across all units, areas and functions of SETU.

Quality in SETU represents the synthesis of the learning, accreditation, knowledge skill and behaviour acquisition and development, experiences, and academic and socio-economic outcomes obtained by students, staff, officers, leaders and governors, in pursuit of goals across a spectrum of national and European public policy, and individual, community, and employer goals and objectives.

The levels of these individual phenomena are achieved through design, structures, decision making and execution, systems and infrastructure, financial resources, behaviours, governance, and activities undertaken by internal and external stakeholders.

2. Underpinning Philosophy

The university recognises that quality is delivered through all of the activities of the university and is committed to engaging all staff in articulating, understanding and delivering on our responsibilities. These responsibilities include:

1. Ensuring that all graduates of the university meet the standards expected of their award.
2. Ensuring that our teaching, learning and student support environments and all units, areas and functions of the university deliver appropriately for the diversity of our student body and that we support learners to achieve their potential.
3. Ensuring that the university is responsive to the needs of the stakeholder at regional and national levels.

In delivering on these responsibilities, the university strives to apply the following values in the development and implementation of our regulations, policies and procedures.

1. Subsidiarity³: Quality is the collective responsibility of all staff in the university and the university should locate responsibility to the closest point to actual delivery of the service.
2. Learner Driven: The involvement of the learner is central to the design, implementation and review of our activities and the university actively engages with the learner to enhance their opportunity to shape their learning process.
3. Data Informed: Decisions of the university should be based on robust data analysis and debate. This includes the development and reporting of appropriate metrics where relevant.
4. Communication: The importance of understanding how quality assurance processes connect to the daily activities of the university is critical to achieving ownership of quality. The university strives to engage all staff through communication channels, training processes and involvement in the design of effective procedures to build a sustainable commitment to delivering on the quality framework.
5. Openness, transparency and ease of engagement: The design and implementation of procedures should result in public, easily understood and easily accessed processes that enable users to readily engage. Procedures should be based on clearly defined policies and be supported by appropriate training and support structures. All policies and procedures should be published and readily available.
6. Strategic: The operation of the quality assurance and quality enhancement systems should be informed by, and support, the strategic plans of the university and be aligned to the strategic risks and risk appetite of the university.

3. Purpose of the Quality Framework

The Quality Framework has a central role in achieving the university's strategic objectives and maintaining and enhancing the university's reputation and position within the higher educational sector, both nationally and internationally. This framework primarily addresses internal aspects of quality assurance, while also recognising the role of external quality assurance.

The South East Technological University aims to fulfil multiple purposes including preparing learners for active citizenship and for their future careers, creating a broad advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation. Therefore, the

³ According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 'subsidiarity' can be defined as "a principle in social organization holding that functions which are performed effectively by subordinate or local organizations belong more properly to them than to a dominant central organization" (Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/subsidiarity>).

various stakeholders⁴ can view quality in higher education differently. The Quality Framework recognises the need to consider these different perspectives and to ensure that they are reflected by actively involving relevant stakeholders in quality procedures and processes and in their development.

For quality to permeate the interactions between all SETU stakeholders, the university has a responsibility to develop, implement, review and enhance policies and associated procedures for the assurance of quality standards of the respective programmes and awards, as well as all units, areas and functions, supported by a robust process of peer review. The Quality Framework identifies expectations for the university in this respect, across the organisation.

The university should maintain a culture of quality assurance and quality enhancement, where university strategies, policies and procedures form an integral part of the governance and management framework. Moreover, to inspire confidence in the quality of the university, its actions should be pursued in a transparent and open manner. The Quality Framework supports such a culture through identifying the broad array of relevant approaches that need to be taken and through highlighting the important linkages with governance, as well as the need for transparency in terms of outcomes and outputs.

External quality assurance of the university is primarily conducted by QQI, although some professional bodies may also conduct reviews specific to their disciplines. The Quality Framework does not explicitly deal with external quality assurance other than to underline that the Framework is essential in helping fulfil the requirements of external agencies and in supporting external appraisals. It is worth noting at this point that the university embraces the principle of externality in its governance, acknowledging the influences on governance that are beyond the internal boundaries of the university and the vital linkages with external stakeholders. In this regard, the university should engage with external bodies and external experts across the entire implementation of this Quality Framework and consider their inputs and perspectives.

