



Parameters of the External Review

A. Context

1. External Reviews aim to evaluate how far schools are planning to and actually managing to reach the standards that ensure learners' entitlement to a quality education.
2. In the first external review cycle, reviews will focus on the school's educational leadership and management, the learning and teaching processes, and the school's ethos. In considering these areas, reviewers will focus their attention on the progress registered by the school in achieving the standards for schools issued by the Quality Assurance Department.
3. Schools identified for external reviews will be reviewed against their School Development Plan [SDP] and the Pre-external Review School Self-Evaluation (a reflective document about educational leadership, learning and teaching, and ethos of the school compiled by the Head of School). Other sources of evidence considered during external reviews include school documents, interviews, questionnaires and observations.
4. The external review team evaluating the school is composed of a Review Leader, QAD Education Officers and Associate Assessors, when applicable. The Assistant Directors, Quality Assurance, may assist on site the review team at any time during the review. The length of the review and the number of reviewers in the team varies according to the size of the school.

B. Before the Review

5. Around six [6] weeks prior to the actual review the Head of School and the College Principal or equivalent are notified by email and phone with the dates of the review. Subsequently, a meeting will be held whereby the Assistant Director informs the Head of School and College Principal or equivalent (if available) about the processes and necessary documentation related to the external review.
6. Once the school is notified about the dates of the review, the Head of School is requested to inform about or forward to the teaching staff and parents the informative letter related to the external review process available on the QAD website. He/she is to coordinate with the Assistant Director the best system to adopt in order to disseminate the online pre-review questionnaires to the respective stakeholders. The deadline for the submission of the questionnaire is three weeks prior to the commencement of the external review.
7. Around three [3] weeks prior to the external review, the Head of School submits all the required documentation to the review leader, preferably via email. The review leader coordinates with the Head of School to set a date for the pre-review meeting.
8. Between five [5] to ten [10] working days prior to the review, the review leader:
 - i. holds an interview with the Head of School mainly to clarify queries emerging from the Pre-external Review School Self-Evaluation;
 - ii. holds informative meetings with the teaching staff;
 - iii. may hold meetings with other stakeholders, including groups of parents and/or learners, as agreed beforehand with the Head of School.



C. During the review

9. The school makes available a lockable room that can be used exclusively by the review team for the duration of the review. This room needs to have enough space for the team to work in and basic tea/coffee making facilities.
10. All schemes of work for the term need to be made available to the review team on the first day of the external review.
11. During the review, interviews or focus groups with representatives of the different stakeholders may be held alongside the ongoing observations.
12. All communication with and observations by the review team is considered on the record and part of the evidence base that underpins the final report.
13. Following 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 by any teacher.

14. Lesson observations

- i. The number of lessons observations carried out in schools depend on the amount of teachers and reviewers.
- ii. Where it is not possible to observe all teachers, the review team selects a stratified sample of teachers to allow for due representation of all sectors/years/departments.
- iii. Observations may or may not last the whole lesson. Teachers may be observed more than once, at the discretion of the review team.
- iv. The reviewer may opt to stop observing a lesson that may give a falsely negative impression of the observed teacher's professional abilities.
- v. Teachers are to hand the current planning for the lesson to the reviewer upon entering the classroom.
- vi. During classroom observations, reviewers:
 - a. Observe the lesson in an unobtrusive manner;
 - b. Review the teachers' file, scheme of work, register, resources, displays and lesson planning in a way that does not interfere with the learning process;
 - c. Observe the organisation and management of the classroom environment;
 - d. Review Individual Education Programme [IEPs], LSA's planning, daily schedules, modified handouts endorsed by the teacher, communication book or equivalent;
 - e. Observe the extent to which teachers and LSAs work in synergy for the benefit of all learners;
 - f. Observe the extent to which the teacher scaffolds learning;
 - g. Observe the teacher's creative teaching approach;
 - h. Closely observe individual/group work going on in class and the extent to which learners experience successful learning;
 - i. Observe assessment strategies employed by the teacher by reviewing learners' past and present work;
 - j. Communicate informally with some learners (not during whole class teaching) in a way that does not interfere with the learning process.



- vii. Reference can be made to the lesson observation sheet available online for further details on classroom observations.
- 15. The review leader and one team member will hold a meeting with the Head of School half way through the review. In this meeting the discussion focuses on the strengths that emerge from the pre-review questionnaires, the main areas for improvement, the progress of the review process and any issues that may have arisen.
- 16. Reviewers are available, after school hours, to discuss any arising matters with any stakeholder. Teachers may make use of this time to discuss, in more detail, the lesson observed. The role of the reviewer in such discussions is to help the teacher reflect on his/her practices and not to pass judgement.
- 17. 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 Head of School.
- 18. On the last day of the review a meeting is held with the Head of School. The review leader informs the Head of School of the main findings of the review. The Head of School may ask SMT members to join in the meeting.
- 19. In the state sector, the College Principal is explicitly not involved in, or informed of developments of the review, so that s/he can fulfil 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

