



Malta
Further & Higher
Education Authority

External Quality Assurance

Audit Report

21 ACADEMY

Carried out on

8th and 9th November 2023

mfhea.mt

Quality education for
confident futures .

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Abbreviations List

CPD	Continuing Professional Development
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EQA/QA audit	External Quality Assurance Audit
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
Hol	Head of Institution
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
MFHEA/the Authority	Malta Further and Higher Education Authority
MQF	Malta Qualifications Framework
NCFHE	National Commission for Further and Higher Education
NQAF	National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education
QA	Quality Assurance
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAR	Self-Assessment Report
TCNs	Third Country Nationals

Executive Summary

Institutional Background

21 Academy was founded in 2018. It is the educational arm of Advisory 21 Ltd (company number C81866) which offers a range of services providing consultancy on data privacy as well as on funded programmes and educational services through 21 Academy. Advisory 21 Ltd was founded in 2017.

21 Academy delivered its first accredited MQF Level 7 award during the academic year 2018/2019. Initially the Academy had one full-time and one part-time employee, two part-time lecturers and a student population of 18. At the time of the audit visit, the Academy employed two full-time and two part-time employees delivering several courses ranging from MQF Levels 5 to 7. The student population during the 2022/23 academic year was 213 students, of which 90 were third country nationals (TCNs). During the same academic year, the number of part-time academic staff rose dramatically. 21 Academy not only delivers its training locally from the training centre in Naxxar and online but also sent academic staff to deliver training in Zahle, Lebanon.

The student profile includes local and international learners from all backgrounds and walks of life, from professionals to those who are aspiring to gain skills to start off their careers. The range of courses attests to this - awards, undergraduate, graduate and post graduate programmes in various fields of study, including business, education, law, human resources management, and more. All the courses offered by 21 Academy are homegrown.

The mission statement of 21 Academy '*Empowering Students with Cutting-Edge Skills*' is the fundamental pillar on which the vision of the Academy is built, stating that the Academy *strives 'to offer excellent academic courses that provide a quality learning experience,... fosters an atmosphere of aspiration and determination to succeed in our students... and become successful leaders in their chosen fields'*.

21 Academy prides itself on its values, academic excellence, student success, diversity, equity, and inclusion, community engagement and ethical leadership and actively implements them in its day-to-day operations to foster a positive and consistent organisational culture.

Overview of the Audit Process

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 online scoping visit and audit interviews from the premises of 21 Academy in Naxxar. The panel is responsible for reaching conclusions on all Standards. As outlined in the External Quality Audit Manual of Procedures, the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) sought external expert advice to evaluate the financial capacity of the provider. Through this report, the panel also highlighted areas of good practice which, in its view, make a positive contribution to academic standards and quality of education that are worthy of being emulated and disseminated more widely.

Timeline

Date	Milestone
11 th July 2023	Panel induction meeting
22 nd August 2023	Additional panel meeting
9 th October 2023	Desk-based analysis Scoping visit online
8 th and 9 th November 2023	Audit at 21 Academy premises in Naxxar

Summary of the Conclusions Reached by the Peer Review Panel

On the basis of the findings documented in the report, the panel has concluded that 21 Academy meets Standards 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11 and requires improvement to meet Standards 1 and 10. The recommendations in the report are meant to improve the standards already in place and to enhance good practice.

The panel made three mandatory recommendations; all shall be implemented within 6 months from the date of publication of this report. They also made ten key recommendations, six of which are to be implemented within 6 months, one within 9 months and three within 12 months from the date of publication of this report. In addition, the panel made seven recommendations.

About the External Quality Audit

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 their 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.

The MFHEA 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 the MFHEA.
- 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 11 Standards:

1. Policy for quality assurance: entities shall have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management.
2. Institutional and financial probity: entities shall ensure that they have appropriate measures and procedures in place to ensure institutional and financial probity.
3. Design and approval of programmes: self-accrediting providers shall have appropriate processes for the design and approval of their programmes of study.
4. 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.
5. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification: entities shall consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student 'life-cycle'.
6. Teaching staff: entities shall assure the competence and effectiveness of their teaching staff.
7. Learning resources and student support: entities shall have appropriate funding for their learning and teaching activities and sufficient learning resources to fully support the students' learning experiences.
8. Information management: entities shall ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

9. Public information: entities shall publish information about their activities which is clear, accurate, objective, up to date and readily accessible.
10. 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.
11. Cyclical external quality assurance: entities should undergo an external quality assurance audit by, or with the approval of, the MFHEA on a cyclical basis, according to the MFHEA guidelines, 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 the 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 rather 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.

The Peer Review Panel

The peer review panel was composed of:

Chair of Review Panel:	Ms Veronica Montebello
Peer Reviewer:	Mr Peter Calleya
Student Peer Reviewer:	Mr Jeremy Mifsud Bonnici
QA Officers (MFHEA):	Ms Fiona McCowan Mr Giacomo Annese

Specific Terms of Reference

The general terms of reference of the review panel were to review the fitness for purpose and effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes as implemented by the provider against the Standards outlined in the National Quality Assurance Framework for Further Education.

Following the desk-based analysis and the scoping visit held with the provider and pursuant to the documentation received from 21 Academy, the panel focused their questions around four main themes and used triangulation to gain a better understanding of the QA provisions in place. These were:

1. The effective management of an internal quality assurance system at 21 Academy aligned to the Standards outlined in the National Quality Assurance Framework for Further Education and with an active input from staff, learners, trainers and external stakeholders.
2. The capacity of 21 Academy to ensure a student-centred approach to teaching and learning.
3. The regular feedback collected from the learners and trainers and the use of that feedback by the institution in ongoing development of the study programmes.
4. The value added of the training provided by the institution to the different needs of Maltese society.

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 institution. The report therefore distinguishes between:

- Mandatory recommendations (MR) which are crucial to meet a Standard and **shall** be implemented within the timeframes allocated by the panel and indicated in this report.
- Key recommendations (KR) which are important to improve a Standard and **should** be implemented expediently by the institution, within the timeframes allocated by the panel, to address certain weaknesses.
- Recommendations (R) for improvement which are merely suggestions based on the panel's analyses and observations; these **could** be implemented by the institution.

Institutional Context

21 Academy is licensed by the MFHEA to operate as a Higher Education Institution (license number 2018-017) from its premises in Naxxar. The license was valid from October 2018 to October 2023 and extended to June 2024. 21 Academy can deliver courses which are formally accredited by the MFHEA up to MQF Level 7. On the dates of the audit, 21 Academy was authorised by the MFHEA to deliver the following homegrown courses listed in the MFHEA License Conditions:

MQF Level 7

1. Award in Company Law Fundamentals (4 ECTS)
2. Masters in Human Resources Management (90 ECTS) with the following exit points:
 - a. Post-Graduate Certificate in Human Resource Management (30 ECTS)
 - b. Post-Graduate Diploma in Human Resource Management (60 ECTS)
 - c. Award in Human Resource Management in Context (9 ECTS)
 - d. Award in HR Planning, Talent Acquisition, Retention and Reward Strategies (9 ECTS)
 - e. Award in Developing, Leading and Engaging People (9 ECTS)
 - f. Award in Employee Relations and Wellbeing (9 ECTS)
 - g. Award in Business Skills and Performance Management (9 ECTS)
 - h. Award in Coaching and Mentoring (9 ECTS)
 - i. Award in Research Methods (6 ECTS)

