External Quality Assurance Audit Report

National Commission for
Further and Higher Education
Malta

Aġenzija Żgħażagħ

Carried out between the 7th and 8th May 2019

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Abbreviations List

ECTS   European Credit Transfer System

EQA audit   External Quality Assurance Audit

IQA   Internal Quality Assurance

MQF   Malta Qualifications Framework

NCFHE   National Commission for Further and Higher Education

NQAF   National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Section A: Background

This report is a result of the External Quality Assurance process undertaken by an independent peer review panel. The panel evaluated the documentation submitted by the educational institution and conducted an on-site audit visit. The panel was responsible for giving judgments on Standards 1 and 3 – 11. As outlined in the External Quality Audit Manual of Procedures, the NCFHE sought external expertise to evaluate and give judgment on Standard 2. Through this report, the panel also highlighted areas of good practice, which in view of an NCFHE peer review panel, make a positive contribution to academic standards and quality and are worthy of being emulated and disseminated more widely.

1.1.1 The Peer Review Panel

The Peer Review Panel was composed of:

Chair of Panel: Ms Edel Cassar

External Peer: Ms Desiree Scicluna Bugeja

Student Peer Reviewer: Ms Tiziana Gatt

QA Managers (NCFHE): Ms Angelique Grech, Ms Sibby Xuereb

1.1.2 Specific Terms of Reference and Main Lines of Inquiry

Following the desk-based analysis and the scoping visit held with the provider, the panel agreed on the areas which needed to be covered during the QA process. The specific terms of reference and the main line of inquiry were strategically aligned to the principles of quality assurance in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the overall quality assurance policy and its implementation within the entity.

The peers focused their main questions to securing a better understanding and triangulating the information on five main themes:

1. The regular feedback collected from the students and staff and the use of that feedback by the institution in programme design and continued relevance of the study programmes.

2. Student/Alumni data management and use of the data for management and programme decisions.

3. Strengthening of pedagogical skills and professional development.

4. Assessment criteria, methodology and feedback provided to students.

5. Organisation and liaison with employers for the work-based learning component.

1.2 Section B: Key Findings, Judgements and Recommendations

1.2.1 Standard 1 - Policy for Quality Assurance

Summary of Main Findings

The AZ has published its Quality Assurance policy on its website. Considering the size of the entity, the volume of students and the number of programmes, the Youth.Inc policy and procedures are well documented and provide a good overview of the way the programmes are managed and delivered. Youth Workers, youths, employers and parents are substantially involved in quality assurance practices.

Good Practice Identified

GP 1.1 All the professionals which the peers interviewed had a very good understanding of Quality Assurance processes; however, the youth workers demonstrated a very sound understanding and appreciation of the development of the QA processes. This is being highlighted since they are a pivotal cohort in the administration of this entities' programmes.

Judgement

AZ meets Standard 1.

Recommendations

R1.1 Key Recommendation: During academic year 2019-2020, the institution should establish processes and procedures to periodically collect in a formalised manner feedback from employers and other external stakeholders and feed them into quality assurance processes. Such structures could range from regular surveys of stakeholders to a consultative committee. The institution should be able to demonstrate documentation of the results process.

1.2.2 Standard 2 - Institutional Probity

Summary of Main Findings

Educational institutions within the public sector are already subject to stringent national financial and administrative regulations and oversight and to national legislation that regulates the appointment of senior personnel and the selection of staff. The EQA does not seek to duplicate the national regulatory structures and procedures already in place. Thus, for educational institutions within the public sector, Standard 2 is interpreted in terms of the capacity and resources of the provider to implement effectively its internal quality assurance procedures to improve the learning experience.

The full-time management and administrative staff at the central office of the Entity and the part-time coordinating staff at in the centres, are appointed according to established public service procedures that have in-built due diligence and fitness for purpose considerations.

AZ needs to develop an organigram of the institution, with detailed roles and responsibilities, especially at management level.

AZ has a very good EU projects management structure and has managed to tap into EU funds to further enhance and strengthen its operations.

There is a clear need for additional human resources at both management and administrative levels so that the vision of management in terms of the quality and scale of provision, the internal mechanisms of due diligence, and the capacity for data-informed review, can be fulfilled.

Headship positions are deemed to be fit for purpose and recruitment in accordance to national legislation that regulates the appointment of Headship positions.

Good Practice Identified

AZ has a well-structured EU projects management coordination point.

Judgement

AZ meets Standard 2.

Recommendations

R2.1 Key Recommendation: AZ shall develop a detailed organigram which outlines roles and responsibilities s at management level.

1.2.3 Standard 3 - Design and Approval of Programmes

Summary of Main Findings

The three Youth.Inc courses offered by AZ are on a full time basis and available for students between the ages of 16 and 21. The Youth.Inc offers courses at MQF levels 1, 2 and 3. Students entering at MQF Level 1 can progress into the subsequent levels upon successful completion of the course.

The concept of Youth.Inc has evolved over a number of years with the involvement of a number of stakeholders and professionals in the sectors, leading to the current NCFHE accredited programmes. Indeed, the programme has been developed and accredited in terms of NCFHE requirements.

The panel has been provided with evidence that substantiate that extensive research was carried out prior to the accreditation of the programme. AZ management conducts on-going evaluation with all stakeholders including youth workers, employers, parents and students to further improve and evolve the programmes. The review panel observed that the work placement structure, design and implementation are successfully assisting the cohort of students following Youth.Inc courses to develop into skilled, empowered, independent citizens and workers.

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Good Practice Identified

GP3.1   The review panel notes that non formal youth work approach is prevalent across all aspects of the programme.

GP3.2   Each student is assigned a personal youth worker to assist the student throughout the course. This approach is enabling a number of students to gain the confidence, skills and attitudes necessary to overcome their shortcomings and succeed.

Judgement

AZ surpasses Standard 3.

Recommendations

R3.1   AZ may wish to consider the design and development of an MQF Level 4 Youth.Inc programme to facilitate another opportunity for further training to their student cohort.

R3.2   AZ may consider extending the timeframe for module delivery to exceed 10 weeks, where possible.

R3.3   AZ may consider extending the integrated module approach through project work adopted for the MQF Level 1 course, to the other two courses.

1.2.4 Standard 4 - Student-centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Summary of Main Findings

The Youth.Inc programme addresses and reaches out to vulnerable young persons (including young persons who are socially deprived and early school leavers) and nurtures their confidence to achieve life skills, employability skills and independence. The tailor-made individual support by

both the managerial and the youth worker/trainer professionals ensures successful retention of students and completion of programmes of studies. The review team has observed a very good balance of guidance/hand-holding and challenging strategies through individually-assigned youth workers that leads to development of more- autonomous young people. All interviews with students, alumni, trainers and youth workers evidence a climate of mutual respect within the student-student and student-teacher relationship and vice versa has been established.

The review panel has viewed and experienced the infrastructural set up that facilitates student centred teaching/learning. A variety of learning resources are available matching the needs of specific course level and module. Each module allocates time for self-study. The review panel observed that students are well supported and guided by trainers/youth workers through direct/ongoing feedback related to self-study tasks.

From the various interviews conducted with students, employers, parents, alumni and youth workers, the review team has gained sufficient insight that work placements offer a highly valid and relevant learning experience to the young persons in Youth.Inc courses, leading to better employment opportunities.

Progress and improvement of students is measured through non-formal assessment procedures that are in place. The review panel observed that students appreciate the hands-on and practical nature of assessment tasks. The panel has noted that current assessment scoring practices are generic and need better definition of criteria and sub criteria to gauge student achievement.

Good Practice Identified

GP 4.1 The infrastructural set up facilitates and stimulates the non-formal student centred teaching/learning.

GP 4.2 The individual, personalised, continuous support provided by AZ youth workers, trainers and AZ management to students is a valuable component of the experience for students enrolled in Youth.Inc courses.

Judgement

AZ requires improvement to meet Standard 4.

Recommendations

R4.1 Key Recommendation: During academic year 2019-2020, module assessment procedures should be updated to ensure coherency in allocation of marks for common criteria across different modules (e.g. Attendance, Participation, Group Work, etc).

R4.2 Key Recommendation: By the end of 2019, Trainers/youth workers should put more emphasis, and further break down each assessment criterion related to specific skills and competences, for each assessment task pertaining to relevant modules.