4. SETU Approach to Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement

The operation of quality assurance and quality enhancement consists of three interrelated activities:

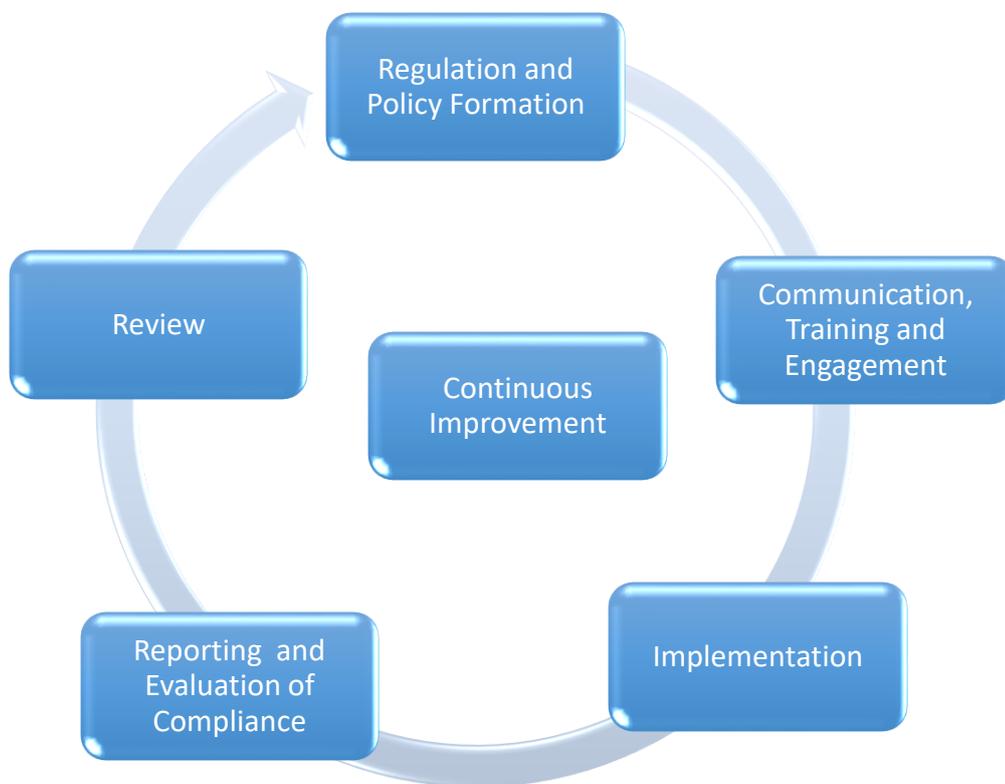
1. The operation of cycles of development, implementation and review of policies and procedures that inform activity and initiate new policies, procedures and practices.

⁴ Unless otherwise specified, in the document stakeholders are understood to cover all actors within the university, including learners and staff, as well as external stakeholders such as employers and external partners of SETU.

2. A defined structure that clearly articulates responsibility of key individuals or bodies with respect to the quality assurance activities.
3. Published policies and procedures across the range of university activities that have been approved by the appropriate university body.

The university's approach to quality assurance and quality enhancement is a cyclical process of continuous improvement as indicated in Diagram 2. Different individuals and bodies have roles and responsibilities within the context of this process. These are not fully set out in this Quality Framework, but rather they should be specified – where appropriate – within individual university policies and procedures.

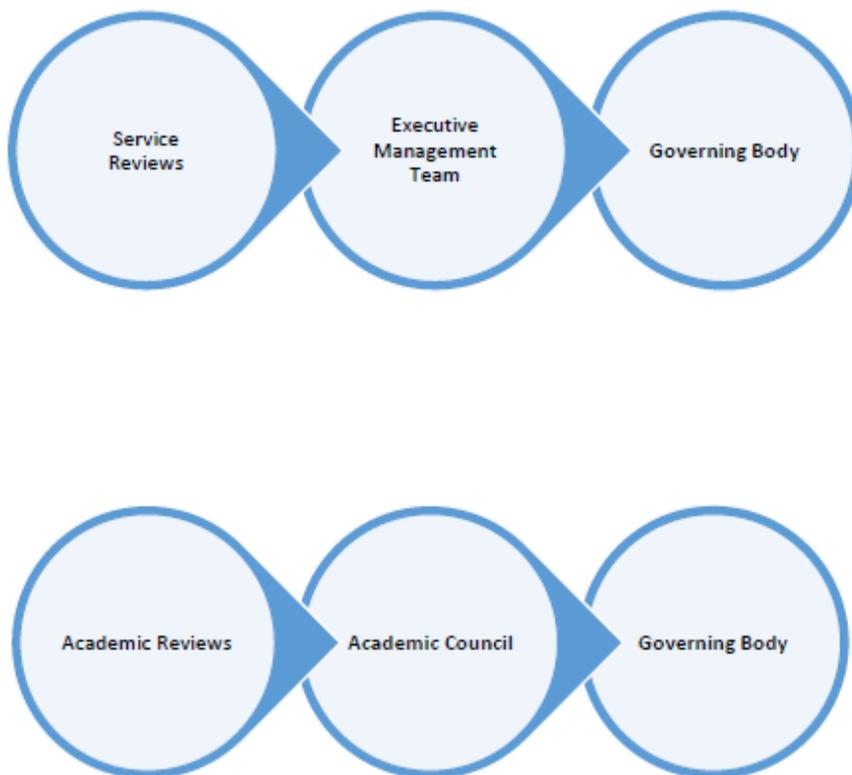
Diagram 2: The Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement cycle:



