TUS

Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest

Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta na Sionainne: Lár Tíre Iarthar Láir

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TUS Policy on Quality Assurance and Enhancement 2022 – 2025

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Contents

1.0 Introduction

The Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (hereafter referred to as TUS or the Technological University) is a regionally focused higher education institution with a national and international outlook. It empowers its diverse student body by providing a quality higher education experience, enabling economic, social and cultural development. The mission of TUS includes the aspiration to be a contemporary and engaged Technological University distinguished by outstanding learner experience, international focus and impactful and applied research. [1] TUS strives to be a leading provider of higher education that is student-centred, research informed, industry-relevant, and accessible to all. Among its shared values include a commitment to *Excellence and Quality*, *Professionalism,* and *Transparency and Integrity*.[1]

- *Excellence and Quality: we will strive to continuously improve all our activities to ensure ongoing excellence and quality – we will do this through a focused range of curricula and related supports that are academically rigorous, research-driven and practise-based.*
- *Professionalism: we will be professional and respectful in all our interactions with students, staff members and other stakeholders; we will continuously refine our professional practice to take account of relevant research and scholarship.*
- *Transparency and Integrity: we will be open, transparent and accountable, and we will display integrity in all our dealings with staff, students and other stakeholders.* [1]

These values serve as important signposts for the development of Quality Assurance and Enhancement at TUS and reflect the importance of the enhancement and continuous improvement imperative as a central focus.

2.0 Quality Policy Statement

The Technological University is committed to quality (assurance) and continuous improvement (enhancement). TUS recognises that robust quality assurance and enhancement plays an important role in delivering on its aspiration *"to be a contemporary and engaged technological University distinguished by outstanding learner experience, international focus and impactful and applied research".*[1] The diversity and complexity of the range of Technological University activities and of the contemporary student body in higher education requires TUS to continuously improve and enhance service delivery in line with best practice nationally and internationally.

TUS operates on the overarching principle that Quality Assurance and Enhancement is '*everybody's business*' in which the Technological University community works in a

collaborative and collegiate manner that fostering a quality culture. TUS recognises that Students are key stakeholders in the organisation and, in this quality culture, the importance of the whole student experience is prioritised to provide a student-centred, career-focused education, within a professional and supportive environment.

3.0 The Statutory and Regulatory Context

The statutory body with oversight responsibility for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Ireland is *Quality and Qualifications Ireland* (QQI). QQI has noted that the term 'quality assurance' is used to describe the processes that seek to ensure that the learning environment reaches an acceptable threshold of quality. QQI further cite a UNESCO definition of quality assurance as *"an ongoing, continuing process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of an education system, institution or program"* [2]. QQI has established the National Quality Assurance Framework [2] which identifies the principle dimensions of the Quality Assurance of Higher Education. The activities identified in the Framework align with two key categories referred to as Internal and External Quality Assurance.

- Internal Quality Assurance refers collectively to the policies, procedures and administrative systems developed by an Institution that enable management control and public assurance of the standards of education, training, research programmes, awards and related services offered.

- External Quality Assurance is concerned with the reporting, engagement, collaboration, and dialogue that takes place with external bodies such as QQI (Annual Quality Review (AQR), Annual Dialogue and Cyclical Review) and the HEA (Ongoing Reporting, Systems Performance Frameworks and Compacts).

TUS complies with statutory and regulatory requirements relating to both internal and external quality assurance and quality enhancement. As an autonomous independent awarding body, TUS operates under the Technological Universities Act 2018[3], the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012[4] and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Amendment Act 2019[5]. The quality assurance and enhancement system of the TUS is in line with the standards and guidelines for the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015)[6] and with national guidelines and criteria for QA procedures, including the QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines[7], Sector Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies[8] QQI Topic Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines.[9] It is the policy of TUS to benchmark its procedures against relevant statutory obligations, the ESG and QQI Policies and Quality Assurance Guidelines.

3.1 Section 28 (1) of the 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act puts an

obligation on Providers that they "*shall establish procedures in writing for QA for the purposes of establishing ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training, research and related services the provider provides*"[4]. It also obliges relevant providers to have regard to the guidelines issued by the QQI in establishing procedures under subsection 1 (as referenced above).

3.2 The QQI Policy on QA Guidelines (2016)[2] obliges Providers to have due regard to the 2015 European Standard and Guidelines[6].

