



FURTHER EDUCATION SUPPORT SERVICE
Seirbhís Tacaíochta don Bhreisoideachas

FETAC Provider Quality Assurance

Section B9

Self Evaluation of Programmes and Related Services

**Self Evaluation
Information Booklet for Providers**

Resource for DES – Funded Providers of FETAC Programmes

Purpose

The purpose of this Information Booklet is to provide guidance and support for those with responsibility for the *Self Evaluation of Programmes and Related Services* as required under the Provider's Quality Assurance Agreement with FETAC. It is presented in two parts.

Part 1

Presents an overview of the Self Evaluation process covering legislative, FETAC and Provider Quality Assurance requirements.

Part 2

Presents a model outlining suggested phases in the Self Evaluation cycle including; preparation, planning, implementation, follow-up, review and forward planning. This section also includes reference to tools and templates that may be of use when conducting a Self Evaluation.

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Part 1: Introduction to Self Evaluation

Qualifications (Education and Training) Act (1999)

Section 18 of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act (1999) requires that all Providers of Further Education and Training establish:

- A Quality Assured System and
- A Self Evaluation System

Under Section 14 of this Act, the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) was established. FETAC makes awards to Learners who have completed one or more of a vast range of programmes offered by Providers. To ensure the standard of the awards FETAC

- agrees Quality Assurance Systems with Providers
- validates programmes submitted by Providers
- monitors and evaluates the programmes

“. . . a provider of a programme of education and training . . . shall, having regard to existing procedures, if any, establish procedures for Quality Assurance for the purpose of further improving and maintaining the quality of education and training. . .” Section 18(1)

“. . . the procedures established under that subsection shall include:
(a) the evaluation at regular intervals and as directed from time to time by the Council of the programme of education and training concerned, including evaluation by persons who are competent to make national and international comparisons in that respect,
(b) evaluation by learners of that programme, and
(c) evaluation of services related to that programme,
and shall provide for the publication in such form and manner as the Council thinks fit of findings arising out of the application of those procedures.” Section 18 (2)

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999

FETAC Requirements

All Providers offering programmes leading to FETAC awards are required to agree a Quality Assurance system with FETAC. The Provider's Quality Assurance agreement must demonstrate that the Provider has the capacity to deliver programmes which ensure the integrity of the award standard. The Quality Assurance system must demonstrate the Provider's capacity to monitor, evaluate and improve, on an ongoing basis, the quality of programmes and services it offers to Learners. FETAC's requirements for Quality Assurance systems are documented in *Quality Assurance in Further Education and Training: Policy and Guidelines for Providers v1.3*

Provider's Quality Assurance Agreement with FETAC

Providers in the Further Education and Training sector offer programmes to Learners in a variety of systems and contexts. There may already be Quality Assurance systems in place within these organisations, such as the Youthreach and STTC Quality Framework, NALA's Evolving Quality Framework or School Development Planning in the post-primary sector. While these quality frameworks may complement the FETAC Quality Assurance systems they are separate and distinct structures and may have separate requirements.

FETAC's Quality Assurance requirements;

Each Provider must document nine policy areas and related procedures. These policy areas are:

B1 Communications

B2 Equality

B3 Staff Recruitment and Development

B4 Access, Transfer and Progression

B5 Programme Development, Delivery and Review

B6 Fair and Consistent Assessment of Learners

B7 Protection for Learners

B8 Sub-contracting/Procuring Programme Delivery

B9 Self-Evaluation of Programmes and Services

What is Self Evaluation?

Self Evaluation allows the Provider to reflect on their work in a considered and structured way. It is a way of learning from experience so that the Provider can structure provision and use available resources in the most productive and effective way. It is a means by which existing good practices can be identified and maintained and areas needing improvement can be targeted and addressed.

"Evaluation is a structured and systematic process to explore, reflect and report on the effectiveness of an activity. It aims to capture, interpret and disseminate learning from any actions undertaken. It seeks to identify good practice and to use the findings to inform future policy and practices. . . . In the context of further education and training, the activity to be evaluated is the provision of programme(s) and related services and providers are required to self evaluate."

(FETAC Quality Assurance in Further Education and Training: Policy and Guidelines for Providers v1.3, p.43)

Self Evaluation helps to determine the success of a programme and related services and identify areas for improvement.