R4.3 Key Recommendation: Employers should be better informed a priori about any learning conditions, capabilities and/ or physical limitations of the youths to be better prepared to welcome the youth at the place of work and also to better match the duties assigned during the work placement. AZ should seek to structure such exchange of information during academic year 2019-2020 before students proceed to their work placements.

R4.4 AZ may consider recruiting an Assessment coordinator to facilitate all assessment procedures and to monitor/verify assessment tasks.

1.2.5 Standard 5 - Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification

Summary of Main Findings

The review team has gained insight into the admission procedures used by the entity to reach the niche target audience of young persons who would benefit from the training provided. Detached youth work is also an important route to attract specific cohorts of young people who could stand to benefit from this course.

The entity's policies include clear reference to accreditation of prior certified learning. The panel has noted that the admissions process also includes a group interview and proficiency tests (Maltese, English and Maths) to facilitate the grouping of students. Induction meetings with parents and students take place in September to provide information about specific tailor-made programmes for the young people.

All students are provided with Certificate of Achievement (if they complete successfully the programme) or Certificate of Competence (if they only partially complete a number of modules from the programme).

Progression between levels of Youth.Inc is smooth and students progressing from one level to another need not formally re-apply. Students who complete or chose to terminate their course of studies are interviewed before they leave the institution and are supported to remain in education and/or employment. This practice is not documented.

The panel has heard from parents, employers and students the need to extend the Youth.Inc programme up to MQF Level 4. The panel noted that the entity takes into consideration access arrangements already provided to students during their compulsory schooling years.

Good Practice Identified

GP 5.1 The entity's policy and procedure document refers to accreditation of prior certified learning. The peers have seen how this is implemented and have appreciated the valorising of all the learning which the young person has achieved.

GP 5.2 AZ issues a 'certificate of competence' to students who do not complete the study programme in which they are enrolled. The certificate includes a list of modules which the student has concluded successfully. This is intended to facilitate the transition into further learning.

GP 5.3 AZ puts emphasis on outreach through 'detached youth work' which targets and facilitates the admission of vulnerable young people to the programme.

Judgement

AZ meets Standard 5.

Recommendations

R5.1   Key Recommendation: Further to, and in alignment to Key Recommendation R1.1, by the end of June 2020, the AZ should have procedures in place to document exit interviews as a means of having further feedback mechanism which feeds back into the review and development of the programmes.

R5.2   It is recommended that the entity seeks to formalise the agreement related to progression of students at other institutions (eg. MCAST, ITS, others) for further studies.

1.2.6 Standard 6 - Teaching Staff

Summary of Main Findings

The training policy adopted by the AZ makes reference to training needs identified by the individual, verbally or by the filling in of a training needs form, or the management team. The peers noted that the weekly meeting is also used as a 'peer learning and group supervision session'. The youth workers and trainers are observed regularly during the sessions and immediate timely feedback is provided by the administration. The youth workers noted that adequate training opportunities are provided by the entity, both locally and abroad. Overseas training is mainly organised through EU funded projects and initiatives. It is particularly noteworthy how the entity has made use of EU funded projects both for the upskilling of their staff but also the youths themselves.

The panel noted that the trainers (on service contracts) are not typically offered the same training opportunities. The panel has noted that the trainers are mainly qualified educators and all seek CPD opportunities in a self-sought manner.

Although the entity has no overarching CPD plan, the panel has seen the all youth workers have been provided with training in ECDL, First Aid, Mental Health, Entrepreneurship, and Food Handling in parallel to other ad hoc opportunities that arise from time to time.

The panel heard from the youth workers that they have been provided with sufficient resources to facilitate informal teaching. On the other hand, the trainers have commented that further teaching resources in class (related to their specific subject areas) are desired.

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Good Practice Identified

GP 6.1 The peers noted that the weekly meeting is also used as a 'peer learning and group supervision session' (SAR pg 30) which involve the possibility of discussion, evaluation, external speakers and building of capacity for staff members.

GP 6.2 The peers were appreciative of the creative manner of how the entity has made use of EU funded projects and initiatives to add capacity building opportunities for staff.

Judgement

AZ meets Standard 6.

Recommendations

R6.1 Key Recommendation: By the end of 2020, the entity should develop a medium/long term overarching plan for continuous professional development to provide direction for all initiatives taken.

R6.2 Key Recommendation: By the end of October 2019, trainers should also be included in the weekly meetings, at least periodically, to provide them with the background philosophy of the entity and to also provide them with the possibility of capacity building, as necessary.

R6.3 Key Recommendation: By the end of 2019, the entity should provide trainers with a more direct, standardised procedure to request learning resources and tools within specific subject areas.

R6.4 The entity should consider extending training opportunities to trainers on a contract basis.

R6.5 The entity should also take into consideration any CPD initiatives taken by the individual trainers in an ongoing manner.

R6.6 It is recommended that the entity creates a meeting space for trainers (such as a staff room) to facilitate their integration with the full time staff members and their networking amongst each other.

1.2.7 Standard 7 - Learning Resources and Student Support

Summary of Main Findings

The panel were informed that no formal library facilitates are available for the young persons at the entity. However, the panel has experienced that the absence of a library has not, in any way, stifled or limited the achievements of young persons since the non-formal learning requires different forms of autonomous learning resources beyond a physical library concept. Ample support by all professionals involved was provided to nurture students' knowledge skills and competence thus facilitating progression.

The panel heard that, in particular circumstances, where the entity is aware of the very restricted socio-economic condition of the family background, the entity also provides tailor-made assistance for students' needs for physical items. The youth workers' knowledge of other assistance programmes available through other agencies also ensures that the youths are guided to access other social services as necessary.

The recent Collective Agreement for youth workers with facilities for additional resources, such as unlimited phone access on mobile phones provided by the entity, has strengthened the possibility for regular unlimited informal care for the youth workers.

The trained youth workers provide sustained pastoral care to all young persons encountering difficulties during their course of studies. In this way, they are facilitating the empowerment and confidence building in young people. Professionals also provide pastoral care support on an individual basis to ensure course completion and progression.

Youth workers also act as the liaison officer between the entity and the employer during the work-based learning portion of the training programmes. Employers have confirmed the consistent and passionate manner in which the youth workers mentor, challenge and support the young persons. at the place of work.

Good Practice Identified

GP 7.1 The support and pastoral care provided to students, which over the years, has led to the creation of a community and social network for students (who has always been on the periphery of the education system) far outweighs the need for technical resources within the various training spaces. This entity has set up a good support system that enables the target cohort to find the adequate care and support both during its learning experience within the remit of the course outline and also outside the academic setup. As a result of the unlimited time and constant effort

dedicated by all the professionals within the entity to ensure that the students are well-cared for and supported adequately, the students have a habitat where they can learn and develop themselves holistically with the possibility to reach their potential.

GP 7.2 The youth workers are trained to reach out to other social services available (such as the children's fund operated by Appogg) for physical resources support which students coming from very challenging socio-economic backgrounds might need from time to time.

GP 7.3 On completion of the Youth.Inc course, the young persons are supported by youth workers to proceed with their desired career sector either through additional training (at other institutions) or by seeking employment. Follow up with student remains ongoing through the Youth Hub.

GP7.4 It was noted that the session attendance sheets, which each trainer is obliged to fill in during each training session, includes a dedicated space for qualitative, descriptive comments. Such comments are followed up daily with the students and the trainers by the Manager.

Judgement

AZ surpasses Standard 7.

Recommendations

R7.1 It is recommended to further develop the youth information area to also include educational learning resources.

R7.2 AZ could seek to provide further better connectivity to facilitate the use of online learning resources within the sessions.

R7.3 The panel appreciated the weekly group meetings with all youths. The youth workers could seek to schedule one-to-one personalised sessions to discuss the way forward in terms of targeted needs.

1.2.8 Standard 8 - Information Management

Summary of Main Findings

Student information is stored in physical student files which are retained centrally by the Youth Workers. Participation in the modules, in terms of attendance, is closely recorded and used to monitor student progression. The initial personal profile (filled at the beginning of each academic year) is included in the personal file and referred to by the Youth Workers during the year. Evaluation sheets filled by the young people are also kept on file for ease of reference.