3.3 The ESG stipulates that *Institutions should have a policy for Quality Assurance that forms a part of strategic management*[6]. Such a policy supports Faculties/Schools/Department and other organisational units (ESG Section 1, Standard 1.1) [2]

3.4 QQI maintains the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and it is the policy of TUS that the Technological University's Academic Qualifications adhere to the National Framework.

3.5 TUS will periodically review its Compliance with Statutory obligations, the ESG and Guidelines issued by QQI.

In accordance with Section 16 of the Technological Universities Act 2018[3], TUS has established an Academic Council. The Academic Council of TUS has a broad range of functions, as specified in Section 17 of the Act, and controls its academic affairs including the curriculum and instruction and education provided. The functions of Academic Council include, inter alia, designing and developing programmes, supporting the implementation of programmes, making recommendations on research, making recommendations on admission and assessment of students and making recommendations to Governing Body regarding the form and content of regulations.

Furthermore, as outlined in Section 10 (1) (a) of the Technological Universities Act, 2018, TUS, in performing its functions, "*shall have the right and responsibility to preserve and promote the traditional principles of academic freedom in the conduct of its internal and external affairs.*" [3]

4.0 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Principles adopted by TUS

TUS is cognisant that the twin purposes of accountability and continuous improvement are at the core of all quality assurance activities, and that taken together, these are fundamental in creating trust and public confidence in the Technological University's performance. As a designated autonomous awarding body, TUS operates a consolidated quality framework that is built on a set of overarching guiding principles. TUS draws on eight guiding quality assurance and enhancement principles established by the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA) in its Technological Higher Education Quality Framework (THEQF)[10] . TUS has adopted and adapted the Principles for its Internal QAE and these are illustrated in Figure 1.
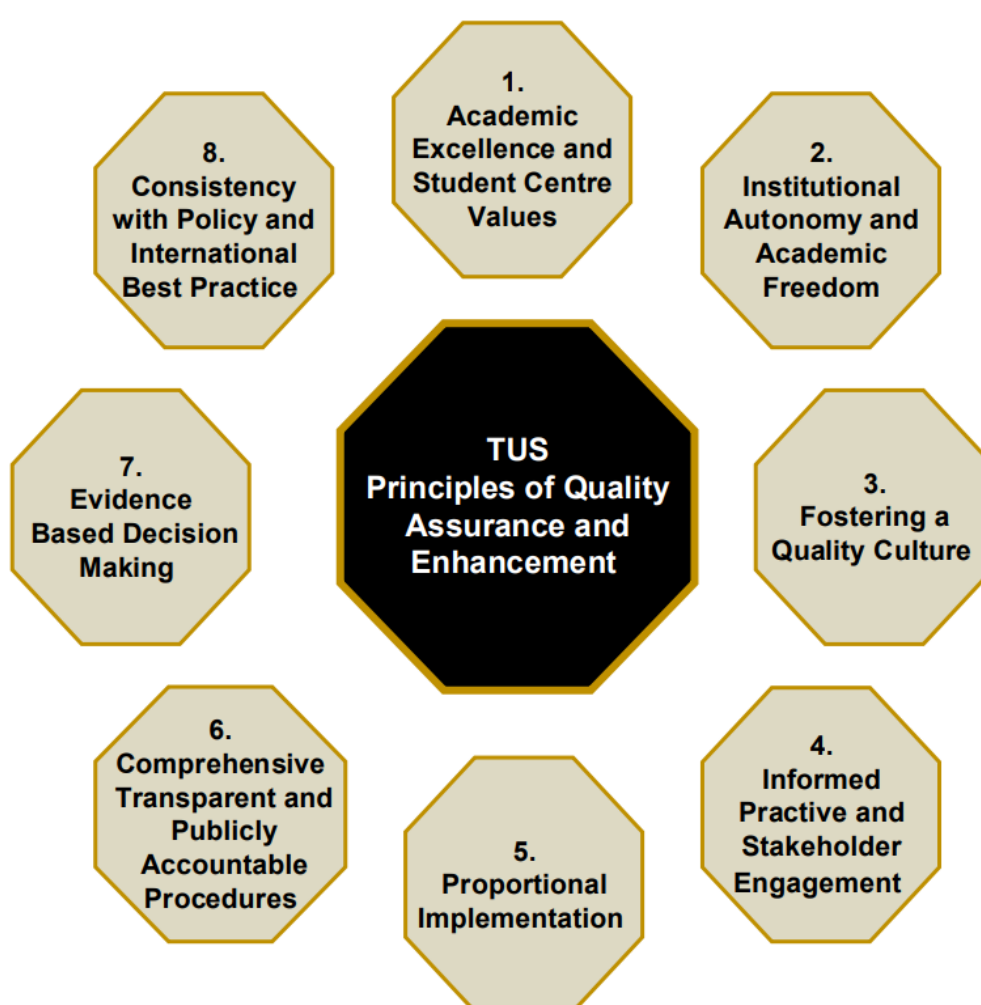