MQF Level 6

Award in Anti Money Laundering and Funding of Terrorism (4 ECTS)

MQF Level 5

1. Award in Payroll Fundamentals (4 ECTS)
2. Training the Trainer Award (4 ECTS)
3. Award in Occupational Psychology (4 ECTS)
4. Award in Introduction to Business Law in the Maltese Legal Context (4 ECTS)
5. Undergraduate Diploma in Business Administration (60 ECTS) with the following exit points:
 - a. Award in Creating a Business (8 ECTS)
 - b. Award in Financial Analysis (8 ECTS)
 - c. Award in Marketing and Research (8 ECTS)

- d. Award in Strategic Marketing (8 ECTS)
 - e. Award in Human Resource Management (8 ECTS)
 - f. Award in Managing Data and its Implications (8 ECTS)
6. Diploma in Law (Malta) (60 ECTS) with the following exit points:
- a. Award in the Maltese Legal System (3 ECTS)
 - b. Award in Legal Research and Interpretation (4 ECTS)
 - c. Award in Constitutional Law (4 ECTS)
 - d. Award in Administrative Law (2 ECTS)
 - e. Award in European Union Law (4 ECTS)
 - f. Award in Criminal Law (4 ECTS)
 - g. Award in Principles of Commercial Law (2 ECTS)
 - h. Award in Principles of Competition Law (2 ECTS)
 - i. Award in Company Law Fundamentals (4 ECTS)
 - j. Award in Information and Communication Technology Law (4 ECTS)
 - k. Award in Principles of Civil Law (8 ECTS)
 - l. Award in Overview of Tax Law (3 ECTS)
 - m. Award in Employment and Industrial Relations Law (2 ECTS)
 - n. Award in Gaming Law (3 ECTS)
 - o. Award in Banking and Finance Law (3 ECTS)
 - p. Award in Civil Procedure (4 ECTS)
 - q. Award in Maltese Education Law and Data Privacy Implications in the Education Sector (4 ECTS)
7. Award in the Behaviour of People at Work (4 ECTS)
8. Award in Office Ergonomics (4 ECTS)
9. Award in Leadership Styles and Middle Leadership for Educators (3 ECTS)
10. Award in Middle Leaders and the Leadership of Educational Institutions (4 ECTS)
11. Award in Office Management and Administration Fundamentals (5 ECTS)
12. Undergraduate Certificate in Events Management (30 ECTS) with the following exit points:
- a. Award in Handling Data Securely (2 ECTS)
 - b. Award in Health and Safety (Events Management) (3 ECTS)
 - c. Award in Budgeting (Events Management) (3 ECTS)

- d. Award in Event Marketing and Communications (3 ECTS)
13. Undergraduate Diploma in Digital Marketing (60 ECTS) with the following exit points:
- a. Award in Marketing and Research (8 ECTS)
 - b. Award in Digital Marketing Basics (8 ECTS)
 - c. Award in Basics of Search Engine Optimisation and Content Creation in CRM (8 ECTS)
 - d. Award in Social Media Marketing and Digital Advertising (8 ECTS)
 - e. Award in Corporate Digital Marketing (8 ECTS)
 - f. Award in Managing Data and Its Implications (8 ECTS)

The Diploma in Law (Malta) MQF Level 5, which was launched in 2021, is the Academy's flagship programme. This qualification fills a gap in the legal market and the demand was identified by legal professionals themselves.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic brought about unprecedented challenges, it also incentivised 21 Academy to extend the MFHEA license to delivery through digital channels, facilitating the seamless continuation of training delivery. Today, online courses cater for the majority of students, while in-person delivery is retained for international students (mostly third country nationals) pursuing specific programmes designed for the tourism market.

Analysis and Findings of Panel

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

During the audit and from the documentation provided by the provider, the panel noted that 21 Academy has clear direction and purpose. The Self-Assessment Report (SAR) compiled by 21 Academy was based around the Standards outlined in the National QA Framework for Further and Higher Education and clearly shows that the Academy has reflected upon its specific internal quality assurance standards whilst showcasing its strengths and identifying areas for improvement. The panel was given details of the Academy's strategic vision, objectives and future direction for the next 5 years and a comprehensive business plan was also presented to the panel. 21 Academy intends to continue expanding the provision of training in areas which are identified as gaps in the local market and industry, and which are not offered by other education institutions, and continue offering the opportunity for learners to continue with their education development in a flexible manner.

The Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) policies and procedures of 21 Academy are available in a concise version on their public website. The whole document was made available to the panel and is communicated to the students upon enrolment. Comprehensive information which is essential for potential students to make an informed decision, such as the recognition of prior learning (RPL) policy and financial policy, are provided. The IQA policies and procedures are integral to 21 Academy's strategic management and serve as a foundational framework for ensuring and enhancing the quality of the education offerings of the Academy and ensuring a high-quality student experience. The panel noted that the Academy has most of the IQA processes and procedures required of a sound QA system, however, still requires some improvement and the inclusion of some formal procedures which might be carried out in the day to day running of the Academy but are not documented. This includes structured meetings with agendas and minutes, the process of lecturing, and staff recruitment. The explicit relationship between research and teaching also remains undefined, which is a requirement of the MFHEA Standard. The Academy does carry out most of the processes in quite a standardised manner, however, the main point for improvement is documenting and formalising these standards of practice. This will ensure continuity of quality assurance practices once the Academy grows and a smooth transition if there is a change in the Academy staff. The panel was told that the IQA document was undergoing a review process, and an updated IQA policy document is scheduled to be sent to the MFHEA.

The panel noted that the Director responsible for IQA had just recently been appointed and is supported by an administrative assistant. This small team assists the Hol to ensure that quality assurance is upheld within the institution. The panel noted that the Director of Studies, lecturing staff and external stakeholders provide minimal formal input into the review and improvement of IQA policies and procedures. However, the panel was told that links to the institution's QA policies and procedures and ethical guidelines are communicated to lecturing staff.

The Academy submitted an organigram which clearly shows the organisational structure of the institution and the description of the main roles and responsibilities. Given the small size of the Academy, the panel notes that it is fit for purpose, albeit that most administrative, managerial and operational responsibilities are carried out directly by the Hol. The panel notes that the Academy must ensure a robust succession plan, especially given the intention of the institution to continue to expand. Once the Academy grows, the Hol and Director for QA both acknowledge the need for more support staff and possibly further development of the virtual space, the Resource Centre, and a more efficient management system. During the time of the audit visit, the plans for the expansion of the premises were in the advanced stages.

Good Practice Identified

Nil.

Recommendations for Improvement

- MR1: 21 Academy shall, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, further develop the IQA policies and procedures, taking into consideration the feedback and recommendations from this EQA audit and including all the requirements identified in Standard 1 of the National QA Framework.
- KR1: 21 Academy should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, establish a formal system to ensure the engagement of all internal stakeholders in the further development of its IQA policies and procedures to strengthen the institution's internal systems.
- KR2: 21 Academy should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, define the explicit relationship between research and teaching, in line with the MFHEA Standard.

Conclusion

21 Academy requires improvement to meet the requirements of Standard 1.

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

Advisory 21 Limited is a limited liability company registered as such under registration number C-81866. The company which operates the 21 Academy is jointly and equally owned by Messrs Clyde Puli and Angelito Sciberras, who are also the Directors of the same company. Mr Puli joined the company in late 2022 following a share transfer deal. The memorandum of association of the abovementioned company lists the creation and running of a professional academy/college/institute offering training to students as the first object of the company and hence is compliant with requirements.