The formal evaluation of programmes and related services is an important means of ensuring, among other things, that quality improvements are made to programmes of Further Education and Training, and that programmes remain relevant to Learner needs.

Such evaluation processes should incorporate both an internal aspect commencing with Self Evaluation, and an external aspect using the expertise of an External Evaluator. In response to FETAC requirements the Self Evaluation process should lead to the production of the Self Evaluation Report and Programme Improvement Plan.

Note: It should be borne in mind that the products of the Self Evaluation process contribute directly to the FETAC Monitoring process. (FETAC has devised a Monitoring process where a review of the Provider's quality system is undertaken and a standard Monitoring report is completed, identifying good practice and areas for improvement as appropriate. FETAC employs Monitors to fulfill this role.)

Section B9, the Self-Evaluation of Programmes and Services is a fundamental part of the Provider's Quality Assurance system. This section allows the Provider to continuously review their programmes and services through constructive questioning, leading to positive recommendations and ongoing planning for improvement. The procedures for this section of the Provider's Quality Assurance system must be documented as follows:

B9.1	Assignment of Responsibility	Job title(s) of the person(s) responsible for coordinating/conducting the Self Evaluation process
B9.2	Frequency	Criteria used for setting out how often the Self Evaluation of programmes will take place
B9.3	Range	How programmes will be grouped for the purpose of Self Evaluation
B9.4	Learner Involvement	How Learners will contribute to a Self Evaluation
B9.5	External Evaluator	Criteria to be used to select and appoint the External Evaluator for a particular Self Evaluation
B9.6	Methodology	How the Self Evaluation will be carried out

Self Evaluation Requirements

- The Provider should appoint an internal person to co-ordinate/conduct the Self Evaluation
- At least one programme and related services, within a Provider, must be Self Evaluated within one year of registration with FETAC. Each programme and related services must be Self Evaluated at least once every five years. **All** programmes being delivered by a Provider must be Self Evaluated within a five year period
- The Provider must clearly identify how programmes will be grouped for the purpose of Self Evaluation. Self Evaluation of programmes may be carried out on an individual programme or on a group of related programmes. The selected programme or group of programmes must be representative, relevant and meaningful to the Provider
- Under Section 18 (2) *b* of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act (1999) procedures to allow for the evaluation of programmes by Learners must be developed and implemented
- FETAC states that a person independent of programme delivery and capable of comparing the quality of programmes with that of similar programmes elsewhere should be appointed to the role of **External Evaluator** (*FETAC Quality Assurance in Further Education and Training: Policy and Guidelines for Providers v1.3, p.45*)
- The Provider must state the methodology to be used for the Self Evaluation process
- The products of the Self Evaluation process must include:
 - The Self/Programme Evaluation Report
 - The Programme Improvement Plan

Part 2: Conducting a Self Evaluation

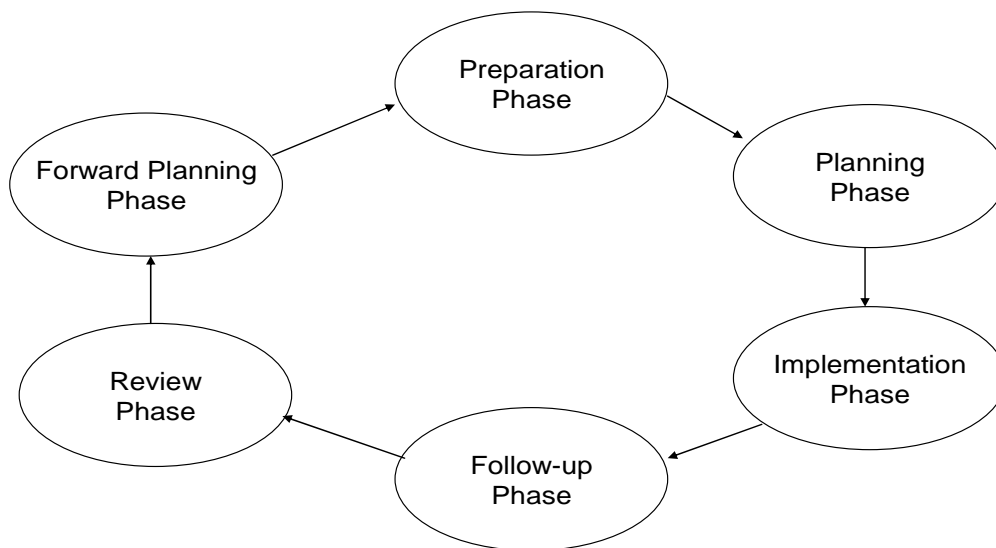


Figure 1. A six phase model for conducting a Self Evaluation

Self Evaluation is an internal process of self-reflection and assessment. Evaluation is a systematic and structured process of reviewing an experience, determining its worth or value and deciding what needs to be changed or further developed. Self Evaluation is a continuous cycle of reflection and review with the objective of bringing about positive change and improvement which in turn feeds into further reflection and review.

