



Malta  
Further & Higher  
Education Authority

# EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AUDIT REPORT

PROVIDER ACCREDITATION  
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION  
INSTITUTIONS

## **FUTURE FOCUS**

Carried out between  
30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> January 2025

**Quality education for  
confident futures.**

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## Abbreviations List

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CPD	Continuing Professional Development
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EQA/QA audit	External Quality Assurance Audit
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
LMS	Learning Management System
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
SAR	Self-Assessment Report

## Executive Summary

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### Overview of the Audit Process

This report is a result of the External Quality Assurance (EQA) process undertaken by an independent peer review panel. The panel evaluated the documentation submitted by the educational institution and conducted an onsite audit visit. The panel is responsible for reaching conclusions on all Standards in line with the Minimal and Performance Indicators as outlined in the External Quality Assurance Provider Accreditation Manual for Higher Education Institutions. 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

<i>EQA Audit Timeline – Future Focus</i>	
<i>Induction meeting</i>	<i>28<sup>th</sup> October 2024</i>
<i>Pre-accreditation panel meeting</i>	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> December 2024</i>
<i>Pre-accreditation provider meeting</i>	<i>16<sup>th</sup> December 2024</i>
<i>Audit visit</i>	<i>30<sup>th</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup> January 2025</i>

### Summary of the Conclusions Reached by the Peer Review Panel

The panel considered 11 Standards. Of these, Standard 10 was considered non-compliant. Standards 1, 2, 3 and 9 were considered partially compliant, Standards 5, 6 and 7 were considered substantially compliant, and Standards 4, 8 and 11 were considered fully compliant.

The panel made six Mandatory Recommendations. Of these, one should be addressed within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, and five should be addressed within 12 months from the date of publication of this report.

The panel made 12 Key Recommendations. Of these, seven should be addressed within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, and five within 12 months from the date of publication of this report.

The panel also made five Recommendations.

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## List of Recommendations

### Mandatory Recommendations

- MR1:** The institution shall, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, develop plans that concretely indicate future activities, performance indicators, resources allocated to the activities, and responsibilities for implementation. These plans must explicitly deal with online and blended learning, too.
- MR2:** The institution shall, within 12 months from the date of publication of the report, establish the Academic Council or a similar body that would oversee academic issues and their development. It would be advisable to compose this body both from internal and from external academics.
- MR3:** The institution shall, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, make effective steps toward strengthening and more formalisation of internal quality assurance processes.
- MR4:** The institution shall, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, clearly link internal quality assurance processes with its strategic and other plans.
- MR5:** The online library services require significant improvement to meet the requirements of delivering programmes at Levels 6, 7 and 8. Future Focus shall enable access to some online research gateways, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report.
- MR6:** If Future Focus is to continue offering a Level 8 programme or intends to expand and offer further courses at this level, it shall reconsider its strategic plan and budgetary allocations to make the necessary adjustments to support research endeavours. This is to be done within 12 months from the date of publication of this report. The requirements of Standard 10 offer a guideline of what is expected.

### Key Recommendations

- KR1:** The institution should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, make sure provisions for membership in governing bodies are clear.
- KR2:** The institution should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, implement a mechanism for regular review of leadership and governance effectiveness.
- KR3:** The institution should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, strengthen students' involvement in decision-making processes at Future Focus.

- KR4:** The institution should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, implement strategies that would make students and other relevant stakeholders aware and understanding of and effectively involved in internal quality assurance processes.
- KR5:** The institution should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, make sure more distribution of responsibility for internal quality assurance is in place, with clearly designated roles for people within the institution.
- KR6:** The institution should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, formalise a signed lecturer's agreement with Future Focus to delineate the duration of each programme and the job description deliverables expected of the lecturer.
- KR7:** The institution should, within 6 months from the date of publication of the report, compile a standard form to capture the changes that lecturers communicate during annual and periodic reviews reflecting current trends on the relevant topics pertaining to the programmes and ensure that these changes are well-communicated and implemented efficiently.
- KR8:** The institution should, within 6 months from the date of publication of the report, compile a well-defined policy for programme termination, including the reasons for termination and the associated legal considerations.
- KR9:** The institution should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, standardise and implement procedures for the internal verification process of assignments compiled by lecturers prior to being submitted to students.
- KR10:** The institution should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, formulate a standardised procedure for the internal verification of assignments submitted by students by a second assessor to ensure consistency and fairness on the marking of assignments.
- KR11:** Future Focus should introduce formal alumni tracer studies to keep track of progression beyond studies and the impact of their courses, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report.
- KR12:** Future Focus should involve employers more formally in their decision-making by formalising meetings, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report.

### **Recommendations**

- R1:** Future Focus could consider making the website clearer and more navigable so that its policies and procedures will be easily accessible.
- R2:** Future Focus could consider recording of all online lectures on Zoom, as this will provide an audit trail for the institution.
- R3:** The institution could consider creating more awareness among students, after the induction process, of their rights to complain and appeal on issues encompassing teaching, supervision, support services, payment and finance, or any other related matters by using the already established Complaints form.

- R4:** Future Focus could consider developing more explicit student support strategies that would cover their diverse needs during the studies.
- R5:** Future Focus could consider possibilities to publish actions based on the results of the feedback surveys.

# About the External Quality Audit

## About the External Quality Audit

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The scope of external quality assurance in Malta is firstly to evaluate the education providers against the indicators included in the External Quality Assurance Provider Accreditation Manual for Higher Education Institutions (<https://mfhea.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/EQA-Accreditation-Manual.pdf>), through the analysis of the self-assessment documentation as well as through the information recorded by the peer review panels during the accreditation visits. Secondly, it is in the scope of external quality assurance to evaluate the progress the providers have made since the previous external quality assurance process, aimed at the continuous enhancement of quality and institutional capacity building of the higher education sector in Malta.

Based on this scope, the external quality assurance processes conducted based on the Manual aim to:

- certify the compliance of the providers with the indicators included in the Manual;
- consolidate the internal quality assurance systems at institutional level;
- support the providers in the quality enhancement and continuous development of their operations;
- increase the quality of learning outcomes across the Maltese higher education sector;
- enhance the student learning experience.

## Standards for Accreditation

- Standard 1: Mission and strategic management
- Standard 2: Governance, organisational structure and administration
- Standard 3: Quality management
- Standard 4: Integrity, accountability and information management
- Standard 5: Teaching and administrative staff
- Standard 6: Design, monitoring and review of programmes
- Standard 7: Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
- Standard 8: Student administration and student support services
- Standard 9: Learning resources and facilities
- Standard 10: Research, development and/or other creative activity
- Standard 11: Institutional cooperation, service to society and internationalisation

The Standards and indicators as per the Manual have been drafted in alignment with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The MINIMAL INDICATORS included in the Manual reflect the mandatory level of achievement that providers have to demonstrate compliance with for accreditation purposes and therefore must be met both before the commencement of their operations (at licensing stage) as well as throughout their activities (during every audit process).

The PERFORMANCE INDICATORS included in the Manual reflect the mandatory level of achievement that providers have to demonstrate compliance with during the audit process in order to have their accreditation confirmed. Therefore, performance indicators must be met, starting with the first audit that a provider undergoes five years after the commencement of its operations as well as throughout their entire licensing period.

Where applicable additional indicators have been developed in the context of online provision through the Guidance for Quality Assurance for Online Learning Providers in Malta.

The peer review panels are nominated by the MFHEA. Each panel shall have a minimum of three members: a Chair, between one and five experts, and at least one student. The panel has the duty to gather, verify and exchange information and supporting elements so as to be able to check the statements made in the self-assessment documentation, as well as during the accreditation visits, and to formulate their own assessments on the performance of the provider against the Standards included in the present Manual. The peer review panels shall discuss and exchange the collected evidence, verify the comprehensiveness and interpretation of the data, and analyse various sources in order to come to a consensual, coherent and consistent conclusion through triangulation and cross-referencing. All peer review panel members are required to sign a Declaration of Interest Form prior to starting work on the external quality assurance process.

The approach of the Quality Assurance (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.

Peer review panels will consider the indicators included in the Manual when determining the judgement for each Standard. The judgement for each Standard will be expressed as follows:

- Fully compliant - The institution is entirely in alignment with the Standard, which is implemented in an effective manner.
- Substantially compliant - The institution is to a large extent in alignment with the Standard, the general principles of which are followed in practice.
- Partially compliant - Some parts of the Standard are met while others are not; the implementation of the Standard is not effective enough.
- Non-compliant - The institution fails to comply with the Standard.

