Policy for the Development of
Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework

Document Area	Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement
Document Function/ Owner	Vice President for Academic Affairs & Registrar
Author	Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Team
Required Approval	Academic Council

Issued Document Location

Internal Staff Portal / Hub	Yes (default repository)
Internal Student Portal / Hub	No
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1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline the key principles and process for developing all documents in the Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement (AQAE) Framework in Atlantic Technological University (ATU). This will ensure a consistent management of all AQAE activities including the design, development and review of policies and procedures across the University.

ATU is dedicated to *'enabling sustainable economic, social and cultural development; connected to our region and with a mindset that reaches far beyond it'.* A robust AQAE Framework is essential to fulfilling this mission. It ensures that our students will have the best possible learning experience and it provides reassurance to all our stakeholders that we adhere to the highest standards in academic excellence.

Quality assurance means that ATU is committed to making sure that quality and excellence are central to everything we do. *Quality enhancement* means that we base our decisions on evidence and that we continually look for ways to improve what we are doing.

All new AQAE policies are required to adhere to the principles and process for policy development outlined in this overarching policy. This document sets out the components for the development of Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement in ATU as follows:

- reference documents and legislation
- the principles that guide and underpin the development of the policies
- the process for development, approval, implementation, and review of AQAE policy documents
- the responsibilities relating to the above.

2. Scope

This policy applies to any person, unit, group, or committee responsible for the drafting, consultation, development, approval, implementation, and review of ATU AQAE documents. This includes areas which are directly related to the student experience, programmes of study and quality assurance of research and innovation. It includes the areas of Academic Quality Assurance, Academic Administration, Student Services and Research and Innovation.

3. External Reference Documents

3.1 The Statutory and Regulatory Context

ATU operates according to the provisions set out in the:

- Technological Universities Act 2018
- Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012
- Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Amendment Act 2019.

The Academic Council of ATU has an important role in the governance and approval of AQAE policies. In accordance with Section 16 and Section 17 of the Technological Universities Act 2018, *'an academic council shall control the academic affairs of the technological university, including the curriculum of, and instruction and education provided by, the technological university'* (p. 23). The functions of Academic Council include the design, development, and implementation of programmes, recommendations for programmes on the development of research, recommendations on the selection, admission, and assessment of students, on student appeals and, the implementation of University regulations. In fulfilling these functions, Academic Council will take due regard of the resources of the University and be subject to periodic review.

ATU complies with the following Quality Assurance and Enhancement guidelines:

- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015)
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016)
- Sector Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies (DAB) (2016)
- QQI Topic Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines.

ATU is a Designated Awarding Body and as such is responsible for the establishment of our quality assurance and enhancement policies and procedures. Two categories of quality assurance are central to our approach:

1. Internal Quality Assurance and Enhancement includes all documents and systems developed by the University that promote effective academic administration and public confidence.

2. External Quality Assurance and Enhancement includes the monitoring and reporting that occurs with external bodies including Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). QQI is the statutory body which provides oversight for Quality Assurance in Higher

Education in Ireland. It is responsible for the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

ATU reports to QQI on an annual basis via the Annual Quality Report (AQR) and Dialogue Meetings. We engage with QQI for the purposes of the Cyclical Review Process. The Cyclical Review Process is contained within the broader quality framework for Designated Awarding Bodies.

ATU will use the statutory quality assurance guidelines issued by QQI in designing, establishing, evaluating, maintaining, and reviewing our AQAE policies and procedures. The following areas are addressed:

- Governance and management of quality
- Documented approach to quality assurance
- Programmes of education and training
- Teaching and learning
- Assessment of learners
- Supports for learners
- Information and data management
- Public information and communication
- Other parties involved in education and training
- Self-evaluation, monitoring and review.

