



Accreditation Manual of Procedures

July 2015

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Foreword

The Accreditation Manual of Procedures is a key deliverable of ESF Project 1.227 'Making Quality Visible'. The partners of Project are:

- The National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) (lead partner);
- The University of Malta;
- The Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST);
- The Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS);
- The Directorate for Lifelong Learning (DLLL) ;
- The Employment and Training Corporation (ETC);
- ACQUIN, the transnational partner of the project and an established cross-border Higher Education Quality Assurance Agency based in Germany.

Through this project the NCFHE is implementing its legal obligation to set up a national external quality audit system that complements the internal quality assurance mechanisms of individual Further and Higher education entities. The first step was the development of a National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education, which provides the conceptual context for this work, and situates it in the paramount need to develop a national quality culture.

This Manual complements the External Quality Audit Manual of Procedures. It sets out step by step the procedures for the accreditation of entities and courses or programmes, that have been refined with experience from 2013 to date. It is envisaged that this first Volume will be followed by a second volume that will include other accreditation procedures that will be developed outside the lifetime of the ESF Project.

I would like to thank my colleagues within the partner institutions of the ESF Project 1.227; NCFHE Chairman Mr Martin Scicluna and the Board members of the NCFHE; NCFHE CEO Ms Edel Cassar; Professor John Portelli, Chairman of the Quality Assurance Committee within the NCFHE, and the members of the Committee; as well as my colleagues within the NCFHE, for their support in this project and in finalising this publication.

Mr. Sandro Spiteri
Head, Quality Assurance Unit
July 2015



Introduction

The accreditation of educational entities providing accredited or recognised further and/or higher courses is a legal requirement as per Subsidiary Legislation (SL) 327.433 'Further and Higher Education (Licensing, Accreditation and Quality Assurance) Regulations'. Courses are referred to as 'accredited' when they have been assessed by the NCFHE and pegged to the Malta Qualifications Framework. Courses are referred to as 'recognised' when the NCFHE recognises that accreditation, including level pegging to the European Qualifications Framework, has already been undertaken by its peer institutions in other countries in the ENIC-NARIC network.

This Accreditation Manual of Procedures (AMoP) does not replicate the regulations provided in SL 327.433 and its amendments, and indeed takes these regulations as read. The intention of the AMoP is to explain and illustrate the internal procedures of the NCFHE to implement these regulations in terms of the accreditation of entities and courses, thus providing transparency to all service users.

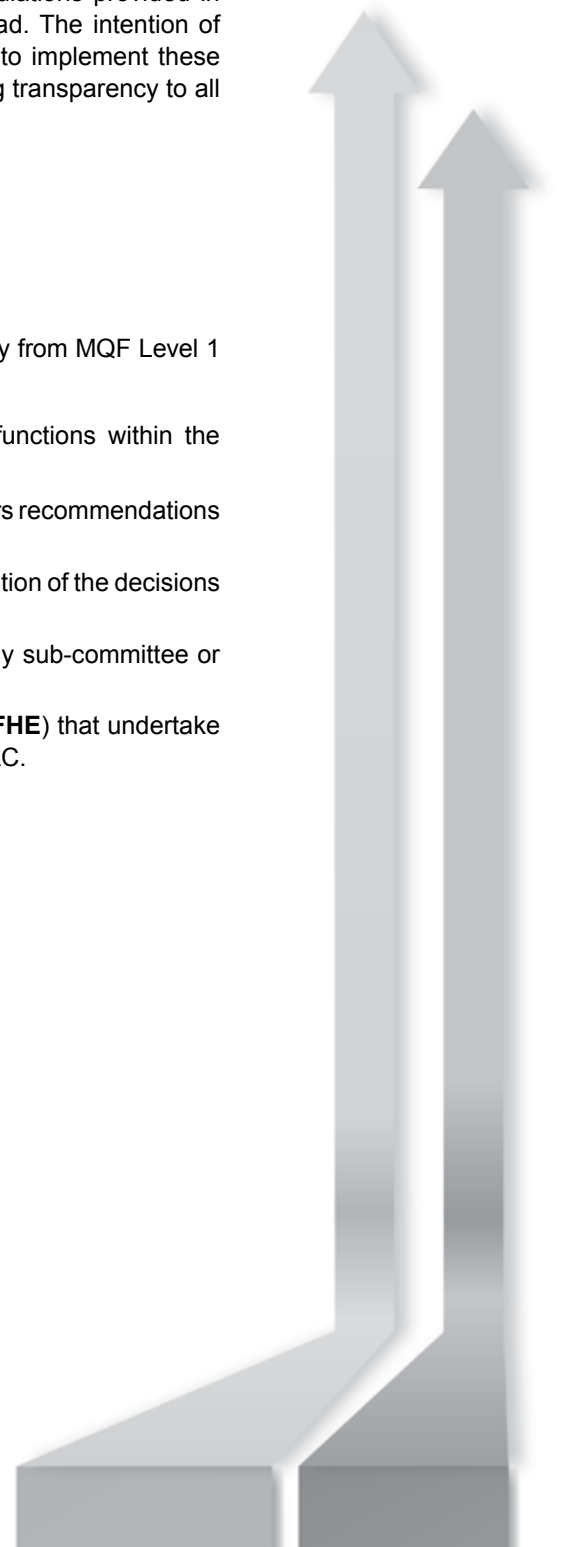
The AMoP is divided in three main parts:

- general information and procedures;
- procedures for the accreditation and licensing of entities;
- procedures for the accreditation of courses or programmes.

Throughout the AMoP, 'course' refers to both courses and programmes of study from MQF Level 1 to 8.

The procedures in the AMoP distinguish between the following important functions within the NCFHE:

- The NCFHE Board (referred to in the AMoP as **Board**), that considers recommendations made by the Quality Assurance Committee through the CEO;
- The Office of the CEO (**CEO**), that ensures the effective implementation of the decisions and policy direction of the NCFHE Board;
- The Quality Assurance Committee (**QAC**), which also includes any sub-committee or panel the QAC may set up;
- The various units and sections within the NCFHE secretariat (**NCFHE**) that undertake the accreditation procedures not within the specific remit of the QAC.





Glossary

AMoP	Accreditation Manual of Procedures
Board	The Board of the National Commission for Further and Higher Education
CEO	Office of the Chief Executive Officer, NCFHE
DLL	Department of Lifelong Learning
ENIC	European Network of Information Centres in the European Region
EQA	External Quality Assurance
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETC	Employment and Training Corporation
IPR	Intellectual property rights
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
ITS	Institute of Tourism Studies
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
MQF	Malta Qualifications Framework
MQRIC	Malta Qualifications Recognition and Information Centre
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union
NCFHE	In the context of the AMoP, this refers to the units and sections within the Secretariat of the Commission that are in charge of accreditation procedures
QA	Quality Assurance
QAC	Quality Assurance Committee
Reg.	A regulation or clause that is part of Subsidiary Legislation 327.433
SL	Subsidiary Legislation
UoM	University of Malta



1. General Information

1.1 The Role of the Quality Assurance Committee

In accordance with Regulation 69(10) of the Education Act and Regulation 4 of SL 327.433, in May 2014 the NCFHE established a Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) to carry out its licensing, accreditation and quality assurance functions. The remit of the QAC is given in Annex 1 of this Communication, which includes the relevant regulations from SL. Briefly:

- The QAC shall carry out the licensing, accreditation and quality assurance functions of the NCFHE;
- decisions taken by the Quality Assurance Committee require adoption by the Commission for their validity and enforcement;
- reference to “the Commission” within LN 296/2012 shall be construed as reference to the Quality Assurance Committee, unless the context shall otherwise require.

The NCFHE Board established that the members of the QAC needed to have high and recognised levels of academic proficiency, professional integrity, mature judgement and experience in further and/or higher education. The following selection parameters were established:

- members shall have a Ph.D. or equivalent MQF Level 8 qualification;
- members shall be recognised authorities in their professional/academic field;
- members shall have demonstrated experience in internal and/or external QA systems in further and/or higher education;
- the QAC shall include members who are also part of the NCFHE Board, who will however be on the QAC in their personal capacity;
- members shall, between them, represent a range of academic and professional disciplines;
- at least one member who shall be a tenured lecturer at the University of Malta, and at least one member shall be a tenured lecturer at MCAST;
- at least one member shall have an international professional/academic profile with respect to QA systems in further and/or higher education;
- the composition of the QA Committee shall have an appropriate gender balance.

Furthermore the following parameters of the QA Committee were established:

- members shall be appointed by the NCFHE Board on the recommendation of the CEO, for a period of one year, with possible renewal;
- one member shall additionally be appointed as Chair of the Committee by the NCFHE Board;
- the QAC shall be composed of five or seven members;
- the Head of the QA Unit within the NCFHE shall act as its executive secretary, without voting powers;
- the QAC shall regulate itself according to procedures that shall be presented to the Commission Board through the CEO for approval.

The QAC started with five members. In February 2015 the need to expand the membership of the QAC to seven was felt due to its increased workload. The QAC may also set up a number of ad hoc sub-committees or Panels to focus on important issues or accreditation requests, respectively, that cannot be handled by the QAC itself due to time constraints. These sub-committees are chaired by a member of the QAC, who presents the recommendations of the sub-committee to the QAC. Typically sub-committees are set up to consider requests for the accreditation of Level 8 courses, and panels are set up to consider requests for the accreditation of universities or for the self-accreditation of entities.

1.2 Sanctions Procedure by the NCFHE

The standards for quality assurance form the basis of the peer review process and incorporate the expectations of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The ESG have been augmented to take account of the circumstances of vocational education and training provision and the particular context of educational provision in Malta. The standards are fully compatible with SL 327.433 2012.

Regulations 5, and 11-17 of SL 327.433 outline the sanctioning powers of the NCFHE. Briefly, the NCFHE may:

- impose ad hoc conditions in licensees, at any time, for a fixed term or indefinitely
- impose restrictions on the licensee
- impose an administrative fine of not more than €4,000
- refuse to renew a licence
- revoke a licence
- in the case of any of the above, inform the competent authorities in any foreign states in which the provider or its subsidiaries are carrying on any activity related to the licence held or previously issued under these regulations.

These articles also clearly outline the obligations of the NCFHE to ensure due process, fair hearing and sufficient safeguards for the licensee to comply with licence conditions and instructions prior to the imposition of any sanction.

The following procedures operationalise the sanctioning function of the NCFHE. These procedures do not replace but define the relevant provisions in the SL.