As part of an enhancement-led approach, the review team will 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 decided 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 indicated timeframes, to address weaknesses.
- Recommendations (R) for improvement which are merely suggestions based on the panel's analyses and observations; these could be implemented by the institution.

The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) considered this report and forwarded it, along with the accreditation decision, to the MFHEA Board for endorsement.

## The Peer Review Panel

The peer review panel was composed of:

Chair of Review Panel: Milan Pol, Masaryk University, Czech Republic

Peer Reviewer: Ronald Aquilina, MCAST, Malta

Student Peer Reviewer: Wilbert Tabone, Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands

Accreditation Coordinators (MFHEA): Fiona McCowan, Giacomo Annese

## Specific Terms of Reference

As defined in the MFHEA Quality Audit Manual of Procedures, the panel was responsible for examining how the institution manages its responsibilities to ensure the provision of the quality and standards of the education it offers. In particular, the following issues were addressed:

- a) the fitness for purpose and effectiveness of the Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) processes, including an examination of the systems and procedures that have been implemented, together with the documentation that supports them;
- b) the compliance of licensed providers with the established regulations and any conditions or restrictions issued by the MFHEA;
- c) the governance and financial sustainability of providers, including assurance about the provider's legal status, the appropriateness of corporate structures and the competence of staff with senior management responsibilities.

These areas have, therefore, been identified as lines of inquiry.

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## Institutional Background and Context

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Future Focus is a private institution providing training and education programmes at different levels for more than two decades. Its main building is located in Floriana, Malta. According to the Self-Assessment Report (SAR), it currently trains around 1,000 students per academic year. There are not many full-time employed staff (mostly those in leadership and administration), and about 40 lecturers are employed on a part-time basis at Future Focus.

Although the current portfolio of programmes is more diverse, the main expertise lies in the field of inclusive education. Programmes of different lengths and levels are delivered mostly in online form for which Future Focus is equipped, in terms of software. Future Focus emphasises respect to the specific situation of its students, providing them with a possibility of individualised study paths and support.

Future Focus is undergoing the second institutional audit, and while in some areas the progress can be seen, in some others a problematic state of art remains. Some problems relate to strategic management and governance as well as quality assurance. The organisational chart was modified, yet now it strongly concentrates responsibilities in one executive position (Head of the Institution) and lacks the unit dealing explicitly with academic issues at the institutional level. Strategic and operational plans are not sufficiently developed, and the same can be said about students' involvement in decision-making bodies of the institution. A student self-governing body is non-existent. Another longer-lasting issue is a low level of formalisation of quality assurance processes at Future Focus. Quality management functions are not visibly integrated into normal planning in a defined cycle of planning, implementation, assessment and review. Consequently, the links between strategic and operational plans and quality assurance are weak.

On the other hand, since the last audit, Future Focus has maintained high ethical standards in teaching and evaluations. It has published extensively all its policies and procedures on its website. It also enforces a strict zero-tolerance policy against academic misconduct, such as plagiarism and cheating, and promptly addresses any violations. Future Focus currently uses online learning platforms and communication tools, such as a learning management system (LMS), that create digital records of student activity.

Yet it is commendable that since the last audit, Future Focus has acted upon the recommendations to coordinate the functions of the Registrar, the Internships & Work Placements and Programme Leaders. Programme Leaders co-ordinate the activities of their respective lecturers and assessors. The panel also considers that since the last audit Future Focus has addressed the issue of lecturers' holding the required qualifications to teach their respective modules. However, since the last audit Future Focus has not

established contracts for teaching staff, delineating clear conditions of engagement, as these contracts were not provided, despite being requested during and after the current audit.

Future Focus has made efforts since the last audit to address the previous recommendation by staying informed about current research, scholarship and professional practices. Specifically, Future Focus has enhanced curricular standards through increased collaboration and engagement with other institutions. This collaborative effort is primarily focused on students, with educators encouraged to maintain high standards by keeping up to date with the latest developments.

The panel considers that given that Future Focus has switched completely to online learning, it is delivering courses that encourage active student participation, enhancing motivation, self-reflection, autonomy, creativity and innovation. Future Focus's pedagogical approaches emphasise student-centred methods, including group work, presentations, discussions and role-playing. Future Focus has addressed, where possible, the previous recommendation that students must now choose placement locations where they, or their immediate family, have no existing connection or involvement.

While some student support practices are in place, some others could be made more explicit to address diverse needs through the studies, though. Library services and resources need significant improvement at Future Focus. Problems with a very low level of research activity persist at Future Focus. Also, Future Focus's work with alumni still has potential for improvement. Future Focus is involved in cooperation with external bodies, both in Malta and internationally. This relates to academic activities as well as broader social activities of the institution. External stakeholders should also be more involved in decision making processes at the institution.

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# Analysis and Findings of Panel

## Analysis and Findings of Panel

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### Standard 1: Mission and strategic management

#### **Main Findings**

The mission statement of Future Focus is formulated as follows: “...to provide a comprehensive range of high-quality educational programmes that will enhance the career prospects of our students. We are committed to achieving sustainable growth and to help foster a skilled workforce both locally and internationally. By doing so we help position ourselves on the global map.” (SAR, p. 5) It can be said that the mission statement is formulated clearly with the main focus teaching and learning, but also on the impact toward a broader social context. The alignment with what is stressed in Future Focus’s plans can be seen, too.

The function of the strategic planning document has a *Business Plan* at Future Focus. It is a rather short and simple text containing several chapters: business history, background and four objectives: (1) provide quality education to students; (2) make education programmes as accessible as possible thus contributing to a more qualified workforce; (3) increase the number of programmes so that students have a varied choice, and (4) attract students and teachers to Malta from abroad thus helping to place Malta on the global education map. Further, this short document contains the chapters titled business environment, services and products, marketing strategies, management and organisation, business proposal resources, expected outcomes and impact. Expected outcomes and impact contain four plans: (1) to increase the number of students by 10%, (2) to increase profitability by 5%, (3) to improve the return on investment, and (4) to apply for the institution’s University status. It cannot be said that the strategic planning document is always measurable and time bound. Overall, the text is rather general, often backwards looking.

The document titled *Operational Plan and KPIs for the next 12 months* just repeats the four plans mentioned in the *Business Plan* with the same two paragraphs stated there, too. It cannot be said that there is an operational plan which describes future activities derived from the strategic plan and sets Performance Indicators together with resources needed for their implementation. Also, this document does not define the responsibility for implementation of the goals.

Future Focus has elaborated budgets that can be seen as supportive to the plans. Total operational costs are planned to grow from 759.686 EUR in 2024 to 959.602 EUR in 2026, and profit for the year, similarly, from 779.577 EUR in 2024 to 877.704 EUR in 2026.

Risks are dealt with at Future Focus to some extent; according to the leaders of the institution, they “are currently considering incorporation of a more advanced monitoring system to detect potential risks before they happen” (SAR, p. 9).

The participatory nature of the mission statement’s development can be assumed to some extent at Future Focus. The panel was informed that the mission of the institution was developed in a process in which a brainstorming meeting of the staff was involved.

There is no doubt that Future Focus works with the data from students, staff and external stakeholders, and it can be assumed this data can contribute to the formation of future steps of the institution.

As already indicated above, strategic and operational plans are developed in a rather short and not complex way, and there is practically no evidence that they are cascading further to team and individual levels (although it needs to be taken into account that the institution is a rather small entity). At the same time, it can be acknowledged that the Managing Director apparently translates plans into more concrete activities, and responsibilities of people involved in Future Focus.

Strategic and operational plans do not explicitly mention online and blended learning, although especially online learning is in place - most of the teaching/learning activities are online at Future Focus (with some blended elements, too).

#### **Good Practice Identified**

Nil.

## **Recommendations for Improvement**

MR1: The institution shall, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, develop plans that concretely indicate future activities, performance indicators, resources allocated to the activities, and responsibilities for implementation. These plans shall explicitly deal with online and blended learning, too.

Judgement: Partially compliant

## Standard 2: Governance, organisational structure and administration

### Main Findings

The procedures and criteria for the selection/appointment of leadership positions and governance bodies are clear at Future Focus.

The persons in leadership positions can be considered as qualified and fit for the responsibilities of their roles.

Future Focus's governing bodies include representatives of some stakeholders; however, students are not directly represented there. Provisions for membership in these bodies are not fully clear.

Future Focus has an organisational chart in which the organisational structure is clearly described with governance, decision making and distribution of responsibilities. On the operational level, the key position is the Head of the Institution. It was confirmed during the interviews that the self-appraisal process is conducted to some extent at Future Focus. It cannot be said that the leadership and governance bodies regularly review their own effectiveness and develop and implement plans for improvement in the way they operate.

