QUALITY ASSURANCE HANDBOOK

2023 Edition – Part C

Section 2: Programme Development & Review

2023

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Quality Programmes

Study programmes are at the core of the higher education institutions' teaching mission. They provide students with both academic knowledge and skills including those that are transferable, which may influence their personal development and may be applied in their future careers.

ENQA (2015)[1]

This section of the *Quality Assurance Handbook* relates to design of new programmes, and reviewing of existing programmes through the Validation and Programme Review processes.

Programmes should be developed, and reviewed, with a focus on:

- Learner outcomes
- Graduate attributes
- Up-to-date, relevant content
- Robust assessment strategies

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[1] ENQA (2015) *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, Part 1, Guideline 1.2, 'Design and Approval of New Programmes', https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf.

2.1 Design and Approval of New Programmes Policy

Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) Part C	
Document Name	**Design and Approval of Programmes Policy**
Policy Document Number	**032**
Version Reference	**v2.2**
Document Owner	**Academic Dean**
Roles with Aligned Responsibility	**Registrar and Director of Campus Operations, Assistant Registrar, QA Officer**
Applicability	**All NFQ/QQI programmes**
Approved By	**Academic Board & QQI**
Approval Date	**23/07/19, v2.2 02/03/2023**
Date Policy Becomes Active	**18/09/19**
Revision Cycle	**A minimum of every five years**
Revision History/Amalgamation History	**N/A**
Additional Information	**Active date will be following approval by QQI**
References/ Supporting Documentation	• **QQI (2016)** *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines*, **Section 2.3, 'Programmes of Education and Training'.**[2] • **QQI (2017)** *Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training.* [3] • **QQI (2020)** *Programme Validation Descriptor for Programmes leading to HET, Major and Special Purpose Awards (Edition 4, 2020).* • **QQI HE Awards Standards.**[4]

2.1.1 Policy Overview

This policy and the stated procedures cover the various process steps and the responsibilities of DBS when undertaking programme validation activities. The activities fall within the broad categories of design, approval and modification of programmes leading to Quality and Qualification Ireland (QQI) awards. This approach ensures that new programmes developed by DBS:

- Are compliant with the mission, policies and Strategic Plan of DBS.

- Are compliant with the policies and procedures of QQI.

- Are of appropriate academic breadth and depth with learning outcomes that are consistent with the levels of knowledge skill and competence as prescribed by the National Framework of Qualifications and QQI award standards in the appropriate domain.

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[2] https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Core%20Statutory%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines.pdf
[3] https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Initial_Validation_policy_7_10_13.pdf
[4] https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/HET-Awards-Standards.aspx

- Provide routes which maximise opportunities for learners to avail of access, transfer and progression routes.
- Fulfil an identifiable need.
- Are developed via a process that is consistent and identifies the academic, physical and human resources required to deliver the programme.

This policy applies to the design and approval of new programmes for Minor, Special Purpose Awards (SPAs) and all Major Awards. These procedures apply to all programmes of study irrespective of delivery mode. The procedures also apply to collaborative programmes where DBS is the main or lead partner in the collaboration. The QAH Part C Section 3 deals with Transnational Programmes and Joint Awards

Procedures for making Modifications to Existing Programmes are outlined Section 2.1.8 below. Significant modifications to programmes are normally evaluated at the time of a Programme Review, which takes place every five years. However, it is to be expected that course teams may request minor modifications to an existing programme outside of that timeframe.

All DBS programmes currently validated by QQI and with an active enrolment, meet the requirements outlined by the applicable named award(s) as outlined in programme validation documentation. These requirements are determined by the statutory body tasked with the function of validating programmes of education and training, namely QQI. Meeting these stringent standards is an overarching consideration in the ongoing process of validation of all new programmes. In addition to meeting the needs of learner groups in a supported high-quality academic environment, all proposed programmes and subsequent validation activities are consistent with DBS strategic aims and objectives and are in harmony with the overarching mission of our organisation.