1. The NCFHE determines that there is sufficient prima facie evidence or indications of suspected non-compliance to SL regulations and/or licence conditions by a licensee for this case to be considered.
2. The NCFHE may request the licensee in question to attend a meeting of the QAC to clarify issues pertaining to the case, and to discuss and/or inform the licensee of the way forward to be taken.
3. If the NCFHE determines that a licensee is guilty of non-compliance and this is endorsed by the NCFHE Board (see point 9 below), a Letter Alerting of Non-Compliance to Regulations is sent to the licensee, with specific conditions and timelines for implementation. Generally, the escalation of sanctions that the Committee would recommend to the NCFHE Board is as follows:

Escalation of Sanctions	Invoking Reg.17
a) Restrictions in the operations of particular courses, i. For a set time period of not more than one year from the date of the communication of the QAC. ii. For a time period longer than one year from the date of the communication of the QAC.	No Yes
b) A review of licence conditions for specific courses or generally with respect to the operations of the licensee: i. For a set time period of not more than one year from the date of the communication of the QAC. ii. For a time period longer than one year from the date of the communication of the QAC.	No Yes
c) Restrictions in the operations of the licensee for an indefinite period, which may include review of the licence in terms of the courses or categories thereof that the licensee may be allowed to operate.	Yes
d) Imposition of administrative fine up to € 4,000. A fine is imposed either: i. If any of the previous sanctions do not lead to compliance, or ii. In conjunction with any sanction for which Article 17 is invoked if the gravity of the offence so warrants.	Yes Yes

e) Suspension of license for a period tied to the fulfilment of specific conditions	Yes
f) Refusal to renew license	Yes
g) Revocation of license	Yes

4. None of the above sanctions absolve the NCFHE from the duty to report suspected criminal action to the authorities if this is warranted.
5. The NCFHE may impose temporary restrictions in terms on point a) i. of the list above (i.e. not invoking Regulation 17 of SL 327.433)¹ on operations with respect to specific courses or programmes of a particular licensee if this is reasonably required due to the urgency of the situation.
6. Any escalation of sanctions may only take place after due consideration of the state of affairs by the NCFHE.
7. The implementation of Article 17 generally takes the form of publication of sanction on the NCFHE website. Furthermore, the NCFHE may also recommend that specific entities in foreign countries be formally alerted.

¹ Regulation 17 of SL 327.433 states: "Upon the imposition of conditions or restrictions on a licensee, or the revocation of a licence under these regulations and when a licence ceases to have effect in accordance with these regulations, the Commission shall inform the competent authorities in any foreign states in which the provider or its subsidiaries are carrying on any activity related to the licence held or previously issued under these regulations."

1.3 Administrative Fees for Programme and Provider Accreditation

In line with Regulation 34 (2)(h) of SL 327.433, as from the 1st December 2014 the NCFHE has introduced administrative fees for accreditation provided to institutions and for programmes and courses. The administrative fees charged have been carefully calculated so that they are fair and proportionate sufficient to cover costs incurred by the NCFHE in providing accreditation to Annex 1 outlines the fees' structure. The structure has been based on a unit cost system and the fees are on a sliding scale basis as follows:

for Provider Accreditation and Audits:

- the category of Provider's License as per Second Schedule of SL 327.433.

for Course Accreditation:

- the MQF Level of the course or programme;
- the length of the course or programme, which can be measured in either the number of ECTS/ECVET points (which are an indication of the length of the course).

Please note that:

- An application will be considered as null and void if after three months no feedback is received from the applicant, who will in turn need to re-submit an application.
- Fees charged for provider accreditation shall be the same for both full (5 years) and provisional (1 year) licenses. These also apply every time a licence or a programme is due for renewal.
- Fees paid are not refundable.

Once providers have filed their application with NCFHE to accredit an institution or course/programme, costs are calculated according to the pre-set criteria in Annex 1. Upon approval of the application, a payment of 50% of the total fee will be requested by the NCFHE's Finance Department via bank transfer.

When the payment has been confirmed the process of accreditation will commence. When the accreditation process is finalised providers will be asked to settle the remaining balance, which will be calculated according to the course structure ultimately accredited. Failure to settle the remaining amount will result in the application being revoked and the process would then have to recommence.

These fees are valid to local providers only as per SL 327.433. The NCFHE Board may exceptionally consider the partial or full waiver of administrative fees for provider or programme accreditation on a case-by-case basis, typically in the case of NGOs providing free services.

1.4 Administrative Procedure for Changes in Licences and Courses

Both providers of locally accredited courses as well as those for courses accredited abroad and recognised by the NCFHE are reminded that the minimum requirements as established in the courses as accredited/recognised are to be strictly adhered to. Adherence to minimum requirements will be one of the checks carried out during External Audits, which will also look at course provision retroactively. Any changes made that are not approved by the NCFHE may lead to the withdrawal of accreditation.

Providers of locally accredited courses who wish to revise the minimum requirements for participation in their accredited course/s for future provision need to contact the NCFHE, where the following procedure will be followed.

1. Requests for amendments in present licences can be addressed internally without the need for extra administrative fees. However if the change is (i) from provisional to full licence and (ii) to University status, the current administrative fees as per section 1.2 previously, apply as is already the case.
2. Applicants need to make their request for changes in accredited course descriptions by using the appropriate course application template to indicate clearly in the respective sections what changes they wish to make, and with each requested change in the same section a detailed justification for the change.
3. The NCFHE determines on a case-by-case basis if a request for a change in any parameter of an accredited course can be addressed internally or not.
4. Where a proposed change does not materially change the integrity of the accredited course, the amendments are made and the applicant is duly informed without additional fees being required. In this case the application with proposed changes and the newly revised accredited course description are filed (they do not replace the older version).
5. Where a proposed change is deemed to potentially materially change the integrity of the accredited course, the CEO is alerted. The CEO may request a review by external persons to confirm or otherwise this decision. Once the decision is confirmed the applicant is then so informed and the relevant fees are communicated to the applicant, who needs to confirm whether the NCFHE shall proceed with the review. If the applicant so approves, the NCFHE proceeds with its review once a 50% payment of the applicable fee is made.
6. In this case the NCFHE tries first to use the services of the original external assessor involved in the accreditation of the course. If this is definitively not possible, a new assessor is selected but the NCFHE ensures that there is a proper induction process for the new assessor re the course and the request being made, to avoid misunderstandings.
7. The process of re-accreditation of the course follows the established feedback cycles and final approval of accreditation as with new applications. Changes made in Level 7 courses have to be approved by the Quality Assurance Committee.
8. A course is considered accredited and included in the NCFHE register once the second tranche payment of fees is confirmed. Once this is done the application with proposed changes and the newly revised accredited course description are filed (they do not replace the older version).
9. The administrative fees for applicants requesting a substantive change in an accredited course are given in Annex 2.

1.5 Selection Procedure for External Evaluators

External evaluators of course applications shall be selected with the following procedure:

1. An open call is made in the media, inviting expressions of interest for inclusion in a Pool of External Evaluators.
2. Applications to express interest shall include the following information:
 - a) Experience in providing evaluation in programme/course accreditation to NCFHE, self-accreditation entities in Malta or similar abroad, AND/OR
 - b) Samples /URLs of personal report/technical/academic writing in English that has been published, peer-reviewed or used in a work context, AND
 - c) Subjects/content areas and MQF Levels for which expression of interest is being submitted, with details of related qualifications and work experiences
 - d) For applicants indicating interest in providing service in levels 6 to 8, contact details of two referees, who will be contacted in confidence by the NCFHE.
3. These referees will be requested, amongst other things, to vouch for the following characteristics of the applicant:
 - a) academic integrity;
 - b) English writing skills;
 - c) Ability to analyse, evaluate, infer, synthesise, and make academic judgements.
4. All applicants will be vetted administratively to make sure that 3 a) or 3 b) above is fulfilled, 3 d) is fulfilled, and in 3 c) indicated subject/content areas and MQF levels match related qualifications.
5. Applicants for MQF Levels 6-8 that pass this administrative vetting and that receive positive references are presented to QAC for confirmation of recommendation. The QAC may interview specific applicants to gauge their suitability to be included in the Pool.
6. Other applicants for MQF Levels 1-5 pass through the administrative vetting. The NCFHE may interview specific applicants to gauge their suitability to be included in the Pool.
7. All successful applicants in points 5 and 6 above are presented to CEO for approval.
8. Selection from the pool for External Evaluators for course applications at MQF Levels 1-7 is at the discretion of the NCFHE according to the best fit between the application and selected reviewers. This may require selection of reviewers who have not applied to join the Pool, and who once selected are included in the Pool. All things being equal and without prejudice to the priority to select the 'best fit' evaluators, different evaluators in the Pool will be used where applicable.
9. Selection from the Pool for External Evaluators for course applications at MQF Level 8 is made by the QAC in consultation with the NCFHE, according to the best fit between the application and selected reviewers. This may require selection of reviewers who have not applied to join the Pool, and who once selected are included in the Pool. All things being equal and without prejudice to the priority to select the 'best fit' evaluators, different evaluators in the Pool will be used where applicable.



2. Provider Accreditation and Licensing

2.1 Categories of Licences

As from September 2012 all providers of Further and Higher education in or from Malta require a license issued by the NCFHE to operate in or from Malta. Before applying for a license to operate in or from Malta the provider needs to apply with the Commission for i) a provider quality audit and ii) a course quality audit. The latter is discussed in Chapter 3.

Provider Accreditation is granted by the Commission upon application by the provider in one or more of the following categories:

2.1.1 University

The NCFHE will only consider accredited higher education institutions to be eligible for University status if the following criteria are established:

1. higher education, teaching, research and dissemination of knowledge are the primary activities of the higher education institution;
2. the higher education institution has
 - a) academic staff; and
 - b) an academic library; and
 - c) stable research training or stable research and development activities of a high standard;
3. the higher education institution has representative bodies of staff and students;
4. the higher education institution has an organisation and infrastructure for providing higher education and undertaking research;
5. the higher education institution provides programmes which lead to national qualifications classified at a combination of either Malta Qualifications Framework levels 5, 6, or 7, or foreign qualifications at a comparable level, in at least four fields, and also has independent competence in setting up the components of such programmes and an independent right to award degrees with respect to such programmes;
6. the higher education institution provides programmes which lead to national qualifications classified at Malta Qualifications Framework level 8, or a foreign qualification at a comparable level, and also has independent competence in setting up the components of such programmes and an independent right to award degrees with respect to such programmes; and
7. the higher education institution is affiliated with international networks in connection with higher education and, or research and participates in national and international cooperation in teaching and, or research: Provided that an accredited HEI shall be eligible to apply for University status if the Commission considers that such application is in the national interest and in fulfilment of national policies, on the basis of a different combination of higher education qualifications other than those indicated in subregulations (e) and (f) above.