An accounting expert appointed by the Authority analysed the financial statements provided. From a review of the documentation, it transpired that the company is compliant with all its fiscal responsibilities in terms of the submission of FSS documentation, income tax and Value Added Tax and, at the time of the review, had no pending liabilities in their respect with the Commissioner for Revenue.

The company provided a full list of employees duly registered with Jobsplus and, as such, was found to be compliant with these particular requirements. The company was also fully compliant with regard to the submission of annual audited financial statements, as its 2021 accounts were presented to the Registry and the annual returns for the year 2023 were also duly submitted to the Malta Business Registry.

Advisory 21 Limited provided signed audited financial statements for the year 2021 and financial projections, namely, the projected income statement, for 2024. The latter showed a profitable perspective.

With regard to the analysis of the financial performance, it transpired that the company had reported a profit in both 2021 and 2020. Furthermore, an analysis of the financial position of the company showed that it had adequate cash resources and had positive equity. Its liquid and current ratios were slightly in the negative range in 2021. Overall, it was concluded that the company had adequate financial resources to meet unexpected challenges.

From the organigram provided, 21 Academy has clearly outlined the responsibilities of the main roles within the company's structure. It is positive to note that the role of IQA features prominently in the organigram. The Vision and Mission Statements are clearly stated. 21 Academy sees its purpose as delivering high-quality education that provides a quality learning experience to empower students and meet the needs of the ever-evolving educational landscape.

21 Academy has a business and financial plan in place up to 2024. The latter sets a clear strategic direction for the Academy and is updated in consultation with staff and external stakeholders.

After having conducted various interviews with key personnel of 21 Academy, the panel is of the opinion that the Head of Academy fulfilling the main headship role, together with the Director responsible for IQA and other members of the senior management team, all have the necessary qualifications, experience and competence, and are fit for purpose.

21 Academy leverages resources and expertise of the parent company and also when it comes to IT and marketing. 21 Academy has a sufficient pool of academic staff who are all engaged on a contract basis.

The Head of Academy is fully aware of the necessity of succession planning and the challenges of hiring and replacing key staff members. Recent additions to the management team are taking over certain tasks, usually done by the Head of Institution, to ensure continuity.

Until now, recruitment efforts have primarily relied on recommendations and referrals, as well as individuals with whom the Academy has had prior professional or personal connections. This is considered to bring strength to the team and add value.

In the case of referrals, interviews are conducted and a thorough assessment is carried out to ensure that the candidates align with the Academy's values. Candidates must also have the required qualifications and maintain a high level of excellence and professionalism. The Academy does not have formal recruitment procedures in place.

The panel noted that while the Academy is fully operational and functioning, as it grows it will benefit from having standardised procedures in place to cover all aspects related to staff and HR.

Good Practice Identified

Nil.

Recommendations for Improvement

KR3: 21 Academy should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, develop a structured recruitment process for staff and implement formal procedures, with established selection criteria, to ensure consistency and objectivity.

R1: 21 Academy could enhance contingency and succession planning. This will benefit the Academy as it grows.

Conclusion

21 Academy meets the requirements of Standard 2.

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

21 Academy carries out market research to identify the emerging training needs of the labour market, stakeholder expectations, and industry trends. The Academy also uses contacts and networking to scan the overseas market, thus continue promoting and delivering their offerings. Various consultations with expert stakeholders, sometimes feedback from tutors, drive the development of qualifications at 21 Academy. Students and alumni are not really involved in the design of programmes, but students are directly involved in assessing the quality of the delivery of the programmes (teaching and learning processes) through the feedback they submit to the institution.

The Academy engages experts in the relevant field (course drafters) to design and write the programmes of study offered and the Hol collaborates with these experts to develop the course content aligned to the guidelines and requirements of the MFHEA. These same experts, most of the time, end up teaching on the courses they help to design. Whenever relevant, the Academy also consults the National Skills Council when designing programmes. The panel was told that the MFHEA Referencing Report (2016) is used to ensure alignment of course design and to establish standards. Following this process, courses are submitted to the MFHEA for accreditation.

The panel saw evidence indicating that the operational procedures of 21 Academy regarding program design and approval were sufficient and operating efficiently. The panel was presented with a document outlining the policy and procedures for course design. The Academy uses formal and informal feedback to ensure that content remains relevant and aligned with evolving industry standards and pedagogical best practices.

The accredited programmes have a defined student workload, which, eventually, is also reflected on the certificate awarded (this has been verified by examining copies of the certificates). All the courses have clear and measurable learning outcomes aligning with programme objectives. Various assessment methods are used to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning experience and the achievement of learning objectives.

The panel noted that all lecturing staff at 21 Academy are seasoned practitioners and leaders in their areas of expertise. This was made clear to the panel both from the interviews and the curricula vitae (CV) samples provided.

Good Practice Identified

Nil.

Recommendations for Improvement

KR4: 21 Academy should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, involve all stakeholders, including students, in the design of courses offered by the institution.

Conclusion

21 Academy meets the requirements of Standard 3.

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

In 21 Academy, a noteworthy aspect of its operational framework is the additional support which is provided to TCNs. The panel acknowledges that providing international students with additional individualised attention by making efforts to address their specific needs, is viewed as a positive approach. This, alongside maintaining uniformity in course content, lectures, assessment criteria, and other elements regardless of demographic differences, is seen as beneficial. Recognising that TCNs typically require more support, this initiative enhances their overall learning experience. The panel noted that there have been no students with special needs studying at the Academy to date; however, there are no policies in place to cater for these.

The involvement of lecturers in the course development process is a crucial element, enabling them to contribute not only to the curriculum design but also to the delivery of lectures aligned with specific learning outcomes. While the requirement to provide master slides and adhere to learning outcomes exists, lecturers are granted considerable autonomy in structuring and delivering their lectures. This flexibility takes into account student preferences and the nature of the topics being discussed, enhancing the adaptability of the educational experience.

The institution's assessment policy is transparent, published in advance, and offers multiple avenues for feedback. Students receive feedback from their lecturers, and a comprehensive scoresheet is available, further aiding their understanding of their performance. Additionally, students can request the scoresheet after the appeals period, ensuring transparency and accountability in the assessment process. Examining the fairness of examinations, the panel noted that assessments are conducted by two examiners, ensuring a balanced and objective evaluation process.

The panel noted that students felt that they were provided with all the resources necessary in an accessible manner and comprehensive in level of information provided. There is consensus on the flexibility given to students and lecturers alike, which allows for an individualised approach that is very manageable given the size of the student population but may become difficult upon the growth of the institution.

Good Practice Identified

The extra assistance provided to TCNs acknowledges and adjusts to the varied needs and backgrounds of the students.

Recommendations for Improvement

- KR5: 21 Academy should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, implement a policy and procedure for students with special needs. This also includes updating the application form to enable students to explicitly indicate any special needs and related requirements.
- R2: As 21 Academy grows, the institution could proactively plan for scalability, given the potential challenges flexibility may present.