Figure 1 TUS Principles of QAE (adapted from THEQF) [10]

1. Academic Excellence and Student-Centred Values

TUS will be characterised by an ethos of academic excellence and prioritising the whole-student experience both within and beyond the formal curriculum to develop the whole person. Recognising, valuing, and supporting the diversity of the learner population and the diversity of learner needs will inform all activities of TUS. Prioritising the student perspective and keeping the holistic development of learners and researchers to the fore will be a central objective.

2. Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom

TUS acknowledges the ownership of responsibility for quality and standards that accompany autonomy, academic freedom, and freedom of enquiry. TUS takes account of the need to be open and transparent to stakeholders about quality policies, regulations, and procedures. The principle recognises the importance of balancing autonomy and assuring public confidence while demonstrating accountability.

3. Fostering a Quality Culture

A quality culture is predicated on the principle of best practice being fostered as the standard practice of the Technological University. TUS recognises the critical and shared role of Staff and Students working in a positive collegiate environment in contributing to and sustaining a quality culture. The TUS quality policies, regulations, and procedures to be used effectively and support the achievement of the mission, values, and strategic priorities of the Technological University.

4. Informed Practice and Stakeholder Engagement

The sustainable development of the Technological University depends upon the depth, relevance and impact of dialogue and engagements with all internal and external stakeholders. Therefore, TUS will engage in responsive dialogue with all relevant partners including Students, Staff, industry, enterprise, educational and professional bodies, the community, and regional, national and international partners to address their needs and requirements relevant to the respective spheres of activity of TUS.

5. Proportional Implementation

TUS will implement a QAE System that is dynamic, flexible, and responsive. The QAE System will be implemented in a coherent manner, be fit for purpose and proportionate to context and contribute effectively to excellence and the maintenance of high standards. The outputs from quality assurance processes including reviews, reports and evaluations will be considered and addressed through formal response reporting with consequential quality improvement plans implemented in a timely manner.

6. Comprehensive, Transparent and Publicly Accountable Procedures

TUS as a public body will provide information on: (i) the strategic basis for its activities; (ii) its governance, management and operational activities (iii) the quality assurance processes, procedures and outputs that underpin its programmes of education and research; and, (iv) the awarding of its qualifications. TUS will actively seek to publicise its quality culture evidenced by a commitment to a high standard of transparency, academic integrity, and accountability.

7. Evidence-Based Decision Making

TUS recognises evidence-based decision making will contribute to the achievement of its Vision, Mission and Strategic Objectives. This includes benchmarking against national and international standards and reporting against national performance criteria. The overarching quality framework will be supported by continuous review of: (i) the quality of inputs (academic leadership, resources, funds, facilities); (ii) the quality of processes (teaching and learning, research, and enterprise engagement); and (iii) the quality of outputs (academic programmes, graduates, research, innovations; and, industry and enterprise engagements.

8. Consistency with Policy and International Effective Practice

TUS will take account of its Statutory obligations and act in accordance with the National and European Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines. TUS will periodically seek independent critique of the effectiveness of its QAE System against national and international benchmarks providing evidence, assurance and accountability to the wider public of its commitment excellence, quality, transparency and integrity

5.0 Cross-Organisational Approach

TUS takes a multi-layered approach to the governance of quality management, with fora such as *Governing Body, Academic Council* and their associated *Sub-committees* and *Working Groups*, in addition to the TUS Executive and Technological University Management structures. These fora and committees play a lead role in reviewing and designing Technological University-wide strategies and processes to maintain and continuously improve academic quality.