Individual programme validations do not happen in isolation within DBS. At any given point in time, DBS is engaged in validation activity, revalidation activity and various other interactions at an institutional level with QQI. Consequently, DBS appreciates the need to plan these separate tasks with sufficient lead times and to make available any human or financial resources required to fulfil our regulatory commitments. However, the complexity of new programme validation and the requirement to have fit-for-purpose programmes that are ready for enrolment, leads to very significant and consistent focus institutionally on these activities. It falls within the remit of the DBS Academic Board to ensure that there are sufficient resources in place to manage all programme validation deliverables across the relevant DBS stakeholders.

2.1.2   Policy Statement

The confidence of learners and other stakeholders in higher education is established and maintained through effective quality assurance activities; this also takes into account quality assurance considerations that must be adopted through robust validation activities. The College's portfolio of academic programmes is constantly developing and expanding to include new programme offerings.

There is an extensive process involved in bringing a new programme from inception, through validation, to delivery and continual review. With this in mind, DBS adheres to the principles contained in the document: *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (*ESG)* (2015) with regard to the design, approval, and ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes. Validation activities regarding proposed programmes are expected to include:

- Development and publication of intended learning outcomes.
- Careful attention paid to curriculum and programme design and content.
- Specific needs of different modes of delivery (e.g. full-time, part-time, distance learning, e-learning) and types of higher education (e.g. academic, vocational, professional).
- Availability of appropriate learning resources.
- Formal programme approval procedures by a body other than that teaching the programme.
- Monitoring of the progress and achievements of learners.
- Regular periodic reviews of programmes (including external panel members).
- Feedback from employers, labour market representatives and other relevant organisations.
- Participation of learners in quality assurance activities.

The application of this policy and procedures should ensure that programmes offered by DBS have academic and intellectual currency and standards, appropriate to the level of the award, and comparable to similar awards offered nationally and internationally. Programmes developed should be of a high quality, be relevant in the marketplace and meet the diverse learning needs of DBS customers. All newly proposed DBS programmes will be designed and developed utilising a strict set of consistently applied and agreed procedures.

The application of academic quality principles at DBS requires that the College satisfies itself and its accrediting bodies that a learner may attain knowledge, skill and/or competence for the purpose of

an award, which is consistent with the NFQ, and fulfils the requirements of QQI in relation to access, transfer and progression. The approval of new programmes is achieved through validation, the QA procedure by which the awarding body satisfies itself that a learner may attain the knowledge skill or competence for the purpose of an award made by the awarding body.

2.1.3 Supporting Documentation

All programmes developed and delivered by DBS are up to date with the policies and criteria defined by QQI and described in the following documents:

- Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training, (QQI, 2017)
- Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines, (QQI, 2016)
- Policy for Determining Award Standards, (QQI, 2014)
- Programme Validation Descriptor for Programmes Leading to HET Major, Special Purpose and Minor Award(s), Edition 4, (QQI, 2020)
- Assessment and Standards, Revised 2022, (QQI, 2022)
- Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Providers, Revised 2013 (QQI, 2013)
- Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes and Joint Awards, Revised 2012, (QQI, 2012)
- National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)
- QQI HE Award Standards
- European Communities ECTS User's Guide 2015
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), (ENQA, 2015)
- Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training, (NQAI, 2003, Restated QQI, 2015)
- Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training, (NQAI, 2005)
- Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners (QQI, 2015)
- Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of a National Approach to Credit in Irish Higher Education and Training, (NQAI, 2006)

In addition, DBS supporting documentation should be referred to such as:

- Other sections of the DBS Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH)
- Any relevant professional body criteria, as appropriate.

2.1.4 Programme Validation Timeline

The validation process for a new programme begins from the initial concept stage all the way through to formalised pre-proposal development and into specific interaction with QQI.