As for gender balance, there seem to be more women in management and administrative structures of Future Focus but this does not represent a cause for concern.

As already mentioned above, student representatives are not full members of governing bodies at Future Focus. The student body (student association or the like) does not exist at Future Focus either. Student representatives are, however, designated as class representatives - these are expected to communicate with the administration and academics about student issues, having a liaison role, if needed. The institution is trying to collect feedback data and mechanisms to be informed about students' views and experience.

The organisational structure covering academic and administration agendas seems to be fitting the purpose. While there are a number of units related to different agendas of the institution, on the overall level there is no unit that would deal/oversee academic issues and their development.

Staff satisfaction with governance, administration, working conditions and information flow seem to be monitored to some extent at Future Focus, namely, by means of self-evaluation and feedback provisions.

Management of online and blended learning is, as many other agendas, mainly in the hands of the Head of the Institution and Administration Executive.

Future Focus seems to be investing sufficient resources into technical infrastructure, training and system of online learning.

### **Good Practice Identified**

Nil.

### **Recommendations for Improvement**

MR2: The institution shall, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, establish the Academic Council or a similar body that would oversee academic issues and their development. It would be advisable to compose this body both from internal and from external academics.

KR1: The institution should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, make sure provisions for membership in governing bodies are clear.

KR2: The institution should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, implement a mechanism for regular review of leadership and governance effectiveness.

KR3: The institution should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, strengthen students' involvement in decision-making processes at Future Focus.

Judgement: Partially compliant

## Standard 3: Quality management

### Main Findings

In relation to internal quality assurance, Future Focus has the document titled Quality Assurance Manual (revised 17.9.2024) and the document titled Internal Quality Assurance Strategy and Process. They are both publicly available on the institution's website.

In the Introduction of the Quality Assurance Manual, it is written that the manual comprises three sections: Internal Quality Assurance Standards, Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures, and Quality Assurance Forms. In fact, the text is structured according to 10 standards (that were used until recently for institutional evaluation) and within these 10 chapters can be found various information, mostly related to quality assurance. This document can possibly serve as a guide for quality assurance practices.

Future Focus is indicating it sees quality assurance based on processes of (1) sample planning based on the principles of 'CAMERA', (2) effective communication, (3) interim sampling, (4) monitoring of assessor practice, and (5) standardisation activities. In practise, these processes do not seem to be formalised very much.

Future Focus is not a large institution, and responsibilities of individual units seem to be clear with quality management. The main role in this context is the Head of the Institution, and it seems a lot (maybe too much?) is related to her.

A strategic management system is part of the management system of the institution. Since strategic documents are not developed sufficiently, this can hardly be seen as the link between strategic development and quality assurance systems. The main focus of quality assurance activities is on the courses/programmes offered.

Oversight arrangements for quality management are strongly linked to the activity of the Head of the Institution at Future Focus.

Quality management functions are not very visibly integrated into normal planning in a defined cycle of planning, implementation, assessment and review.

As for the involvement of students and external stakeholders, the data from them are collected to some extent with the aim to keep/develop quality of the courses/programmes. It cannot be said that the students and external stakeholders are

sufficiently aware of and effectively engaged in the design and implementation of the quality management structures and processes at Future Focus, though.

Performance reports related to individual performances are compiled to some extent (in cases when appraisal is done). The overview of performance of the institution is not reported, although some collected data are used to inform strategic decisions and operational adjustments.

Quality management policies, procedures and arrangements are reviewed to some extent, with no evidence that there is sufficient regularity and a systematic nature to it.

The quality management policy also relates (mainly) to online learning since this is a prevailing form of teaching at Future Focus.

#### **Good Practice Identified**

Nil.

#### **Recommendations for Improvement**

- MR3: The institution shall, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, make effective steps toward strengthening and more formalisation of internal quality assurance processes.
- MR4: The institution shall, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, clearly link internal quality assurance processes with its strategic and other plans.
- KR4: The institution should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, implement strategies that would make students and other relevant stakeholders aware and understanding of and effectively involved in internal quality assurance processes.
- KR5: The institution should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, make sure more distribution of responsibility for internal quality assurance is in place, with clearly designated roles for people within the institution.

Judgement: Partially compliant

## Standard 4: Integrity, accountability and information management

### Main Findings

The quality management policy also relates (mainly) to online learning since this is a prevailing form of teaching at Future Focus.

Future Focus has extensively published all its policies and procedures on its website. Future Focus upholds a Code of Ethics that supports academic freedom and ethical integrity. This code is well-structured, serves its intended purpose, and is publicly available on the institution's website. The panel observed that Future Focus regularly updates the Code to address new ethical concerns and maintain its relevance. The audit revealed that the institution maintains high ethical standards in teaching, evaluations and administrative tasks and the academic staff are trained on ethical principles, especially for digital and online environments, supported by clear policies and guidelines. The institution is committed to helping both students and staff understand and tackle any ethical concerns that crop up. It actively fosters an environment that discourages intolerance, discrimination and harassment among students and staff. Additionally, Future Focus conducts induction sessions for new students and lecturers to raise awareness and ensure a clear understanding of and adherence to these ethical principles. It enforces a strict zero-tolerance policy against academic misconduct, such as plagiarism and cheating, and promptly addresses any violations. This policy is clearly communicated to students at the beginning of their courses, with written guidelines being explained in detail. Additionally, students are provided with links to tools that allow them to check their work for plagiarism before submission to their lecturers. A report indicating the originality percentage is submitted alongside assignments. It is significant that Future Focus has applied the same procedures to AI-generated content.

The panel learnt during the audit that recording of lectures is undertaken, when students demand it. Also, Future Focus uses online learning platforms and communication tools, such as an LMS, that create digital records of student activity. This data is carefully examined and analysed, always in compliance with data privacy laws. This process helps improve teaching and learning while protecting student privacy and data security.

The panel's examination of Future Focus's website revealed that it provides clear, precise and up to date details about its activities, including academic programmes, on its website. This readily available information enables prospective students to make well-informed choices regarding the knowledge, skills and competencies they can expect to gain upon successfully completing a programme. Furthermore, the panel noted that all published content adheres to the MFHEA regulations. It is evident that to enhance transparency, Future Focus continuously updates its website and regularly reviews the information to ensure accuracy and relevance.

The panel noted that Future Focus has protocols which are in conformity with the procedures of the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 and the Data Protection Act (Cap 586). Future Focus ensures that all the personal data collected, which is held within the institution's servers, is correct and up to date, administered fairly and lawfully, processed in accordance with good practice, and not kept for a period longer than is required by law. It is only the Future Focus's Registrar who can update this data whereas the Head of the Institution has access to that data without update facilities, which is necessary for the institution to run its programmes effectively. The Registrar creates records for each student in the database, containing academic profiles, study module details, attendance records, assessment details, results achieved, and students' satisfaction with the programmes and learning resources. The Head of the Institution undertakes, when necessary, the analysis and evaluation of student data to make effective decisions in the planning and implementation of Future Focus' programmes. Also, when required, the institution extracts data from the database and presents it in the form of spreadsheets to the National Statistics Office to satisfy legal requirements.

### **Good Practice Identified**

Future Focus provides students with links to tools that allows it to check their work for plagiarism before submission to their lecturers, and a report indicating the originality percentage is submitted alongside assignments.

### **Recommendations for Improvement**

- R1: Future Focus could consider making the website clearer and more navigable so that its policies and procedures will be easily accessible.
- R2: Future Focus could consider recording of all online lectures on Zoom, as this will provide an audit trail for the institution.

Judgement: Fully Compliant

## Standard 5: Teaching and administrative staff

### Main Findings

Future Focus has a cohort of very well-prepared lecturers, both academically and professionally. The panel found that all lecturers hold the required qualifications to teach their respective modules. However, one of the lecturers, who was delivering a taught module in Level 8, albeit having several years' experience in industry and in lecturing, has only a Level 7 qualification. The panel understands that the requirement to hold a Level 8 qualification in this case is waived due to the lecturer having several years' experience in industry and in lecturing. The panel noted that Future Focus always provides new lecturers with a thorough orientation that ensures they become familiar with the institution's services, programmes, student development strategies, and development priorities. It is evident that this orientation helps lecturers to integrate effectively into the institution. Most of Future Focus's lecturers also teach at other institutions. The policy related to the teaching methodology adopted by Future Focus focuses on student-centred methods such as group work, presentations, evaluation of videos, role playing and discussions with students based on the lecturers and students' work experiences. The institution prides itself in that all lecturers are keen to deliver courses using the online learning approach to attain the programme objectives and to meet the demands of their students. Future Focus ensures that staff induction incorporates instruction on the systems used to track student engagement and participation in online courses. The panel learnt during the audit that the number of teaching staff at Future Focus allows a student-staff ratio which is adequate for the optimal delivery of education, including the support necessary for students, and is comparable to European best practice. This ratio ensures that lecturers are available to meet students' educational needs. To ensure this, Future Focus has a capping for every course where upon reaching the number of students the course is closed, and a following intake is scheduled. Also, Future Focus's Administration Executive appropriately quantifies and regularly monitors the workload of the teaching staff which includes the contact hours, preparation and assessment hours.