The approach of TUS to the development and implementation of Quality Assurance and Enhancement systems and processes is effective, active, accountable and robust, and meets the Statutory obligations as outlined in Section 3. The Core Statutory Guidelines[7] issued by QQI in 2016, stipulate that the Quality Assurance System is embedded and maintained on a cross-organisational basis, including all levels of management, administration, teaching staff and learners. To achieve compliance and

have a fit for purpose quality assurance system the overarching components include:

1) developing and implementing a comprehensive suite of Technological University-wide policies and procedures;

2) establishing and conducting a broad range of internal reviews; and,

3) participating in annual monitoring and reporting to QQI (through AQR and Dialogue Meeting), in addition to participating in periodic reviews in the form of Cyclical Review[11].
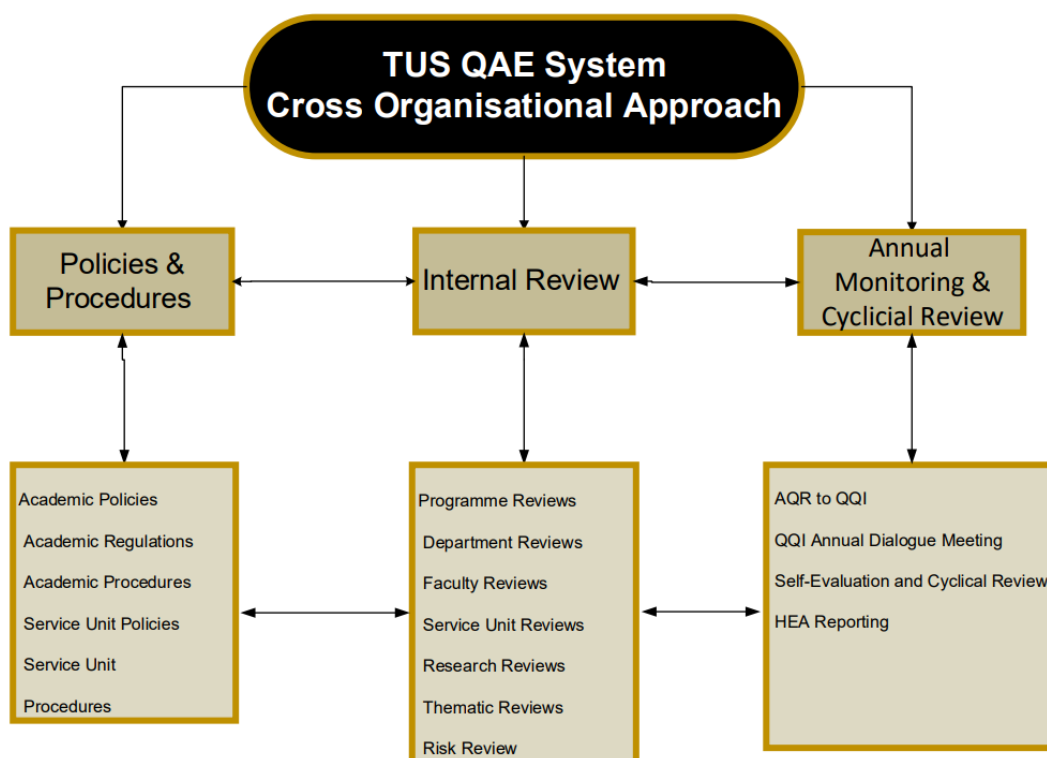

Figure 2. Overview of the Cross-Organisational Approach to QAE

5.1 Policies and Procedures

TUS is an independent autonomous designated awarding body with powers to make awards from Level 6 to Level 10 of the National Framework of Qualifications. The Technological University's Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures provide a systematic approach to promote and enhance quality. The systems established set out clear lines of authority showing where responsibility for quality lies. Senior management within the Technological University are responsible for developing and maintaining a quality culture.

