A. Before the Review

1. Schools selected to be externally reviewed will be informed in July of the preceding scholastic year.
2. Schools identified for external reviews will be reviewed against their School Development Plan [SDP] and their own internal review according to the school’s self review checklist namely the School Profile.
3. The review will be a form of ipsative assessment, and will look for:
   - in reporting: veracity, comprehensiveness and reflection;
   - in planning: focus, direction, shared leadership and sustainability;
   - in implementing: classroom and school processes, effective delivery, evidence of learning, evidence of school improvement, evidence of reflexive practice by the school community.
4. Therefore, the focus will be on ascertaining if schools are planning to, and in fact are becoming better, in the context of a universal expectation of all schools to reach the required standards so that the curricular entitlement of all learners is fulfilled.
5. In the first external review cycle the review team will take a wide angle view of the school’s internal review process. The review team will focus mainly on the school’s “Leadership and Management” and on “Learning and Teaching” In the subsequent cycles, it is envisaged that the review team will formulate a number of review questions based on the school’s previous review reports, its latest internal review checklist and its latest SDP. These questions then orient the external review process in the respective school.
6. The target school is notified twenty [20] working days prior to the actual review. In the state sector the relevant principal is also informed by the Quality Assurance Department [QAD].
7. The review team is composed of one review leader and a number of QAD Education Officers [EOs], according to the size of the school.
8. During the twenty [20] working days prior to the review, the assistant director meets the Head of School (HoS) to explain the purpose, process and possible outcomes of the review.
9. Dates are set with the assistant director when the HoS:
   a. forwards the completed School Profile, the School Development Plan, class timetables and other documentation as per ‘Documentation required for External Review’.
   b. disseminates a copy of the letters and questionnaires available on the QAD website:
      - the letter to teachers and the teachers’ and LSAs’ pre-review questionnaires are to be given to teachers, KGAs and LSAs accordingly;
      - the letter and the questionnaire for parents are available in both Maltese and English and the appropriate version is given to parents.
   c. sets a date for the following week when the questionnaires are to be picked up.
   d. schedules the meetings for the review team with the following stakeholders to explain the purpose, process and possible outcomes: the School Management Team [SMT], school council, the staff and the student council or equivalent where applicable.
10. The QAD will provide a special letterbox where the questionnaire may be posted. Alternative arrangements that ensure confidentiality may be agreed with the HoS.
11. The Monday before review week, or an earlier day if required, the review team meets with the different school stakeholders. On this day the HoS forwards the Schemes of Work [SoWs] of the teachers for the term during which the review will be taking place.

12. In the case of a large school a sample of a 150 questionnaires is used for statistical purposes. These 150 are picked randomly from the whole pack. However all comments will be taken on board for the purpose of the analyses.

13. Questionnaires are then processed by the QAD staff for inclusion in the final report.

**B. During the review**

14. The school makes available a lockable room containing a lockable cupboard or equivalent that can be used exclusively by the review team for the duration of the review. This room needs to have basic tea/coffee making facilities. Access to a telephone, not necessarily in the room but preferably nearby, is also a requirement.

15. During the review, meetings with representatives or focus groups of all stakeholders will be held alongside the ongoing observations.

16. All communication to and observations by the review team is considered on the record and part of the evidence base that underpins the final report.

17. During review, after each classroom observation, the teacher is given short structured feedback by the reviewer only if this is requested. The review team will also accept requests for meetings with any teacher.

18. Reviewers shall try to observe as many lessons as possible. In the smaller schools all teaching staff, including any peripatetic staff, will be observed. In the larger schools the review team will try to observe as many teachers as possible (but not less than 40% of the teaching staff) without prejudicing the quality of the observation process.

19. Where it is not possible to observe all staff, teaching staff are selected for observation at the discretion of the review team. In these cases a stratified sample procedure will be used to allow for due representation of all sectors/year/departments.

20. Observations may not last the whole lesson. Reviewers may opt to view different episodes of the same lesson thereby not remaining in the classroom all the time. Teachers may be observed more than once, at the discretion of the review team.

21. The reviewer may opt to stop observing a lesson that “really started on the wrong foot” and may thereby give a falsely negative impression of the observed teacher’s professional abilities.

22. During the review days teachers are to leave the current planning for the lesson available for the reviewer to pick up on entering the classroom.

23. Classroom observations may include any or a combination of the following activities:
   a. silent unobtrusive observation,
   b. reviewing of teachers’ file, register, resources, displays and or lesson planning in a way that does not interfere with the learning process,
   c. the review of Individual Education Programme [IEPs], teachers’ forecast of work, daily schedules, modified handouts endorsed by the teacher, communication book and teacher – LSA interaction (in the case of learners with a statement of needs with Learning Support Assistant [LSAs] in the classroom),
   d. moving from group to group or person to person during individual or group work,
e. reviewing learners’ past and present work in a way that does not interfere with the learning process,
f. quick informal communication with some learners, not during whole class teaching, in a way that does not interfere with the learning process.

24. The reviewer may also take with him/her the teachers’ file/s and or Homework [HW] copybooks for later review. These are returned as soon as possible, not later than the following morning.

25. Prior to observing a particular class, the review team member will always:
   a. Knock on the door,
   b. Formally salute the teacher and ask him/her to enter,
   c. Salute the class,
   d. Wait until the teacher very briefly introduces the review team member in the following manner “this is Mr/Ms XXX. S/he will be staying with us during this lesson”

26. The review team shall be particularly careful to ascertain that it is observing the school’s typical range of learners.

27. The team leader and possibly some team members will hold a meeting with the HoS half way through the review to inform about any progress, iron out any difficulties and give initial feedback on the results. The HoS may also indicate new sources of data.