The panel has heard of a tracer study which is carried out after 3 months and after 6 months from when the young persons leave the Youth.Inc programme. Furthermore, the entity facilitates an

Msida Youth Cafe every Friday for youths in general. Students and alumni are invited to remain in contact with the entity and youth workers through this social initiative.

Good Practice Identified

GP 8.1 The peer noted that the AZ follows up with all young people who conclude their study period with the Youth.Inc programme after 3 months and then again after 6 months.

GP8.2 The Youth Hubs, operated by the AZ, create a safe space for the young people to network between alumni and the current cohort of students to further strengthen the social support structures.

Judgement

AZ meets Standard 8.

Recommendation

R8.1 Key Recommendation: The tracer studies which are carried periodically after the young people conclude their study period at AZ should feed into a stand-alone report. Such a report could be consulted during the review of the programmes. The first of these reports should be prepared by the end of academic year 2019-2020.

R8.2 It is recommended that the AZ starts the process to digitalise the personal files for backup purposes and ease of reference by all youth workers as necessary.

1.2.9 Standard 9 - Public Information

Summary of Main Findings

The review panel heard that youth workers are very visible on the local media to promote the entity and the Youth.Inc in particular. This is further complemented with more direct outreach with youths targeting in particular vulnerable youths.

The review panel saw that the website includes all the details as expected by this standard.

On registering for the course, students and parents are informed of initial meetings which are held prior to the start of the academic year.

Good Practice Identified

GP 9.1 The peers have noted that the outreach which the youth workers do, the verbal communication, the face-to-face interaction, and the TV and radio presence are critical in sharing the information about the unique educational service offered about the Youth.Inc.

Judgement

AZ meets Standard 9.

Recommendations

R 9.1 Students' testimonials could be included in the website to give visibility to the successful experiences which the students have while following the Youth.Inc programmes.

1.2.10 Standard 10 - On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes

Summary of Main Findings

During the visit the panel could see that there is clear on-going monitoring and review of programmes being delivered by AZ. The panel heard of how the AZ seeks different sources of feedback and evaluation mechanisms from all stakeholders (employers, parents, alumni, youth hub, regional hub and current cohorts). Students provide formal feedback at different intervals of the education process at AZ.

The panel also heard of the Erasmus Project which is currently ongoing. The project's dual aim of capacity building and programme review fits squarely within the aims and objectives of the entity. Through the same project, the AZ is building capacity on 'peer to peer' monitoring for its youth workers. The panel has heard how such an initiative has contributed to their professional development.

Good Practice Identified

GP 10.1 Over the years, the AZ, has sought to maximise the use of EU funded projects to review the education programmes as well as create capacity building opportunities for its staff members abroad. Fundings for such activities would not have been possible had the entity not embarked on such projects.

GP10.2 The AZ has recently introduced the concept of 'peer to peer' mentoring between its youth workers, also as a means of building capacity.

GP10.3 Within the scope of one of the Erasmus-funded projects, the AZ is collaborating with international partners (Mets and the YMCA) with regard to training, sharing of expertise, curriculum review and development and supervision practices. One of the main outcomes of the project is a review of Youth.Inc programme at MQF Level 1.

Judgement

AZ meets Standard 10.

Recommendation

R10.1 Key recommendation - By the end of the academic year 2019-2020, the AZ should establish a structured process for monitoring and cyclical review of the Youth.Inc programmes that also describes the resources necessary and also involve internal and external stakeholders (such as alumni, parents and employers) in such review.

1.2.11 Standard 11 - Cyclical External Quality Assurance

Summary of Main Findings

The panel has found AZ to be particularly pro-active, receptive, supportive and self-reflective during the entire quality assurance process. The AZ has provided the SAR and additional documentation in very timely manner.

Good Practice Identified

GP 11.1 All the professionals interviewed, especially the youth workers, have been extremely forthcoming and eager to contribute to the external quality assurance process.

Judgement

AZ surpasses standard 11.

2. About the External Quality Audit

2.1 Introduction

The External Quality Assurance audit is a tool for both development and accountability. The QA audit shall ensure that the internal quality management system of the provider is:
- fit for purpose according to the provider's courses and service users;
- compliant with standards and regulations and contributing to the development of a national quality culture;
- contributing to the fulfilment of the broad goals of Malta's Education Strategy 2014-24;
- implemented with effectiveness, comprehensiveness and sustainability.

2.2 Reviewers

Evaluation subject	Aġenzija Żgħażagħ	
Peer Panel Members	**External Peers:** Ms Edel Cassar Ms Desiree Scicluna Bugeja **Student Peer Reviewer:** Ms Tiziana Gatt **QA Managers (NCFHE):** Ms Angelique Grech Ms Sibby Xuereb	
Timeline	**Dates** 3rd January 2019 18th February 2019 8th April 2019 7th and 8th May 2019	**Milestone** Panel received induction and preparation. Panel met to determine the specific terms of reference, aims, objective and research question of the QA process. Preliminary Provider meeting On-site Audit visit at AZ.

2.3 Institutional Context

Aġenzija Żgħażagħ was established in February 2011 to promote the interests of young people and support them in achieving their potential.

Aġenzija Żgħażagħ devised Youth.Inc, an inclusive non-formal education programme, based on applied learning and open to young people between the age of 16 and 21. The aim of the programme is to help young people to improve their standard of education and gain more knowledge, values and skills to enter the labour market or gain qualifications to continue in further education and/or training. The Youth.Inc Programme offers 3 courses: Level 1 – Access Skills for Independent Living and Working Life; Level 2 – Skills for Vocational Pathways and Level 3 – Connect: Skills and Competences for the Working Life.

Aġenzija Żgħażagħ encourages active involvement of young people in a non-traditional learning environment while the Youth.Inc programme supports diverse modes of learning, including leisure, cultural and educational activities, with the aim of empowering and motivating young people to become more active participants in their own learning.

2.4 General Terms of Reference, Aims and Objectives of the EQA

Quality assurance in Malta is underpinned by six principles that determine the remit and function of the *National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education*, and the relationship between internal and external quality assurance to enhance learning outcomes.

   i. The Framework is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and enriched by the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) perspective.
   ii. The Framework contributes to a National Culture of Quality, through:
   - increased agency, satisfaction and numbers of service users,
   - an enhanced international profile and credibility of providers in Malta,
   - the promotion of Malta as a regional provider of excellence in further and higher education.
   iii. The Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) is fit for purpose.
   iv. The External Quality Assurance (QA audit) is a tool for both development and accountability. The QA audit shall ensure that the internal quality management system of the provider is:
   - fit for purpose according to the provider's courses and service users,
   - compliant with Standards and regulations and contributing to the development of a national quality culture,
   - contributing to the fulfilment of the broad goals of Malta's Education Strategy 2014-24,
   - Implemented with effectiveness, comprehensiveness and sustainability.
   v. The Quality Improvement Cycle is at the heart of the Framework.
   vi. The integrity and independence of the QA audit process is guaranteed.

The QA audit provides public assurance about the Standards of further and higher education

programmes and the quality of the learning experience of students. It presents an opportunity for providers to demonstrate that they adhere to the expectations of stakeholders with regard to the programmes of study that they offer and the achievements and capabilities of students. It also provides a focus for identifying good practices and for the implementation of institutional approaches to the continuous improvement in the quality of educational provision.

NCFHE has a responsibility to ensure that a comprehensive assessment is conducted for all higher education providers in Malta. The QA audit provides an opportunity to assess the Standards and quality of higher education in Malta against the expectations and practices of provision across the European Higher Education Area, and internationally.

The QA audit examines how providers manage their own responsibilities for the quality and Standards of the programmes they offer. In particular, the following issues are addressed:

- The fitness for purpose and effectiveness of internal quality assurance processes, including an examination of the systems and procedures that have been implemented and the documentation that supports them.
- The compliance with the obligations of licence holders with established regulations and any conditions or restrictions imposed by NCFHE.
- The governance and financial sustainability of providers, including assurances about the legal status of the provider, the appropriateness of corporate structures and the competence of staff with senior management responsibilities.