It is noteworthy that Future Focus maintains a staff turnover rate below 10% and has measures in place to ensure that student learning experiences are not adversely affected by staff changes. The panel also noted that all lecturers, who have a high sense of belonging towards Future Focus, endeavour to understand the background and the learning levels of their respective students to effectively deliver the programmes. All the lecturers are specialised in their fields, thus drawing from their practical experiences and ensuring that they have the appropriate knowledge to deliver the programmes, thereby enhancing the personal and professional development of the students. This was confirmed by most students and alumni, who expressed that they looked forward to these sessions, finding them knowledgeable, informative, enjoyable and valuable. Lecturers also effectively communicate with their students through the Virtual Learning Environment LMS, email and WhatsApp groups.

The panel has learnt during the audit that Future Focus has the Recruitment and Selection policy and procedure in place. Future Focus adopts a fair approach to the recruitment, assessment and selection process, ascertaining that the procedure is transparent, whilst balancing the need for confidentiality of all applicants. Future Focus ensures that all positions, whether academic or administrative, are filled through open competition and those appointed to these roles possess the necessary qualifications. The recruitment and selection processes are coordinated by Future Focus's Human Resource Manager.

The panel learnt during the audit that administrative and academic staff is usually engaged through a call for applications. Positions are usually advertised through online websites, print media, agencies and recommendations. From the documentation provided and interviews carried out, the panel learnt that an interviewing board prepares a separate set of standard questions based on a set criterion for the recruitment of administrative and lecturing staff, respectively, given that the nature of their work is significantly different from each other. Whereas Future Focus maintains that the selected administrative staff can cope with the day-to-day administrative duties, lecturing staff are chosen with the knowledge that they can provide excellent quality education to their students. The panel also noted that Future Focus has the CVs of their lecturers in place, delineating the employment history as well as their academic qualifications. The panel observed that the recruitment and selection procedure aids Future Focus to choose the most appropriate administrative and lecturing staff that is able to fulfil effectively their responsibilities and to fit within the culture of Future Focus.

It was evident during the audit that Future Focus takes teaching observations, peer reviews and lecturers' self-assessment processes very seriously. It is commendable that the Head of the Institution conducts unannounced teaching observation visits based on a set of criteria to evaluate the teaching quality of the lecturers. The teaching observations criteria include lesson planning, effective course management, clear lecture structure, creative lecturing approaches, learners' engagement, formative assessment tools, and successful lecturing. The Head of the Institution evaluates the teaching observations, prepares the peer review from these observations and assesses the lecturers' self-assessment. The evaluation criteria include reliability, punctuality, student engagement, lecture preparation, commitment, professional appearance and CPD activities undertaken by the lecturers. The Head of the Institution provides feedback to lecturers and points out measures that are required to be implemented to enhance their teaching expertise and the learning experience of students. All the lecturers that were interviewed during the audit were subjected to these annual processes and the corresponding documentation that was filled in by the peer reviewer and lecturers were very well demonstrated.

The panel noted that Future Focus takes the continuing professional development (CPD) of their lecturers very seriously. Indeed, the Head of the Institution monitors professional development activities during the appraisal sessions that are held annually with staff. The panel observed that from the documentation provided, lecturers are obliged to fill in a standardised CPD form denoting all the details on the professional development activities

undertaken during the academic year. Of significance is that most of the lecturers pursued their professional development activities by participating in the EU Erasmus projects. Other lecturers also take their personal initiative to undertake big personal CPD initiatives such as pursuing a Level 8 qualification. During these sessions, staff is obliged to also indicate other CPD activities that may be pursued in the future.

### **Good Practice Identified**

Nil.

### **Recommendations for Improvement**

KR6: The institution should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, formalise a signed lecturer's contractual agreement with Future Focus to delineate the duration of each programme and the job description deliverables expected of the lecturer.

Judgement: Substantially Compliant

## Standard 6: Design, monitoring and review of programmes

### Main Findings

In the self-assessment report and the programme applications submitted to the panel, Future Focus demonstrates the fulfilment of requirements for the design and approval of programmes. Established in 2000, Future Focus has successfully maintained programmes accredited by the MFHEA ranging from Levels 2 to 8, and currently offers 29 online programmes from Level 2 to Level 7. Future Focus also offers three full-time degree programmes, two at MQF Level 6 and one at MQF Level 7. Future Focus also commenced the first year of a Level 8 programme by providing three taught modules. This is prima facie evidence that Future Focus has appropriate processes in place for the design and approval of programmes.

In designing its programmes, the panel noted that Future Focus is guided by its mission and the needs of the labour market. It utilises current sector knowledge and analysis methods such as market analysis, Political, Economic, Social and Technological (PEST) analysis, and demographic research. Future Focus strives to ensure that the procedure adopted is one whereby quality meets the students' needs. As a primary source the Managing Director identifies a niche in the market, or someone informs Future Focus about a need. Research is carried out by Future Focus about whether the course is presently being offered by other players in Malta or abroad. This stage includes brainstorming sessions between the Head of the Institution and the educators involved in the prospective teaching sessions, in order to collect data, which is then evaluated and summarised to formulate a course outline.

The panel observed that Future Focus designed its programmes with active involvement from both internal and external stakeholders, such as administrative staff, academic peers, students and employers. External stakeholders are actively involved, especially for employment-oriented programmes, to ensure relevance and effectiveness. This collaborative approach ensures that the programmes are relevant and meet the needs of all parties involved. The panel noted that Future Focus focuses on the learning outcomes when writing the course modules. The institution places the emphasis firmly on a student-centred approach to learning, focusing clearly on what the student should be able to do on successful completion of the course. This approach also indicates to students more clearly what they have to do to achieve a pass in the course or module.

Future Focus employs well-defined course development standards and guidelines for programme development. When it comes to courses that build up from lower to higher levels, Future Focus ensures that progression is as smooth as possible. From the programme applications officially approved by the MFHEA and provided to the panel, it is evident that the Future Focus's programme design process is thorough and systematic,

ensuring that it addresses various critical factors. It also indicates appropriate resources and forms of assessment. It defines student workloads in line with ECTS credits and ensures these are realistic, considers the target audience and eligibility criteria, and bases programmes on clear learning outcomes, distinguishing between knowledge, skills and competencies. The process sets standards for teaching staff qualifications and outlines responsibilities for course design, technical support, and teaching. The process also facilitates smooth student progression and occasionally includes student input. The panel noted that Future Focus programmes are structured to ensure a logical progression of their components, balancing theoretical and practical activities effectively. They provide students with ample opportunities to meet learning outcomes within a reasonable timeframe.

Future Focus engages in comparative analysis of similar programmes offered by leading international higher education institutions when developing its own programmes. This practice helps ensure that its programmes are competitive and aligned with global standards. Once the application is written and approved by the Head of the Institution, Future Focus submits the course application to the MFHEA. The panel observed that Future Focus then proceeded to make public the course details within the institution itself and also published it via their website.

The panel noted that Future Focus has formal policies and procedures for monitoring and reviewing its programmes, and these are effectively put into practise. Future Focus's programme monitoring process is comprehensive. It is undertaken primarily by the Head of the Institution, encompassing the analysis of admissions, progression, completion and student achievement. Future Focus seeks to improve the review processes by updates based on lecturers and students' feedback and emerging trends to maintain high standards and continuous improvement. For example, where a change necessitates a major revision, the panel noted that Future Focus engages internal and external stakeholders to provide feedback prior to submitting the revised application to the MFHEA.

The panel also observed that most lecturers that were interviewed during the audit updated their material content to reflect current trends on the relevant topics pertaining to the programmes as well as meeting the objectives of the programmes. Such updates do not entail major revisions to the programme. Future Focus organises these changes through annual and periodic reviews. This structured approach helps ensure that both incremental and significant updates are managed appropriately.