Application for university status shall be subject to an evaluation by a panel of experts and such evaluation shall comply with the following:

1. It shall include consideration of any offshore activities of the applicant Higher education institution which are required to meet relevant regulatory and reporting requirements in Malta.
2. Where the evaluation by the expert panel makes a proposal to the Commission for or against the granting of University status, the report of the evaluation shall clearly state the reasons for this.

2.1.2 Higher Education Institution

New, unlicensed or established providers of Higher Education are eligible to be licensed as a 'Higher Education Institution' if they meet the following criteria:

1. For eligibility for a licence as a Higher education institution to be issued, a provider must be a body corporate.
2. A licence as a Higher education Institution is granted to providers who deliver programmes or modules that are self awarded or otherwise and that have been formally accredited at Level 5 or higher of the Malta Qualifications Framework or a foreign qualification at a comparable level.
3. Providers licensed solely as Higher education institutions are prohibited from delivering Further education programmes (Levels 1-4) and must only offer programmes or modules that have been formally accredited onto a recognized local qualifications framework (Level 5 or Higher) or a foreign qualification of a similar title at a comparable level.
4. Providers licensed as Higher Education Institutions are proscribed from using the word 'University' in any media, advertising, published material or promotional material intended for intending students or members of the general public. However, providers licensed as Higher Education Institutions are allowed to use the term 'University' when referring to a programme being delivered in conjunction with a licensed university or an overseas university by means of a joint programme or otherwise.

2.1.3 Further Education Institution

New, unlicensed or established providers of Further education are eligible to be licensed as a 'Further education institution' if they meet the following criteria:

1. For eligibility for a licence as a Further education institution to be issued, a provider must be a body corporate.
2. A licence as a Further Education Institution is granted to providers who deliver programmes or modules that are self awarded or otherwise, which lead to a national qualification on the Malta Qualifications Framework classified at Levels 1 to 4 or a foreign qualification at a comparable level.
3. Providers licensed solely in this category are prohibited from delivering courses that have been classified on the Malta Qualifications Framework as being higher than Level 4 or a foreign qualification at a comparable level.
4. Licensees licensed in this category are proscribed from using the terms 'Higher' or 'university' in any part of their name and the term 'university', 'degree', 'masters', 'master' or 'Higher' in any title or with reference to any programme provided or award conferred by them.

2.1.4 Further Education Centre

New, unlicensed or established providers of Further education are eligible to be licensed as a 'Further education centre' if they meet the following criteria:

1. A new, prospective or established provider is only eligible for a licence to be issued under the category of 'Further Education Centre' if the provider is an individual and not a body corporate.
2. A new prospective or established provider can only be licensed as a Further education centre if they deliver accredited Further education programmes that are non self awarded.
3. Providers licensed solely in this category are prohibited from delivering courses that have been classified on the Malta Qualifications Framework as being Higher than Level 4 or a foreign qualification at a comparable level.
4. Licensees licensed in this category are prohibited from using the terms 'Higher' or 'university' in any part of their name and the term 'university', 'degree', 'masters', 'master' or 'Higher' in any title or with reference to any programme provided or award conferred by them.

2.1.5 Tuition Centre

New, unlicensed or established providers of Further education are eligible to be licensed as a 'Tuition Centre' if they meet the following criteria:

1. A new, prospective or established provider is eligible for a licence to be issued under the category of 'Tuition Centre' if the provider is an individual or a body corporate.
2. A new prospective or established provider can only be licensed as a Tuition Centre if they deliver education programmes that are not accredited and are not part of compulsory schooling.
3. Providers licensed solely in this category are prohibited from delivering courses that have been classified on the Malta Qualifications Framework or a foreign qualification at a comparable level.
4. Licensees licensed in this category are prohibited from using the terms 'Higher' or 'university' in any part of their name and the term 'university', 'degree', 'masters', 'master' or 'Higher' in any title or with reference to any programme provided or award conferred by them.

2.2 Due Diligence for Provider Accreditation

The NCFHE issues licences for Further and Higher Education providers on the basis of:

1. the **accredited programmes** which they will be providing (except for Tuition centres). This is addressed in Chapter 3;
2. the **qualifications** of the head of school and the academic staff;
3. the **premises** being used as a centre for Further and Higher education, and
4. the **internal quality assurance (IQA)** system of the entity. More information on the IQA requirements is available in the Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education. The Framework, which is also a deliverable of ESF Project 1.227, is available at: www.ncfhe.org.mt.

Applications for University accreditation require additional due diligence, as is explained in Section 2.6.

2.2.1 Qualifications of Academic Staff

The NCFHE issues licences for new, established or unlicensed providers of Further and Higher Education once it is satisfied that the Head of school and the academic staff employed by the provider are in possession of the relevant qualifications that enable them to fulfil their defined role in the educational institution. The Commission is fully cognizant of the fact that certain Heads of school or members of the teaching body in the vocational sector might not be in possession of formal qualifications and would, in that case, ask for a curriculum vitae to be submitted as evidence that the applicant has sufficient knowledge and competence of the specific field s/he will be lecturing in gained via informal and non-formal learning.

Further guidelines on the minimum qualifications for teaching staff are provided in Section 2.3.

2.2.2 Premises

The Commission must ensure that all learning is delivered from safe premises that do not pose any physical threats to students and teachers of Further and Higher Education, and are in line with all relevant planning regulations. Thus, the Commission asks new, established and unlicensed providers, when submitting their application for the registration of an educational institution to provide a plan view drawing of the premises which will be used and the MEPA Compliance Certificate confirming that these premises are suitable for use as a Further and Higher educational institution.

New, unlicensed and established providers of Further and Higher education must equip their premises with the necessary resources required for different kinds of training, for example, fully operational ICT laboratories, science labs and workshops to heighten the quality of training. Premises of Further and Higher Education must also be equipped with a physical or virtual library, canteen, recreational and study areas as appropriate for the intended learning.

Further guidelines on appropriate venues for accreditation are provided in Section 2.4.

2.3 Minimum Qualifications for Teaching Staff

The following regulations are intended to serve as guidelines on the minimum level of qualification/s of an MQF Level for prospective tutors² of a course³. In all cases, the NCFHE reserves the right to determine particular requirements on a case-by-case basis.

1. Academic courses pegged at MQF Levels 1 – 5 require tutors who are qualified at least with a relevant degree or equivalent at MQF Level 6.
2. In addition to point 1 above, mainstream academic courses require tutors who are in possession of a valid Teacher's Warrant issued or otherwise recognised by the Council for the Teaching Profession as per the Education Act.
3. Vocational courses at MQF Levels 1 – 4 require tutors who are qualified at least with a relevant full qualification at Level 5.
4. Vocational courses at MQF Levels 5 and 6 as well as academic courses at Levels 6 and 7 require tutors who have a full relevant qualification at least one Level up from the course being provided.
5. In the case of vocational courses up to level 5, when there is clear evidence that the local market does not provide tutors of the required qualification level, the NCFHE will consider proposals for twinned provision, namely that in which a highly-experienced and effective tutor with a lower qualification level is mentored by a colleague with a qualification at the appropriate level, who is preferably also be involved in co-delivery, to ensure that the required level of learning outcomes delivery and assessment is maintained. Such proposals would have to indicate clearly the role of the mentoring tutor, what relevant documentation is being retained to substantiate this role and how this documentation is being used for IQA purposes.
6. Degrees and other courses at Level 7 need to have course/module coordinators with a full relevant qualification at Level 8. Such courses may include input from tutors that have a full relevant qualification at Level 7 and at least 10 years of relevant high level/executive experience in the field, which needs to be specified in the application. The academic/theoretical aspects of such degrees still require input from tutors with a full relevant qualification at Level 8.
7. Courses at MQF Level 8 require tutors at MQF Level 8.
8. In the case of courses that are not clearly academic, vocational or professional/executive in nature, the NCFHE shall make a final judgement as to the category and process accordingly.

2. In the AMoP, 'tutors' refers to any lecturer, tutor, teacher or other person providing tuition of any kind, including supervised and distance learning.

3. In the AMoP, 'course' refers to any full or partial programme of studies that is or in the process of being accredited. .e. similar in content to those provided in Malta's schools, VI Forms and Junior College.

4. i.e. similar in content to those provided in Malta's schools, VI Forms and Junior College.

2.4 Regulations on Venues for Provider Accreditation

The NCFHE distinguishes between:

- **internal provision:** regular provision within approved premises
- **external provision:** provision that takes place exclusively or for a significant proportion in the open air due to the nature of the provision itself, e.g. scuba diving, abseiling, camping, fire-fighting, etc.
- **home provision:** provision that takes place at the provider's home due to specific circumstances approved on a case-by-case basis by the NCFHE: e.g. teaching of music or academic subjects to small groups, etc.

2.4.1 Internal provision

1. A MEPA compliance certificate is required; OR
2. documentation from MEPA confirming that the premises is in compliance with regulations for the purposes of tuition, OR
3. confirming that MEPA has agreed on an implementation plan that will allow the provider to be in compliance with such regulations over a specified period of time.
4. The National Minimum Conditions for Schools (1994) apply, especially if tuition included minors.
5. If the premises are old and cannot have MEPA documentation as per above, a health and safety report that includes sanitation and fire safety is required every two years. This report is carried out at the expense of the applicant. In such cases the licence issued would be valid for two years, and the licence fee, which normally covers accreditation for five years, is calculated pro-rata.
6. Sports grounds are considered venues for internal provision.
7. Local councils, licensed schools including English language schools, functioning sports venues, functioning religious venues (youth centres, church halls etc.) and functioning hotels, hospitals and resting homes are deemed to be fit for purpose for regular tuition that would normally be held in such venues or parts thereof. Applicants need only a letter of authorisation from the hosting venue. The NCFHE shall have the power to decide whether a particular venue is fit for purpose for the particular proposed tuition. In any case the NCFHE may request a MEPA compliance certificate as part of its due diligence.
8. Any venue that is subject to criminal investigation or MEPA regulatory action is disqualified as an eligible venue for accredited provision.

2.4.2 External provision

1. A health and safety report is required for every external venue used. This report is carried out at the expense of the applicant. In such cases the licence issued would be valid for two years, and the licence fee, which normally covers accreditation for five years, is calculated pro-rata.
2. However, if the venue is already covered by a MEPA permit for this use, the venue is treated as with internal provision.

2.4.3 Home provision

1. A health and safety report that includes sanitation and fire safety is required every two years. This report is carried out at the expense of the applicant. In this case the licence issued would be valid for two years, and the licence fee, which normally covers accreditation for five years, is calculated pro-rata.
2. Provider licences with home provision shall have a limit on the number of learners at any one time on the premises, which shall be determined by the size of the room used for tuition. This must have a minimum of two (2) square meters of space per learner, and shall not accommodate more than 10 learners at any one time.