Conclusion

21 Academy meets the requirements of Standard 4.

Standard 5: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification

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

Main Findings

Academy staff assist potential students enquiring about a course of studies and provide them with all the necessary information. Those students who do not meet the eligibility criteria are offered an interview with the Hol if they are mature students, and entry as mature students is explained. The Director of Studies has interviews with students whose first language is not English to ensure they have the required standard of the English language to be able to participate and be potentially successful in their studies. Successful applicants receive an acceptance letter. The Director of Studies emphasises that this enables a comprehensive evaluation of candidates' abilities to understand, comprehend and navigate the course content. When students are enrolled in a course, they are provided with detailed information about the resources available to them. All students are informed of data processing procedures related to their personal data.

The admissions procedure is designed to accommodate the diverse backgrounds of students, ensuring that it evaluates applicants holistically by considering not only their academic qualifications but also their practical experiences. A comprehensive RPL policy is in place, outlining the criteria for RPL, the assessment process, and the decision making and appeal procedures involved.

Induction sessions take place according to the type of course and students. Students following longer courses go through a robust induction process which takes place over several days. Besides course content, information is also given about assessments and resources available such as the Course Resource Centre and Turnitin anti-plagiarism software. To assist international students further, they are provided with information about Maltese customs and culture, and practical information about the locality. Student support regarding the Get Qualified Scheme, visas and fulfilling requirements of Identity Malta (for third party nationals) is also provided. Induction is thoughtfully designed to cater for all students, irrespective of their time of arrival. This inclusive approach acknowledges the varied entry points for students and underscores the Academy's commitment to ensuring that everyone receives a comprehensive introduction to the academic and organisational aspects of their chosen course.

For online courses, the induction involves an initial session on the course content, resources available and requirements, and another one on how to do assignments.

The setup of 21 Academy is structured to accommodate the different lengths of courses and the unique backgrounds of students. This tailored approach recognises that the needs and experiences of students may vary based on the duration of their courses and their individual backgrounds. This adaptability contributes to a more student-centric environment, facilitating a smoother transition into the academic journey.

Students are well aware of the policies available and how to access them, the Director of Studies is focused on ensuring that they are followed, and an open-door policy to discuss accordingly with the institution is evident.

Students' progression is collected, monitored and managed by the institution's administrator and HoI. This is a requirement for TCNs, to be in accordance with Identity Malta's requirements to ensure that students are truly attending and progressing in their chosen course of studies due to visa matters.

Students are guided throughout their academic pursuit in matters relating to both academia and personal issues pertaining to their stay here in Malta, the students' reference points being their tutors.

The panel was given the policy on progression and certification as part of the SAR and samples of the certificates which are given to students on successfully completing their studies. The panel noted that the certificates are in line with the requirements as defined in MFHEA Communication MFHEA/09/2021 and include the institution category and license number, MQF level and number of ECTS. Transcripts are provided. The scoresheet for shorter courses works as a transcript. The Academy is working on a system which uses a QR code for employers to verify the authenticity of certificates. This will be made available once the new website is functioning.

Good Practice Identified

The Academy's admission process and onboarding procedures exemplify a commitment to clarity and inclusivity. By offering multiple pathways for admission, robust inductions, and a flexible setup that caters to diverse student backgrounds, the institution ensures that each student's journey begins on a strong and equitable footing.

Recommendations for Improvement

Nil.

Conclusion

21 Academy meets the requirements of Standard 5.

Standard 6: Teaching Staff

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

Main Findings

21 Academy does not employ full-time lecturers as all are engaged on a service-contract basis. Recruitment of academic staff takes place through the extensive network of professional contacts senior management of the Academy has together with recommendations and referrals from other tutors. There is no formal recruitment policy in place.

After reviewing all documentation provided, including CVs, and carrying out several interviews with relevant stakeholders, the panel is satisfied that the Academy recruits academic staff in a proper manner. All tutors undergo a formal interview process to ensure suitability for the role and ensure they have the right level of qualifications and experience. The Academy also has policies and procedures in place to ensure the academic integrity of its teaching staff. These are sent to all lecturers.

Prior to the commencement of a study unit, tutors agree on the parameters of the course. This is mainly done with the Hol. Most of the tutors are involved in the design and development of their respective programmes given their specialist knowledge in the subject area. The Academy ensures the course material is aligned to the learning outcomes, sets rubrics in place, and ensures that guidelines and requirements of the MFHEA are followed. The panel also confirmed that tutors have the necessary flexibility to deliver lectures in the most effective manner.

Formal class observation of tutors for both online and physical classes is mainly done by the Hol and feedback on mode of delivery, what went well and where improvements can be made is shared with the tutors. This is done in an informal manner.

There is a structured system in place to collect regular feedback from students about the tutors and other aspects of the course. This is analysed by senior management of the Academy and any issues are addressed immediately.

Most tutors undertake continuing professional development (CPD) through their main profession. However, the Academy has contributed to tutor personal development by offering sessions on use of AI, data protection and online pedagogy. These sessions are also recorded to enable greater access and widen reach. Furthermore, the Academy allows lecturers to attend classes of other qualifications where they may have an interest to enhance their knowledge.

Tutor appraisal is done in an informal manner. This usually takes place through a discussion with the HoI on an individual basis. Academic staff also have periodic meetings to discuss course progression, revision of course content and the development of new study programmes. Once again, these take place on an individual basis. All staff records are adequately kept.

Lecturers do not have any opportunity to interact amongst themselves, discuss and share best practices unless they are delivering the same programme.

Academy staff are present for the commencement of every lecture and assist both tutors and students with any requirements and technical issues. The panel also confirmed that tutors have the necessary resources available for both academic and administrative purposes to deliver the study programmes.

Tutor communication with students is ongoing. This is done directly during and after lectures and indirectly via email through the Academy. Tutors also have access to the Resource Centre to view all course material and resources available to students.

The panel observes that all tutors are committed and dedicated to their work and are approachable and available to students to facilitate learning. This was confirmed by the course participants, alumni and Academy staff.

Good Practice Identified

The Academy allows lecturers to attend classes of other qualifications for their own personal development.

Recommendations for Improvement

- KR6: 21 Academy should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, implement a formal process of tutor observation during classes, with feedback delivered in a structured manner, as this will contribute to improving the teaching experience.
- R3: The Academy could consider implementing a formal tutor appraisal system and implement a structure to gauge lecturers' method of delivery, identify any training needs, and assess what went well and where improvements can be made.
- R4: The Academy could organise periodic meetings that facilitate tutor interaction and enable them to discuss common issues and share best practice.

Conclusion

21 Academy meets the requirements of Standard 6.

Standard 7: Learning Resources and Student Support

Learning resources and student support: 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 Academy has all the necessary resources and provides the required support to ensure a positive and beneficial learning experience for students. The necessary infrastructure and facilities are in place to deliver physical and online classes in a professional manner. IT and technical support is provided to both tutors and students. The Academy is also investing in new physical classrooms which will mainly be used by TCNs.

The Academy has policies and procedures in place covering all academic aspects of studies, complaints and appeals, and teaching and learning resources, together with other relevant practical information. These are made available to all course participants in a Student Handbook, with a specific version of the latter developed for international students which, besides policies and procedures and expectations, also contains practical information about living in Malta. This contributes to facilitating a better student journey. The panel confirmed that students are aware of this handbook and the resources available.

The Academy has a diverse student population which includes mature, part-time, employed and international students. All local students attend courses online where sessions are recorded and made available. For practical reasons and to fulfil visa requirements, third party nationals attend classes in person. Every effort is made to satisfy students' particular needs by being flexible, accommodating personal commitments, and offering assistance and support when needed. The Academy has an open-door policy and for every course a WhatsApp group is created to ensure communication is open and ongoing.