Self Evaluation is one aspect of the Provider's Quality Assurance system. It is the aspect that ensures that the Quality Assurance system in place is meeting its' objectives and allows for the continuous improvement of the system and the programmes and services which it supports.

The Self Evaluation cycle outlined in this Resource is a model which Providers may choose to adopt when conducting a Self Evaluation exercise. The six phases identified above are referenced throughout.



Phase 1: Preparation Phase

During the Preparation Phase the Provider will:

✓Assign/ identify personnel with responsibility for planning and implementing the Self Evaluation (*Procedure B9.1 FETAC Quality Assurance in Further Education and Training: Policy and Guidelines for Providers v1.3, p49*)

Providers may choose to form a Self Evaluation team where key members of staff are identified. Depending on the Provider context this team may include:

- Principal/Manager
- QA coordinators
- FETAC coordinator
- Programme/course coordinator(s)
- Teaching staff
- Members of staff with responsibility for the related services to be evaluated

✓Be familiar with relevant background information policies, procedures and supporting documentation which inform the Self Evaluation process including:

- Provider Quality Assurance agreement with FETAC
- FETAC Quality Assurance in Further Education and Training; Policy and Guidelines for Providers v1.3
- FETAC Self Evaluation templates:
 - Self Evaluation Checklist
 - Programme/ Self Evaluation Report
 - Programme Improvement Plan

(Please see appendices for a list of resources that may be of use during this stage)

✓Train/brief members of Self Evaluation team

Key staff should be trained and/or briefed on the process of carrying out a Self Evaluation and must be familiar with the Provider's Quality Assurance agreement and section B9 of FETAC's Quality Assurance in Further Education and Training; Policy and Guidelines for Providers v1.3. (See www.fess.ie for details of supports that are available)

✓ **Appoint External Evaluator**

This person should be "... a person who is independent of programme delivery and capable of comparing the quality of the programme(s) with that of similar programmes elsewhere" and should have:

- Education, training or industry experience in the broad subject area of the programme being evaluated
- Experience in national/international certification systems
- Experience in one or more of the following:
 - Programme design
 - Programme delivery
 - Programme evaluation
 - Cross moderation of standards
 - External verification of standards
 - Auditing of quality systems
 - Centre accreditation

(FETAC: Quality Assurance for Further Education and Training: Policy & Guidelines for Providers V1.3, p.45)

(Please refer to the criteria outlined for the appointment of External Evaluators in your Providers Quality Assurance agreement (*Procedure B9.5*))

✓ **Draft an overall plan for the continuous cycle of Self Evaluation to ensure the inclusion of all programmes and related services within the Provider**

Depending on the Provider context this may take the form of a 5 year plan for Self Evaluation. The plan will incorporate annual Self Evaluations of a specific range of programmes and related services (see appendix for planning templates for Self Evaluation).

Within a 5 year cycle all programmes and related services within the Provider must be Self-Evaluated.

Self Evaluation should be carried out to a frequency appropriate to the duration and nature of the programmes concerned. The maximum period between evaluations will be five years but this would be appropriate only in exceptional circumstances

(FETAC Quality Assurance in Further Education and Training: Policy and Guidelines for Providers v1.3, p.45)



Phase 2: Planning Phase

During the Planning Phase the Provider will:

✓ **Determine an Action Plan for the process**

- Determine tasks and timeframe
- Assign responsibility for the tasks

✓ **Decide what is to be evaluated**

- Refer to the overall plan determined at the Preparation Phase to establish which programme/s and related services are to be evaluated this cycle

✓ **Determine the aim and objectives of the Self Evaluation**

- For example: Is the programme and its related services maximizing the potential for the Learners to achieve the aims and objectives of the programme?