TUS's Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures are implemented on all of its campuses and learning centers. These policies and procedures govern the design,

10

delivery and review of its academic programmes on the NFQ framework from Level 6 to Level 10, whilst also assuring quality across its Craft Apprenticeships, and Adult, Life-Long Learning and Flexible Education Programmes. TUS Policies for Collaborative and Linked Provision ensure that learners enrolled on collaborative or transnational programmes (whether at home or overseas) which lead to a TUS Award receive an equivalent learning experience to that of learners studying at TUS.

a) In accordance with the Technological Universities Act 2018,[3] the Governing Body and Academic Council and their Sub-Committees oversee the monitoring and review of the academic Quality Assurance Procedures set out in this Policy and in the wider TUS Quality Assurance Handbook. All committees with an input to quality assurance have clearly defined membership and terms of reference. Academic Council and its Sub-committees provide the mechanisms for the management, development and monitoring of academic policy.

b) The Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures of TUS form the basis of a coherent framework for enhancing the quality of education and training and services provided by TUS. Policies and procedures are collated in the Technological University's Quality Assurance Handbook. The Academic Regulations of TUS are a constituent element of the Academic Quality Assurance Handbook.

c) New programme validation processes operated by TUS ensures that academic programmes are robustly and successfully validated, thereby achieving adherence respectively to: (i) the *European Standard Guideline* for the 'Design and Approval of Programmes', and the *QQI Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training*[12]. Validation requires evidence that the minimum intended programme learning outcomes are consistent with the applicable awards standards and the relevant National Framework of Qualifications award-type descriptor(s) in terms of knowledge, skill and competence. The involvement of key stakeholders, including external specialist and students is a core element and is supported by comprehensive primary and secondary research.

d) TUS operates an examination and assessment system which is fair, consistent and effective in measuring the extent to which learners achieve stated learning outcomes. The assessment procedures are consistent with the *QQI Assessment and Standards (Revised 2013))*[13]. TUS places significant emphasis on Academic Integrity and is represented on the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) established by QQI. The sharing and dissemination of information relating to the current issues, initiatives and best practice in relation to academic integrity is an important activity for TUS.

e) External Examiners act as independent and impartial advisors providing the Technological University with informed comment on the standards set and the

student achievement in relation to those standards.

f) TUS is committed to developing its research portfolio and profile. TUS facilitates and encourages involvement by its staff in research, consultancy and development work. The Academic Council Sub-Committee on Postgraduate Research Studies monitors the quality of the Technological University's Research Regulations and Procedures operated at NQF award Level 9 and 10 by the Technological University, in accordance with the QQI *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Providers of Research Degree Programmes*[14] and Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes.[15]

g) TUS recognises that Students, as key stakeholders in the organisation, require a range of mechanisms to contribute to Quality Assurance and Enhancement and provide feedback to TUS that contributes to enhancing the quality of the learning experience. Students are members of the key decision-making fora of the Technological University, including Academic Council, Subcommittees of Academic Council and Programme Boards. Students are also full members of New Programme Validation Panels and Programmatic Review Panels. TUS is committed to the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (Student Survey.ie) and the National Programme for Student Engagement (NStEPS)[16] and actively works to facilitate student participation and engagement.

h) Fair and transparent mechanisms for processing complaints and appeals are in place. All decisions of the Technological University affecting students are subject to an Appeals process which includes independent external members.

i) TUS supports innovative teaching and learning through a range of measures, including, recognising and promoting best practice. It promotes pedagogies of engagement through active & applied learning. Students become vigorously engaged in exploring, assimilating, and constructing knowledge with active learning a key element where students to take responsibility for their own learning. As an outcome, learners are equipped to continuously develop personally and professionally.

j) TUS strives to maintain and improve the academic and support services available to students. The necessary resources for effective teaching and learning are continuously reviewed and enhanced to give academic support to students of varied abilities and backgrounds. Students are provided with a range of professional, focused and student-centred support and welfare services. These services are complemented with a comprehensive range of Student Support Policies and Procedures.

k) TUS aims to recruit and retain the high caliber staff required to ensure the delivery of a quality education service. TUS maintains a comprehensive staff development

plan which provides CPD opportunities for staff to further their knowledge and skills.

l) TUS aims to generate and collate all necessary data in order to monitor critical quality indicators, such as, entry points, continuous assessment results, examination results, retention and completion rates, student feedback, external examiners reports, programme board reports, external periodic reviews and graduate destination data. Data is monitored by the most appropriate forum, planned interventions are recorded and carried out and the effectiveness of these interventions is evaluated. TUS makes quality data and reports available to stakeholders, as appropriate.

m) TUS will generate, collate and retain all data in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679,[17] Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2018[18] and the TUS Data Governance Policy.[19]

n) TUS strives to ensure that its premises, equipment and facilities meet the needs of all stakeholders including Students and Staff. TUS will continue to develop its digital infrastructure to facilitate blended and online learning and the integration of digital literacy skills as part of the student learning experience. A range of key enabling Policies and Procedures these goals.