Students of 21 Academy have access to the Course Resource Centre which is a proprietary virtual learning environment (VLE) where all course material, including notes and lecture recordings, can be accessed, assignments uploaded and formal communications submitted. Students can also access the Academy's policies and procedures via this learning platform. Tutors and students had no issues with the online platform, and it was ascertained that this had the necessary functionality to assist lecturers and help students in their academic journey. The panel noted that while the VLE is adequate for the current offering, 21 Academy might need to consider an upgrade as its operations grow.

The Academy has a small physical library which students can use, and links are provided in the Course Resource Centre to open source libraries and databases with relevant course information such as law judgements for legal courses. The Academy has plans to subscribe to private online libraries.

Lecturers and staff are satisfied with the facilities and learning resources available. Students also expressed their satisfaction with the teaching methods.

Good Practice Identified

Nil.

Recommendations for Improvement

R5: The Academy could consider investing in a more robust VLE as this will be beneficial and useful in facilitating its growth ambitions.

Conclusion

21 Academy meets the requirements of Standard 7.

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

21 Academy has a structured framework in place for its information management. This ensures that all records and administrative requirements related to the programmes of studies are effectively maintained.

The Academy has an internal database where all records are kept. This is shared via Google Drive in a secure manner with different levels of access for specific users.

Upon course acceptance, a student profile is created on the internal database. Personal details, course progression, grades, attendance and any other relevant information are retained in the database.

All admission records, personal details, payments schedule, and details of course followed, with proof of assessment and grades, are all kept within this database. The HoI, Director of Studies and Administrative Assistant have access to the data. The Office Administrator keeps all details related to payments and financial matters.

Records of course participation, attendance, retention and success rates are closely monitored. Student feedback after each module / course is also kept, although this may be anonymous. Any issues are immediately addressed.

Student data throughout the academic journey is kept and the Academy has robust procedures in place for storage and backup. After a course participant has completed the course, all records are kept and deleted in accordance with GDPR requirements.

The Academy has a lot of data through knowledge of the market environment, feedback from lecturers, results from student questionnaires, and internal data related to course participation, grades and success rates. However, there is no evidence that this data is being used in a coordinated manner to conduct any analysis and dissemination for course improvement.

The Academy does not carry out any traceability studies. The panel acknowledges that some courses are quite new and have not yet had any candidates who have fully completed the course. The Academy does send alumni information about new course programmes if these are considered relevant. However, it is up to the students to decide whether to keep in contact with the Academy after course completion. No official records are kept in relation to employment and career progression of course participants.

Good Practice Identified

Nil.

Recommendations for Improvement

KR7: 21 Academy should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, make better use of data to extract reports to address any issues and use this to enhance future course programmes.

KR8: 21 Academy should, within 9 months from the date of publication of this report, implement tracer studies to gather information related to the employment and career progression of course participants who have completed their studies.

Conclusion

21 Academy meets the requirements of Standard 8.

Standard 9: Public Information

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

Main Findings

The Academy is actively focusing on the development of a new website, recognising it as a pivotal solution to address various challenges related to information dissemination, certification confirmation, and the dynamic process of updating and uploading data. The current website meets the requirements set by the MFHEA to a satisfactory level but has room for more up-to-date and detailed information. The upcoming website is expected to be better tailored in content and features to the specific needs and goals of the Academy.

A noteworthy practice is the institution's commitment to incorporating student feedback into the continuous improvement of the website. While feedback is not directly consulted in the display or updates, the institution considers feedback gathered from previous semesters, demonstrating a proactive approach to enhancing the user experience based on student perspectives.

Presently, one person primarily checks and oversees the information on the website. However, it is encouraging to note that a collaborative effort precedes the upload process, involving multiple members of the institution who scrutinise the information to ensure accuracy and relevance.

Acknowledging the importance of maintaining high standards in information presentation, the Academy is taking proactive measures by providing training to numerous staff members. This initiative aims to broaden the involvement of staff in updating and adding information to the website, and introducing checks and balances that will contribute to the timely, efficient, accurate, and up-to-date display of information. This strategic move becomes particularly crucial during the growth phase of the institution, ensuring that the expanding team is equipped with the necessary skills to uphold the institution's commitment to quality and relevance.

Alumni and students are satisfied with the information available and noted that the use of social media is extremely important to reach out. What is noteworthy is the open-door policy once again being present in this Standard as students are comfortable with the personal element of contacting the institution and with the information obtained at that level.

The focus of 21 Academy on a new website, consideration of student feedback, collaborative information verification processes, and ongoing staff training collectively underscore a commitment to providing a robust and user-friendly online platform. As the institution grows, these measures will play a crucial role in maintaining the integrity and effectiveness of the information dissemination process.

Good Practice Identified

Maintaining an open-door policy and encouraging personalised communication with students through various channels, including social media, fosters a sense of comfort and accessibility. Students appreciate the personal element of contacting the Academy.

Recommendations for Improvement

- KR9: 21 Academy should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, have a standard procedure in place to periodically review and update the online materials and information to ensure they remain relevant and aligned with emerging trends and technologies in website management and information dissemination.
- R6: 21 Academy could consider developing a formalised social media strategy to ensure a consistent and effective online presence. This may include content planning, engagement strategies, and monitoring feedback on social media platforms.

Conclusion

21 Academy meets the requirements of Standard 9.

Standard 10: Ongoing 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

Once the IQA document is further developed as claimed by the Academy and recommended by the panel in Standard 1, the institution must also ensure a procedure for monitoring and periodically reviewing the institution's IQA policies and processes with the involvement of external stakeholders, students, alumni, teaching staff and Academy staff. All minutes and reports in relation to IQA and EQA exercises are to be filed and made readily available for audit purposes.

During the interviews, the panel was told how the subject experts and lecturers of 21 Academy contribute to informally reviewing the contents of the training programmes and carry out adjustments to ensure that the most updated and current subject content is being taught. The Academy holds regular informal meetings with course coordinators and lecturers for the purpose of ensuring that course content remains aligned with specific industry updates. Most of the activities, including meetings related to programme review, are informal and not documented. The panel was provided with a *Course Monitoring Policy and Procedures* document; however, this now needs to be regularly implemented and formal documentation of the process of periodic review of the courses delivered by the Academy kept, filed and provided during audits. Minutes of these formal meetings should also be kept.

During the interviews, the panel heard that training delivered by 21 Academy was professional, timely and relevant, and the Academy always adapted the contents and mode of delivery according to the requirements of the diverse student profile. The panel noted how students and alumni are appreciative of the value added of the courses provided by 21 Academy in their current work practices and in their careers.

Ongoing improvements at the Academy are undertaken through informal and formal student feedback, and informal tutor and other stakeholder feedback. Feedback data is not recorded and filed electronically. The panel recommends that data synthesis and pooling be carried out and recorded in official regular reports. This data can be fed back into the system and used as a tool to enhance and improve the institution's existing QA mechanisms and training provision, thus ensuring a good quality student learning experience. Such a holistic process identifies strengths and areas for improvement and recognises opportunities for further development. Capitalising on these during the creation of the strategic plan of the institution ensures a meaningful high quality learning experience for the learners.

Good Practice Identified

There is good rapport and collaboration between the institution and external stakeholders.