✓ **Determine the criteria with which the Provider will determine level of success. This will include criteria to measure the following:**

- The quality of the programme and its related services
- The effectiveness of the Quality Assurance system supporting the programme and related services
- Any other issues particular to the Provider's own mission. These may include:
 - Demand for the programme
 - Completion of the programme by Learners
 - Results and Certification
 - Progression to third level and/or employment
 - Learner experience while on the programme
 - Levels of Learner engagement

These criteria are statements of how 'things should be' within the programme and will be determined by the priorities for the Self Evaluation. The programme details (targets, tasks) should also be consulted when outlining criteria. The selected criteria will form the basis for the collation of evidence so that the Provider can judge actual outcomes against expected outcomes.

For example:

- *The quality of the programme – suggested criteria with which to determine success;*

- Enrolment figures are high
 - Learners are progressing to employment and/or further education
 - Learners are attending classes regularly
 - Learners are completing the programme
 - Learners are achieving high results
 - Delivery methodologies are appropriate for the Learner profile and the content of the programme
 - Resources are adequate and appropriate
 - Learners are availing of the support services as appropriate (e.g. Guidance, Counselling, Mentoring, Learning Support, etc)
 - The supports in place are meeting the needs of the Learners
 - Programme-related services are sufficient to support the programme (e.g. IT, Administration, Library, etc)
 - Learners are positive about their experience/s on the programme
 - Teachers/tutors are positive about the quality of the programme
 - The programme caters to the needs of industry
- *The effectiveness of the Quality Assurance system supporting the programme – suggested criteria to measure success;*
 - Appropriate evidence is generated to prove that procedures were adhered to (e.g. B1.1 Communication with Learners – Agendas and Minutes of student council meetings, student handbook produced and received by all Learners, Learner notice board kept up-to-date, etc)
 - Stated procedures are meeting the policy objectives
 - Staff are familiar with the Provider's Quality Assurance system

✓ **Identify the people that are to be involved in the Self Evaluation process**

- Learners

Under Section 18 (2) *b* of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 procedures to allow for the evaluation of programmes by Learners must be developed and implemented. Effective methods of gathering Learner feedback must be used. These methods may comprise questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, etc. Ideally the views of past Learners should also be included. (Please see appendices for Sample Learner Questionnaires)

- Management

The Self Evaluation process should be “promoted and supported by Management in the allocation of time, expertise and resources” (*FETAC Quality Assurance in Further Education and Training: Policy and Guidelines for Providers v1.3, p44*)

- Staff/personnel

Attached to the particular programme and related services will include: Programme co-ordinator, teachers/tutors, guidance counsellor, learning support staff, recruitment and admissions staff, librarian, catering staff, IT support, administration staff, etc.

-

Other Stakeholders

Stakeholders who may be relevant to the Self Evaluation cycle may include:

- Employers
- Professional Organisations
- Work Experience supervisors
- Community Organisations
- Parents/Guardians (if Learners are under 18 years)
- Board of Management

Data from the above persons/stakeholders may be obtained by selecting a representative sample.

- External Evaluator

Plan the role of the External Evaluator in the process (i.e. will the External Evaluator be involved on a consultative basis throughout the Self Evaluation or introduced to the process at a later stage when the first draft of the programme evaluation report has been produced?)

✓ **Decide on the methodology to be used**

Methodology will comprise a series of steps that will be planned and implemented in order to capture the required information. The Provider should state clearly the information being sought and the most effective ways of obtaining it. A broad based approach, which is inclusive and evidence-based, is preferable. (See appendices for Questionnaire Resources)

✓ **Identify data required**

This may include data already available within the Provider and/or data generated for the Self Evaluation process:

- Enrolment statistics
- Drop-out rates
- Assessment results
- Attendance records
- Assessment records
- Minutes of meetings
- Progress reports
- Records of activities such as guest speakers, field trips, etc.
- Work experience placement reports
- Learner response from questionnaire/focus group/interview findings
- Staff response from questionnaire/focus group/interview findings
- Stakeholders' response from questionnaire/focus group/interview findings
- Data from the Self Evaluation Checklist
- Any other relevant information

✓Plan and design tools to capture evidence from Learners, staff and stakeholders

Produce valid and reliable tools, which can be used to gather information on the programme/s and related services. These tools can be designed to produce both quantitative and qualitative data.