4. Policy

4.1 Principles

Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement in ATU is underpinned by four key principles, as illustrated in Figure 1.
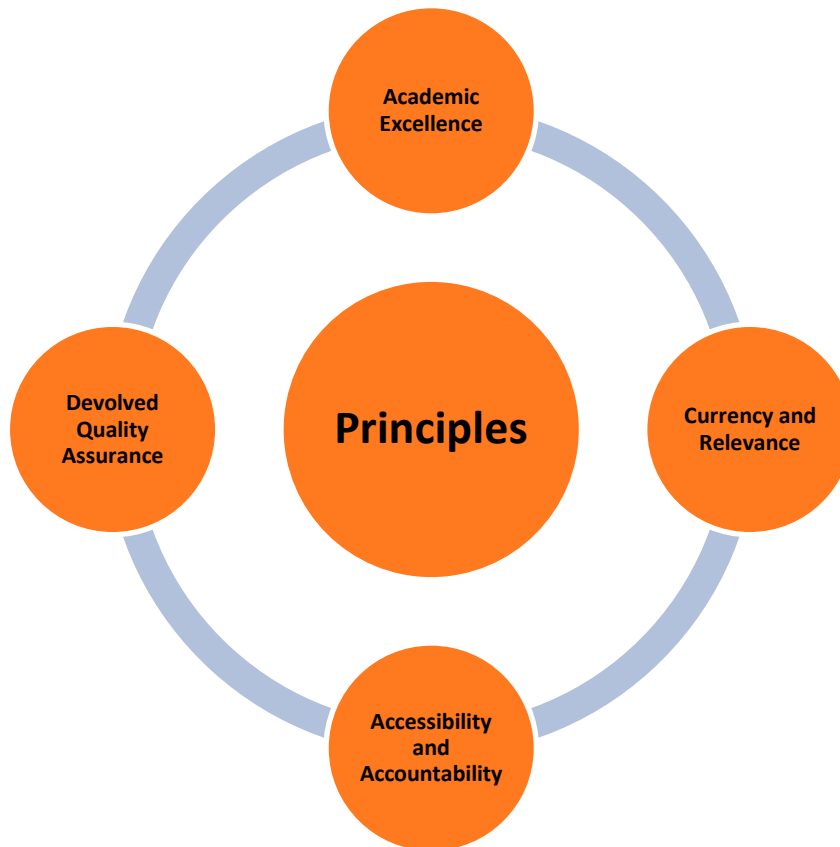
Figure 1. Principles of AQAE

4.1.1   Academic Excellence

This principle recognises that academic excellence is central to AQAE. This includes the promotion of the highest standards in teaching, learning and research. The AQAE Framework will be developed to meet the requirements of relevant legislative and regulatory guidelines and will inform and be aligned with ATU Mission and Strategic Plan.

Therefore, AQAE polices must:

- Comply with and operate in accordance with all relevant national legislation including the Technological Universities Act 2018, the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Amendment Act 2019.

- Have regard to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015) developed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, and by extension to policies, guidelines and provisions set out by QQI.
- Be developed in accordance with this overarching policy.
- Promote and safeguard academic integrity and work to combat academic fraud and misrepresentation.

4.1.2 Currency and Relevance

This principle recognises that ATU will benchmark our approach to quality assurance against European Standards and Guidelines and other comparable systems of international quality assurance practice.

ATU operates a continuous improvement cycle to ensure the AQAE Framework remains current and relevant. Accordingly, AQAE policies shall:

- Be guided by national and international best practice.
- Be driven by evidenced-based decision making.
- Be reviewed on a regular basis, aligned to the lifecycle of the Academic Council and through periodic review.
- Use internal and external review mechanisms to identify improvement opportunities and implement action plans and mitigation strategies.
- Support student access to ATU and be informed by relevant Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and Access to Education legislation and initiatives. This reflects our commitment in ATU to being a *'diverse, equal and inclusive University […] making progress on embedding equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) across everything we do'*.

4.1.3   Accessibility and Accountability

This principle recognises that AQAE documents must be readily accessible and produced within a transparent governance structure.