The QA audit benchmarks the QA system and procedures within an institution against eleven (11) Standards:

1. <u>Policy for quality assurance</u>: entities shall have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management.
2. <u>Institutional and financial probity</u>: entities shall ensure that they have appropriate measures and procedures in place to ensure institutional and financial probity.
3. <u>Design and approval of programmes</u>: self-accrediting providers shall have appropriate processes for the design and approval of their programmes of study.
4. <u>Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment</u>: entities shall ensure that programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in the learning process.
5. <u>Student admission, progression, recognition and certification</u>: entities shall consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student 'life-cycle'.
6. <u>Teaching staff</u>: entities shall assure the competence and effectiveness of their teaching staff.
7. <u>Learning resources and student support</u>: entities shall have appropriate funding for their learning and teaching activities and sufficient learning resources to fully support the students' learning experiences.
8. <u>Information management</u>: entities shall ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.
9. <u>Public information</u>: entities shall publish information about their activities which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible.
10. <u>On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes</u>: entities shall implement the 'Quality Cycle' by monitoring and periodically reviewing their programmes to ensure their continuing fitness for purpose.

11. <u>Cyclical external quality assurance</u>: entities should undergo external quality assurance, approved by NCFHE, at least once every five years.

Peer-review panels essentially ask providers the following question about their arrangements for quality management:
'What systems and procedures are in place and what evidence is there that they are working effectively?'

The approach to quality assurance can be encapsulated in a number of key questions which providers should ask themselves about their management of quality.
- What are we trying to do?
- Why are we trying to do it?
- How are we trying to do it?
- Why are we doing it that way?
- Is this the best way of doing it?
- How do we know it works?
- Could it be done better?

Answers to these questions should form the basis of the provider's critical assessment of and response to the self-evaluation questionnaire.

The approach of QA audit is not simply about checking whether providers adhere to the regulations; it examines how providers are developing their own systems in addressing the expectations of sound management of educational Standards and the quality of their learning and teaching provision. It does not involve the routine identification and confirmation of criteria -– a 'tick- box' approach – but a mature and reflective dialogue with providers about the ways in which they discharge their obligations for quality and the identification of existing good practices.

2.5 Specific Terms of Reference and Research Questions

Following the desk-based analysis and the scoping visit held with the provider, the panel agreed on the areas which needed to be covered during the QA process. The specific terms of reference and the main line of inquiry were strategically aligned to the principles of quality assurance in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the overall quality assurance policy and its implementation within the entity.

The peers focused their main questions to securing a better understanding and triangulating the information on five main themes:

1. The regular feedback collected from the students and staff and the use of that feedback by the institution in programme design and continued relevance of the study programmes. 2. Student/Alumni data management and use of the data for management and programme decisions.

3. Strengthening of pedagogical skills and professional development.

4. Assessment criteria, methodology and feedback provided to students.

5. Organisation and liaison with employers for the work-based learning component.

The review team decided that, as part of an enhancement-led approach, it would issue recommendations linked to all parts of the operations of the institute. The report therefore distinguishes between:

- key recommendations (KR) which need to be implemented expediently by the institute to address weaknesses;
- recommendations for improvement which are merely suggestions based on the panel analysis and observations.

3. Analysis and Findings of Panel

3.1 Standard 1: Policy for Quality Assurance

Policy for quality assurance: entities shall have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management.

Main findings

AZ has processes and procedures in place for the assurance of the quality and standards of its programmes and education provision and a clear commitment to the enhancement of quality in its work. The entity has a quality assurance policy that is publicly available on its website. This is also complemented by a number of policy and procedural documents including a Programme Design and Review Policy that was made available to the peers. Considering the size of the entity, the volume of students and the number of programmes, the Youth.Inc policy and procedures are well documented and provide a good overview of the way the programmes are managed and delivered.

The QA policy outlines the different roles within the institutions and details the procedures and processes followed by the AZ. The Self-Assessment Report (SAR) compiled by the provider showed that the entity has reflected upon its own internal policies, the strategic planning of the institution, the students' involvement in QA processes and also on the review of its programmes.

QA is mainly the responsibility of the Senior Manager however ample evidence observed during the audit visit has reflected that the quality assurance procedures and actions are equally owned by other professionals within the entity. Youth Workers, youths, employers and parents are substantially involved and visibly committed to quality assurance practices. The eagerness to provide a quality educational service to its young students shone through in their commitment and concern to help the young people grow and mature. The panel saw how all the staff is committed to developing in the young people both the vocational and technical skills (which eventually might lead them to gain employment or further their students in the subject area) as well as in the transversal, social and independent living skills (such as self-management, presentation skills, time management, communication skills, etc.

The Panel noted that the Senior Manager is highly involved in all quality assurance initiatives and provides direction in all activities of the institution. Furthermore, during the audit, the panel noted that the CEO, the Senior Manager, the youth workers and the trainers are in constant communication with each other in order to ensure quality within the organisation's mechanisms. Nonetheless, the panel has taken note that there are some areas for improvement on all the standards.

The QA policy (as seen by the Panel) includes references to the accreditation process, procedures for grievances, disciplinary procedures, registration and admission and work placements. The QA policy is complemented by a number of policies which the AZ upholds such as, the Protection, Safety and Well-being of Young People Good practice Guide, the Health and Safety Policy, Data Protection Privacy Policy, Staff Training and Development Policy and Youth Workers Code of Ethics.

Student feedback is an integral part of AZ quality assurance system. The main source of feedback comes through informal channels from the youth workers' close contact with the student. During the site visit, the panel ascertained that, not only are students continuously encouraged to provide feedback but that the students feel very comfortable doing so. The size of the entity and the number of students permit such feedback to reach the trainers, the youth workers and the Senior Manager in a very direct and timely manner allowing for amendments and updates to be carried out as necessary.

Although the relationship with external stakeholders, including employers and parents, is not formally documented, the panel could confirm that the AZ seeks to foster and develop such relationships. Both the employers and parents confirmed that, from time to time, they have provided feedback to AZ about the content of the courses and the skills which young persons need to develop.

Good Practice Identified

GP 1.1 All the professional staff which the peers interviewed had a very good understanding of Quality Assurance processes; however, the youth workers demonstrated a very sound understanding and appreciation of the development of the QA processes. This is being highlighted since they are a pivotal cohort in the administration of this entity's programmes.

Overall judgement for Standard

AZ meets Standard 1.

Recommendations for improvement

R1.1 Key Recommendation: The institution should establish processes and procedures to collect feedback from employers and other external stakeholders periodically in a formalised manner and feed them into quality assurance processes. Such processes could range from conducting regular surveys of stakeholders to establishing a consultative committee. The institution should be able to demonstrate documentation which collates the results of the recommended collection of feedback, such as a report.

3.2 Standard 2: Institutional Probity

Institutional and financial probity: entities shall ensure that they have appropriate measures and procedures in place to ensure institutional and financial probity.

Main findings

Educational institutions within the public sector are already subject to stringent national financial and administrative regulations and oversight and to national legislation that regulates the appointment of senior personnel and the selection of staff. The EQA does not seek to duplicate the

national regulatory structures and procedures already in place. Thus, for educational institutions within the public sector, Standard 2 is interpreted in terms of the capacity and resources of the provider to implement effectively its internal quality assurance procedures to improve the learning experience.

The full-time management and administrative staff at central office of the Entity and the part-time coordinating staff at in the centres, are appointed according to established public service procedures that have in-built due diligence and fitness for purpose considerations.

AZ need to develop an organigram of the institution, with detailed roles and responsibilities especially at management level.

AZ has a very good EU projects management structure and has managed to tap into EU funds to further enhance and strengthen its operations.

There is a clear need for additional human resources at both management and administrative levels so that the vision of management in terms of the quality and scale of provision, the internal mechanisms of due diligence, and the capacity for data-informed review, can be fulfilled.

Headship positions are deemed to be fit for purpose and recruitment in accordance to national legislation that regulates the appointment of Headship positions.

Good Practice Identified

GP2.1   AZ has a well-structured EU projects management coordination point.

Overall judgement for Standard

AZ meets Standard 2.

Recommendations for improvement

R2.1 Key Recommendation: AZ shall develop adetailed organigram thatoutlines roles and responsibilities s at management level.

3.3 Standard 3: Design and Approval of Programmes

Design and approval of programmes: self-accrediting providers shall have appropriate processes for the design and approval of their programmes of study.