Examples of tools include:

- Questionnaires
- Focus Group format and questions
- Interview format and questions (individual, group, telephone)
- Observations
- Visits
- Checklists (e.g. self evaluation checklist)

The Provider must determine how the qualitative and quantitative evidence is to be extracted from the data for analysis, for example:

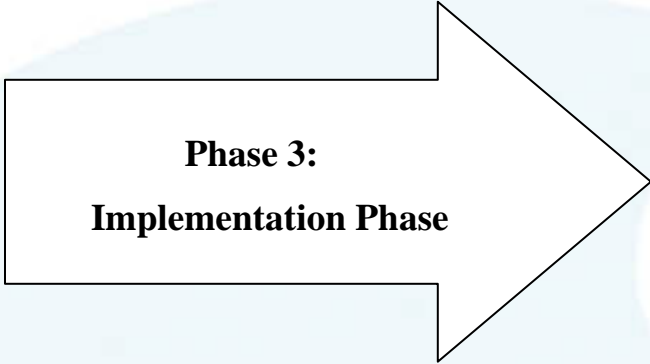
- Coding of data
- Spreadsheets
- Templates
- Statistical analysis software package

(See appendices for Questionnaire Resources)

✓Conduct Staff Training/Briefing

Procedures / Briefings should be implemented to ensure that all staff members are informed of the Self Evaluation process and Action Plan.

The Provider should provide training for staff involved in data collection specific to the instrument being used.



Phase 3: Implementation Phase

During the Implementation Phase the Provider will:

✓Engage the External Evaluator

- Engage the External Evaluator at the agreed point in the process. This may be at the earlier planning phase, or towards the end of the Implementation Phase following completion of the first draft of the Self/Programme Evaluation Report (see diagram page 17)

✓Gather the data as determined in the action plan

- Collect all relevant records, statistics, figures and minutes of meetings
- Conduct all focus groups and interviews
- Administer all questionnaires
- Use the FETAC Self Evaluation checklist
- Gather any other relevant information

✓Collate the data

- Extract and record all relevant data in accordance with the procedure determined in the Action Plan

(See Self Evaluation Sample Question Bank which may be used to gather data for Self Evaluation of Programmes and Related Services)

✓Analyse the data

- Compare the outcomes of the data collation to the criteria set out in the Planning Phase (Phase 2) in order to determine the success of the programmes being Self Evaluated.
- Record whether or not programme(s) are meeting the required criteria. In instances where the criteria are not being met the Provider should record actual evidence and identify procedures to ensure that criteria will be met in the future.

Criteria for Success = 'How things should be'

Evidence demonstrates 'How things are'