All Future Focus programmes that are accredited by the MFHEA are designed for online delivery in a manner to ensure that all required teaching and learning elements are incorporated in the course. These specific elements are adapted purposely to apply for online and blended delivery.

### **Good Practice Identified**

Nil.

### **Recommendations for Improvement**

KR7: The institution should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, compile a standard form to capture the changes that lecturers communicate during annual and periodic reviews reflecting current trends on the relevant topics pertaining to the programmes and ensure that these changes are well-communicated and implemented efficiently.

KR8: The institution should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, compile a well-defined policy for programme termination, including the reasons for termination and the associated legal considerations.

Judgement: Substantially Compliant

## Standard 7: Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

### Main Findings

The panel noted that Future Focus strives to deliver its courses in a way that encourages students to take an active role in the learning process and subsequently enhances students' motivation, self-reflection, autonomy, creativity and innovation. Of significance is Future Focus's approach towards student-centred learning, even addressing the diverse needs of its student population. Future Focus achieves this by evaluating and adapting its andragogy approaches and lecture delivery methods to nurture an inclusive educational environment. Lecturers apply updated andragogy principles when they deliver their lectures. The panel was informed that lecturers apply various teaching methods, ranging from discussions, group work, role-playing, brainstorming, evaluation of case studies and video-clips, and presentations. To reach its objectives, Future Focus successfully uses the digital technologies of the Zoom platform for its online delivery. Lecturers also share with students their practical knowledge of the subjects they are teaching as well as experiences from their professional lives which are highly enriching.

The panel also observed that the institution has clearly established responsibilities for dissertation supervisors at all academic levels, including Level 8 candidates. These guidelines outline the specific roles and duties of supervisors, ensuring that students receive structured, consistent and effective support throughout their research journey. Of significance, the panel learnt during this audit that Future Focus maintains high standards for thesis evaluation and defence by implementing clear and fair procedures. The process involves a thorough review conducted by two qualified academic examiners, one internal and one external, ensuring objectivity and rigour. Additionally, the assessment includes a Viva Voce, an oral examination where students defend their thesis before the two examiners. The student's supervisor is also invited to attend and observe the proceedings. This was confirmed by all the learners and alumni that were interviewed during the audit. They also expressed their utmost satisfaction with their lecturers and dissertation supervisors who continuously assisted them to achieve the course's objectives. Also, all the students and alumni interviewed during the audit were enthusiastic about enrolling for new courses that will be launched by Future Focus in the future.

Of importance is the provision of course material which is uploaded by lecturers onto their Virtual Learning Environment LMS. This training material includes PowerPoint presentations, video-clips and other notes, also delineating the learning objectives, assessment methods, the various learning styles and recommending links for additional reading material.

Additionally, the panel noted that the institution integrates work-based learning or internships into its specialised programmes, providing students with appropriate supervision throughout their experience. Many students trained at Future Focus, such as those in the Child Care Development Programmes, often secure employment at Childcare Centres where they complete their placements. These students are allocated placements by the various Childcare Centres and are assessed by Future Focus's visiting tutors by observing them undertaking activities with students. These tutors evaluate the students' uploaded portfolio. The tutors also receive written feedback on the students' performance from their employers to be able to assess and improve their experiences, thus ensuring that students contribute effectively to their educational goals.

The provision of continuous feedback by lecturers directly to the students in an efficient and helpful manner is one of the main strengths of Future Focus. The lecturers provide valuable feedback to their students, that is both actionable and oriented towards enhancing their learning journey. In this respect, lecturers continuously assist students in achieving the course objectives, often serving as the primary point of reference for students at Future Focus. This feedback was greatly appreciated by the students interviewed during the audit and contributed towards their skill improvement in a timely fashion. The students' standard feedback form is also communicated to lecturers at the end of the programme and subsequently reviewed by the Head of the Institution. Such feedback ensures that the course objectives are being met. The panel noted that students can ask questions, give suggestions, or provide feedback to the lecturer or Future Focus administration at any time during the course. This open communication channel is beneficial for enhancing the teaching and learning processes offered by the institution.

The panel observed that Future Focus's assessment system is well-structured to ensure clarity and fairness. It also includes the advanced publication of the mode of assessment and criteria. However, the panel learnt during the audit that assignments that are compiled by lecturers are not always internally verified by the Head of the Institution prior to being submitted to students; and when they are internally verified, there is no standard procedure to confirm that internal verification has been done. This internal verification ensures that the assignment fulfils the objectives of the learning outcomes, and that the assignment is set in a fair and correct manner. The review panel noted that assignments submitted by students are marked by the respective lecturer. There is no procedure for the internal verification of students' assignments corrected by lecturers. Such a formal process ascertains that the marking of assignments is being carried out correctly.

The panel has learnt that Future Focus has a clearly defined students' complaints and appeal policy and procedure that is communicated to students during the induction process. Complaints encompass issues pertaining to teaching, supervision, support services, payment and finance, or any other related matters. The procedure also outlines the grounds for academic appeals, the criteria used for making decisions, and the remedies available to students. Of significance is the fact that there are clear standard

forms for students' complaints and appeals and any communication to Future Focus is to be carried out and addressed to the Managing Director or the Head of the Institution. The panel noted that this policy is explained by Future Focus's administration to all students during an induction session at the start of every course and this explanation is confirmed by a declaration that is signed by the students as per the Learner Induction Checklist. However, all students and alumni that were interviewed during the audit seemed to be unaware that complaints and appeals procedures exist and confirmed that they never had any justification to complain.

### **Good Practice Identified**

Nil.

### **Recommendations for Improvement**

- KR9: The institution should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, standardise and implement procedures for the internal verification process of assignments compiled by lecturers prior to being submitted to students.
- KR10: The institution should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, formulate a standardised procedure for the internal verification of assignments submitted by students by a second assessor to ensure consistency and fairness on the marking of assignments.
- R3: The institution could consider creating more awareness among students, after the induction process, of their rights to complain and appeal on issues encompassing teaching, supervision, support services, payment and finance, or any other related matters by using the already established Complaints form.

Judgement: Substantially Compliant

## Standard 8: Student administration and student support services

### Main Findings

Prospective students may consult Future Focus's website to acquire any information necessary in order to make an informed decision. All relevant information related to the range of programmes, admissions procedures, services, scholarship opportunities, tuition and administrative fees, and other relevant information is provided. The panel also noted that all relevant policies related to student conduct and plagiarism, the student lifecycle in the institution - from admission to completion (i.e., the student handbook), and other relevant policies on the procedures were made available on the website in a dedicated page accessible from the website footer.

Once the prospective student has acquired the necessary information, they phone Future Focus to express their interest, and further information is provided via the phone and a subsequent in-person meeting. At this point, any arrangements due to diverse needs and/or recognition of prior learning are considered. Following the payment of fees, an induction session is organised for the new intake of students. During the information session, the procedures enlisted in the aforementioned policy documents are outlined, as are the student's rights and duties.

During the study period, attendance is monitored by the lecturers themselves and stored on the LMS. The institution's head has access to the progression and attendance data via a data dashboard that visualises the student's life cycle in several graph formats. Through the dashboard, the Director could look out for absenteeism carefully and consider it when there is a student complaint related to grading or other factors. In case of such issues, the student is contacted, and a meeting is held to discuss a way forward. The collected student data (via the LMS) is also used by the Head of the Institution for decision-making.

If students face difficulties during their studies, they usually contact the lecturer (if it is related to a course) or the Head of the Institution via the LMS. The latter would then handle the issue on a case-by-case basis and see what is required to mitigate the situation. In cases of personal problems, Future Focus is open to supporting students where necessary, but it does not have direct contact with any psychological facilities.

After completing a module, a feedback form is made available to the students via Google Forms. While the panel was made aware of the existence of such forms sent by both the institution and the lecturers separately, via the interviews conducted with the students and lecturers, the panel did not see any actual results from the forms themselves.

### **Good Practice Identified**

Nil.

### **Recommendations for Improvement**

- R4: Future Focus could consider developing more explicit student support strategies that would cover their diverse needs during the studies.
- R5: Future Focus could consider possibilities to publish actions based on the results of the feedback surveys.

Judgement: Fully Compliant

## Standard 9: Learning resources and facilities

### Main Findings

Future Focus's premises are wholly owned by the company and situated in Floriana. In the past, students used to attend their lectures onsite; however, following the COVID-19 pandemic, most students preferred online course delivery, which the institution obliged. The premises are located in a refurbished palazzo, which poses some challenges to installing a lift that allows for better accessibility. Despite the accessibility issues, the rest of the building is well equipped to host onsite teaching should it be required, with modern equipment installed in most rooms. Technical support is available via a third-party provider, which is on call should any issues arise. The same provider is also responsible for ensuring continuity of service and disaster mitigation for the data stored by Future Focus. Regular backups are conducted, with the data stored both onsite and in an offsite server within a European jurisdiction. The review panel confirmed the existence of policies relating to data protection, IT policy, and other policies related to the resources provided by the institution.