2.5 Protocol for Accreditation and Licensing of Entities

2.5.1. Licensing

1. Submission of application + first instalment of the fee (50%).
2. When the payment is settled, applicant is so informed and application receives its unique number.
3. NCFHE Officer proceeds to the internal due diligence based on the requirements of the Application Form. The Application Form is available at <http://www.ncfhe.org.mt/>.
4. If application lacks information or contains incorrect information, Officer contacts applicant to adjust/correct it. The correctness of application is verified once again.
5. If application is filled correctly and all due diligence issues are addressed, request is approved by CEO.
6. Applicant is asked to pay second instalment of the fee (50%).
7. In case the transfer is not made, reminders are sent to applicant. 1st – after 10 working days, 2nd – after 5 working days.
8. If, in spite of reminders, the payment is not made, application is rejected.
9. Once payment is confirmed, licence is issued and sent to applicant. Provider accreditation is included in the NCFHE Register.

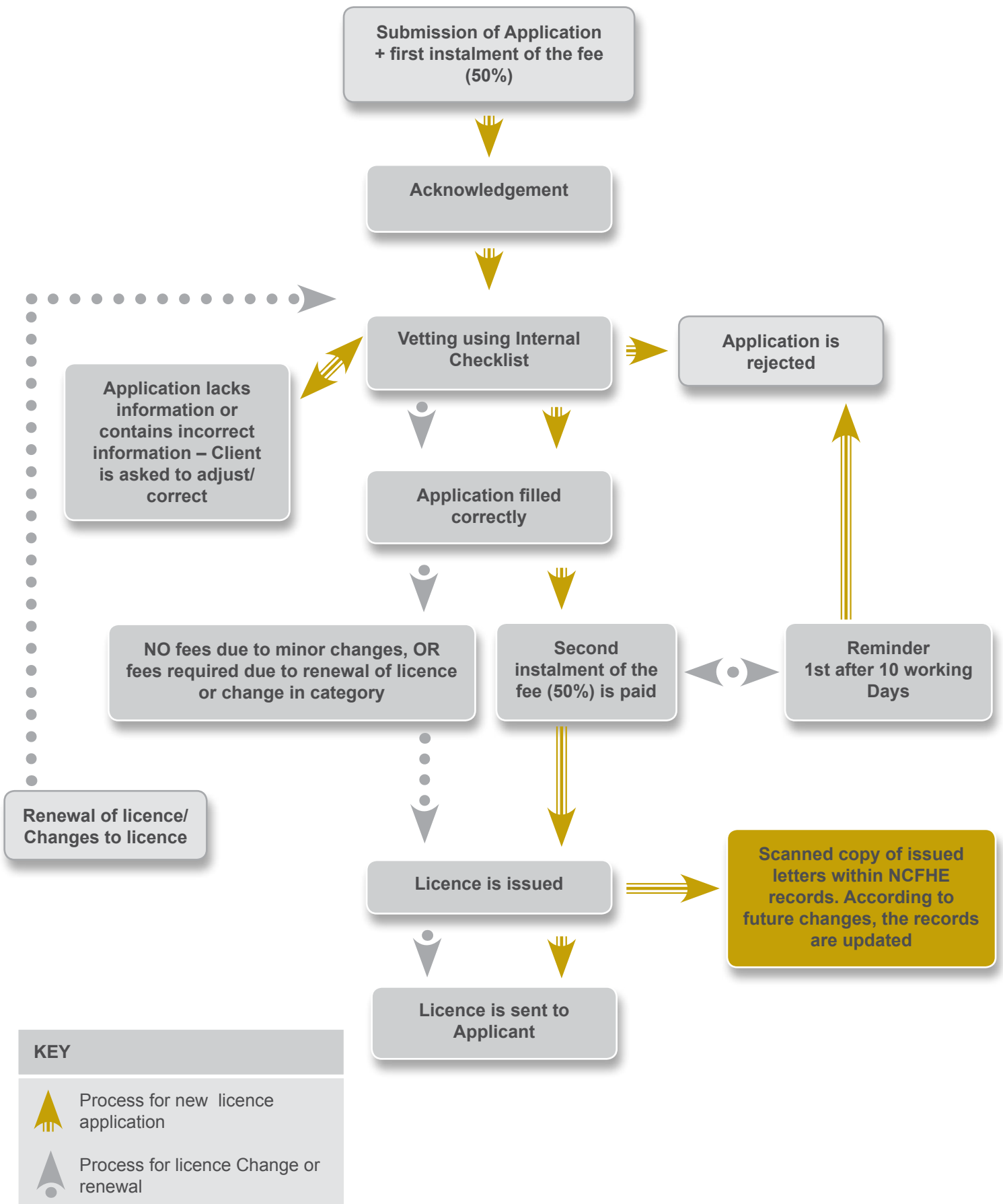
2.5.2. Changes to License and/or Conditions

1. Provider informs the NCFHE of any change to licence information or conditions. This is followed by a new vetting process.
2. There are normally no fee charges for changes in licence information or conditions. However if the change is (i) from provisional to full licence and (ii) to University status, the current administrative fees apply.
3. If fees apply, first instalment of fee (50%) is made.
4. If proposed application change lacks information or contains incorrect information, NCFHE Officer contacts applicant to adjust/correct it. The correctness of application is verified once again.
5. If application is filled correctly, applicant is asked to pay second instalment of the fee (50%) where applicable.
6. In case the transfer is not made, reminders are sent to applicant. 1st – after 10 working days, 2nd – after 5 working days.
7. If, in spite of reminders, the payment is not made, requested change is rejected.
8. Once payment is confirmed, revised licence is issued and sent to applicant. Revised provider accreditation is included in the NCFHE Register.

2.5.3 Renewal of Licence

1. One month prior to expiry Alert is issued by NCFHE by email.
2. Applicant needs to apply for licence renewal within stipulated time period.
3. Renewal of Licence is followed by new vetting process.

2.6 Provider Accreditation Flowchart



2.7 Additional Procedure for Accreditation of Universities

The provider accreditation procedure for applicants of licences for universities is governed by Regulation 47 of SL 327.433. Prior to the consideration of the licence application itself, which follows the procedure set out in Section 2.5, the eligibility of the applicant needs to be considered in terms of the seven tests of eligibility set out in the Regulation.

When an application for university accreditation is received, the following procedure is followed:

1. If applicants have not already done so, they are requested to fill in a questionnaire elaborating the requirements of Regulation 47, given below.
2. After the administrative fees due are paid, the Chair of the QAC is informed of the application. The Chair then consults with the Chair of the NCFHE, the CEO and senior NCFHE staff on the membership of the Panel that will review the application for university application.
3. The minimum number of Panel members is three suitable qualified and experienced academics, and it is chaired by a member of the QAC. The QAC considers the proposed Panel membership and approves or otherwise.
4. Remuneration to the Panel chair and members is set at the hourly rates established from time to time by the NCFHE Board.
5. In the meantime, the NCFHE undertakes an initial administrative verification of the documentation received. This will check that:
 - a) all the required information in the provider application and in the questionnaire is present;
 - b) information is in line with the guidelines in the provider application itself.
6. The outcomes of the initial administrative verification are submitted to the Panel for its consideration.
7. In undertaking its due diligence, the Panel may request the applicant to provide any information it deems fit, which may include interviews with the applicant and/or third parties.
8. At the end of its deliberations the Panel will submit a written Report with its recommendations, which may include licence conditions.
9. The QAC takes due note of this Report, and may request the Panel to clarify or investigate further. The QAC then formulates its written recommendations to the Board, which may include licence conditions.
10. The Board may endorse the recommendation of the QAC, or send it back to the QAC for reconsideration, explaining its reasons in writing. The final decision on the accreditation of university applications rests with the Board.

2.7.1 Due Diligence Questionnaire with respect to Eligibility of Applicant

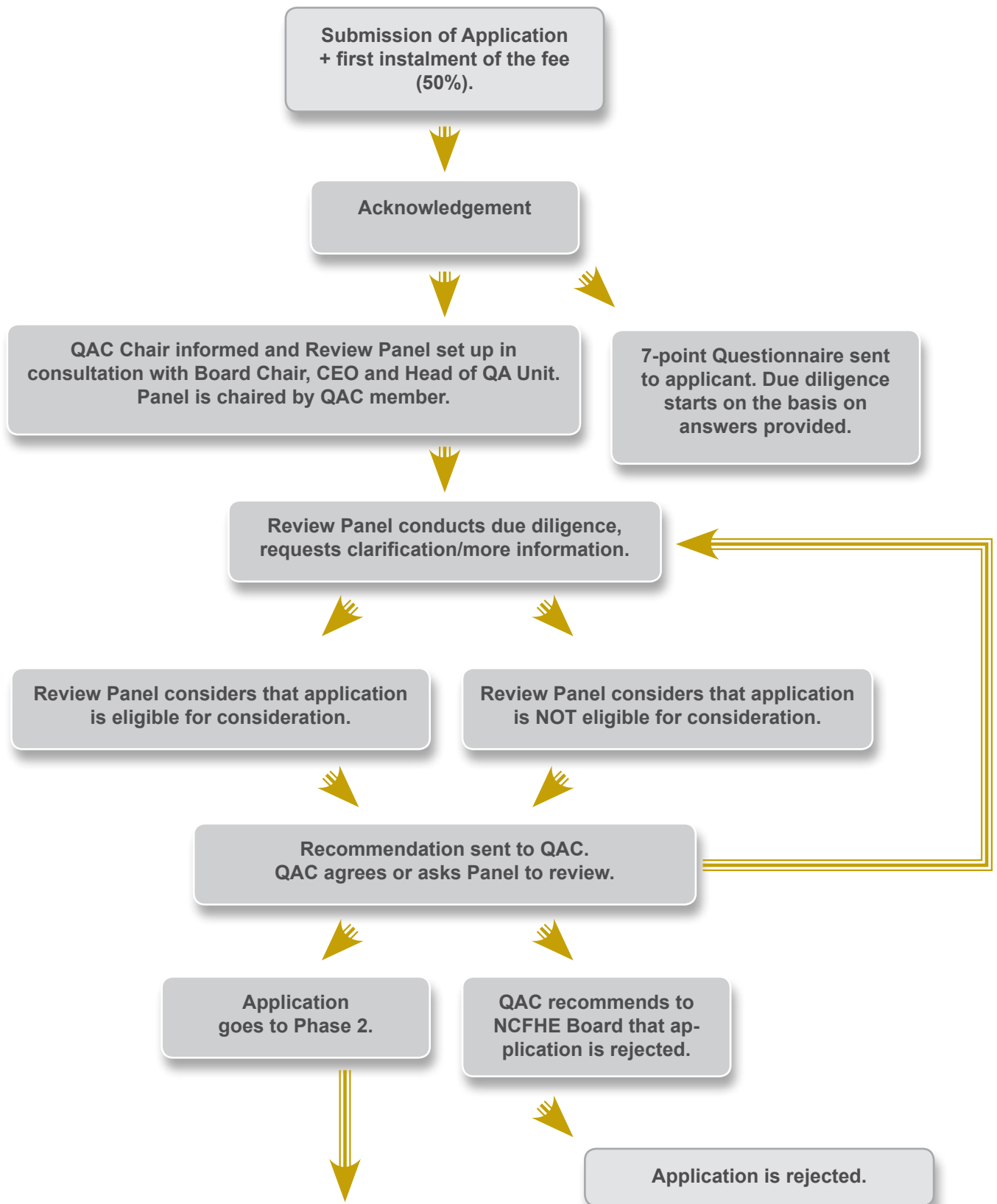
As indicated above, the applicant is requested to provide further information, in as detailed a manner as required, in reply to the following questions. Where applicable, the applicant may simply refer to relevant URLs or to information already provided in the filled-in application for the accreditation of new entities.