All AQAE policy and procedure documents that address all aspects of teaching, learning, research, engagement activity, and student-wellbeing within the University will be published on the Staff and Student Portals. Where indicated in the public interest, AQAE policy and procedure documents will be published on the ATU website.

ATU Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policies must:

- Be approved by the Academic Council.
- Be maintained within an organised system for document management and change control.
- Be presented in a standard and consistent format.
- Demonstrate a commitment to Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

4.1.4   Devolved Quality Assurance

This principle recognises that quality assurance is a function of all areas of the University including Faculties, Student Services and Academic Affairs. ATU recognises the critical and shared role of all staff and students in embedding a quality culture and values, respects and supports staff and student contributions to that culture. AQAE polices must:

- Be devised in a culture of ownership, participation, and responsiveness, where all staff understand their individual and collective responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement.
- Be formulated in collaboration and consultation with key stakeholders, including but not limited to academic staff, students, Professional, Management and Support Staff (PMSS), and Academic Council.
- Ensure that student, staff, and external feedback is included.
- Encourage a culture of critical evaluation to retain academic excellence in teaching, learning and research.

4.2 Definitions: Document Types

The Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework is made up of different types of documents:

- Policy
- Procedure
- Standard
- Form
- Work Sheet
- Template

ATU defines these documents as follows:

A **policy** describes the broad *principles* and *process* that regulate conduct and guide decision making in a particular context. The policies are driven by the values, mission, and strategic plan of the University. All our policies are informed by legislative requirements, best practice, and by external regulatory standards. They are used to communicate to staff and students their responsibilities in relation to quality assurance and enhancement.

A policy is usually accompanied by a **procedure** which sets out how the policy is to be implemented. A procedure is a document that describes in operational detail the processes and appropriate actions necessary to implement a policy. It outlines the sequence of steps necessary to carry out defined tasks. Procedures must align with best practice and any legal requirements set out in the related policy.

A **standard** is a norm, measure or model that specifies criteria for systems and awards, to ensure that they are clear and consistent. Where a 'standard' is referenced in an ATU AQAE document, the definitive source of the standard should be fully referenced.

A **form** collects required information in a structured, logical, and meaningful fashion. It may be used as a record of a fact or event occurring, and / or as a method of data collection to inform decision making.

A **worksheet** is a detailed description of sets of repeatable tasks. It ensures that tasks are accomplished in a coherent manner.

A **template** provides a prescribed structure and format for the presentation of information.

4.3 Policy requirements

The requirements set out in this policy and related procedure shall apply to all new AQAE policies approved by the ATU from the date of designation, April 1st, 2022. Policies in existence prior to designation will be required to comply with this policy when they are reviewed and considered for reapproval. Please see Appendix 1 for an indicative outline of AQAE policy areas.

4.4 Policy Development Process

All AQAE policies must be drafted and developed through a consultative process. Figure 2 presents an outline of the AQAE policy development and review process.
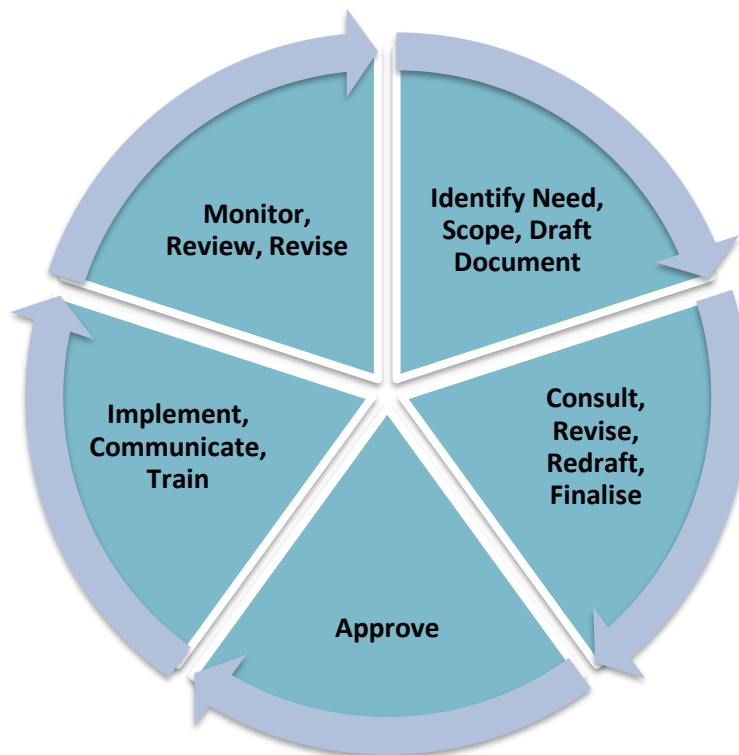
Figure 2. Schematic Diagram of the Policy Development and Review Process