The timetable for completion of the development and approval process is normally one academic year, but in general it should be undertaken in good time to enable scheduling of all necessary meetings to facilitate evaluation and approval (internally and externally), as appropriate, in advance of the proposed programme commencement date.

2.1.5 Proposal of a new Programme Concept

Any member of DBS staff, including an individual or a group, can bring forward a proposal for a new programme concept. This scoping activity is proactively promoted within DBS as we ensure our new programme development meets the needs of our future learners. Identification of opportunities for new programme development is a shared responsibility at DBS, and may happen through formal market research by the DBS Marketing Department, in response to tender for government-funded programmes or from the academic departments by a member or members of academic staff. The stages of the informal and formal process involve both internal and external review and approval mechanisms, and include input from but not limited to:

- The Academic Departments
- Academic Dean
- DBS President
- Registrar and Director of Campus Operations
- Assistant Registrar
- Programme Approval Sub-Committee
- The Quality Assurance, Enhancement and Sustainability Committee
- Academic Board
- Industry stakeholders
- Potential learners
- QQI

Any proposed programme concept that is developed by a member of academic staff should be brought to the attention of the Academic Dean at the earliest opportunity. These concepts will be evaluated against a consistent set of measurables. This process is not exhaustive, but provides fair and balanced recommendations regarding specific criteria having been met or not, and allows DBS

to instigate initial pre-proposal development of the communicated concept and plan associated market research activities.

Concept measurables include consideration of the following:

- Is the concept in harmony with the mission and strategic aims and objectives of DBS?
- Has the concept identified a niche or viable market need?
- Is there capacity and infrastructure within the organisation for the proposed programme?
- Does the concept have the capacity to meet stakeholder requirements, i.e. funding and awarding bodies?

2.1.6 Phases of the Development and Approval of New Programmes

Current programme validation activity takes account of new and updated regulatory direction from QQI as outlined above. In addition, all current programme validations are completed utilising the template in the QQI *Programme Validation Descriptor 2020*.

There are seven distinct phases to developing a programme leading to an award, incorporating both internal and external activity. The programme only proceeds to the next stage subject to approval at the previous stage.

Stage	Details
1. Initiation	• Initial discussions/market research/potential employer engagement. • Proposal Approval Form completed and submitted to Programme Approval Sub-Committee • Proposal review and approved/refused by Programme Approval Sub-Committee
2. Programme Proposal Development	• Programme Development Team established • Engagement with stakeholders and industry • Programme Documentation prepared
3. Internal Review	• Internal Review by Registrar and Director of Campus Operations and Assistant Registrar • Programme reviewed and approved/not approved to proceed to external evaluation by Programme Approval Sub-Committee
4. DBS External Evaluation	• Review with external stakeholders: potential employers, and subject matter experts (Independent Programme Review - mock panel) • Post-review final Programme Document prepared • Updated programme approved/refused by Programme Approval Sub-Committee
5. Submission and External Review QQI	• Submission to QQI • QQI Validation Panel event held • Panel Report and DBS Response to Panel Report
6. Approval of Programme	• Programme approved/refused by the QQI Programme and Awards Executive Committee • Certificate of Validation and Approved Programme Schedule provided by QQI to provider for validated programmes
7. Implementation	• Programme included in the CAO (where relevant) • Programme Board established