In answering these questions, the applicant may also include consideration of any relevant offshore activities outside Malta of the institution in question.

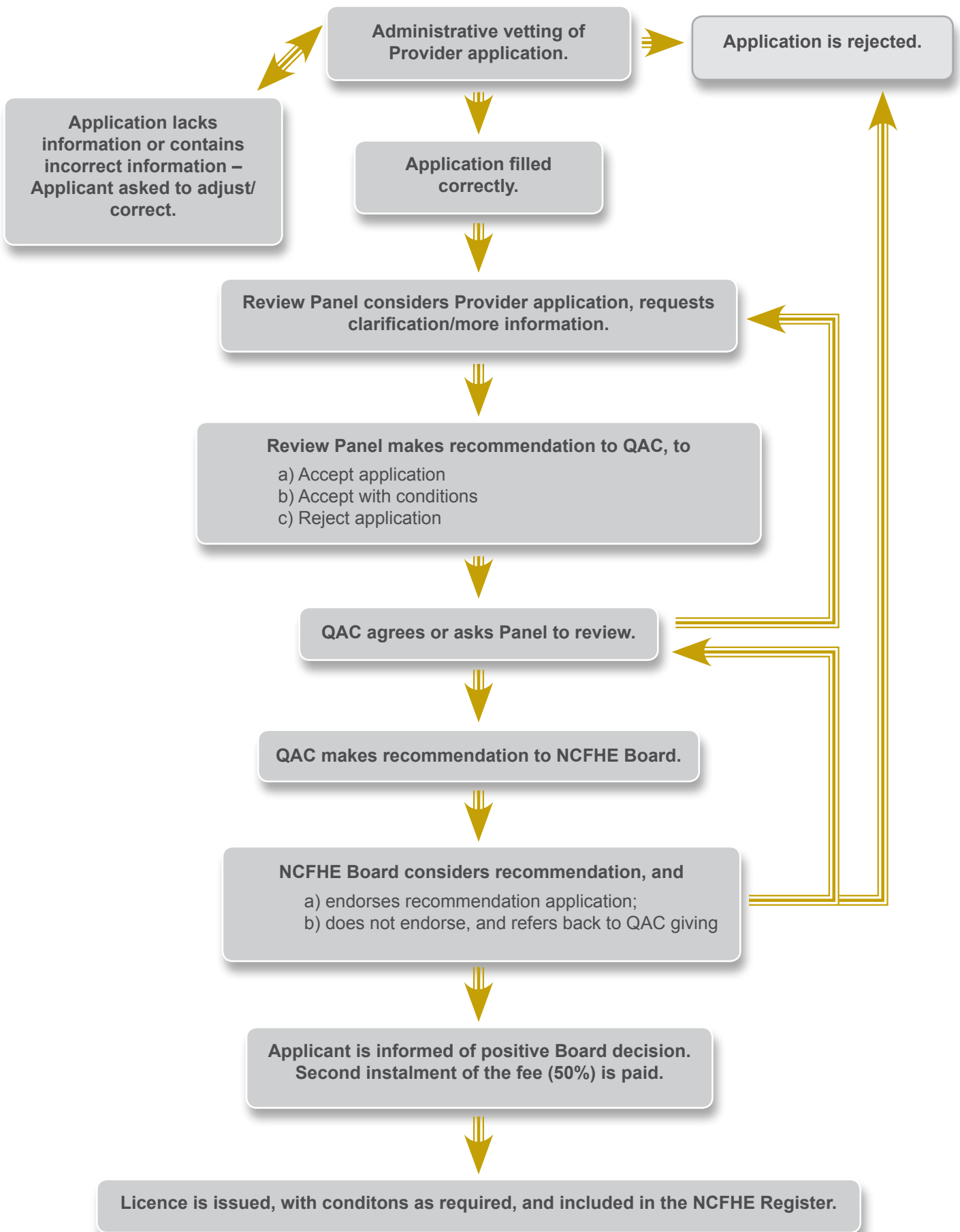
1. In what way are higher education, teaching, research and dissemination of knowledge the primary activities of the applicant?
2. How can the applicant demonstrate that it has academic staff, an academic library, stable research training or stable research and development activities of a high standard?
3. Which are the applicant's representative bodies of staff and students, if any? Applicants needs to provide the relevant statutes/regulations and the description of each.
4. What is the organisation and infrastructure that the applicant has for providing higher education and undertaking research?
5. What independent competence does the applicant have in setting up the components of higher education programmes? What accredited programmes is the applicant already providing? Under which jurisdiction are these programmes accredited? Does the applicant have an independent right to award degrees with respect to such programmes?
6. To which international networks in connection with higher education and/or research is the applicant affiliated, if any? Applicant needs to provide details of such network/s.
7. How does the applicant participate in national and international cooperation in teaching and/or research? Applicant needs to provide information about the resultant activities as applicable.

2.8 University Accreditation Procedure Flowchart

Phase 1: Eligibility Due Diligence in terms of Regulation 47



Phase 2: Provider Accreditation Due Diligence in terms of Regulation 47



2.9 Reference to NCFHE in Publicity and Other Material by Accredited Entities

The following parameters are intended to ensure uniform implementation of the Regulations in SL 327.433 relating to reference to NCFHE in publicity and material by accredited entities. In these guidelines 'licensed institutions' refer to both those with regular as well as provisional licenses. Institutions with regular licenses i.e. valid for five years shall be referred to explicitly. These parameters shall be considered as part of the Licence Conditions of all Licensed Providers as per Article 12(3) of S.L. 327.433.

1. Advertising, websites and other printed, published and/or disseminated material shall include the following information:
 - a) licence number;
 - b) Second Schedule Category, e.g. Further Education Institution;
 - c) the accredited status of the course or programme: e.g. VET Award/Further Education Programmes, and
 - d) where applicable, the MQF/EQF level for programmes provided at the Institution, e.g. Level 5.
2. The certificates, and if applicable, related degree or diploma supplements issued by licensed institutions to the successful programme or course participants, shall include the following information:
 - a) licence number;
 - b) Second Schedule Category, e.g. Further Education Institution;
 - c) the accredited status of the course or programme: e.g. VET Award/Further Education Programme;
 - d) the MQF/EQF level for programmes provided at the Institution, e.g. Level 5, for example: 'MQF/EQF Level 5';
 - e) the number of ECTS/ECVET points, for example: 'Learning Points: 10'.

These requirements apply for the certification of courses that bear the name, whether exclusively or in conjunction with a third party, of the further and/or higher education institution licensed by the NCFHE as the sole or joint awarding institution.

In the case of courses administered by a NCFHE-licensed entity but whose certificates are issued by an awarding institution that is not licensed by the NCFHE, the NCFHE-licensed entity must ensure that the certificate and/or accompanying degree/diploma/certificate supplement includes:

- the EQF level, or the relevant level in terms of the national qualifications framework of the country of origin of the awarding institution, and
- the ECTS/ECVET points or credits of the course.

If this information is not normally made available with the certificate, the NCFHE-licensed entity administering the course needs to attach to each certificate a declaration indicating these two points of information.

3. Licensed institutions are empowered to use the following wording on the certificates and, if applicable on related degree or diploma supplements issued by them to the successful programme or course participants: **The National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) deems this certificate to be at Level "X" of the Malta Qualifications Framework and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning.**

In this case the information in point 2 d) above should then be ignored.

4. Only **institutions with regular licenses (i.e. valid for five years)** shall be empowered to use the NCFHE logo on their printed, published and/or disseminated material including certificates of programmes and courses. Such institutions may request a high-definition version of the NCFHE logo.



3. Accreditation of Courses

3.1 Course Accreditation

Programme accreditation is granted by the NCFHE upon application by the provider, in one of the following categories. The applications for the accreditation of Further and Higher education programmes are available at www.ncfhe.org.mt.

3.1.1. Further Education Programme⁵

An academic, vocational or professional programme which is of non-compulsory formal education and is accredited by the Commission under these regulations as one which leads to a national qualification classified up to and including Malta Qualifications Framework Level 4 or a foreign qualification at a comparable level.

3.1.2 Further Education Module

Part of a “Further education programme” offered by a provider which simultaneously offers one or more “Further education programmes”, accredited by the Commission under these regulations as a module and which serves to obtain, only in part, a national qualification classified up to and including Malta Qualifications Framework Level 4 or a foreign qualification at a comparable level.

3.1.3 Higher Education Programme

A full academic, vocational or professional programme which is of non-compulsory formal education, training or research and is accredited by the Commission under these regulations as one which leads to a national qualification with the title of Degree, Certificate, Diploma or other similar title at Malta Qualifications Framework Level 5 or Higher or a foreign qualification of a similar title at a comparable level.

3.1.4 Higher Education Module

Part of a “Higher education programme” offered by a provider, accredited by the Commission under these regulations as a module and which serves to obtain, only in part, a national qualification at Malta Qualifications Framework Level 5 or Higher or a foreign qualification at a comparable level.

3.1.5 Approved Foreign Further Education Programme

An academic, vocational or professional programme of non-compulsory formal education which is accredited by a recognised foreign accreditation agency and leads to an award awarded by a foreign provider and a foreign qualification classified as comparable to a level up to and including Malta Qualifications Framework Level 4. This programme does not lead to a national qualification.