Main findings

The three Youth.Inc courses offered by AZ are on a full time basis and available for students between 16 and 21 years. Youth.Inc comprises courses at levels 1. 2 and 3 as follows:
Level 1: Access Skills for Independent Living & Working Life
Level 2 : Skills for Vocational Pathways
Level 3 : Connect: Skills & Competences for the Working Life.

Students entering at Level 1 can progress to the subsequent levels upon successful completion of the course. The information provided by AZ indicates that the agency offers other courses that are not accredited. The concept of Youth.Inc has evolved over a number of years with the involvement of a number of stakeholders and professionals in the education and vocational sectors, leading to the current NCFHE accredited programmes. Indeed, the programme has been developed and accredited in terms of NCFHE requirements including: identified entry requirements, learning outcomes, ECTS, MQF Level rating and assessment criteria.

The panel has been provided with evidence that substantiates the fact that extensive research was carried out prior to the accreditation of the programme. AZ management conducts on-going evaluation with all stakeholders including youth workers, employers, parents and students to further improve on the programmes. The evaluation and review is both formal and informal. Through the interviews conducted throughout the on-site visit, the review panel confirms that the courses are primarily non-formal   and based on the pedagogies of applied learning through experiential activities. This context entails the need for balance between formal and non-formal programme evaluation. The review panel gathered sufficient evidence to note that this balance is achieved. The programme was also evaluated through an ongoing Erasmus+ (KA2) project which involved a full review of the level 1 course. The information gathered throughout on-site visit provides positive feedback about the work placement that forms a substantial part of the programme at each of the three course levels. The review panel observed that the placement structure, design and implementation are successfully assisting the cohort of students following Youth.Inc courses to develop into skilled, empowered, independent citizens and workers. The placement opportunity facilitates the students' transition to employability and independent living.

The review panel notes that a non-formal youth work approach is prevalent across all aspects of the programme. A personal youth worker is assigned to assist each student throughout the course. This approach is enabling students to gain the confidence, skills and attitudes necessary to overcome personal limitations and challenges and succeed. The panel noticed that a number of students, youth workers and trainers highlighted the need for more time extending beyond 10 weeks for each module as a means of facilitating effective module coverage and hands on practice, especially with students with learning difficulties and/or lack of confidence.

Good practice identified

GP3.1   The review panel notes that a non-formal youth work approach is prevalent across all aspects of the programme.

GP3.2   A personal youth worker is assigned to assist each student throughout the course. This approach is enabling students to gain the confidence, skills and attitudes necessary to overcome personal limitations and challenges and succeed.

Overall judgement for Standard

AZ surpasses Standard 3.

Recommendations for improvement

R3.1   AZ may wish to consider the design and development of an MQF Level 4 Youth.Inc programme to facilitate another opportunity for further training to their student cohort.

R3.2   AZ may consider extending the timeframe for module delivery to exceed 10 weeks, where possible.

R3.3   AZ may consider extending the integrated module approach through project work adopted for the MQF Level 1 course, to the other two courses.

3.4 Standard 4: Student-centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment: entities shall ensure that programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in the learning process.

Main findings

The Youth.Inc programme addresses and reaches out to vulnerable young persons (including young persons who are socially deprived and early school leavers) and nurtures their confidence to achieve life skills, employability skills and independence. The programme is implemented through a hands-on, applied, practical approach facilitating the learning process for the target audience.

The tailor-made individual support by both the managerial and the youth worker/trainer professionals ensures successful retention of students and completion of programmes of studies.
The review team has observed a very good balance of guidance/hand-holding and challenging strategies through individually-assigned youth workers that leads to development of transversal skills in the young person's, making them more- autonomous independent learners.

The youth workers, trainers and AZ management provide support and encourage regular communication with the students, particularly during breaks and one-to-one encounters. Members of AZ management are also present throughout many of the sessions, so as to keep in touch with the students, regularly acting as mentors for any queries related to the students' daily and course needs. Individual youth workers are also assigned to the students, alongside with mentoring and support by the AZ management when necessary. The review panel was informed that such practices strengthen the bond between the students themselves and between students and youth workers/trainers. Indeed, from all interviews with students, alumni, trainers and youth workers it is very evident that a climate of mutual respect within the student-to-student and the student-to-teacher relationship has been established.

Students interviewed by the review panel expressed satisfaction with the course structure and especially with the way youth workers and trainers explain and contextualise taught material according to students' abilities, needs and creativity. From the interviews with students and staff, the review panel observed that trainers employed a variety of pedagogic methods deemed appropriate to facilitate student engagement, interest, learning and motivation. The Youth.Inc

courses offer students a wide range of modules although some students still mentioned their wish to have more extended module choices (eg. music).

Each module allocates time for self-study. The aim of the self-study is to engage students to further practise skills encountered within the course, complementing the work conducted during the sessions and consolidating skills acquisition. The review panel observed that the self-study is aligned to tasks held during the course. The review panel observed that students are well supported and guided by trainers/youth workers through direct/ongoing feedback related to self-study tasks. Students often use personal resources for self-study (eg. hair equipment for hairdressing). In cases where such equipment is not available trainers consider lending it to students to allow the students to maximize the learning process with borrowed equipment.

From the various interviews conducted with students, employers, parents, alumni and youth workers, the review team has gained sufficient insight that work placements offer a highly valid and relevant learning experience to the young persons in Youth.Inc courses, leading to better employment opportunities. The review team has noticed, in particular, that the relationship between AZ and the employers is well structured in terms of ensuring skills development of the youths. Interviews with employers indicate the need to ensure that employers are fully informed about a student's learning condition and/or disability prior to placement allocation.

Progress and development of students is measured through non-formal assessment procedures that are in place. The assessment strategies employed are aligned to the non-formal project based teaching prevalent in the Youth.Inc course. Indeed, emphasis on skills based assessment procedures is evident. The review panel observed that students appreciate the hands-on and practical nature of assessment tasks. However, the panel has noted that no specific person in charge of assessment to coordinate and streamline assessment practices, current assessment scoring practices are generic and need better definition of criteria and sub criteria to gauge student achievement.

Good practice identified

GP 4.1 The individual, personalised, continuous support provided to students by AZ youth workers, trainers and AZ management is a valuable component of the experience for students enrolled in Youth.Inc courses.

GP 4.2 The individual, personalised, continuous support provided by AZ youth workers, trainers and AZ management to students is a valuable component of the experience for students enrolled in Youth.Inc courses.

Overall judgement for Standard

AZ requires improvement to meet Standard 4.

Recommendations for improvement

R4.1 Key Recommendation: Module assessment procedures should be updated to ensure coherency in allocation of marks for common criteria across different modules (eg Attendance, Participation, Group Work, etc).

R4.2 Key Recommendation: Trainers/youth workers should break down further and create sub criteria for each assessment criterion related to specific skills and competences, for each assessment task pertaining to relevant modules.

R4.3 Key Recommendation: Employers should be better informed in advance about any learning conditions, capabilities and/ or physical limitations of the students so as to be better prepared to welcome them at the place of work and assign appropriate duties during the work placement. AZ should seek to structure such an exchange of information during the academic year before students proceed to their work placements.

R4.4 AZ may consider recruiting an Assessment coordinator to facilitate and streamline all assessment procedures, and to monitor/verify assessment tasks and processes across different modules and subject areas.

3.5 Standard 5: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification

> <u>Student admission, progression, recognition and certification</u>: entities shall consistently apply pre- defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student 'life-cycle'.

Main findings

The review team has gained insight into the procedures used by the entity to reach the niche target audience of young persons who would benefit from the training provided, and it results that the entity has diverse forms of student recruitment systems. Primarily, it has established an extensive network of professionals (e.g. INCOs, LSEs, Career Guidance Teachers, Youth Workers, etc) to promote and redirect potential students to follow the courses offered by the entity. It also has an outreach setup in place, where through detached youth work and youth cafés it attracts specific cohorts of young people who could benefit from this course.

The entity's policies include a clear reference to accreditation of prior certified learning. On admission, students indicate whether they have already followed any courses such as ECDL, First Aid, Food Handling or have achieved any formal certifications such as O Levels. The entity takes these into consideration when providing exemptions from particular modules.