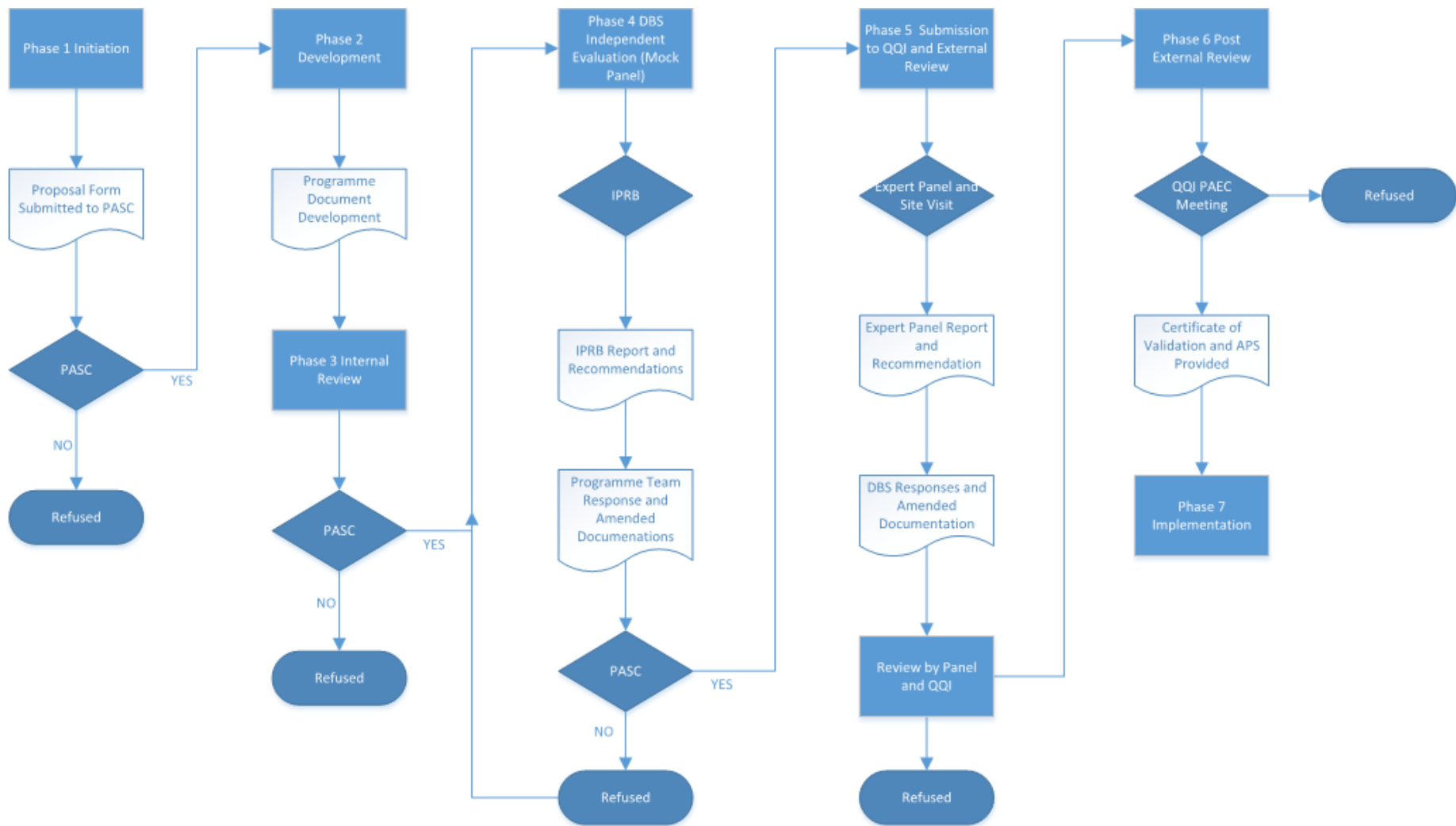**Figure 1: Stages of New Programme Approval**

Figure 2: New Programme Validation Process

Phase 1: Initiation

This phase occurs within the relevant academic department and is required for new programmes and significant re-developments or modifications of existing programmes leading to a revalidation and where there are significant resource implications. This phase does not apply to standard Programme Reviews for Revalidation.

The collation of the information gathered is coordinated in the appropriate department. The key criteria for driving academic programme development are:

1. There are legitimate strategic and logistical reasons for doing so such that:
    -   There is an identifiable market demand (internal/external);
        and/or
    -   The College has been requested by an external agency to develop/offer a specific programme;
        and/or
    -   The College is responding to a tender for government-funded programmes;
        and/or
    -   There is a feasible requirement to provide a progression option for learners on a current programme.