3.1.6 Approved Foreign Higher Education Programme

An academic, vocational or professional programme of non-compulsory formal education, training or research which is accredited by a recognised foreign accreditation agency and leads to an award awarded by a foreign Higher education provider and a foreign qualification classified at a level comparable to Malta Qualifications Framework Level 5 or Higher. This programme does not lead to a national qualification.

Where a provider applies for accreditation of a course that serves to obtain a national qualification (a home-grown course), course accreditation shall be based on a desk-based course quality audit. In a course quality audit the NCFHE with the assistance of external expert evaluators in various fields, assesses whether the content and structure of the programme achieves national/international and European standards. This is done through a thorough analysis of, amongst other:

- The overall learning outcomes of the course and the modular learning outcomes;
- The breakdown of the hours of learning;
- The target group of the programme;
- The entry requirements to the programme;
- The certification and experience required by the person delivering the programme/module;
- The internal quality assurance of the programme.

At the end of the course quality audit the Commission classifies the Accredited Entities and Qualifications. All accredited full undergraduate courses at MQF Level 6, and all accredited courses at MQF Levels 7 and 8, are subject to an external quality audit after the end of the first cycle of provision. Other courses may be subject to external quality audits as required from time to time by the NCFHE.

⁵ The Third Schedule of SL 327.433 refers to ‘programme’; as already indicated in the introduction for the purposes of this Manual the word ‘course’ refers also to ‘programme’.

For the purposes of its Register the NCFHE lists a newly accredited course as pertaining to and being delivered by the registered accredited institution as it appears on the course application. The intellectual property rights (IPR) of the course itself are deemed to reside with its legal owner according to the contractual arrangements that the author/s of the course may have with the accredited institution that appears on the course application. The NCFHE shall not otherwise enter into the merits of the IPR of the course itself.

In the case of qualifications which are awarded by foreign awarding bodies, the Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre (MQRIC), which forms part of the ENIC-NARIC Network, grants or NCFHE classifies the qualification at a comparable level of the MQF. Such qualification can be included in the Register.

3.2 Protocol for Course Accreditation

3.2.1 Submission

1. Submission of Application + First instalment of the fee (50%).
2. Verification that applicant is accredited with NCFHE. If not, applicants is requested to apply for provider accreditation and course accreditation process only starts once provider accreditation application is submitted and 50% fee paid.

3.2.2 Administrative Evaluation

3. When the payment is settled, application receives its unique number.
4. NCFHE Officer proceeds with administrative evaluation of application.
5. Feedback is sent to Applicant who is given up to three (3) months to include all the changes and resubmit the application.
6. NCFHE provides up to up to two feedback cycles at this stage.
7. If required changes are not made, NCFHE may reject the application.

3.2.3 Technical Evaluation

8. Once the application is considered sufficiently sound to proceed to the next part of the accreditation process, NCFHE informs applicant that revised application is going be sent to the external evaluators.
9. Evaluators are normally given three (3) weeks to submit their Evaluation Report to NCFHE.
10. When Report is received, it is either accepted by the NCFHE or further clarification from the same Evaluator/s is requested.
11. If more than one evaluator is required (e.g. for MQF Level 7 or 8 application) the NCFHE convenes the evaluators so that a consolidated report is produced.
12. Once the Report is accepted by the NCFHE, it is forwarded to the applicant for their comments and for the necessary amendments in the application, as applicabl e.
13. A second round of technical evaluation might be required by NCFHE, depending on the extent and nature of the revisions requested by the evaluator/s.
14. Exceptionally, more rounds of feedback may be required.
15. If required changes are not made, NCFHE may reject the application.

3.2.4 Accreditation

16. Course is approved for accreditation.
17. Applicant is informed about the approval.
18. Second instalment of the fee (50%) is paid. Once payment is confirmed, course is accredited and included in the NCFHE Register.

3.3 Guidelines for Accreditation of MQF Level 7 Courses

3.3.1 Introduction

This section sets out guidelines of minimum requirements for the accreditation of MQF Level 7 courses by the NCFHE. These guidelines are inspired by SL 327.433. In line with Malta's obligations as signatory to the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Recognition Convention, they are based on a three-cycle system of higher education, with one cycle typically leading to the next.

In the following guidelines, all references of MQF requirements include also equivalent EQF qualifications as duly recognised by MQRIC.

3.3.2 Categorisation of Courses

The NCFHE considers that the following terms may be used only as follows:

- Post-Graduate Certificate: At least 30 ECTS, of which not less than 25 must be at MQF Level 7.
- Post-Graduate Diploma: At least 60 ECTS, of which not less than 40 must be at MQF Level 7.
- Master's Degree: Typically at least 90 ECTS, of which not less than 60 must be at MQF Level 7, and including a dissertation, research project or research component/s of equivalent standard to which not less than 20 ECTS are assigned.

The NCFHE may consider exceptional requests for Masters' degrees that have less than 90 ECTS but not less than 60 ECTS. In such cases not less than 60 ECTS must be at MQF Level 7. In such cases the dissertation, research project or research component/s of equivalent standard should still be not less than 20 ECTS.

MQF Level 7 courses that have less than 30 ECTS of which less than 25 ECTS at MQF Level 7 may not use the words 'Certificate', 'Diploma', 'Post-Graduate Certificate', 'Post-Graduate Diploma' or 'Masters' in the title. MQF Level 7 courses that have less than 60 ECTS of which less than the established number of ECTS are at MQF level 7 may not use the words 'Diploma', 'Post-Graduate Diploma' or 'Masters' in the title.

3.3.3 Minimum Entry Requirements

The aim of establishing minimum entry requirements for MQF Level 7 courses is to ensure that prospective students can pursue their selected course meaningfully and with profit. The minimum entry requirements for MQF Level 7 course with more than 30 ECTS are as follows:

Post-Graduate Certificate

- An MQF/EQF⁶ Level 6 degree, OR
- A relevant MQF/EQF Level 5 award of at least 30 ECTS plus a portfolio evidencing at least two years of relevant work experience.

Post-Graduate Diploma

- An MQF/EQF Level 6 degree, OR
- A relevant MQF/EQF Level 5 award of at least 60 ECTS plus a portfolio evidencing at least three years of relevant work experience

Master's Degree

- A relevant MQF/EQF Level 6 degree at second class, OR
- An MQF/EQF Level 6 degree plus a portfolio evidencing relevant work experience for at least 3 years, OR
- An MQF/EQF Level 5 full qualification, AND a portfolio evidencing
 - i. appropriate writing and analytical skills to ensure that the prospective candidate can fully and meaningfully participate in course, and
 - ii. work experience at professional and/or executive level for at least 5 years.

The NCFHE shall consider proposals for supplementary or preparatory programmes and other exceptional entry requirements on a case-by-case basis.

Where a student does not have the requisite language skills in terms of the language of instruction and assessment of the course, licensees shall set minimum language requirements not less than the equivalent of MQF L4 in the target language. Article 24 of LN 296/2012 shall apply as relevant.

⁶ The Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) is equivalent to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

3.3.4 Minimum Qualification Requirements for Tutors⁷

Courses at MQF Level 7 require tutors who have a full relevant qualification at least one Level up from the course being provided. Degrees and other courses at Level 7 need to have course/module coordinators with a full relevant qualification at Level 8. Such courses may include input from tutors that have a full relevant qualification at Level 7 and at least 10 years of relevant high level/executive experience in the field, which needs to be specified in the application. The academic/theoretical aspects of such degrees still require input from tutors with a full relevant qualification at Level 8.

3.3.5 Minimum Course Requirements

Entities providing MQF Level 7 courses need to have in place the following minimum course requirements:

- The minimum amount of time required to complete the course, considering that the ECTS system is based on the convention that 60 credits measure the workload of a full-time student for one academic year;
- The maximum amount of time within which a student will be allowed to complete a course, given temporary suspension of studies and extensions to complete course requirements;
- Procedures for taking temporary suspension of studies;
- Procedures for granting extension for duration of course;
- Appropriate student information and support systems in line with the National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education.

Applications for course accreditation as per clause 9 overleaf shall have this information clearly labelled for ease of reference.

3.3.6 Minimum Assessment Requirements

1. Any Master's degree must include a dissertation, research project or research component/s of equivalent standard to which not less than 20 ECTS are assigned.
2. Entities providing MQF Level 7 courses need to have in place an assessment policy that includes:
 - a) Descriptors for the range of grades/marks to be assigned per module/unit/for the whole course, as well as the final classification of the course;
 - b) Procedures for selection of dissertation tutors;
 - c) An Ethics Approval System and related committee to process all relevant research requests, including dissertations;
 - d) Procedures for dissertation, research project or research component/s of equivalent standard and other examining boards;
 - e) Procedures in case of plagiarism and other forms of misconduct;
 - f) Procedures for appeals.

3.3.7 Quality Assurance Requirements

All courses accredited at MQF Level 7 shall be subject to IQA and EQA requirements as per the National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education. Additionally, all new MQF Level 7 courses will undergo course-based EQA after the first complete cycle of provision. However the NCFHE shall retain the right to undertake spot-checks as required.

3.3.8 Compliance with FHE QA Framework

All the above requirements must be in compliance with the National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education. In any case of conflict of interpretation, the Framework is considered to be the primary guiding document.

⁷ In this document, 'tutors' refers to any lecturer, tutor, teacher or other person providing tuition of any kind, including supervised and distance learning.

3.3.9 Accreditation Procedure

Applications for MQF Level 7 courses are to use the Application Form provided at www.ncfhe.org.mt. After the internal verification of the form by NCFHE staff is carried out, MQF Level 7 courses with more than 30 ECTS are submitted to the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) for initial evaluation. This initial evaluation shall include, but may not be limited to:

- Course entry requirements;
- Minimum qualifications for lecturers/tutors;
- Course assessment.

The first cycle of feedback sent to applicants shall include the outcomes of the initial verification by NCFHE staff and the initial evaluation of the QAC. Following the resubmission of the application, if it is fit for purpose in terms of the feedback sent, it is forwarded to external assessors. The number of assessors shall be not less than two. However, in all cases the number of assessors shall in the final analysis depend on the complexity and variety of the modules of the course, and the range of expertise of the assessors.

The evaluators shall issue one evaluation report. This consolidated evaluation report shall be sent to the applicants for feedback. The report with applicants' feedback is then reviewed by the QAC, and a decision taken accordingly. The QAC may recommend further improvements to the applicants before it is considered sufficiently robust to be recommended for approval to the NCFHE Board.

3.3.10 Distance-Learning Based Courses

These requirements are generally applicable to distance-learning based courses as well. The NCFHE shall issue a separate document that will specify requirements for this category of courses.

3.3.11 Dual/Joint Courses

These requirements are generally applicable to dual/joint and distance learning courses as well. The NCFHE shall issue a separate document that will specify requirements for this category of courses.