This cycle is designed to ensure that all quality initiatives and implementations have performance indicators (including appropriate metrics) and review processes, and to ensure they are kept up to date and that they are responsive to changing environments. The Governing Body ultimately oversees this cycle and is the overall approving body, supported by other SETU bodies such as Academic Council (in the academic space in particular), the Executive Management Team and by appropriate functions and personnel within SETU who work on quality assurance and quality enhancement. Each policy and procedure approved must have a defined review date that informs the work of other relevant SETU bodies.

All academic areas and functional management areas must undergo periodic review by external peer process. The outcomes of these reviews must be submitted to Academic Council or the Executive Management Team for their consideration and for noting. Academic Council and the Executive Management Team will report to Governing Body, as appropriate, as to the completion of their obligations to hold Academic and Service Reviews and to the outcomes of the reviews and the development plans that arise from this. The development plans should be put to Governing Body for approval. This is illustrated in Diagram 3 below.

Diagram 3: Flowchart for Service Reviews and Academic Reviews:



5. Principles of the SETU Quality Framework

The following twelve principles (which are informed by and, in parts, draw directly from the ESG (2015)) are central to the SETU Quality Framework and guide the development of quality assurance and quality enhancement activities across the university. Prominently featured across these principles are the three core elements of the SETU Quality Framework previously identified (Academic Reviews, Regulation and Policy, and Service Reviews). Overarching this are the governance structures of SETU and their associated review, approval, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes as appropriate.

Principle 1: Policies and Procedures for Quality Assurance

The SETU Quality Framework seeks to ensure that high standards of quality permeate the learning outcomes, delivery and assessment of programmes, learning opportunities, services and facilities. This is achieved through effective governance and clear and robust quality assurance, underpinned by a strong regulatory framework that is embedded within the overall strategy of the university and the management of that strategy.

To address this principle, SETU develops regulations, policies and procedures for taught programmes, linked provision, the validation of programmes, and research.

Principle 2: Design and Approval of Programmes

Programmes are designed in a manner that: is cognisant of national and international requirements and best practices; is inclusive of internal and external stakeholder perspectives; considers the programme's relevance to stakeholders; reflects upon appropriate assessment methods in the context of learning outcomes to be achieved; and recognises the need to be learner-centred.

The approval of programmes should involve input from relevant stakeholders through validation panels, who will be independent of the programme and which will include members who are external to the university and who have appropriate expertise. Academic approval for programmes will rest with Academic Council.

To address this principle, SETU develops regulations, policies and procedures in the area of teaching, learning and assessment and the validation of programmes.

Principle 3: Learner Centred Learning

The university should embed and continually promote a learner-centred approach in the development and review of its programmes, to stimulate learners' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process. In addition, the delivery method of programmes should encourage learners to take an active role in the learning process. The university should seek to facilitate the learning needs of learners appropriately and to reflect the voice of the learner in decisions and actions on an ongoing basis, including in relevant matters related to assessment and services.

To address this principle, SETU develops regulations, policies and procedures in the area of teaching, learning and assessment and student experience.

Principle 4: Learner Pathways – Admission, Progression and Completion

The university should ensure that it has a clear and robust suite of policies and procedures around admission, progression and completion that are fit for purpose and periodically reviewed, and that facilitate the smooth progress of learners in their

academic careers. In this regard, relevant information, support and guidance should be made available to stakeholders as necessary regarding learner pathways and different stages along the way. This will encompass areas such as recognition of prior learning, registration, induction, assessment, transfer options and conferring.

To address this principle, SETU develops regulations, policies and procedures for taught programmes, linked provision and research.

Principle 5: Development of Staff

The role of staff is essential in creating a high-quality learner experience and enabling the acquisition of knowledge, competences and skills. The university embraces the responsibility for the quality of its staff and for providing them with a supportive environment that allows them to carry out their work effectively. In this regard, the university: offers opportunities for and promotes professional development; promotes recognition and rewarding of excellence; encourages scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research; and encourages innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies.