Recommendations for Improvement

- MR2: 21 Academy shall, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, have a plan of action of how periodic reviews of courses will be implemented and formally documented and which also includes timelines and persons responsible. This must include the involvement of all internal and external stakeholders.
- MR3: 21 Academy shall, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, have a documented and formalised procedure for the monitoring and periodic review process of the IQA system of the institution, the QA processes and procedures. This must involve contributions from all internal and external stakeholders.
- KR10: 21 Academy should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, have a system in place to collect formal feedback from experts, employers and other stakeholders, which information is fed back into the strategic management mechanism of the institution.
- R7: 21 Academy could carry out synthesis and pooling of all the data collected by the institution. The outcomes can be used by the institution to enhance and improve QA mechanisms and training provision.

Conclusion

21 Academy requires improvement to meet the requirements of Standard 10.

Standard 11: Cyclical External Quality Assurance

Cyclical external quality assurance: entities should undergo an external quality assurance audit by, or with the approval of, the MFHEA on a cyclical basis, according to the MFHEA guidelines, once every five years.

Main Findings

21 Academy fulfils this Standard by hosting the external audit referred to in this report. This is the first QA audit cycle of this institution.

The panel appreciated the cooperation of the Head of Institution and the interviewees throughout the audit. The panel has found 21 Academy to be responsive and self-reflective during the quality assurance audit process. This augurs well for the institution to embrace the recommendations put forward by the panel, in support of further enhancing the delivery of good quality student-centred training and compliance to the National Quality Assurance Framework.

Overall, the panel was presented with clear evidence which illustrates the impetus for the optimisation of the quality of teaching and learning carried out by 21 Academy, with the main objectives being the success of the students in their studies and the delivery of high standard training courses in areas which are relevant and current to the society we live in.

Recommendations for Improvement

Nil.

Conclusion

21 Academy meets the requirements of Standard 11.

Response by the Provider

As part of its commitment to continuous improvement and excellence in education, 21 Academy recognises the importance of implementing robust quality assurance measures across all aspects of its operations. In alignment with this commitment, and after having read the External Quality Assurance Audit Report, the Academy is committed to embark on a comprehensive review and assessment of its policies, procedures, and practices, with the aim of enhancing accountability, transparency, and effectiveness in meeting the needs of its stakeholders.

The External Quality Assurance Audit Report has identified several recommendations, of which a few are mandatory while others are key, to strengthen the institution's quality assurance framework and ensure alignment with national standards and best practices. These recommendations encompass various aspects of academic and administrative functions, including curriculum development, teaching and learning practices, stakeholder engagement, and institutional governance.

To address these recommendations and drive meaningful change, 21 Academy has developed a structured action plan that outlines specific steps and timelines for implementation. This action plan emphasises the active involvement of internal and external stakeholders, including staff, students, industry partners, and other relevant stakeholders, in the review, development, and enhancement of quality assurance processes and procedures.

Through collaborative efforts and a commitment to continuous improvement, 21 Academy seeks to foster a culture of excellence, innovation, and accountability, thereby ensuring the delivery of high-quality education that prepares students for success in a dynamic and ever-changing world.

Response to Key Recommendations and Recommendations Made by the Peer Review Panel

Action plan		
Recommendations	Actions to be taken to address the recommendations	Date for completion
Standard 1:		
KR1 21 Academy should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, establish a formal system to ensure the engagement of all internal stakeholders in the further development of its IQA policies and procedures to strengthen the institution's internal systems.	See MR1 below	
KR2 21 Academy should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, define the explicit relationship between research and teaching, in line with the MFHEA Standard.	See KR4, KR7, KR8 & KR10	
Standard 2:		
KR3 21 Academy should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, develop a	Develop clear and objective selection criteria for each position, based on job descriptions, required qualifications, and competencies. Ensure the criteria are aligned with the institution's goals and standards.	

<p>structured recruitment process for staff and implement formal procedures, with established selection criteria, to ensure consistency and objectivity.</p>	<p>Draft a structured recruitment policy outlining the entire recruitment process, including job posting, application review, interviewing, and selection.</p> <p>Include procedures to ensure transparency, consistency, and objectivity.</p> <p>Discuss the policy and procedures internally with relevant stakeholders.</p> <p>Finalise the revised policy and procedures and seek approval from the Board of Directors</p> <p>Implement the new recruitment policy and procedures.</p>	<p>End of August 2024</p>
<p>R1 21 Academy could enhance contingency and succession planning. This will benefit the Academy as it grows.</p>	<p>Begin documenting all tasks, processes, and responsibilities handled at 21 Academy</p> <p>Include temporary assignment of responsibilities to other staff members and identify new roles and start recruitment process.</p> <p>Organise training sessions, job shadowing, and mentoring to build existing staff and new employees' capabilities.</p>	<p>Started and planned to finalise by end of August 2024</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Standard 3:</p>		
<p>KR4 21 Academy should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, involve all stakeholders, including students, in the design of courses offered by the institution.</p>	<p>Identify all relevant stakeholders, including administrative staff, industry partners, alumni, and current students.</p> <p>Create a stakeholder directory with contact information and areas of expertise or interest.</p> <p>Draft an engagement plan detailing how stakeholders will be involved in the course design process.</p> <p>Develop and distribute surveys to gather input from stakeholders on current courses, potential new courses, and areas for improvement.</p> <p>Compile and synthesise feedback.</p>	

	<p>Identify actionable insights and key recommendations for course design.</p> <p>Based on stakeholder feedback, draft proposals for new courses and revisions to existing courses. Ensure proposals align with academic standards, institutional goals, and market needs.</p>	End of April 2025
Standard 4:		
<p>KR5 21 Academy should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, implement a policy and procedure for students with special needs. This also includes updating the application form to enable students to explicitly indicate any special needs and related requirements.</p>	<p>Develop a comprehensive policy for students with special needs, covering identification, assessment, support services, and grievance procedures.</p> <p>Revise the student application form to include a section where applicants can explicitly indicate any special needs and related requirements.</p> <p>Ensure the form is accessible and user-friendly.</p>	<p>End of August 2024</p> <p>2025/26 academic year application forms</p>
<p>R2 As 21 Academy grows, the institution could proactively plan for scalability, given the potential challenges flexibility may present.</p>	See R1 above	
Standard 5:		
	Not Applicable	
Standard 6:		
<p>KR6 21 Academy should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this</p>	<p>Conduct research on best practices for tutor observation in higher education.</p> <p>Review observation frameworks and feedback mechanisms used by other institutions.</p>	