5.2 Internal Reviews

TUS's quality assurance policies and procedures are subject to the same rigorous monitoring and review processes as its educational and training programmes. The Technological University is committed to self-study and peer review. These play a pivotal role in monitoring the effectiveness of the quality policy and procedures. The 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act[4] requires *'periodic evaluation of training, research and related services by the provider'.* As a consequence, TUS operates a programme of Internal Reviews on a cyclical basis. These include reviews of *Programmes of Study*, *Departments, Faculties/Schools*, *Research Reviews*, *Service* and *Thematic Reviews* where appropriate. These peer reviews result in the development and implementation of a range of Quality Improvement Plans (QIP's).

5.2.1 Academic Reviews of Faculties, Departments and Programmes

a) Programme re-validation processes operated by TUS ensure that academic programmes are robustly and successfully re-validated in accordance with ESG1.9 and relevant national statutory and regulatory requirements.

b) Each programme is subject to periodic review, normally on a five to seven yearly cycle as part of a Programmatic Review of a Faculty/School or Department. The provides an opportunity for Programme Boards to fundamentally reappraise

programmes and modules and to make modifications where considered appropriate. A critical element of this activity is consultation with relevant stakeholders, including current students, graduates, industry and enterprise and the community sectors as relevant.

c) The involvement of external specialists in the design, monitoring and review of programmes ensures national standards, education sector standards and industry standards of quality within programmes.

d) The involvement of students in the review processes is highly valued by TUS. This includes their contribution to the primary and secondary research and their participation as members of the external validation panels.

e) As part of ongoing review and continuous improvement programme boards continually monitor the operation and effectiveness of programme structure, content, delivery and teaching and learning methods. TUS regulations allow programme boards to make changes annually to support this improvement through a process of oversight at programme board/department level in addition to Academic Council and its subcommittees.

5.2.2 Review of Support Units and Thematic Reviews

In delivering *Excellence and Quality* to students in accordance with this TUS *value* [1], the Technological University and its Faculties and Academic Departments are supported by a diverse range of support services providing and supporting core functions across all campuses. Examples of such support units include, inter alia, Student Support Services, Human Resources (HR), Library & Information Services, Computer Services (CSD), Quality, International, and Corporate Services. Research reviews and other thematic reviews may be conducted as appropriate. The effective provision of such services is a key-factor in the provision of an overall quality experience and supportive environment for students and the TUS community.

The *TUS Policy on Strategic Review of Technological University Support Units* [20], specifies the process involved. Accordingly, the review includes a range of considerations within the context of the individual Service. These are broadly informed by the management principles specified in the *ISO9001:2015 Quality Management Standard* [21] and the internal review takes due account of these principles. These include: 1. *Customer Focus (TUS Stakeholder Focus); 2. Leadership; 3. Engagement of People; 4. Process Approach; 5; Continual Improvement; 6. Evidence Based Decision Making; and 7. Relationship Management* [21].

An onsite review by a visiting Peer Review Group constitutes a core component of the review process which leads to the production and publication of a Peer Review Group

Report. This report comments formatively on the Service and makes any recommendations that support quality enhancement. A post-review phase of the process involves consideration of recommendations and the formulation of an Quality Improvement Plan followed by ongoing implementation review and monitoring.