The panel noted that although the entity does not make reference to learning or physical impairments in its registration forms, it recognises and takes into consideration access arrangements already made during previous schooling. In relation to this, the fact that the entity has no one-to-one LSEs engaged is not to the detriment of the students' learning experience as this

reinforces the entity's philosophy of promoting independence and responsibility through experiential learning in small groups, with the personalised guidance of youth workers. The panel has also noted that the admissions process includes a group interview and proficiency tests (Maltese, English and Maths) to facilitate the grouping of students. Induction meetings with parents and students take place in September to provide information about specific tailor-made programmes for the young people.

The courses accredited at the different MQF levels are made up of a number of modules or subjects, which collectively provide the students with a variety of technical/vocational and transversal skills. Each level creates acts as a stepping stone for students to progress, not only within the scope of this programme, but also in their personal and social life. Progression between levels of Youth.Inc is smooth and students progressing from one level to another need not formally re-apply. However the youth workers compile a personal profile for each young person at each level. The personal profile also includes the preference for work-based learning. With regards to progression opportunities within each level, the entity has a number of inter-agency agreements that aid in maximising possibilities through which the students can further develop their skills in a more focused and professional manner, especially with regards to the drama and art modules.

All students are provided with a Certificate of Achievement (if they complete successfully the programme) or a Certificate of Competence (if they only partially complete a number of modules from the programme). Students who complete or choose to terminate their course of studies are interviewed before they leave the institution and are supported to remain in education and/or employment. This practice is not documented.

The panel has heard from parents, employers and students concerning the need to extend the Youth.Inc programme up to MQF Level 4 in order to further equip the students with the necessary work, academic and life skills. Although this level is not currently on offer by the entity, the students still have a good foundation to further their academic or work aspirations, as the current 3-tiered level course is recognised by other further and higher education institutions and some employers. The panel has heard that the entity does not currently have in place formal agreements with other educational institutions in Malta that facilitate smooth transitions for students processing to further education.

Good practice identified

GP 5.1 The entity's policy and procedure document refers to accreditation of prior certified learning. The peers have seen how this is implemented and have appreciated the valorising of all the learning which the young person has achieved.

GP 5.2 AZ issues a 'certificate of competence' to students who do not complete the study programme in which they are enrolled. The certificate includes a list of modules which the student has concluded successfully. This is intended to facilitate the transition into further learning.

GP 5.3 AZ puts emphasis on outreach through 'detached youth work' which targets and facilitates the admission of vulnerable young people to the programme.

Overall judgement for Standard

AZ meets Standard 5.

R5.1   Key Recommendation: Further to, and in alignment to Key Recommendation R1.1, the AZ should have procedures in place to document exit interviews as a means of having further feedback mechanism which feeds back into the review and development of the programmes.

R5.2   It is recommended that the entity seeks to formalise the agreement related to progression of students at other institutions (eg. MCAST, ITS, others) for further studies.

3.6 Standard 6: Teaching Staff

Teaching staff: entities shall assure the competence and effectiveness of their teaching staff.

Main findings

The Youth.Inc teaching staff comprises both youth workers and trainers. Through the years the number of trainers has been reduced and currently only 10 trainers are employed on a contract basis. The eligibility requirement to work as a youth worker at AZ is having a youth workers' warrant; while the requirement to work as a trainer is holding a teachers' warrant. These requirements secure the professionalism and high standards in the engaged personnel. The recruitment of all teaching staff follows rigorous Public Service Commission (PSC) regulations.

AZ management holds regular weekly meetings for youth workers, however no regular meetings are held for trainers. The meetings offer youth workers and AZ management ample opportunity for peer to peer support/feedback and exchange of ideas. At times specific themes are selected and professional experts are invited to discuss/explore the theme.

Despite the fact that weekly meetings are held, the trainers who are engaged on a service contract basis are not included. Similarly, the trainers do not share the staff rooms or the common areas which are typically used by the youth workers or the educators. Such a situation limits the interaction and sharing of knowledge and expertise.

The trainers are qualified educators in the modules they teach and the review panel can confirm that trainers steer away from formal teaching styles and indeed adopt project-based, hands-on, practical non-formal approaches to engage the students and facilitate learning.

The review panel concludes that no overarching CPD plan is in place. Also, no standard procedure exist on how resources are allocated for capacity building resources. However, AZ management offers a range of opportunities for continuous professional development to youth workers. The training opportunities for youth workers also extend beyond a national level; indeed, AZ taps EU

funding to provide youth workers training opportunities abroad. All youth workers were provided with training in ECDL, First Aid, Mental Health, Entrepreneurship, and Food Handling. From the interviews held the review panel concludes that trainers seek their own professional training on an individual level.

AZ management conducts regular visits during sessions to gain direct feedback. AZ management puts forward direct verbal timely feedback related to teaching/learning resources, student needs, to both youth workers or trainers when necessary.

Good practice identified

GP 6.1 The peers noted that the weekly meeting is also used as a 'peer learning and group supervision session' (SAR pg 30) which involves the possibility of discussion, evaluation, external speakers and building of capacity for staff members.

GP 6.2 The peers were appreciative of the creative manner in which the entity has made use of EU funded projects and initiatives to add capacity building opportunities for staff.

Overall judgement for Standard

AZ meets Standard 6.

Recommendations for improvement

R6.1 Key Recommendation: The entity should develop a medium/long term overarching plan for continuous professional development to provide direction for all initiatives taken.

R6.2 Key Recommendation: Trainers should also be included in the weekly meetings, at least periodically, to provide them with the background philosophy of the entity and to also provide them with the possibility of capacity building, as necessary.

R6.3 Key Recommendation: The entity should provide trainers with a more direct, standardized procedure to request capacity building resources within specific subject areas.

R6.4 The entity should consider extending training and capacity building opportunities to trainers who are engaged on a contract basis.

R6.5 The entity should also take into account? any CPD initiatives taken by the individual trainers in an ongoing manner.

R6.6 It is recommended that the entity creates a meeting space for trainers (such as a staff room) to facilitate their integration with the full time staff members and their networking amongst each other.

3.7 Standard 7: Learning Resources and Student Support

<u>Learning resources and student support</u>: entities shall have appropriate funding for their learning and teaching activities and sufficient learning resources to fully support the students' learning experiences.

Main findings

The review panel has viewed and experienced the infrastructural set up that facilitates student centred teaching/learning. A variety of learning resources are available matching the needs of the specific course level and module. The review panel was able to confirm that any necessary resources are purchased to facilitate student learning across each module. However, AZ management can facilitate further availability of resources within specific modules for students' whose socio-economic situation might not allow them to have even the most basic of resources.

The panel was informed that no formal library facilities are available for the young persons at the entity. The common space with reading facilities is more akin to and is referred to as the youth information area. However, the panel has experienced that the absence of a library or specific technical equipment has not, in any way, stifled or limited the achievements of young persons since non formal learning requires different forms of autonomous learning resources beyond a physical library concept. Ample support is given by all professionals involved to nurture students' knowledge, skills and competence thus facilitating progression.

The panel noted that the terminology used and philosophy the entity holds complements the informal educational setting, in that, instead of being referred to as 'classrooms', the rooms are given names, and the format of such rooms also moves away from the traditional mainstream classroom setup. Furthermore, the number of students in each class is relatively small so as to facilitate the communication between the students and the trainer and among the students themselves, with the aim of creating a cohesive environment conducive to learning, especially bearing in mind the number of students with a physical or learning impairment. The panel has heard that the internet bandwidth is limited in some rooms, creating a challenge for the trainers and youth workers to use online learning resources during meetings and lessons.

The panel heard that, although the students benefit from a stipend, a maintenance grant, and supplementary grants to purchase any resources required for the course, in particular circumstances, where the entity is aware of the very restricted socio-economic condition of the family background, the entity also provides tailor-made assistance for students' needs for physical items. The youth workers' knowledge of assistance programmes available through other agencies also ensures that the youths are guided to access other social services as necessary (such as the children's fund operated by Appogg).