Most learning resources are provided in the dedicated LMS, which contains all the lecture materials and assessments. Links to the online live lectures are posted in the LMS in advance so the students can connect to the respective class on the day using the Zoom video conferencing software. The resources on the LMS are the bare minimum required (slide notes and basic readers). Further reading is available in a dedicated online library maintained by Future Focus. The content in this online library is minimal and contains papers or books supplied by the lecturers. It is, therefore, very difficult for students following Levels 5 to 8 courses to access other resources to effectively conduct their research since no journal subscription services are made available by Future Focus.

### Good Practice Identified

Nil.

### Recommendations for Improvement

MR5: The online library services require significant improvement to meet the requirements of delivering programmes at Levels 6, 7 and 8. Future Focus shall enable access to some online research gateways, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report.

Judgement: Partially compliant

## Standard 10: Research, development and/or other creative activity (applicable only to universities and providers that deliver programmes at MQF Level 8)

### **Main Findings**

Future Focus currently offers a diploma programme in Strategic Management and Leadership Practice at Level 8. As such is the case, the review panel was obliged to consider Standard 10 in its evaluation as accorded by the Manual of Procedures.

The institution has no budgetary allocation or strategic properties for research and development, nor are there the necessary policies, expectations or infrastructure in place to support this endeavour. It was noted by the review panel that the lecturing staff, albeit appropriately qualified, is not actively publishing, nor are they directly encouraged by the institution to conduct research in addition to their teaching commitments. There are also no budgetary resources allocated for this endeavour, nor are there any tangible resources (as outlined in the findings of Standard 9) in the form of library resources for the effective conducting of research activities. The institution currently also lacks the human resources to offer research-intensive courses at such a level as few of the lecturing staff have achieved a Level 8 qualification (the panel is cognisant, however, that some lecturers are currently pursuing a Level 8 degree).

It is, therefore, the recommendation of the review panel that the institution review its commitment to offering research-intensive courses by allocating the necessary resources as required by Standard 10.

### **Good Practice Identified**

Nil.

### **Recommendations for Improvement**

MR6: If Future Focus is to continue offering a Level 8 programme or intends to expand and offer further courses at this level, it shall reconsider its strategic plan and budgetary allocations to make the necessary adjustments to support research endeavours. This is to be done within 12 months from the date of publication of this report. The requirements of Standard 10 offer a guideline of what is expected.

Judgement: Non-compliant

## Standard 11: Institutional cooperation, service to society and internationalisation

### Main Findings

Future Focus is looking beyond the national market and plans to attract more foreign students as part of its internationalisation efforts. Furthermore, it allows its lecturing staff and students to participate in mobility exchanges via Erasmus+ funding. Internships can, therefore, be conducted via the Erasmus+ route. However, most students perform their internship locally, where several MOUs are in place between the institution and other education providers catering to primary or secondary education. An internship form is signed between the Head of the School and the Head of Future Focus to provide the internship. Students are monitored from time to time during the internship by the lecturing staff. The review panel also noted that the lecturing staff is also reviewed, with staff performance reviews in place.

Future Focus also contributes to the local society of Floriana, where various monies are donated to local community causes, embedding the institution within the local community. Several causes were highlighted in the SAR and mentioned during the onsite interviews.

The panel noted that alumni are not tracked after they finish their studies, nor are they consulted for any form of decision-making. The same can be stated for employers, who are consulted for feedback informally but almost never invited to formal meetings, which may improve the courses offered by Future Focus.

### Good Practice Identified

Nil.

### Recommendations for Improvement

KR11: Future Focus should introduce formal alumni tracer studies to keep track of progression beyond studies and the impact of their courses, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report.

KR12: Future Focus should involve employers more formally in their decision-making by formalising meetings, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report.

Judgement: Fully compliant

## Panel Member Signatures

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The Audit Report is compiled by the peer review panel:

Chair of Review Panel: Milan Pol

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Milan Pol", written on a light-colored background.

Peer Reviewer: Ronald Aquilina

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Ronald Aquilina", written in a cursive style.

Student Peer Reviewer: Wilbert Tabone

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Wilbert Tabone", written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

## Response by the Provider

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### Preamble

#### Formal Response to the MFHEA Institutional Audit

Future Focus Institute for Further and Higher Education will be commemorating its 25th anniversary in December 2025. Over the past quarter-century, the Institute has established itself as a reputable and leading provider of further and higher education in Malta. This experience has also enabled the Institute to extend its reach by promoting its educational programmes internationally.

Future Focus remains fully committed to continuous improvement and upholding the highest standards of quality assurance. We appreciate the efforts of the audit board and welcome their findings. In response, we have developed a strategic plan aimed at further enhancing our quality assurance practices to ensure ongoing institutional development and educational excellence.

We also recognise the essential role that external stakeholders play in the sustainability and growth of the institution, particularly employers, who are vital in offering our graduates full-time and part-time employment opportunities. Moving forward, we are committed to increasing the involvement of external academics and student representatives, as their insights and recommendations can provide valuable perspectives that contribute to the ongoing improvement and innovation of our educational provision.

We are pleased that our efforts since the last review have resulted in demonstrable progress, as reflected in the current audit report. We remain dedicated to further professionalising our institution and enhancing its appeal to both local and international students.

Finally, we extend our sincere thanks to the audit committee for their comprehensive review and constructive recommendations. These will undoubtedly support the Institute in its future endeavours and ongoing commitment to educational excellence.

## Response to Mandatory Recommendations Made by the Peer Review Panel

Action plan		
Mandatory Recommendations	Actions to be taken to address the recommendations	Date for completion
Standard 1:		
<p>The institution shall, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, develop plans that concretely indicate future activities, performance indicators, resources allocated to the activities, and responsibilities for implementation. These plans must explicitly deal with online and blended learning, too.</p>	<p>Future Focus Institute is committed to addressing the recommendation outlined in the audit report. Over the coming months, the Institute will work in close collaboration with key stakeholders to develop comprehensive plans that clearly define future activities, with particular emphasis on online and blended learning provision. These plans will include measurable performance indicators, specific resource allocations, and designated individuals responsible for implementation. This approach will ensure structured, accountable, and sustainable development in alignment with the institution's strategic objectives.</p>	<p>April 2026</p>
Standard 2:		
<p>MR2: The institution shall, within 12 months from the date of publication of the report, establish the Academic Council or a similar body that would oversee academic issues and their development. It would be advisable to compose this body both from internal and from external academics.</p>	<p>Future Focus Institute has already identified individuals who will form part of the Academic Council, which will be formally established within the stipulated timeframe. The Council will be composed of both internal and external academics to ensure a balanced and informed perspective on academic matters. It will be entrusted with the oversight and development of academic policies and practices, and the Institute will closely monitor its work to ensure it contributes effectively to the continuous improvement of academic standards.</p>	<p>April 2026</p>

Standard 3:		
MR3: The institution shall, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, make effective steps toward strengthening and more formalisation of internal quality assurance processes.	Future Focus Institute recognises internal quality assurance as a critical function for ensuring academic and operational excellence. In line with the recommendation, the Institute is committed to taking effective steps over the next 12 months to further strengthen and formalise its internal quality assurance processes. This will include reviewing existing procedures, aligning them with best practices, and ensuring clear documentation, monitoring mechanisms, and accountability structures are in place.	April 2026
MR4: The institution shall, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, clearly link internal quality assurance processes with its strategic and other plans.	Future Focus Institute is committed to aligning its internal quality assurance processes with its strategic and operational plans. Over the next 12 months, clear and systematic links will be established to ensure that quality assurance mechanisms actively inform, support, and reflect the institution’s strategic objectives and other key planning documents. This integration will enhance coherence, accountability, and continuous improvement across all areas of the institution.	April 2026
Standard 4:		
Standard 5:		
Standard 6:		
Standard 7:		
Standard 8:		