- 20. After the review, the review team works on the report of the review. This report includes:
 - a. Introduction including formation of review team, sources of evidence, survey responses and the school context;
 - b. Review findings related to each of the standards for schools issued by the QAD;
 - c. Areas of strength for each of the standards intending to acknowledge and encourage existing good practices;
 - d. A way forward that can be considered by the school in its endeavour to register further progress;
 - e. Five or six recommendations the school would be expected to tackle effectively for school improvement;
 - f. Indication as to when the next external review should be held;
 - g. An appendix including the standards for schools and a table indicating the average quantities referred to when using quantifying words in the report.
- 21. A draft report is sent electronically to the Head of School around four [4] weeks after review week. The Head of School then has three [3] working days to forward an electronic copy of his/her feedback to the review leader. The QAD may amend the draft report accordingly and finalise the report. The finalised report is endorsed by the Director, QAD.
- 22. Around six weeks after the review, an electronic version of the finalised report is sent to the Head of School, the College Principal or equivalent, the Archbishop's Delegate for Education and the Director for Educational Services in the Secretariat for Catholic Education (in case of church schools) and equivalent in Independent Schools (if any). Signed printed copies are



sent to the above and to the Director General – Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education [DG-DQSE], the Director Generals – Directorate for Educational Services [DG-DES] (in the case of state schools). No further changes may be made to the report from this point onwards.

23. A summary report and a post-review template will also be forwarded to the Head of School.
24. The review report and the Head of School's feedback are retained in the QAD files as internal documents.
25. It is recommended that the Head of School and the College Principal or equivalent meet to discuss the report prior to communicating the outcomes of the external review to all members of the teaching staff. Members of staff, who have been identified in the report as giving outstanding or unsatisfactory service, will be shown the part where they have been identified in the report.
26. The Head of School is to disseminate the Report Summary to all staff members. This distribution is mandatory. The Head of School also formally communicates to the staff the findings of the review. They are to discuss these findings and decide on SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) actions to be taken by the school to address the way forward and recommendations highlighted in the report. A specific post-review action plan template is available online to facilitate this exercise. State schools will be able to avail themselves of an additional two-hour staff meeting for this purpose. Non-state schools are encouraged to take similar measures.
27. The review leader sets up a post review meeting by around 10 weeks after the external review. The Director QAD and/or Assistant Director, the Head of School and the College Principal or equivalent, representative/s from the Secretariat for Catholic Education (in case of church schools) or equivalent (in independent schools) are invited to this meeting. The Head of School may consider inviting the key person contributing to the internal review process. During the meeting the Head of School explains how the school agreed to address the recommendations listed in the report, which actions would have been recorded in the post-review template. Following the meeting, the updated version of the action plan is to be forwarded to the QAD within two weeks. The follow-up visit will assess the extent to which the school addresses effectively the report's recommendations. The post-review action plan is to be considered as a working tool where actions should be evaluated and tweaked/changed as necessary along the year to better address the recommendations.
28. The Head of School is to inform parents in writing about the outcomes of the review. Before the dissemination of this information, the Head of School is to send a draft copy to the review leader, informing him/her when and how it will be disseminated. The QAD has the right to ask for the information to be revised if it does not constitute a comprehensive representation of the review report.
29. Depending on the outcomes and recommendations of the external review or the follow-up report (see section D), the QAD may decide either to carry out another review in the following scholastic year (short cycle), or after the termination of the first cycle of external reviews.

D. The Follow up



30. The Assistant Director, review leader (and other members of the original review team if required), will undertake an unannounced follow-up visit at the reviewed school. This will take place during the following scholastic year.
31. The purpose of this visit is:
 - a. to validate the external review;
 - b. to ensure that the school is addressing effectively the main recommendations identified in the external review report.

Quality assurance practices during the follow-up visit include interviews with the Head of School and different members of staff as well as classroom observations.

32. The review leader will send a short draft report of the follow-up visit to the Head of School in within two weeks following the visit. The Head of School then has three working days to forward an electronic copy of his/her feedback to the review leader. The review leader and Director QAD may amend the draft report accordingly. The review leader sends the finalised follow-up report electronically to the Head of School by around 3 weeks after the receiving the feedback.
33. On the basis of the follow-up report, the Director QAD may decide to:
 - shorten the review cycle for that school,
 - retain the review cycle as originally intended.The Director QAD may not decide to reverse a 'short cycle' decision.
34. An electronic version of the finalised report is sent to the Head of School, the College Principal or equivalent, the Archbishop's Delegate for Education and the Director for Educational Services in the Secretariat for Catholic Education (in case of church schools) and equivalent in Independent Schools (if any). Signed printed copies are sent to the above and to the Director General – Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education [DG-DQSE], the Director Generals – Directorate for Educational Services [DG-DES] (in the case of state schools).
35. The report and the Head of School's feedback are retained in the QAD files as internal documents.

E. Other Issues

36. 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 given an explanation for such a decision. 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.
37. 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.



38. 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.
39. In the case of a school where the QAD has decided that no improvement has been made after the second review, 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.

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

40. 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 the external review report.