✓ **Document the findings, draw conclusions and make recommendations**

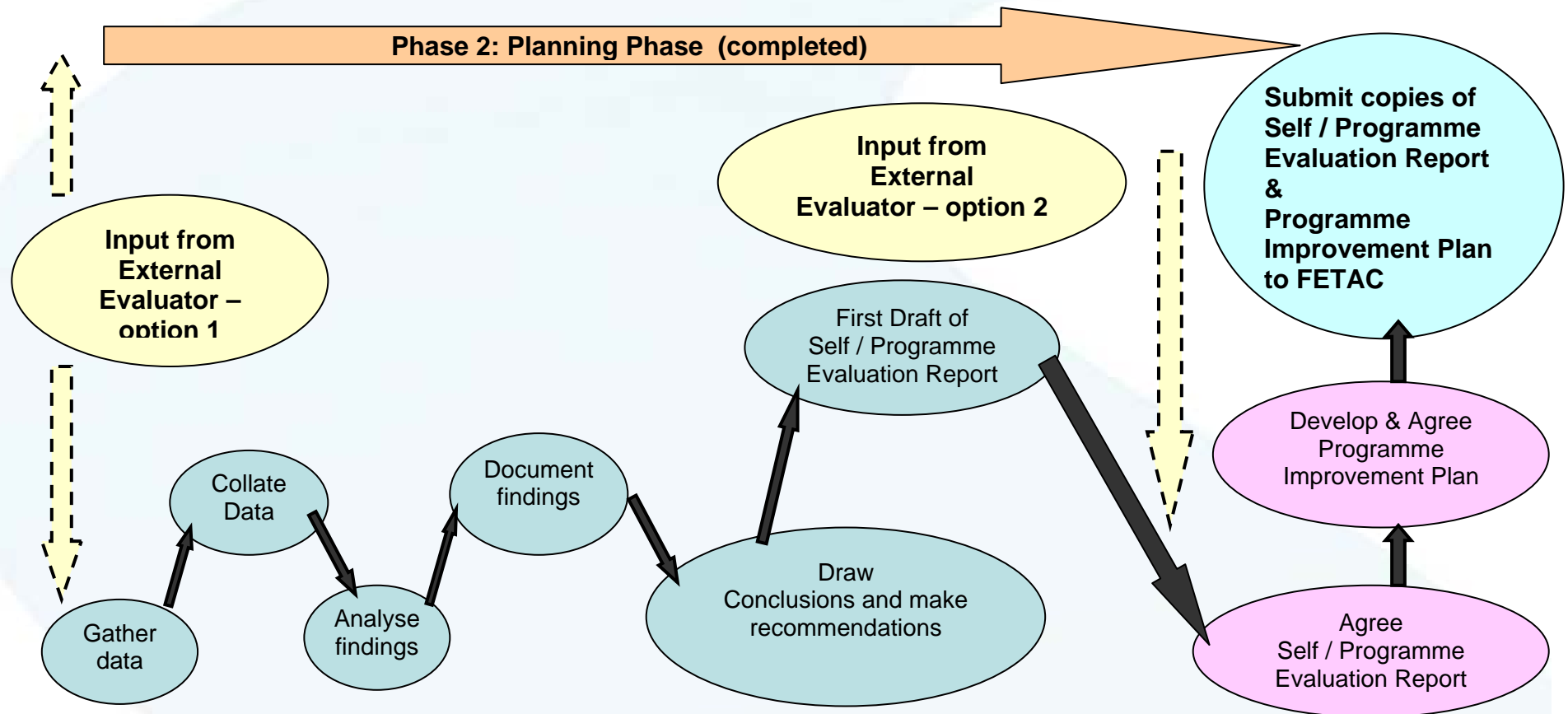
- Document the findings by completing the first draft of the Programme Evaluation Report
- The External Evaluator then reviews the draft Programme Evaluation Report
- Finalise the agreed Programme Evaluation Report and ensure it is signed by all appropriate personnel
- Draw up the Programme Improvement Plan (see FETAC template) based on agreed recommendations in the Programme Evaluation Report. The Plan must state:
 - The actions agreed
 - The person responsible for ensuring that each action is implemented
 - The deadline for implementation

✓ **Submit a copy of the Programme Evaluation Report and the Programme Improvement Plan to FETAC**

These will feed into the FETAC monitoring process.

(See Exemplar Samples Provider Self Evaluation Documentation / Reports)

Phase 3 – Implementation Phase



- **Figure 2.** Flow Chart for **Phase 3** of Self Evaluation – **Implementation Phase**

Note: There are two possible points in the implementation phase highlighted for the introduction of the External Evaluator to the Self Evaluation process.

Option 1: If External Evaluator enters the process at option 1 they may enter at Phase 2 (Planning Phase) or at another stage where the Provider deems this appropriate, and may remain involved throughout the Implementation Phase (Phase 3) process.

Option 2: If External Evaluator enters the process at option 2 they will enter at the point where the 1st draft of the Programme Evaluation Report has been completed.



Phase 4: Follow-up Phase

During the Follow-up Phase the Provider will:

✓File Records and documentation

Ensure that all relevant Self Evaluation paperwork/evidence is filed and available for the FETAC Monitor if requested.

✓Disseminate Feedback on findings and recommendations

Disseminate the findings and recommendations of the Self Evaluation exercise to all contributors to the process including staff, learners and other stakeholders. It is imperative that this is done effectively in order to maintain the importance and profile of the Self Evaluation process both internally and externally.

This may be done in a variety of ways including:

- Staff briefing/meeting
- Learner briefing/meeting
- Stakeholder meeting
- Student Council meeting
- Written report circulated
- Report on Provider website

✓Update the Quality Assurance System

Amend the Quality Assurance system if necessary. As a result of the findings and recommendations from the self evaluation exercise and the learning derived from conducting the self evaluation process itself, it may be necessary for the Provider to amend their Quality Assurance system. As the ultimate focus of all Quality Assurance systems is continuous improvement, it is likely that Providers will amend their QA on an ongoing basis.

Such changes must be documented by the Provider and must be available for the FETAC Monitor. It may be necessary to notify FETAC of major changes.