28. Teachers are informed that once (in a short review) or twice (in a five-day review) on specified days after school hours, reviewers are available in the room allocated for the team at the school to discuss any arising matters. Teachers may also make use of these meetings to discuss, in more detail, the lesson observed. The role of the team member in such discussions is to help the teacher reflect on his/her practices and not to pass judgment.

29. During the course of the review the team members keep a lookout for evident health and safety issues that are of significant danger to the school community and/or school visitors. These are immediately pointed out to the HoS.

30. At the end of the Review the HoS is orally informed by the review leader of the team’s main findings and likely recommendations.

31. In the state sector the College Principal (CP) is explicitly not involved in, or informed of developments of the review, so that s/he can fulfill his/her specific role as explained later on. This is also true for persons in non-state schools with comparable roles.

C. After the Review

32. After the review, the team works on the report of the review. This report includes:
   a. an executive summary of findings and recommendations,
   b. findings that are based on the realities of the school with special reference to learning and teaching and school leadership,
   c. recommendations,
   d. recommendation as to when the next external review should be held,
   e. appendices that include the necessary information including data from the teachers’ and parents’ questionnaires.
33. This draft report is sent electronically to the HoS up to two weeks after review week. The HoS then has three working days to forward an electronic copy of the feedback. No part of the draft report may be divulged even to the CP or equivalent. The Director QAD together with the review team leader may amend the draft report accordingly. This finalized report is signed by the Director, QAD.

34. Up to three weeks after the review, the finalised report and the report summary are sent to the HoS, the CP (in the state sector), the school board or equivalent, the Director General – Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education [DG-DQSE] and the Director General – Directorate for Educational Services [DG-DES] (in the case of state schools). No further changes may be made to the report from this point on.

35. The review report and the HoS’s feedback are retained only in the QAD internal files as internal documents. Only the report summary is kept in the registry files.

36. The HoS and CP or equivalent may wish to request a meeting with the QAD to discuss the recommendations of the report.

37. Prior to communicating the report to all members of teaching staff, the HoS and the CP or equivalent meet to discuss the report. Members of staff, who have been identified in the report as giving outstanding or unsatisfactory service, will be given the opportunity to discuss the report. These members of staff are only shown the part of the report relating to them.

38. The HoS is to make copies of the report summary and distribute them to all staff members. This distribution is mandatory. The HoS also formally communicates the findings of the review. State schools will be able to avail themselves of an ad hoc meeting to discuss the findings of the review. Non-state schools are encouraged to take similar measures.

39. The HoS is to make copies of the data gathered from the parents’ questionnaires sent to him by the review leader, and distribute them to parents.

40. The HoS will be requested to inform the QAD:
   a. when and how this letter will be disseminated,
   b. when the findings of the review will be disseminated,
   c. by submitting a copy of any documentation to be sent to parents about the findings of the review.

41. The next external review is normally held after the termination of the current cycle of reviews. However, the Director QAD, in collaboration with the review team leader, may decide that the outcomes and recommendations of the report merit a tighter cycle of review, in which case the next review is in one year’s time.

D. The Follow up

42. The review team leader and other members of the original review team will undertake an unannounced follow-up visit to the reviewed school. This can take place within one calendar year from the external review.

43. The purpose of this visit is:
   a. to ensure that observations made during the external review were not unduly influenced by tactical behaviour by school staff, and
b. to determine to what extent the school has started to consider its recommendations. During the follow-up visit the HoS will be expected to identify which recommendations he/she has started to work on his/her plan of action on the other recommendations.

The review leader will send a short draft report of the follow-up visit to the HoS in the week following the visit. The HoS has three working days to give feedback in writing. The assistant director, together with the review team leader, may amend the draft report accordingly. This finalized report of the follow-up visit is signed by the Director QAD.

44. On the basis of the follow-up report, the Director QAD may decide to:
   - shorten the review cycle for that school to one year,
   - retain the review cycle as originally intended.

The Director QAD may not decide to reverse a ‘short cycle’ decision to a ‘long cycle’ one.

45. This follow-up report and the school feedback are presented to the HoS, the CP (in the state sector), the School Board or equivalent, the DG-DQSE and the DG-DES (in the case of state schools).

46. The report and feedback are retained in the file.

47. The Director QAD and the review leader are available to meet the CP, chairperson of the school board or equivalent, if so requested, to discuss this report.

E. Other Issues

48. The DG-DQSE may annul an external review and direct that it is held again. The school in question is informed of this decision and the reasons for it. The replacement review is held within the same scholastic year as the annulled review. If this is not possible [because the annulled review took place at the end of the period within the scholastic year that is available for scheduled reviews] the replacement review is carried out in the first available slot for scheduled reviews in the following scholastic year. The planned reviews for that scholastic year are rescheduled accordingly.

49. Notwithstanding any of the above, the DG-DQSE may direct the QAD to undertake a school review with a general or specific purpose, at any time during the scholastic year over and above any other review or visit that may have already taken place. In this case the school is given five working days notice of this visit.

50. The DG-DQSE may also direct the QAD to undertake unannounced inspections, with specific terms of reference to one or more schools at any time during the scholastic year.

51. In the case of a school where the QAD has decided that no improvement has been made after the second review within the same scholastic year, the QAD will recommend:
   a. that another [third] review takes place within one year,
   b. to the minister through the DG-DQSE; that the school is in breach of Art.129 (5) of the Education Act. This recommendation shall be included in the report of the follow up visit in question.

52. In this eventuality, an addendum to the report summary shall be added that includes this recommendation and a summary of the justification for it.

53. If the third review recommends again that the next [fourth] should also take place within a year, the QAD shall recommend to the minister, through the DG-DQSE, that the school is in breach of Art 129 (5) of the Education Act. This recommendation shall be included in both the internal report and the report summary of the review in question.