3.4 Protocol for Accreditation of Level 6 and 7 Courses

Applications courses at MQF Levels 6 and 7 are to use the Higher Education Application Form provided in the NCFHE website. The accreditation protocol is as follows:

1. After the administrative fees due are paid, the application is vetted for administrative compliance. If the course applied for is i) at Level 6 and less than 180 ECTS, or ii) at Level 7 and less than 30 ECTS, it is processed as per normal accreditation procedure as per Section 3.2 of this AMoP.
2. If the i) the Level 6 course has 180 ECTS or more, or ii) the Level 7 course has 30 ECTS or more, the initial administrative verification will check that:
for Section A:
 - all required information is present;
 - information is in line with the guidelines in the course application itself, and in the case of a Level 7 course, in line with the Level 7 Guidelines;
 - there is internal coherence between the various parts of the application;
for Section B:
 - all required documentation is present;
for Section C:
 - all sections are filled in and coherent with the relevant parts in Section A;
 - prima facie the Learning Outcomes are appropriate for the MQF Level of the course applied for.
3. The initial administrative verification may include up to two cycles of feedback in which the applicant is requested to revise specific aspects of the application so as to streamline the technical evaluation process that will follow.
4. Should the applicant not reach the required standard for the application to be sent for external assessment, and the applicant refuses to make further changes as requested, the NCFHE shall so inform the Chair of the QAC, and then proceed according to instructions.
5. After the internal administrative verification of the application is successfully concluded, the NCFHE undertakes an initial technical evaluation of Sections A and B of the application, with QAC support where required. The initial technical evaluation shall include, but may not be limited to:
 - Course entry requirements;
 - Minimum qualifications for lecturers/tutors;
 - Course assessment.

This evaluation may lead to the NCFHE requesting the applicant to undertake revisions to these sections of the application. One cycle of feedback is allowed at this stage.

6. After the initial technical evaluation by the QAC of the application is successfully concluded, the application is sent to the external evaluators, which shall not be less than two. However, in all cases the number of assessors shall in the final analysis depend on the complexity and variety of the modules of the course, and the range of expertise of the assessors. The NCFHE shall consult with the QAC in the identification of suitable assessors.
7. The external assessors shall not be known to each other and shall work separately. Normally three weeks are given for the assessors to each produce a report based on a template prepared by the NCFHE. The Head of the QA Unit then sets up a meeting with all the assessors involved, so as to converge the different reports into one consolidated report. The NCFHE drafts this consolidated report on the basis of the separate reports and requests the approval of the assessors.
8. Once the consolidated report is concluded, it is sent to the applicants for feedback and a revised version of the application is requested. Depending on the nature of the recommendations of the report, the NCFHE may i) review the revised application and determine that the recommendations have been fulfilled, or ii) it may revert back to the external assessors for a second report, following which the consolidation process as per point 9 may have to be repeated, depending on the nature of the reports.
9. Once the NCFHE considers the revised application to have fully addressed all relevant concerns and recommendations, this final version along with the consolidated report (and any additional subsequent report/s) are sent to the QAC with as recommendation for the accreditation of the course in question. The QAC may recommend further improvements to the applicants before it is considered sufficiently robust to be recommended for approval to the NCFHE Board.
10. Once the decision to accredit the course is taken, it is communicated to the applicant, and the course is included in the Register of accredited courses of the NCFHE.

3.5 Guidelines for Accreditation of MQF Level 8 Provision

3.5.1. Introduction

This section sets out guidelines of minimum requirements for the accreditation of Malta Qualifications Framework Level 8 (MQF Level 8) provision by the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE). These guidelines are inspired by Subsidiary Legislation 327.433 and draw on a range of documents and regulations in Malta and abroad that reflect the importance of the European dimension in situating Malta-accredited doctorates in a wider context, particularly the Salzburg Principles⁸ and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)⁹. In line with Malta's obligations as signatory to the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Recognition Convention, they are based on a three-cycle system of higher education, with one cycle typically leading to the next.

In the following guidelines, all references of MQF requirements include also equivalent EQF qualifications as duly recognised by the Malta Qualifications Recognition and Information Centre (MQRIC).

3.5.2 Core Principles of Level 8 Provision

The following core principles apply for the consideration of applications for the accreditation of Level 8 provision. In this document, the word 'research' is used to cover a wide variety of activities, with the context often related to a field of study; the term is used here to represent a reflective and focussed in-depth study or investigation based on a systematic understanding and critical awareness of knowledge. The word is used in an inclusive way to accommodate the range of activities that support original and innovative work in the whole range of academic, professional and technological fields, including the sciences, social sciences, humanities, and traditional, performing, and other creative arts. It is not used in any limited or restricted sense, or relating solely to a traditional and narrow conception of research.

1. **Providing institutions:** MQF Level 8 programmes may be offered in Malta by self-accredited institutions that are so empowered as per the First Schedule of Subsidiary Legislation 327.433, and by institutions accredited by the NCFHE as Higher Education Institutions and Universities as per the Second Schedule of same.
2. **Advancement of knowledge through original research:** The core component of doctoral work is the advancement of knowledge through original research. At the same time it is recognised that doctoral work must increasingly meet the norms and practices established by a profession.
3. **Highest levels of study:** doctoral candidates are expected to acquire the highest levels of knowledge, skills, dispositions, and competencies in their disciplines. This requires guidance, support and instruction during the course or programme. All formal and informal modes of preparation should be available to them including lectures, seminars, colloquia, summer schools, group discussions, field activities, etc. as appropriate.
4. **Communities of reflective practice:** the providing institutions need to assume responsibility for ensuring that the doctoral programmes and research preparation they offer operate within a community of research practice, are designed to meet new challenges and include appropriate professional career development opportunities.
5. **Doctoral candidates as professionals:** Doctoral candidates should be recognized as early stage researchers and therefore as professionals– with commensurate rights - who make a key contribution to the creation of new knowledge.
6. **Entry requirements:** the entry requirement for MQF Level 8 provision is normally a full MQF Level 7 qualification. When considering a possible research project, careful consideration should be given to the suitability of the project for research student study, the need to provide an appropriate research environment and the practicality of completing the project within the period of registration for the higher degree. Admission procedures should be transparent, be consistently applied and should involve the judgement of more than one member of the institution's staff.
7. **Supervision:** providing institutions should have clear procedures for monitoring doctoral candidates by a supervisory team on research, teaching activities, training choices and career projects. It is incumbent on the institutions when accepting research students to ensure that their supervisor(s) has sufficient research expertise and supervisory experience. Institutions should also have clear procedures for recourse and redress with respect to students who experience unsatisfactory supervision.

At the beginning of the research project, the various roles and responsibilities of all parties involved with the research project should be clearly identified and agreed in order to establish a transparent, contractual framework of shared responsibilities between doctoral candidates, supervisors and the institution, and where appropriate including other partners. Arrangements should be in place outside of the student/supervisor relationship in terms of the established procedures which ensure that the identified responsibilities, including the monitoring of the work plan, training and timelines and quality of supervision are being acceptably discharged.

⁸ Bologna Seminar on "Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society". Conclusions and Recommendations. Salzburg, 3-5 February 2005. Available at: http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/Salzburg_Conclusions.1108990538850.pdf. Last accessed on 15th March 2015.

⁹ Available at: <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=65>. Last accessed on 15th March 2015.

8. **Assessment:** The assessment of doctoral programmes, even those that include course work, should include and i) a thesis and ii) a viva or oral defence thereof.
9. **Duration:** The duration and the content of the doctoral programme should be adapted for doctoral candidates on the basis of their research project. Generally speaking according to the Salzburg Principles there should normally be three to four years allocated for full time research.
10. **Student support:** Reflecting individual needs and situations, research students should receive training to enable them to undertake their research projects effectively and with confidence. In addition to the provision of training in research methodologies aimed at equipping the student with the skills necessary to produce a thesis successfully, consideration should also be given to providing training which leads to the acquisition of personal transferable skills. Where teaching and demonstrating duties are undertaken by the research student, appropriate guidance must be provided.
Alongside supervisory and academic support, students should also be provided with access to welfare support services necessary to achieve a successful outcome to the research project.
11. **Sustainability:** The institution should ensure that the research degree student is able to work in an environment of academic staff, postgraduates and postdoctoral workers, which fosters and actively supports creative and sustainable research and scholarly work, and from which they can learn the process of research. The institution will need to consider whether there is an appropriate minimum size for the community within which the student will be working and be able to indicate how this was determined.

3.5.3 Descriptor of Level 8 Qualifications

Qualifications that signify completion of the third cycle are awarded to students who:

1. have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a substantial body of knowledge or field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field;
2. have demonstrated the ability to design and implement a substantive process of research with scholarly integrity for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems;
3. have made a contribution through original research or other advanced scholarship that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantive body of work which has the potential to lead to a refereed publication;
4. are capable of making informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, and undertake critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas;
5. can communicate their ideas and conclusions about their areas of expertise clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences: their peers, the larger scholarly community and wider society;
6. are able to advocate within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement.

Doctoral programmes that may include a research component but which have a substantial taught element (for example, professional doctorates), lead usually to awards which include the name of the discipline in their title. Professional doctorates aim to develop individuals' professional practice and to support them in producing a contribution to (professional) knowledge.

Honorary doctoral degrees are not considered as academic qualifications. Honorary doctoral degrees may only be issued in Malta by institutions that are accredited to provide the same qualifications in Malta.