To address this principle, SETU develops regulations, policies and procedures across different units, areas and functions with a view to facilitating and encouraging staff development.

Principle 6: Learning Resources and Learner Support

Learners rely on a range of resources to assist their learning that vary from physical resources such as libraries, study spaces and IT facilities to human support in the form of lecturers, counsellors and other advisers. The university should ensure that, on an ongoing basis, all resources are fit for purpose, accessible and that learners are informed about the services available to them.

To address this principle, SETU develops regulations, policies and procedures for the student experience and student services.

Principle 7: Quality Assurance and Enhancement of Research

The university works to ensure that research is embedded in its strategies and policies. In line with its vision and goals, the university should use appropriately developed and periodically reviewed policies and procedures to:

- Link research with learning, teaching, and assessment strategies;
- Seek regular input from internal and external stakeholders;
- Be cognisant of the balance between teaching and research within the university's priorities, and address research-informed teaching;

- Measure the impact of research activity;
- Facilitate a variety of research and encourage early career research through structured postgraduate programs including National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Level 9 Research Master's Degrees and NFQ level 10 structured PhDs.

To address this principle, SETU develops regulations, policies and procedures in research.

Principle 8: Information Management

The university should collect, analyse and use relevant information for effective informed decision-making in relation to the management of all activities. Processes are required to ensure that this is undertaken where needed and that outputs (including, but not limited to, relevant metrics) are provided to appropriate units, areas and functions to support high quality decisions.

To address this principle, SETU develops regulations, policies and procedures across all units, areas and functions which consider relevant information and how it is used.

Principle 9: Public Information

The university should make appropriate information available for relevant parties in an accessible manner. This would include information about the activities of the university, services and facilities available, programmes and qualifications, assessment methods and procedures, external reviews of programmes, Faculties/Schools/Campuses, units, areas and functions as appropriate, and opportunities available to learners.

To address this principle, SETU develops regulations, policies and procedures across all units, areas and functions which consider relevant information and how it is made available.

Principle 10: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes

Measures should be in place for monitoring and periodically reviewing the university's programmes offered, to ensure that they achieve their objectives and to make appropriate amendments. The aim is to ensure that their provision is appropriate and to consider improvements that might be necessary due to developments in research and the changing needs of learners and society. This will entail a process of review and evaluation (involving relevant stakeholders, some of whom may be external as appropriate) in areas such as: programme and module content and currency; modes of delivery and assessment; learner workload, progression and completion; learner needs and expectations; and the overall learning environment and support services. Following any evaluation, where changes are required, an implementation plan is developed and actions from this are subject to ongoing review.

To address this principle, SETU develops regulations, policies and procedures in programme validation.

Principle 11: Cyclical External Quality Assurance

The university should develop, implement, monitor and continuously improve its own systems for the quality assurance and quality enhancement of provision. External quality assurance, in its various forms, can challenge and verify the effectiveness of the university's internal quality assurance processes, which facilitates improvement and aids the university in informing strategy. It should also provide information to assure the university and the public of the quality of the university's activities.

Therefore, the university should participate in cyclical external quality assurance processes on a periodic basis that should take account of the requirements of the legislative framework in which it operates. This requires system-wide analyses, peer review, self-evaluation and self-reflection, and external and independent appraisal, and should be done in conjunction with all relevant stakeholders in a transparent, supportive and developmental manner.

To address this principle, SETU develops regulations, policies and procedures in the area of teaching, learning and assessment, to support and facilitate an external quality assurance process, and in programme validation. SETU further supports this through the production of relevant reports, including the Annual Quality Review.

Principle 12: Periodic Review of the Delivery of University Services

The university provides many services across various units, areas and functions within SETU. While some of these services are learner-facing, others are not (at least directly) but fulfil a vital role in what the university provides to all of its stakeholders and how it does this. Quality assurance and quality enhancement is equally important in these services as it is in learner-facing services and, in this respect, the periodic review of the delivery of all university services is vital. Consistent with Principles 10 and 11 above, all student service units, administrative units, areas and functions across SETU should periodically undertake an assessment of their activities. This should be user-focused, self-reflective, informed by and involve relevant stakeholders, and include an external element to the review. Where identified by the university as necessary, thematic reviews of university services should also be undertaken.

To address this principle, SETU develops regulations, policies and procedures to support and facilitate a quality assurance process (incorporating an external element) of all units, areas and functions across SETU, including the determination of the unit of analysis for undertaking periodic and/or thematic reviews of university services.