<p>report, implement a formal process of tutor observation during classes, with feedback delivered in a structured manner, as this will contribute to improving the teaching experience.</p>	<p>Develop clear criteria and a structured framework for tutor observations, including aspects such as teaching methods, student engagement, use of technology, and classroom management.</p> <p>Ensure the framework is aligned with the Academy's teaching and learning objectives.</p> <p>Conduct initial observations using the developed criteria and framework.</p> <p>Gather feedback from involved tutors and observers.</p> <p>Analyse feedback to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.</p> <p>Refine the observation criteria and framework based on pilot feedback.</p> <p>Develop a standardised feedback form to ensure consistency and structure in the feedback provided to tutors.</p> <p>Ensure observers are well-versed in the observation criteria, feedback mechanisms, and confidentiality requirements.</p> <p>Schedule regular observations, ensuring that tutor delivering multiple sessions are observed at least once per academic year.</p>	<p>End of December 2024</p>
<p>R3 The Academy could consider implementing a formal tutor appraisal system and implement a structure to gauge lecturers' method of delivery, identify any training needs, and assess what went well and where improvements can</p>	<p>See KR6</p>	

be made.		
R4 The Academy could organise periodic meetings that facilitate tutor interaction and enable them to discuss common issues and share best practice.	<p>Develop a schedule for periodic tutor interaction meetings, taking into account availability and preferences of tutors. Consider organising separate meetings for specific multi-module courses or for local and international students' lecturers.</p> <p>Determine the format of meetings, whether in-person, virtual, or hybrid, based on the needs assessment and logistical considerations.</p> <p>Document the proceedings of each tutor interaction meeting, including key discussions, decisions, and action items.</p>	Starting 2024/25 academic year
Standard 7:		
R5 The Academy could consider investing in a more robust VLE as this will be beneficial and useful in facilitating its growth ambitions.	A more robust VLE will be available with the new website which is currently in testing phase.	Start of 2024/25 academic year
Standard 8:		
KR7 21 Academy should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, make better use of data to extract reports to address any issues and use this to enhance future course programmes.	<p>Identify existing data sources, types of data collected, and gaps in data collection.</p> <p>Define the key metrics and types of reports needed to address issues and enhance course programmes.</p> <p>Implement the selected data analytics tools.</p> <p>Create standardised reporting templates for different types of reports, including course performance, student satisfaction, and issue resolution.</p> <p>Roll out the finalised data reporting process across the institution.</p>	End of December 2024
KR8 21 Academy should, within 9 months from the date of publication of this	<p>Conduct initial planning to define the objectives and scope of the tracer studies.</p> <p>Benchmark against best practices and tracer study methodologies used by other institutions if made</p>	

<p>report, implement tracer studies to gather information related to the employment and career progression of course participants who have completed their studies.</p>	<p>available.</p> <p>Develop a methodology for conducting tracer studies, including data collection methods, target populations, and key indicators to measure employment and career progression.</p> <p>Conduct a pilot tracer study with a small group of recent graduates.</p> <p>Analyse pilot results to refine survey instruments and data collection methods.</p> <p>Roll out the tracer studies to all relevant cohorts of graduates.</p> <p>Analyse data collected from tracer studies to identify trends, patterns, and insights related to employment and career progression.</p> <p>Prepare detailed reports summarising the findings and highlighting key outcomes.</p>	<p>March 2025</p> <p>May/June 2025</p>
<p>Standard 9:</p>		
<p>KR9 21 Academy should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, have a standard procedure in place to periodically review and update the online materials and information to ensure they remain relevant and aligned with emerging trends and technologies in website management and information dissemination.</p>	<p>Conduct an initial assessment to inventory all existing online materials and information on the Academy's website.</p> <p>- Identify key areas that need regular updates, such as course content, news, events, policies, and contact information.</p> <p>- Create a standard procedure for periodically reviewing and updating online materials. This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency of reviews (e.g., quarterly, bi-annually) • Responsibilities for content owners and reviewers • Criteria for assessing relevance and accuracy. <p>Develop a checklist to guide the review process.</p>	

	<p>Develop a system to monitor and track updates to online materials.</p> <p>Use analytics to identify the most visited pages and prioritize their review.</p>	End of December 2024
<p>R6 21 Academy could consider developing a formalised social media strategy to ensure a consistent and effective online presence. This may include content planning, engagement strategies, and monitoring feedback on social media platforms.</p>	<p>Conduct an initial assessment to understand the current state of 21 Academy’s social media presence.</p> <p>Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis).</p> <p>Define clear objectives and goals for the Academy’s social media presence. These might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing brand awareness - Engaging with current and prospective students - Promoting events and achievements - Gathering feedback and insights <p>Develop a content calendar to plan social media posts in advance.</p> <p>Ensure the content is diverse, engaging, and aligns with the Academy’s brand and objectives.</p> <p>Implement tools for monitoring social media activity and gathering feedback.</p> <p>Use analytics to track key metrics such as reach, engagement, and conversion rates.</p> <p>Implement the refined social media strategy across all relevant platforms.</p>	End of March 2025
Standard 10:		
<p>KR10 21 Academy should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, have a system in place to collect formal feedback from experts, employers and other stakeholders, which</p>	<p>Conduct an initial assessment to identify current feedback collection practices and gaps.</p> <p>Define the objectives and scope of the feedback system, ensuring alignment with the Academy’s strategic goals.</p> <p>Identify key stakeholders to be included in the feedback, process, such as industry experts, employers, alumni, and professional associations, in addition to those identified earlier above.</p>	

<p>information is fed back into the strategic management mechanism of the institution.</p>	<p>Design formal feedback instruments, such as surveys, questionnaires, and interview guides, tailored to different stakeholder groups.</p> <p>Ensure questions cover key areas such as course content relevance, skills alignment with industry needs, employability of graduates, and suggestions for improvement.</p> <p>Roll out the formal feedback collection system to all identified stakeholders.</p> <p>Utilise various communication channels to collect feedback.</p> <p>Establish a process for integrating stakeholder feedback into the Academy's strategic management mechanism.</p>	<p>To be established by end of June 2025 and to be implemented during 2025/26 academic year</p>
<p>R7 21 Academy could carry out synthesis and pooling of all the data collected by the institution. The outcomes can be used by the institution to enhance and improve QA mechanisms and training provision.</p>	<p>See KR4, KR7, KR8 & KR10</p>	
<p>Standard 11:</p>		
	<p>Not Applicable</p>	

Response to Mandatory Recommendations Made by the Peer Review Panel

Action Plan		
Mandatory recommendations	Actions to be taken to address the recommendation	Date for completion
Generic comment	The below actions are mostly related to and dependant of the above-mentioned actions to be taken to address the recommendations and key recommendations.	
MR1 21 Academy shall, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, further develop the IQA policies and procedures, taking into consideration the feedback and recommendations from this EQA audit and including all the requirements identified in Standard 1 of the National QA Framework.	<p>Establish an Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) Task Force.</p> <p>Conduct a comprehensive review of the EQA audit report to extract specific feedback and recommendations.</p> <p>Conduct a gap analysis to assess current IQA policies and procedures against the requirements of Standard 1 of the National QA Framework.</p> <p>Identify specific areas needing development or enhancement.</p> <p>Develop a draft of the revised IQA policies and procedures, incorporating audit feedback and meeting Standard 1 requirements.</p> <p>Discuss the drafts internally with relevant stakeholders.</p> <p>Finalise the revised IQA policies and procedures and seek approval from the Board of Directors.</p> <p>Officially implement the revised policies across the institution.</p>	Mostly by end of December 2024
MR2 21 Academy shall, within 6 months from the date of publication of this	<p>Appoint a leader to oversee the course review process.</p> <p>Conduct a comprehensive review of existing course review processes, including frequency, methodologies, and documentation practices.</p>	