✓Implement the Programme Improvement Plan

The Provider must implement the findings of the Programme Improvement Plan, which agree;

- The actions to be taken
- The person responsible for ensuring that each action is implemented
- The deadline for implementation

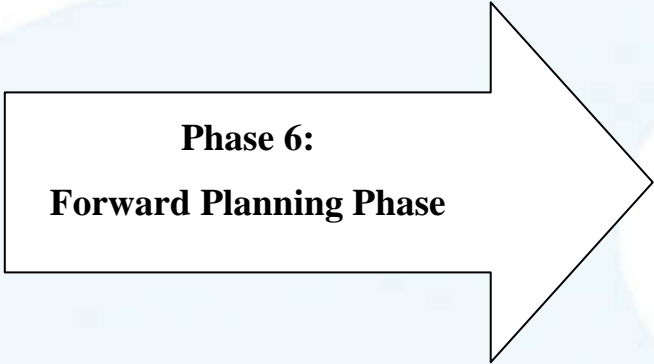
It is important that Providers ensure that the Programme Improvement Plan is implemented and is used to inform the next cycle of Self Evaluation. It is good practice to keep all relevant stakeholders informed of the progress and outcomes related to the actions in the plan.



**Phase 5:
Review Phase**

✓ During the Review Phase the Provider will:

- Review the Self Evaluation process, in order to learn how to improve the way that the Provider undertakes Self Evaluation
- Plan any necessary improvements/amendments to be incorporated into the next cycle. It may be useful for the team involved in the initial preparation and planning stages to come together to review the whole process. The following questions will help to guide this process:
 - Was the focus/range of the Self Evaluation appropriate?
 - Were the objectives achieved?
 - Was the methodology appropriate?
 - Were the strategies used to involve Learners, staff and stakeholders effective?
 - Were findings used effectively?
 - Was the role of the External Evaluator used effectively?
 - What should be done differently the next time?
 - When will the process start again?



**Phase 6:
Forward Planning Phase**

✓ It has already been recognized that the Self Evaluation Process is an ongoing cycle, encompassing procedures for continuous improvement. During the Forward Planning Phase the Provider will:

- Apply lessons learnt from this Self Evaluation cycle
- Amend methodologies as a result of outcome/s of the Review Stage
- Restructure the planning cycle if necessary
- Plan to start the process again
- Undertake any necessary research identified through the Review Phase
- Commence preparation/planning

Reference/Resource list

- Area Development Management (2001), Strategic Review: A Practical Guide for Partnerships and Community Groups, ADM, Dublin 2
- CEDEFOP, (2003) A European Common Quality Assurance Framework available at http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Upload/Projects_Networks/Quality/key_documents/TWG_-_A_European_Common_Quality_Assurance_Framework.pdf
- Clarke, J. (1996), A Guide to Self Evaluation, in Managing Better: A Series on Organisational and Management Issues for the Community and Voluntary Sector, Combat Poverty Agency, Combat Poverty Agency, Dublin
- Department of Education and Science, Approaches to Evaluation available at <http://www.sdpi.ie/guidelines/PDF/Unit05.pdf>
- Department of Education and Science, School Development Planning: Guidelines for Post Primary Schools (Draft)
- FETAC, FAQ's on Self Evaluation: http://www.fetac.ie/qa/FAQs_Self-Evaluation.htm
- FETAC, (2008), Quality Assurance in Further Education and Training: Policy and Guidelines for Providers v1.3
- FETAC, Questionnaires/Feedback Tools available at <http://www.fetac.ie/qa/qa3.htm>
- Flanagan, N., Haase, T., & Walsh, J. (1995) Planning for Change: A Handbook on Strategic Planning for Local Development Partnerships, Combat Poverty Agency
- Further Education Support Service/IVEA Self Evaluation Conference Resources available at www.fess.ie
- Government of Ireland, Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 available at <http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/acts/1999/a2699.pdf>
- HETAC (2005), Criteria and Process for Reviewing the Effectiveness of Quality Assurance Procedures in Higher Education and Training
- INTO, (1999), An Approach to School Review
- NALA, (2008), Summary of the Evolving Quality Framework for Adult Basic Education (ABE) available at http://www.nala.ie/index.cfm/section/publications/top/1/ext/Publications/search_pub/1/
- Quality Framework Initiative for Youthreach and STTCs available at <http://www.youthreach.ie/qualityframework>
- SDPI: School Developing Planning Initiative <http://www.sdpi.ie/index.html>



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