Any member of staff may propose a change to an existing document or a new document. The proposed change must be sent to the function owner of the document who will note the proposals for change/inclusion in the next periodic revision of the document or initiate a revision sooner in the case of e.g., legislative, or regulatory changes. More detail on the mechanism for this is outlined in the *Procedure for the Development of Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework*.

All staff and students are encouraged to contribute to the drafting process during the consultative phase. The level of consultation required may vary.

The Vice President for Academic Affairs & Registrar will designate a person to manage the repository for all AQAE documents and will ensure that documents are issued once they are approved and ensure that a single approved version of each document is available.

Once issued, all documents will be subject to periodic review, coinciding with the lifecycle of the Academic Council. Some documents may require more frequent revision *e.g.*, *Marks & Standards Policy*.

Changes approved take effect from the beginning of the next academic year. If warranted, for example for legal reasons, changes may be made earlier. We will review and consult to ensure that proposed changes do not place any restrictions on students.

4.5 Responsibilities

ATU recognises that all staff and students are actively involved in the fostering, management and implementation of a quality assurance and enhancement culture. The Vice President for Academic Affairs & Registrar on behalf of Academic Council is the guardian of all policies relating to academic quality assurance and enhancement. Function areas both within and outside the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs & Registrar may be nominated as the area owner of subsidiary documents (Procedures or Forms, for example).

The area owner is the appropriate academic or support unit of the University whose remit and responsibility covers the subject matter of the policy.

4.6 Approval Process

AQAE policies must be approved by Academic Council.

AQAE procedures are reviewed by an appropriate Standing Committee of Academic Council. Standing Committees can request the input of Academic Council in the evaluation of AQAE procedures. A recommendation for approval of an AQAE procedure is forwarded from the Standing Committee to the Vice President for Academic Affairs & Registrar. Approved procedures will be noted by Academic Council.

5. Associated Documents Generated by this Policy

Procedure for the Development of Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework.

6. Revision History

Revision No	Description of Change	Approval Date
000	New ATU Policy	Academic Council 17th Feb 2023

7. Appendix 1

Indicative AQAE Policy Areas

An outline of policy areas is presented in Table 1. The supporting documents for each area will be developed over time and the list is not exhaustive.

Academic Governance	Marks and Standards	Programmes	Research	Student Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment
Quality Assurance Policy	Examinations and Assessment of Learners	Award Standards	Research	Student Code
Academic Council	Awards	Programme Design	Research Degrees	Learning and Teaching Strategy
Academic Governance of Quality Assurance	Academic Integrity	Approval of New Programmes	Research Ethics	Student Retention
Academic Policies	Rechecks, Reviews and Appeals	Online and Blended Programmes	Professional and Work Based Doctorates	Student Supports
Institutional Review	Defers and Withdrawals	Collaborative Provision (including Joint Awards)	Authorship	Fitness to Study/Practice
Faculty Review	Reasonable Accommodations	Monitoring, Review and Enhancement of Programmes		Professional Practice
Professional and Support Services Review	External Examining	Programmatic Review		Child Protection
Qualifications Frameworks		Access, Transfer and Progression		EDI
		RPL		Social Media
				UDL

Table 1 Indicative AQAE Policy Areas