The trained youth workers provide sustained pastoral care to all students encountering difficulties during their course of studies. In this way, they are facilitating empowerment and confidence building in young people. Professionals working at the agency, including the youth workers, the trainers and the administrative staff also provide pastoral care and support on an individual basis to ensure course completion and progression. Such care and support was reinforced by the recent Collective Agreement for youth workers working at this entity. Youth workers and trainers have been allocated additional funding for unlimited access to place phone calls from their work mobile

phones to reach out and speak with the young people as often as necessary. This facility has strengthened the possibility for regular unlimited informal care for the youth workers towards their youths. The sessions focusing on life skills which are held on a weekly basis, offer a platform whereby students are given the possibility to express themselves with the youth workers, giving the youth worker additional insight to the students' strengths and weaknesses. By having such comprehensive and dedicated supervision, the youth worker is able to identify the varying conditions and situations the students go through and therefore can guide them or refer them to other professionals accordingly. One-to-one follow up with youths is not scheduled formally. Youth workers follow up informally in between sessions or during break times.

Youth workers also act as the liaison officers between the entity and the employers during the work-based learning portion of the course programmes. Employers have confirmed the consistent and dedicated manner in which the youth workers mentor, challenge and support the young persons at the place of work. As a means to further guide the students in choosing their academic or career path, in level 3 of their course of studies students have a seminar where they meet a variety of HR personnel, thus allowing them to explore the different industry needs and demands. Moreover, outings to the different work places are organised by the youth workers on a regular basis to further enhance the students' knowledge of the different working environments and different working options.

To date, the entity has not received any formal appeal requests from students. Such appeals policy is formally in place within the Assessment Policy. Any misunderstandings or potential grievances are usually dealt during one-to-one sessions with the youth workers, the trainers or the management where students are given the possibility to raise any queries with regards to their assessment in an informal manner.

The entity collaborates with other entities, by means of Erasmus+ partnerships and funding. These collaborations are key to offering upskilling and reskilling opportunities to the staff members through organic learning environments in collaboration with both informal and formal education stakeholders. Such training involves partners who are experienced in recognizing and apprehending the dynamics of the vulnerable cohort/target audience which the Agency deals with.

Good practice identified

GP 7.1 This entity has set up a good support system that enables the target cohort to find the adequate care and support both during its learning experience within the remit of the course outline and also outside the academic setup. The support and pastoral care provided to students which, over the years, has led to the creation of a community and social network for students (who have always been on the periphery of the education system) far outweighs the need for technical resources within the various training spaces. As a result of the unlimited time and constant effort dedicated by all the professionals within the entity to ensure that the students are well-cared for and supported adequately, the students have a habitat where they can learn and develop themselves holistically with the possibility to reach their potential.

GP 7.2 The youth workers are trained to reach out to other social services available for physical resources support which students coming from very challenging socio-economic backgrounds might need from time to time.

GP 7.3 On completion of the Youth.Inc course, the young persons are supported by youth workers to pursue their career towards their desired sector either through additional training (at other institutions) or by seeking employment.

GP7.4 It was noted that the session attendance sheets, which each trainer is obliged to fill in during each training session, includes a dedicated space for qualitative, descriptive comments. While such attendance sheets are typically only used for record keeping of attendance, in the case of Aġenzija Żgħażagħ, the qualitative/descriptive comments - which trainers note are used by the management and the youth workers - can help gauge the students who might be going through difficult moments.

GP 7.5 The infrastructural set up facilitates and stimulates the non-formal student centred teaching/learning.

Overall judgement for Standard

AZ surpasses Standard 7.

Recommendations for improvement

R7.1 It is recommended to further develop the youth information area to also include educational learning resources.

R7.2 AZ could seek to provide further better connectivity to facilitate the use of online learning resources within the sessions.

R7.3 The panel appreciated the life skills sessions with all youths. The youth workers could seek to schedule one-to-one personalised sessions to discuss the way forward in terms of targeted needs.

3.8 Standard 8: Information Management

> Information management: entities shall ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

Main findings

Student information is stored in physical student files which are retained centrally by the Youth Workers. These files are kept in a central repository and all youth workers have access to all the files. Such files are not retained digitally and thus limit the number of youth workers who might need to access the files while risking misplacing or missing files. Participation in the modules, in terms of attendance, is closely recorded and used to monitor student progression.

The initial personal profile (filled at the beginning of each academic year) is included in the personal file and referred to by the Youth Workers during the year. The personal profile includes details related to the student's abilities, educational achievements, aims for career progression and also work placement interests.

Evaluation sheets filled by the students are also kept on file for ease of reference. The feedback provided by the students is collated into one evaluative report and used for the update of session plans and to provide trainers and youth workers with constructive feedback on their delivery.

The panel has heard of a tracer study which is carried out after 3 months and after 6 months from when the young persons leave the Youth.Inc programme. Unfortunately, the results of such tracer study are not available as a stand-alone report. Furthermore, the entity provides youth workers to animate and facilitate an informal meeting space, referred to as ' the Msida Youth café' every Friday for youths in general. Students and alumni are invited to remain in contact with the entity and youth workers through this social initiative. This weekly contact is an informal mechanism of the agency to remain in touch with the youths as a means of tracking their career and personal progression after they have terminated their formal Youth.Inc programme.

Good Practice identified

GP 8.1 The peer noted that the AZ follows up with all students who conclude their study period with the Youth.Inc programme after 3 months and then again after 6 months.

GP8.2 The informality of the Youth Hubs, operated by the AZ, create a safe space for the students to network between alumni and the current cohort of students to further strengthen the social support structures, while at the same time create the opportunity for the AZ to track the progress (both professional and personal) of the youths after they have left formally the Youth.Inc programme.

Overall judgement for Standard

AZ meets Standard 8.

Recommendations for improvement

R8.1 Key Recommendation: The tracer studies which are carried periodically after the students conclude their study period at AZ should feed into a stand-alone report. Such a report could be consulted during the review of the programmes.

R8.2 It is recommended that the AZ starts the process to digitalise the personal files for backup purposes and ease of reference by all youth workers as necessary.

3.9 Standard 9: Public Information

Public information: entities shall publish information about their activities which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible.

The review panel heard that youth workers are very visible in the media to promote the entity and the Youth.Inc programme in particular. This is further complemented by more direct outreach with youths at recreation places and youth cafes, and in schools through various professionals, targeting in particular the youths who would benefit most from the programme. Outreach by the youth workers is also done through face-to-face interaction, and TV and radio participation as a means of sharing information about the unique educational service offered at the Youth.Inc.

The website has a basic design that works well aesthetically and functionally. The review panel saw that the website includes all the details as expected by this standard, in that it includes all the relevant information related to all the programmes offered by the entity, the content pertaining to each level and the MQF level rating for each course. Moreover, the website also includes some of the entity's policies and procedures. There is a media section that includes pictures of successful events, however there seems to be limited visibility of student placements and success stories and no reference to successful student experiences. It would be interesting to see students' testimonials on the website. Making public this information could help other young people and potential applicants to make a more informed choice on whether the Youth.Inc would be the right programme for them.

On registering for the course, students and parents are informed of initial meetings which are held prior to the start of the academic year. During these meetings, parents and students are provided with ample information about the programme as well as visits to the different workshops and rooms where lessons and meetings are held. In this manner, the parents and the students are able to experience beforehand the learning environment provided during the course.

Good practice identified

GP 9.1 The peers have noted that the outreach which the youth workers do, the verbal communication, the face-to-face interaction, and the TV and radio presence are critical in sharing the information about the unique educational service offered by the Youth.Inc.

Overall judgement for Standard

AZ meets Standard 9.

Recommendations for improvement

R 9.1 Students' testimonials could be included in the website to give visibility to the successful experiences which the students have while following the Youth.Inc programmes.

3.10 Standard 10: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes

> Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes: entities shall implement the 'Quality Cycle' by monitoring and periodically reviewing their programmes to ensure their continuing fitness for purpose.

Main findings

During the visit the panel could see that there is clear on-going monitoring and review of programmes being delivered by AZ. The panel was presented with several examples which showed that the entity is serious in its intention to take into consideration feedback from the various stakeholders during the review process.

The panel heard of how the AZ seeks different sources of feedback and evaluation mechanisms from all stakeholders (employers, parents, alumni, youth hub, regional hub and current cohorts). In particular, employers are actively involved in providing feedback to the liaison youth workers about the young persons.

Students provide formal feedback at different intervals of the education process at AZ. After the first semester and at the end of the academic year they provide written feedback. During the weekly meetings with the respective youth workers, they are queried about ongoing progression, ability to master challenging tasks within the different modules and personal achievements and difficulties. During their work placement, students and youth workers meet with their employers on a weekly basis to take stock of the developments and provide feedback. Furthermore, the AZ is rather keen to uphold an 'open door policy' at all levels of the management and academic structures. Students have told the panel that they feel comfortable reaching out also to the Senior Management, as and when necessary.