Standard 9:		
MR5: The online library services require significant improvement to meet the requirements of delivering programmes at Levels 6, 7 and 8. Future Focus shall enable access to some online research gateways, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report.	Future Focus Institute acknowledges the importance of robust online library services in supporting the delivery of programmes at MQF Levels 6, 7, and 8. Research will be given due priority, and in this regard, the Institute plans to benchmark its approach against practices adopted by other reputable institutions. Within the next six months, Future Focus will take concrete steps to enable access to selected online research gateways, thereby strengthening the support available to students and academic staff engaged in research and advanced study.	October 2026
Standard 10:		
MR6: If Future Focus is to continue offering a Level 8 programme or intends to expand and offer further courses at this level, it shall reconsider its strategic plan and budgetary allocations to make the necessary adjustments to support research endeavours. This is to be done within 12 months from the date of publication of this report. The requirements of Standard 10 offer a guideline of what is expected.	Future Focus Institute is committed to supporting its Level 8 provision and any future expansion at this level. In line with the recommendation, the Institute plans to review and revise its strategic plan and budgetary allocations within the next 12 months to ensure adequate support for research activities. This includes continued investment in the library and other academic resources that benefit both staff and students. The revised planning will be guided by the requirements outlined in Standard 10, ensuring that research at this level is effectively resourced and sustained.	April 2026
Standard 11:		

## 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:		
Standard 2:		
KR1: The institution should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, make sure provisions for membership in governing bodies are clear.	Future Focus Institute acknowledges the importance of clarity and transparency in the composition and functioning of its governing bodies. In response to the recommendation, the institution will further develop and formalise its policies and procedures to clearly define the provisions for membership in governing bodies. This work will be completed within the stipulated 12-month timeframe to ensure effective governance and accountability.	April 2026
KR2: The institution should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, implement a mechanism for regular review of leadership and governance effectiveness.	Future Focus Institute recognises the importance of regularly evaluating the effectiveness of its leadership and governance structures. In line with the recommendation, internal discussions will be initiated with the aim of enhancing the effectiveness of these roles. These discussions will inform the development and implementation of a formal mechanism for the regular review of leadership and governance, contributing to a more robust and accountable institutional framework.	April 2026
KR3: The institution should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, strengthen students' involvement in decision-making processes at Future Focus.	Future Focus Institute acknowledges the value of student involvement in institutional decision-making processes and is committed to strengthening this aspect. While the necessary policies and procedures are already in place, student participation has proven to be limited. Over the next 12 months, the Institute will make a concerted effort to actively encourage and motivate students to engage in governance structures. Additional measures will be explored to raise awareness of the importance of their contribution and to create more accessible and appealing opportunities for involvement.	April 2026

Standard 3:		
<p>KR4: The institution should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, implement strategies that would make students and other relevant stakeholders aware and understanding of and effectively involved in internal quality assurance processes.</p>	<p>Future Focus Institute recognises the critical importance of engaging students and other relevant stakeholders in the internal quality assurance processes. In response to this recommendation, the Institute will, within 12 months from the publication of the report, develop and implement targeted strategies aimed at raising awareness and understanding of these processes among all stakeholders. These strategies will include clear communication channels, informative sessions, and opportunities for meaningful involvement, thereby ensuring that stakeholders are effectively engaged in maintaining and enhancing the quality of educational provision.</p>	<p>April 2026</p>
<p>KR5: The institution should, within 12 months from the date of publication of this report, make sure more distribution of responsibility for internal quality assurance is in place, with clearly designated roles for people within the institution.</p>	<p>Future Focus Institute acknowledges the importance of distributing responsibility for internal quality assurance across the institution. In line with this key recommendation, the Institute will, within 12 months from the publication of this report, implement a clear framework that delineates roles and responsibilities related to quality assurance. This framework will ensure that accountability is shared appropriately among designated staff members, thereby strengthening the effectiveness and sustainability of the institution's quality assurance processes.</p>	<p>April 2026</p>
Standard 4:		
<p>R1: Future Focus could consider making the website clearer and more navigable so that its policies and procedures will be easily accessible.</p>	<p>Future Focus Institute appreciates the recommendation regarding the accessibility of its policies and procedures. The institution already maintains a dedicated page on its website where these documents are readily available. Nonetheless, the Institute will review the website's design and navigation over the coming months to identify any possible improvements that could further enhance user experience and ease of access to important information.</p>	<p>April 2027</p>
<p>R2: Future Focus could consider recording of all online lectures on Zoom, as this will provide an audit trail for the institution.</p>	<p>Future Focus Institute acknowledges the value of recording online lectures, such as those conducted via Zoom, as a means of maintaining a comprehensive audit trail and enhancing the quality assurance framework. The Institute will evaluate the feasibility and implications of implementing a policy for recording all online lectures, taking into consideration privacy, consent, and technical aspects. Steps will be taken within the coming months to develop clear guidelines</p>	<p>April 2027</p>

	and, where appropriate, incorporate recording practices to support institutional accountability and student learning.	
Standard 5:		
KR6: The institution should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, formalise a signed lecturer's contractual agreement with Future Focus to delineate the duration of each programme and the job description deliverables expected of the lecturer.	Future Focus Institute acknowledges the importance of formalising contractual agreements with its lecturers, specifying programme durations and job description deliverables. It is important to note that such signed agreements are already in place within the institution. During the audit process, a specimen copy of the lecturer's contract was not requested by the auditors, and this point was also clarified and disputed during the factual accuracy exercise. The Institute remains committed to maintaining clear and formalised agreements with all academic staff in line with Standard 5 requirements.	October 2026
Standard 6:		
KR7: The institution should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, compile a standard form to capture the changes that lecturers communicate during annual and periodic reviews reflecting current trends on the relevant topics pertaining to the programmes and ensure that these changes are well-communicated and implemented efficiently.	Future Focus Institute acknowledges the importance of systematically capturing and communicating updates made by lecturers during annual and periodic programme reviews. In response to this recommendation, the Institute will develop and implement a standardised form within six months from the date of publication of the report. This form will facilitate the documentation of changes reflecting current trends and ensure that such updates are effectively communicated and efficiently implemented across relevant programmes. The responsibility for overseeing this process will be assigned to the Academic Council, which will ensure timely review and dissemination of information to all relevant academic and administrative staff. Communication will be carried out through established channels including meetings, official emails, and the institution's online portal, thereby maintaining consistency and currency in programme delivery.	October 2026

<p>KR8: The institution should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, compile a well-defined policy for programme termination, including the reasons for termination and the associated legal considerations.</p>	<p>Future Focus Institute recognises the importance of having a clear and well-defined policy for programme termination that addresses the reasons for termination as well as the associated legal considerations. In response to this key recommendation, the Institute will develop and formalise such a policy within six months from the date of publication of this report. This policy will ensure transparency, compliance with regulatory requirements, and safeguard the interests of all stakeholders involved.</p>	<p>October 2026</p>
<p>Standard 7:</p>		
<p>KR9: The institution should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, standardise and implement procedures for the internal verification process of assignments compiled by lecturers prior to being submitted to students.</p>	<p>Future Focus Institute recognises the importance of maintaining consistent academic standards through a rigorous internal verification process for assignments. In response to this key recommendation, the Institute will, within six months from the date of publication of this report, develop and standardise clear procedures for the internal verification of assignments compiled by lecturers prior to their distribution to students. These procedures will ensure consistency, fairness, and alignment with programme learning outcomes, thereby enhancing the overall quality of assessment practices.</p>	<p>October 2026</p>
<p>KR10: The institution should, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report, formulate a standardised procedure for the internal verification of assignments submitted by students by a second assessor to ensure consistency and fairness on the marking of assignments.</p>	<p>Future Focus Institute recognises the critical role of internal verification in ensuring the consistency and fairness of assessment outcomes. In response to this recommendation, the Institute will, within six months from the date of publication of this report, formulate and implement a standardised procedure for the internal verification of student assignments by a second assessor. This procedure will be designed to uphold academic integrity, promote transparency in marking, and ensure equitable treatment of all students.</p>	<p>October 2026</p>

R3: The institution could consider creating more awareness among students, after the induction process, of their rights to complain and appeal on issues encompassing teaching, supervision, support services, payment and finance, or any other related matters by using the already established Complaints form.	Future Focus Institute acknowledges the importance of ensuring students are fully aware of their rights, including the processes for complaints and appeals across various areas such as teaching, supervision, support services, and financial matters. Building on the induction process, the Institute will implement additional measures to raise awareness among students about these rights and the use of the established Complaints Form. This will include targeted communications and informational sessions through multiple channels to ensure that students are well informed and empowered to seek redress when necessary.	April 2027
Standard 8:		
R4: Future Focus could consider developing more explicit student support strategies that would cover their diverse needs during the studies.	Future Focus Institute recognises the importance of providing comprehensive and inclusive support to students throughout their studies. In response to this recommendation, the Institute will consider developing more explicit and structured student support strategies that address the diverse needs of its student body. These strategies will aim to enhance academic, personal, and wellbeing support, ensuring that all students have access to appropriate resources and assistance to successfully complete their programmes.	April 2027
R5: Future Focus could consider possibilities to publish actions based on the results of the feedback surveys.	Future Focus Institute values the feedback provided by its students and other stakeholders as an essential tool for continuous improvement. In response to this suggestion, the Institute will explore possibilities to publish and communicate the actions taken based on the results of feedback surveys. This transparency will not only demonstrate the institution's commitment to responsiveness but also encourage greater engagement in future feedback initiatives.	April 2027
Standard 9:		
Standard 10:		