5.3 Annual Monitoring and Cyclical Review

As outlined Section 2.0, QQI has statutory responsibility for oversight of Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Ireland. As part of annual monitoring by QQI, TUS as a designated awarding body, prepares and submits an Annual Quality Review (AQR) which details all developments in Quality Assurance and Enhancement in the respective academic years. TUS also engages with QQI in an Annual Dialogue Meeting that complements the AQR process. Annual monitoring leads to Cyclical Review which involves a periodic external quality review of the Technological University. Cyclical Review[11] involves a Technological University wide self-evaluation process leading to the production of an Institutional Self Evaluation Report (ISER). This is followed by a peer review process involving a Main Review Visit by an external panel and the publication of an Institutional Cyclical Review Report. This report makes recommendations for further enhancement of quality. The Technological University then considers how best to implement these recommendations and develops associated implementation plans.
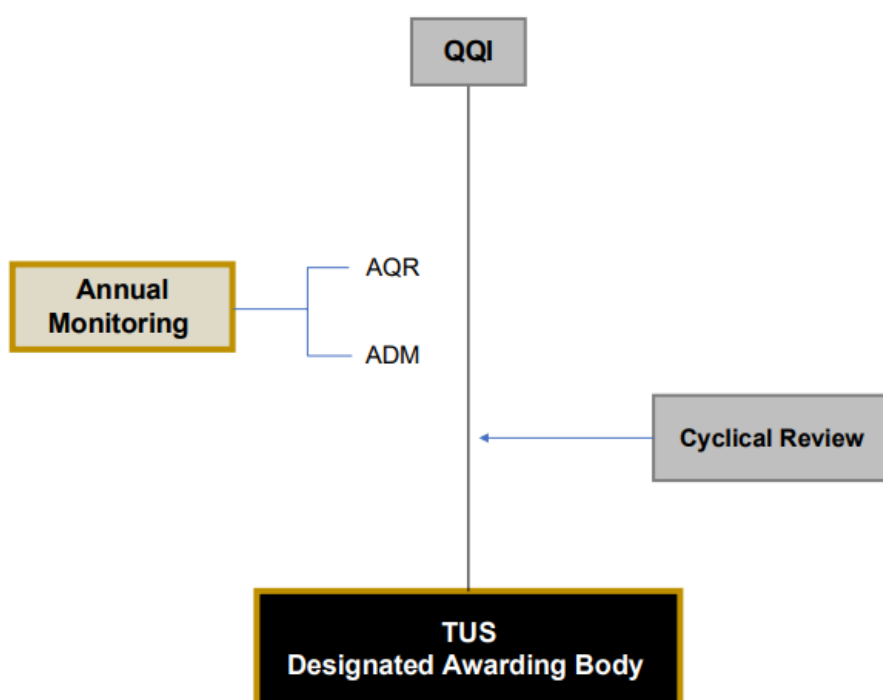

Figure 3. Key Elements of the National Quality Framework for TUS as a Designated Awarding Body

6.0 Fostering a Technological University-wide Quality Culture

TUS is committed to quality assurance and continuous improvement Quality assurance and enhancement and recognises the vital role it plays in delivering its vision, mission and strategic objectives. As outlined in Section 1.0, the TUS has identified Excellence and Quality, Professionalism and Transparency and Integrity as core Values[1] and is committed to the development and implementation of these values across all its activities. This commitment, together with the comprehensive Quality Principles Framework and the robust Cross-Organisational Approach, outlined in Sections 4.0 and 5.0 of this policy, respectively (consistent with statutory obligations) provides the environment for this quality culture to be an integral feature of the activities of the TUS to the benefit of all its stakeholders.

QQI note, as an overarching principle, the importance of the creation of 'the quality culture' and states that such a quality culture "is the outcome of individual staff and collective organisational commitment to continuous improvement"[2]. The fostering of a quality culture is an implicit aspect of the cross-organisational approach. This embeds quality assurance and enhancement as an integral component of professional practice in TUS, promoting a culture of best practice as standard practice.

7.0 References

1) [Application for Designation as a Technological University. AIT-LIT Consortium](#)

2) [QQI: Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines, April 2016.](#)

3) TU Act 2018

4) [Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012)](#)

5) 2019 Act

6) [ESG Guidelines](#)

7) QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016); www.qqi.ie

8) Sector Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies www.qqi.ie

9) QQI Topic Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016) www.qqi.ie

10) [Technological Higher Education Quality Framework.](#) (2017) Technological Higher Education Association.

11) [QQI: The CINNTE Review Cycle for Higher Education, September 2017](#)

12) QQI Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training. www.qqi.ie

13) QQI Assessment and Standards (Revised 2013). www.qqi.ie

14) QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Providers of Research Degree Programmes www.qqi.ie

15) QQI Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes

16) https://studentengagement.ie/

17) [General Data Protection Regulation (EU](#)) 2016/679

18) [Data Protection Acts](#) 1988 to 2018

19) TUS Data Governance Policy

20) TUS Policy on Strategic Review of Technological University Support Units

21) [ISO 9001:2015](#)