3.6 Protocol for Accreditation of Level 8 Courses

Applications courses at MQF Level 8 are to use the Higher Education Application Form provided in the NCFHE website. The accreditation protocol is as follows:

1. After the administrative fees due are paid, the application is vetted for administrative compliance. The initial administrative verification will check that:

for Section A:

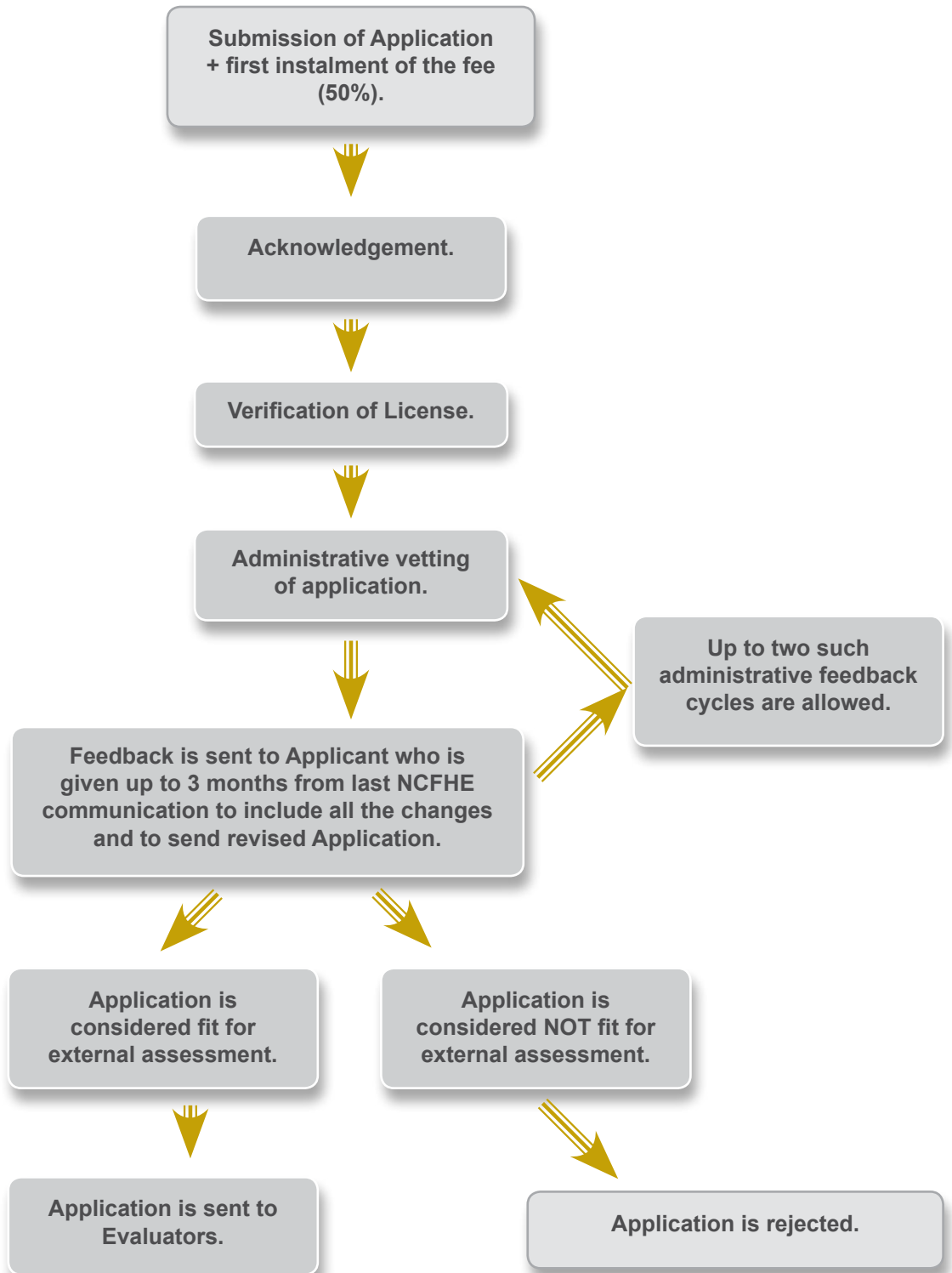
- all required information is present;
- information is in line with the guidelines in the course application itself;
- there is internal coherence between the various parts of the application;

for Section B:

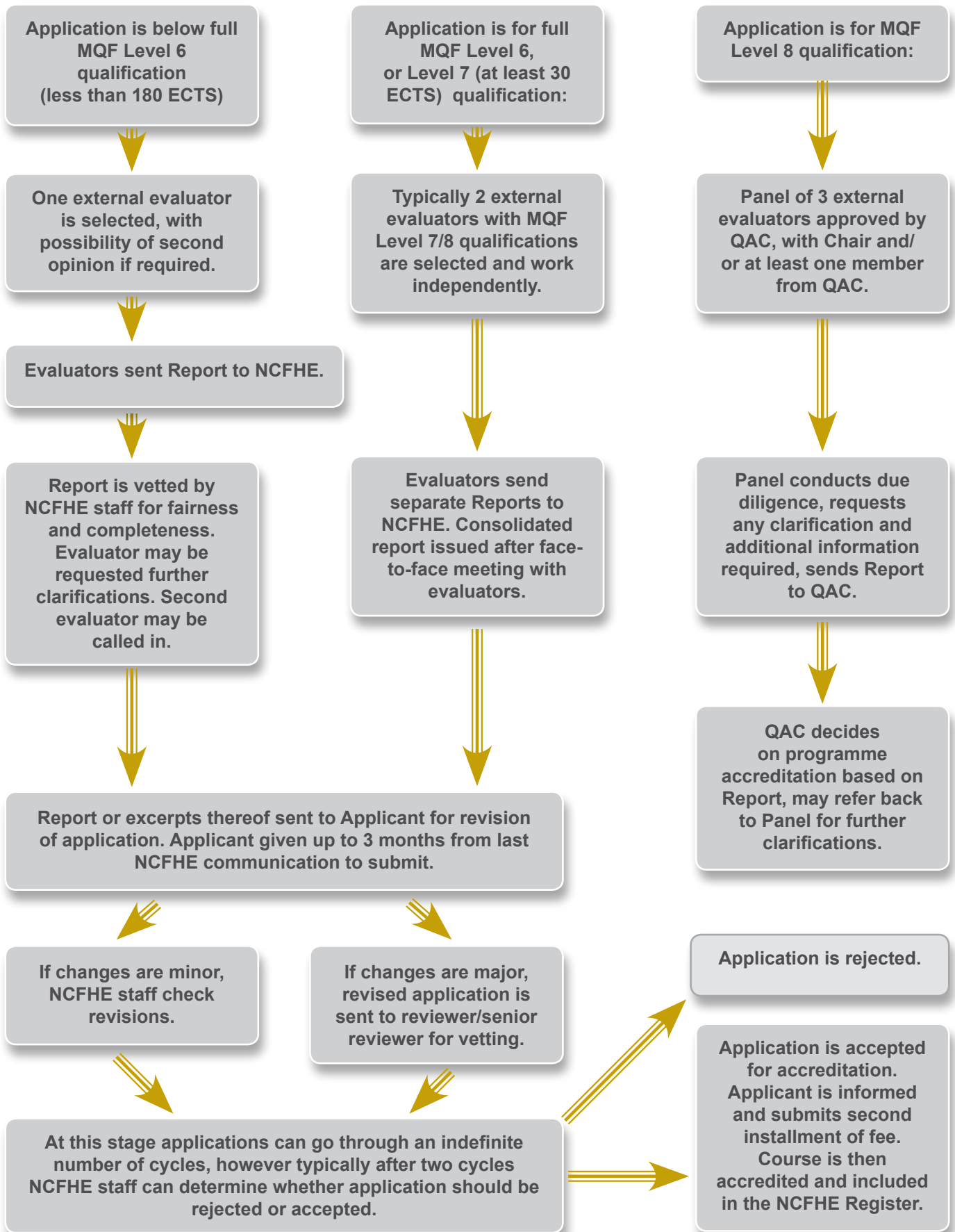
- all required documentation is present.
2. The initial administrative verification may include up to two cycles of feedback in which the applicant is requested to revise specific aspects of the application so as to streamline the technical evaluation process that will follow.
 3. Should the applicant not reach the required standard for the application to be sent for external assessment, and the applicant refuses to make further changes as requested, the NCFHE shall so inform the Chair of the QAC, and then proceed according to instructions.
 4. Should the applicant reach the required standard for the application to be sent for external assessment, the Chair of the QAC is so informed. The Chair then consults with the Chair of the NCFHE, the CEO and senior NCFHE staff on the membership of the Panel that will review the Level 8 application.
 5. The minimum number of Panel members is three. The panel in its totality needs to have sufficient expertise and experience in the specific field of the application, and in the accreditation of Level 8 programmes
 6. The QAC considers the proposed Panel membership and approves or otherwise. The Panel is typically chaired by a member of the QAC. In exceptional cases the QAC may decide that a particular application requires a chair from outside the QAC; in this case a QAC member is included as one of the members of the Panel.
 7. Remuneration to the Panel chair and members is set at the hourly rates established from time to time by the NCFHE Board.
 8. In undertaking its due diligence, the Panel may request the applicant to provide any information it deems fit, which may include interviews with the applicant and/or third parties.
 9. At the end of its deliberations the Panel will submit a written Report with its recommendations, giving detailed justification thereof.
 10. The final decision on the accreditation of the Level 8 application is taken by the QAC taking into consideration the recommendation of the Panel.

3.7 Course Accreditation Flowchart

Accreditation Procedure for all Courses at Level 1 to 8: Phase 1



Course Accreditation Procedure: Phase 2





Annex 1. Administrative Fees for Accreditation of Entities and Courses

Administrative Fee Structure per ECTS/ECVET for Programme Accreditation

MQF Level of Course	The First 10 ECTS/ ECVET	11th to 30th ECTS/ ECVET	ECTS/ECVETs above the first 30
1 and 2	€15	€10	€2
3 and 4	€20	€12	€2
5 and 6	€30	€15	€5
7	€60	€30	€10
8	€3000		

Examples of the total costs for accreditation of courses

MQF Level of Course	Course with up to 10 ECTS/ ECVET	Course with up to 30 ECTS/ ECVET	Course with 60 ECTS/ ECVET	Course with 90 ECTS/ ECVET	Course with 150 ECTS/ ECVET
1 and 2	€150	€350	€410	€470	€590
3 and 4	€200	€440	€500	€560	€680
5 and 6	€300	€600	€750	€900	€1,200
7	€600	€1,200	€1,500	€1,800	€2,400
8	€3000				

Administrative Fee Structure for Provider Accreditation

Provider Accreditation	Local Market Provider Fee
University	€2,000
Higher Education Institution/Further and Higher Education Institution	€500
Further Education Institution	€200
Further Education Centre	€50



Annex 2. Administrative Fees for Accreditation of Entities and Courses

Fee Structure per ECTS/ECVET for Programme Accreditation Revision

MQF Level of Course	The first 10 ECTS/ ECVET, for each	11th to 30th ECTS/ ECVET, for each	ECTS/ECVETs above the first 30, for each
1 and 2	€7	€5	€1
3 and 4	€10	€6	€1
5, 6, 7	€15	€7	€2
8	€3,000		

Examples of Total Costs for Accreditation of Courses Revision

MQF Level of Course	Course with 10 ECTS/ ECVET	Course with 30 ECTS/ ECVET	Course with 60 ECTS/ ECVET	Course with 90 ECTS/ ECVET	Course with 150 ECTS/ ECVETs
1 and 2	€70	€170	€200	€230	€290
3 and 4	€100	€220	€250	€280	€340
5, 6, 7	€150	€290	€350	€410	€530
8	€3,000				