Standard 11:		
<p>KR11: Future Focus should introduce formal alumni tracer studies to keep track of progression beyond studies and the impact of their courses, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report.</p>	<p>Future Focus Institute recognises the importance of alumni tracer studies to monitor graduate progression and assess the impact of its courses. It is important to note that tracer studies are already in progress within the institution. During the audit process, the audit committee did not request a copy of these studies, and this was also clarified and disputed during the factual accuracy exercise. Future Focus remains committed to further enhancing these efforts to ensure continuous tracking and improvement based on alumni outcomes.</p>	<p>October 2026</p>
<p>KR12: Future Focus should involve employers more formally in their decision-making by formalising meetings, within 6 months from the date of publication of this report.</p>	<p>Future Focus Institute recognises the valuable role that employers play in informing and shaping its educational offerings. In line with this recommendation, the Institute will, within six months from the date of publication of this report, formalise employer involvement in decision-making processes through the establishment of regular, structured meetings. This will enhance collaboration, ensure that programmes remain aligned with labour market needs, and strengthen partnerships with key external stakeholders.</p>	<p>October 2026</p>

## Annexes

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### Annex 1: Review Panel Bio Notes

#### Chair of the Panel:

**Prof Milan Pol** is Professor of Education and, from 2014 to 2022, Dean of the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University (Brno, Czech Republic). At this faculty he is head of the doctoral programme of Educational Sciences. His professional interests are divided into leadership in education and evaluation in education. In the field of evaluation, Prof Pol is often invited to evaluations arranged by ENQA (the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) and has been head/a member of evaluating panels of QAA (UK), FINEEC (Finland) and SQAA-NAKVIS (Slovenia). He participates frequently in institutional/programme evaluations in higher education in various countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Kosovo, Malta, Romania, Russia, Slovakia and others). In 2010-2016 Prof Pol was a member of the Accreditation Committee of Slovakia. He is author of numerous publications (<https://www.muni.cz/en/people/75-milan-pol/publications>) and works as editor-in-chief of *Studia Paedagogica*, a Scopus-databased journal, and is a board member (formerly chairperson) of the European Network for Improving Research and Development in Educational Leadership and Management (ENIRDELM). Honoris causa doctor (2023, University of Latvia).

#### Peer reviewer:

**Dr Ronald Aquilina** is administering Master's Degree Programmes at Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST). At MCAST, he is also lecturing in "Applied Research & Development" and "Business & ICT Alignment". Dr Aquilina was also a senior lecturer at St Martin's Institute of Higher Education, lecturing Information Systems and Management to St Martin's undergraduates. He was also Vice-Principal of the same Institute between 2007 and 2011. Dr Aquilina graduated in Economics with honours from the University of Malta. He furthered his studies by reading for a Master's Degree in Business Administration (MBA) from the same University. He completed his formal education at the Robert Gordon University (RGU), Aberdeen. At RGU, Dr Aquilina successfully completed the postgraduate certificate programme in Research Methods with distinction and earned his Doctorate by doing original research on IT strategising in small firms. He also attained the postgraduate certificate in higher education at Saint Martin's Institute of Higher Education. Dr Aquilina was Atlas Technology Group's Support Manager. He was also Information Technology Manager at Marsovin Group and Systems Manager at Dowty (Malta) Limited.

### **Student reviewer:**

**Dr Wilbert Tabone** is a researcher in the areas of applied artificial intelligence, human-computer interaction and the application of technology in the arts and cultural heritage. He holds a PhD in cognitive human-robot interaction from Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands where he was previously a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Early Stage Researcher. Dr Tabone also graduated BSc (Hons) with first class honours in Creative Computing from the University of London and later read for an MSc in Artificial Intelligence at the University of Malta, conducting his research at the Bernoulli Institute for Mathematics, Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence, University of Groningen in the Netherlands. He is currently a postdoctoral researcher at Delft University of Technology, focusing on brain-computer interfaces for human-robot interaction. Moreover, Dr Tabone is actively involved in the cultural, technology and education sectors and is also an activist for several Maltese and international NGOs, including the Commonwealth Youth Council and National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE). In the Netherlands, he is involved in the creative coding community, and is a keen follower and creator of new media art. Dr Tabone has years of experience in both the public and private sectors, where he has worked in the telecom industry, fintech industry, and the heritage and museum sectors. Dr Tabone also formed part of Malta.AI, the Malta National Task Force on Artificial Intelligence, tasked with formulating Malta's national strategy on AI. He has been engaged as a quality assurance auditor for the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) for the past nine years.

## Annex 2: Agenda of the Onsite Visit

### QA Audit Agenda: Future Focus

#### Day 1

**Date:** Thursday, 30<sup>th</sup> January 2025

**Venue:** Future Focus, 8 Triq L-Imhazen, Floriana

**Panel:** Prof Milan Pol (Chair of peer review panel), Dr Ronald Aquilina (Peer reviewer),  
Dr Wilbert Tabone (Student peer reviewer)

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

08.30 – 09.00	Panel and officers arrive at Future Focus
09.00 – 10.00	Meeting with Managing Director
10.00 – 10.15	Panel discussion
10.15 – 11.00	Meeting with Head of Institution/responsible for QA
11.00 – 11.15	Panel discussion
11.15 – 12.00	Internships and Work Placements & Meeting with Student Guidance & Support/Student Welfare & Support
12.00 – 12.15	Panel discussion
12.15 – 12.45	Meeting with HR & Compliance/Head of Finance & Operations; Student peer reviewer to have demonstration of platform for online teaching/administration
12.45 – 13.45	Working lunch
13.45 – 14.30	Meeting with Registrar/Administration
14.30 – 14.45	Panel discussion
14.45 - 15:15	Programme Leader/Course Coordinator/Examiner/Dissertation Supervisor /Lecturer for Level 6 ECEC & Level 6 Incl.
15.15 – 15.30	Lecturer for Degree and Master's Level/Dissertation Supervisor:
15.30 – 15.45	Panel discussion and conclusions of Day 1
16.00 – 16.30	Lecturer for ECEC & Incl. Degree and Incl. Master's Level; Level 7 & 8 Education Management & Leadership Lecturer/Assessor/Supervisor; Level 6 and Level 7 Supervisor/Dissertation Supervisor/Examiner:

## QA Audit Agenda: Future Focus

### Day 2

Date: Friday, 31<sup>st</sup> January 2025

Venue: Future Focus, 8 Triq L-Imhazen, Floriana

08.30 – 09.00	Panel and officers arrive at Future Focus
09.00 – 09.15	Meeting with Head of Institution
09.15 – 10.15	Meeting with Lecturers & Assessors (Levels 6 to 8)
9.15	Level 6 & Level 7 Health & Social Care
9.30	Level 6 Business management; Accountancy; HR management; Strategic management; Logistics and supply chain management
9.45	Level 6 BA Incl; Level 6 Examiner & Dissertation mentor
10.00	Level 6 BA Incl.; Level 6 BA ECEC; Level 6 Examiner & Dissertation mentor
10.30 – 11.30	Meeting with Students (Levels 6 to 8)
10.30	Level 6 BA Incl. 1 <sup>st</sup> year of study and Level 6 BA ECEC 1 <sup>st</sup> year of study
10.50	Level 7 MEd 2 <sup>nd</sup> year of study
11.10	Level 8 1 <sup>st</sup> Year of study
11.30 – 11.45	Panel discussion
11.45 – 12.45	Meeting with Alumni (Levels 6 to 8)
11.45	Level 6 BA Incl. exit year Nov 24
12.15	Level 6 ECEC exit year Nov 24
12.45 – 13.30	Working lunch
13.30 – 14:15	Meeting with external stakeholders
13.30	Owner/Manager at Newark Malta Childcare Centre
13.45	Owner/Manager at JJ Childcare Centre
14.15 – 15.45	Internal panel working session
15.45 – 16.15	Presentation of Initial Findings





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