<p>report, have a plan of action of how periodic reviews of courses will be implemented and formally documented and which also includes timelines and persons responsible. This must include the involvement of all internal and external stakeholders.</p>	<p>Identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement based on internal and external feedback.</p> <p>Development of Course Review Guidelines.</p> <p>Define roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders involved in the review process.</p> <p>Select a sample of courses to pilot the revised course review process.</p> <p>Gather feedback from participants to assess the effectiveness of the process and identify areas for improvement.</p> <p>Develop standardised templates and tools for documenting course review findings, recommendations, and action plans.</p> <p>Communicate the outcomes of course reviews to relevant stakeholders.</p> <p>Solicit feedback from stakeholders on their experience with the course review process and use this feedback to inform future iterations.</p>	<p>Mostly by End of December 2024</p>
<p>MR3 21 Academy shall, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, have a documented and formalised procedure for the monitoring and periodic review process of the IQA system of the institution, the QA processes and procedures. This must involve contributions from all internal and external</p>	<p>Appoint a leader to oversee the development of the monitoring and review procedure.</p> <p>Conduct a comprehensive review of existing IQA processes, including monitoring and review practices, documentation procedures, and stakeholder engagement methods.</p> <p>Identify areas of strength and areas for improvement based on internal assessments and external benchmarks.</p> <p>Develop comprehensive guidelines outlining the procedures and criteria for monitoring and reviewing the IQA system.</p> <p>Define roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders involved in the monitoring and review process.</p> <p>Document the monitoring and periodic review</p>	

<p>stakeholders.</p>	<p>procedure in a formalised document, detailing step-by-step instructions, timelines, data collection methods, and reporting mechanisms.</p> <p>Ensure alignment with institutional goals, external standards, and stakeholder expectations.</p> <p>Communicate the finalised monitoring and review procedure to all stakeholders, emphasising the importance of their contributions and involvement.</p>	<p>Mostly by end of December 2024</p>
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Annex 1: Review Panel Bio Notes

In the setting up of the review panel for 21 Academy, the MFHEA sought to maintain a high degree of diligence in the process of selection of the members of the 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 MFHEA.

The following bio notes present the profiles of the members of the peer review panel. The bio notes are correct as at the time the QA audit was carried out, i.e., on 8th and 9th November 2023.

Chair of Review Panel:

Ms Veronica Montebello is a visiting senior lecturer at the University of Malta where she imparts her expertise in both online and face-to-face teaching. Additionally, she serves as a Clinical Supervisor within the Faculty of Dental Surgery and the Faculty of Health Science.

With a background as a registered dental hygienist, Ms Montebello has made significant contributions to both the public and private sectors. Her leadership experience includes a tenure as the Director designate at the Department of Programme Implementation, MFH, also a senior executive role at the Directorate of Allied Health Care Services. Presently, she holds the position of Lead Profession Manager at the Department of Dental Surgery, MDH and works closely with the People Management Division, MHA.

Ms Montebello was the project leader for an ambitious ESF project and is involved with the Malta team on the EU HEROES Joint Action. She also forms part of the WHO Malta delegation on Health Workforce planning and forecasting. Notably, Ms Montebello has spearheaded key projects such as the Competence Assessment Framework (2013), widely utilised by Allied Health Professionals within the public service. Additionally, her contributions to the National Health Workforce Strategy underscore her dedication to shaping and optimising healthcare systems.

Ms Montebello is a respected figure in European and international academic circles, actively participating in numerous professional federations, committees and associations. She holds a position on the Council for the Professions Complementary to Medicine. Since 2016, Ms Montebello has been an expert panel reviewer and chairperson of several External Quality Assurance audits and programme evaluations for the MFHEA.

Peer Reviewer:

Mr Peter Calleya has been a financial services professional for over 35 years and is currently an Executive Manager at HSBC Bank Malta. He is also a Visiting Senior Lecturer at the University of Malta where, since 2007, he has lectured various courses from Diploma and Bachelor's to Master's level and also served as an examiner, paper-setter and reviewer.

Since 2003, Mr Calleya has been elected for consecutive terms to the Board of Directors of the further and higher education Institute of Financial Services (IFS Malta) and, since 2011, has served as Vice President. He has also recently been re-elected for his fifth consecutive three-year term to serve on the Board of Directors and Executive Committee of the Brussels-based European Banking and Financial Services Training Association (EBTN) for 2023-2025. Mr Calleya holds an MBA (Bangor), MA Marketing (Melit.) and BA (Hons) Business Management (Melit.). He is also a Chartered Banker, Chartered Marketer and Fellow of both the London Institute of Banking and Finance and Chartered Banker Institute (UK). Since 2019, Mr Calleya has been appointed by the MFHEA to sit on various Quality Assurance review panels of licensed further and higher education institutions.

Student Peer Reviewer:

Mr Jeremy Mifsud Bonnici is a Master's student at the University of Malta pursuing a Master's of Laws in European Business Law. He currently acts as President of Kunsill Studenti Universitarji and sits on the Senate and Council Committees at the University of Malta. Mr Mifsud Bonnici has experience of Quality Assurance at the University of Malta, carrying out analyses in a variety of faculties as well as undertaking training under the ESU QA Pool's supervision.

Annex 2: Agenda of the Onsite Visit

QA Audit Agenda: 21 Academy

Day 1

Date: 8th November 2023

Venue: 21 Academy, 21 Business Centre, 20 Triq in-Nutar Debono, Naxxar

Panel: Ms Veronica Montebello (Chair of peer review panel), Mr Peter Calleya (Peer reviewer),
Mr Jeremy Mifsud Bonnici (Student peer reviewer)

Officers: Ms Fiona McCowan (MFHEA officer), Mr Giacomo Annese (MFHEA officer)

08.30 – 09.00	Panel and officers arrive at 21 Academy
09.00 – 10.30	Meeting with Head of Institution <i>(Mr Angelito Sciberras)</i>
10.30 – 10.45	Panel discussion
10.45 – 11.30	Meeting with Director responsible for IQA
11:00 – 11:15	<i>Meeting with lecturer - online</i>
11.30 – 11.45	Panel discussion
11.45 – 12.45	Meeting with Office Administrator and Administrative Assistant
12.45 – 13.45	Panel discussion and working lunch
13.45 – 14.30	Meeting with industry advisors, consultants and employers
14.30 – 14.45	Meeting with lecturer - online
14.45 – 15.00	Panel discussion
15.00 – 16.00	Meeting with alumni - in person and online
16.00 – 16.15	Panel discussion and conclusions of Day 1

Day 2

Date: 9th November 2023

Venue: 21 Academy, 21 Business Centre, 20 Triq in-Nutar Debono, Naxxar

Panel: Ms Veronica Montebello (Chair of peer review panel), Mr Peter Calleya (Peer reviewer),
Mr Jeremy Mifsud Bonnici (Student peer reviewer)

Officers: Ms Fiona McCowan (MFHEA officer), Mr Giacomo Annese (MFHEA officer)

08.30 – 09.00	Panel and officers arrive at 21 Academy
09.00 – 09.15	Meeting with Head of Institution <i>(Mr Angelito Sciberras)</i> [Demonstration of Resource Centre for Diploma in Law]
09.15 – 10.15	Meeting with lecturers (Levels 5, 6 and 7 courses) - in person and online
10.15 – 10.30	Panel discussion
10.30 – 11.30	Meeting with student focus group (Level 5 courses)
11.30 – 13.00	Internal panel working session and lunch
13.00 – 13.30	Presentation of initial findings <i>(Mr Angelito Sciberras and Mr Clyde Puli)</i>



Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA)

Quality Assurance Office

J Abela Scolaro Street, Hamrun. HMR 1304, Malta.

Email: qa@mfhea.mt

Tel: +356 2598 1489

www.mfhea.mt