The panel also heard of the Erasmus Project which is currently ongoing. The project's dual aim of capacity building and programme review fits squarely within the aims and objectives of the entity, through its collaboration with international partners (Mets and the YMCA) with regard to training. During the project life time, the entity will have reviewed the Youth.Inc programme at MQF Level 1, while it would have built capacity on how to review programmes. In parallel, through the same project, the AZ is building capacity on 'peer to peer' mentoring for its youth workers. The panel has heard how such an initiative has contributed to their professional development.

Good practice identified

GP 10.1 Over the years, the AZ, has sought to maximise the use of EU funded projects to review the education programmes as well as create capacity building opportunities for its staff members abroad. Funding for such activities would not have been possible had the entity not embarked on such projects.

GP10.2 The AZ has recently introduced the concept of 'peer to peer' mentoring between its youth workers, also as a means of building capacity.

GP10.3 Within the scope of one of the Erasmus-funded projects, the AZ is collaborating with international partners (Mets and the YMCA) with regard to training, sharing of expertise, curriculum review and development and supervision practices. One of the main outcomes of the project is a review of Youth.Inc programme at MQF Level 1.

Overall judgement for Standard

AZ meets Standard 10.

Recommendations for improvement

R10.1 Key recommendation - The AZ should establish a structured process for monitoring and cyclical review of the Youth.Inc programmes that also describes the resources necessary and also involve internal and external stakeholders (such as alumni, parents and employers) in such review.

3.11 Standard 11: Cyclical External Quality Assurance

> Entities should undergo external quality assurance by, or with the approval of, the NCFHE on a cyclical basis, according to NCFHE guidelines, once every five years.

Main findings

The panel has found AZ to be particularly pro-active, receptive, supportive and self-reflective during the entire quality assurance process. The AZ has provided the SAR and additional documentation in very timely manner. All the professionals interviewed, especially the youth workers, have been extremely forthcoming and eager to contribute to the external quality assurance process. The AZ fulfilled this standard by virtue of facilitating so efficiently and effectively all the logistical aspects of the scoping hosting and the external quality audit referred to in this report.

Overall judgement for Standard

AZ surpasses sStandard 11.

4. Response by the Provider

1. Preamble

In 2014, Youth.Inc came under the remit and management of Aġenzija Żgħażagħ and the 2014/15 academic year witnessed the first full session of the programme under the management of the agency. Since assuming responsibility for the programme, Aġenzija Żgħażagħ has made significant changes and adopted innovative approaches to its implementation.

Youth.Inc is an inclusive educational experiential programme for young people between the ages of 16 and 21 who wish to continue to build on their educational experience and gain more knowledge, values and skills to either enter the labour market or gain qualifications to continue further training. The programme is based on the concept that success can be achieved by students if they are engaged and motivated to actively participate in an applied learning environment with a practical approach. The methods of learning on this programme are distinctly different from the learning methods in formal primary and secondary education. It requires young people's commitment to expand their knowledge outside the classroom and develop their personal and employability skills for the world of work. Applied learning is based on experiential learning and is for students who prefer a more practical style of learning. One of the key attractions of this type of learning is that students are given the opportunity to apply their learning in a real life or work context.

In 2016, revised programmes at Level 1 - Access Skills for Independent Living and Working Life, and at Level 2 - Skills for Vocational Pathways were submitted to the NCFHE for approval and validation. A new Level 3 programme - Connect: Skills and Competencies for the Workplace, which expands the learning opportunities and employment prospects of young people participating in the Youth.Inc programme, was also developed and submitted to the NCFHE for approval and validation.

For the 2018/2019 programme, 27 young people received the full qualification certificate for Level 1, 40 young people receive the full qualification certificate for Level 2 and 21 young people received the full qualification certificate for Level 3.

2. Response to comments and proposals made by the Peer Review Panel in connection with Standards where the judgment was "Standard met or surpassed".

Of the 11 standards determined by the Audit, the Provider (Aġenzija Żgħażagħ) was deemed to have met 6 of these standards - Policy for Quality Assurance; Institutional Probity; Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification; Teaching Staff; Information Management; and Public Information. The Provider was deemed to have met and surpassed 4 standards - Design and Approval of Programmes; Learning Resources and Student Support; On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes; and Cyclical External Quality Assurance.

With regard to the comments and proposals made by the Peer Review Panel, in a number of instances the timeframe for implementing recommendations was during or by the end of the 2019/2020 academic year. Given that the Audit Report was not submitted to the Provider until 5th of February instead of August as it is stipulated in regulations it was not possible to adhere to the

timeframe in all instances. The recommendations set out as regards to Standards 1, 5, 8 and 9 will be undertaken. In the context of Standard 2, it should be noted that the Provider has a clear and transparent organisational structure in place. With regard to Standard 6, the Provider has a strong focus on staff training and professional development. Staff at all levels are encouraged and facilitated to pursue further training and professional development and other measures such as supervised practice and the creation of a learning organisations are being actively pursued and promoted. Nonetheless, the recommendations in respect of Standards 2 and 6 will also be pursued.

In a number of areas - Design and Approval of Programmes; Learning Resources and Student Support; On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes; and Cyclical External Quality Assurance the Provider was deemed to have met and surpassed the requisite standard. While the Provider will endeavour to further strengthen the programme as recommended by the Review Panel, further extending capacity and expanding it to Level 4 will be considered in the context of the new national youth policy which will commence in 2021.

3. Response to comments and proposals made by the Peer Review Panel in connection with Standards for which the Peer Review Panel decided "Improvement is required"

In only one of the 11 standards - Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment - were improvements recommended to meet the standard. The recommendations on module assessment procedures and assessment criteria will be implemented during the 2020/21 academic year while enhanced information exchange and interface with employers will also be put in place during the 2020/21 academic year.

Annex: Review Panel Bio Notes

In the setting up of the review panel for Aġenzija Żgħażagħ, the NCFHE sought to maintain a high degree of diligence in the process of selection of the members of Peer Review Panel. The Panel sought to be composed of specialists in quality assurance to act as External Peers, professionals and practitioners of quality assurance frameworks, as well as students who, prior to the audits, attended professional Training Seminars organised by the NCFHE.

The following bio notes present the profiles of the members of Peer Review Panel. The bio notes are correct as at the time of when the QA audit was carried out **7th** and **8th May 2019.**

Head of Review Panel/External Peer:

Ms Edel Cassar is an educator by profession with an educational background in psychology, sociology, human resources and training. Her work experience started off as a teacher and proceeded towards specialisation in EU projects, in particular funding coordination in the public sector. Ms Cassar occupied the position of Chief Executive Officer within the Commission for Further and Higher Education, the entity responsible for recognition, validation and accreditation of further and higher education. Ms Cassar also headed the National Skills Council and the Scholarships Unit within the Ministry for Education and Employment and is now spearheading to the Strategy Development of the Malta College of the Arts, Science and Technology. Ms Cassar is also a visiting lecturer at the University of Malta.

Peer Reviewer:

Ms Desiree Scicluna Bugeja currently holds the position of Assistant Director within the Directorate for Learning & Assessment Programmes (MEDE). She is responsible for STEM subjects and coordinates a team of seventeen curriculum leaders in the field of STEM education. Together with a highly committed team, Ms Scicluna Bugeja ensures quality STEM education across primary and secondary sectors. She is the national coordinator of a number of European projects including Scientix, Teach-UP, SYSTEMIC and CDG4E. Ms Scicluna Bugeja has a keen interest in educational assessment and evaluation and has often lectured undergraduate and qualified educators re quality and standards in educational practices. Further to the initial degree in teacher education, Ms Scicluna Bugeja attained a postgraduate diploma in Youth Studies, and a Masters in Educational Evaluation & Assessment.

Student Peer Reviewer:

Tiziana Gatt is a University of Malta student reading for a Master of Arts in Health, Medicine and Society. She read for a B.Sc.(Hons) in Sport and Active Lifestyles, and a Diploma in Management Studies graduate. She also holds an Award Certificate in Teaching Adults.