2. The proposed programme would fall within the known fields of competence of DBS.
3. There are employment opportunities for graduates.
4. Graduates of the proposed programme would be well positioned to progress to further study in the field.
5. The programme is considered feasible.
6. The requirements of any professional or statutory bodies for which the programme might require recognition or approval.

Initial market research is conducted involving a number of sources, including data generated by the Central Applications Office (CAO) system; review and analysis of courses offered by other colleges; and information garnered from industry, employers and third parties (e.g. economic and development agencies). The market research conducted is usually of both a primary and secondary nature. Secondary sources include application and enrolment data, educational reports, competitor analysis and recommendations from institutional review and government skills reports. The

preparation of this information is conducted in consultation between the Marketing Department and the academic department.

On completion of the relevant market research, the relevant Academic Director is required to complete the Programme Proposal Approval Form for submission to the Programme Approval Sub-Committee (PASC).

The Programme Approval Sub-Committee is convened and reviews the proposed programme for desirability and viability against the criteria listed above. If approved, the programme is formally scheduled for development.

Phase 2: Programme Proposal Development

A Programme Development Team comprised of representatives from the main subject areas for the programme is assigned from the lecturing staff by the Head of Teaching Delivery and Content Production in conjunction with the Academic Dean, with assigned responsibility for development of a formal submission document for progression through the internal and external approval phases and review by the validating body, QQI.

At this stage, the validating body is informed, by the Registrar and Director of Campus Operations or nominee, of the intention to propose a new programme and will be advised of the timescale involved. With respect to QQI programmes, the timescale for validation and approval of Programme Reviews is set out in the *Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training* (QQI, 2017), which allows for 25 weeks from the date of an accepted submission by QQI to the completion of the validation process. However, DBS recognises the front-loaded workload necessary in advance of this submission to develop a valid application which will lead to a successful validation of a programme of education and training.

The development phase results in a complete Programme Document presenting the final programme proposal for validation. The Programme Document is prepared using the template provided in the QQI *Programme Validation Descriptor* (2020) which includes:

- Minimum Intended Programme Learning Outcomes
- Award Standard(s) used
- Profile of the proposed programme's target learners
- Access, transfer and progression routes
- Programme assessment strategy

- Module assessment strategies

- Any associated embedded awards (including exit awards)

The Programme Development Team, under the guidance of the Academic Director and Academic Dean, has primary responsibility for the academic development of the new programme and drives the programme's documentation through the internal review and approval processes, supported by the Academic Dean to ensure consistency across programmes.

This phase includes further discussion at Programme Development Team level, and consultation with key stakeholders such as learners, graduates, employers, industry experts and professional bodies, where appropriate, to ensure that all feedback mechanisms are explored.

The objectives set for Programme Development Teams, under the direction of the Academic Director and Academic Dean, are to develop a formal programme proposal that satisfies validating body requirements and includes the following:

- Rationale for the new programme
- Aims and learning outcomes of the new programme
- Graduate attributes
- Programme structure and content (including specific module descriptors, appropriate to the level)
- Teaching and learning strategy
- Programme assessment strategy that aligns with and is appropriate to the programme learning outcomes
- Required academic resources and support services.

Any requirement of professional or statutory bodies for which recognition or approval will be required must also be explicitly addressed in development of the programme.

The programme will be assessed against the QQI *Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training* (QQI, 2017):

1. The provider is eligible to apply for validation of the programme
2. The programme objectives and outcomes are clear and consistent with the QQI awards sought
3. The programme concept and implementation strategy and its interpretation of QQI awards standards are well informed and soundly based (considering social, cultural, educational, professional and employment objectives)
4. The programme's access, transfer and progression arrangements are satisfactory
5. The programme's written curriculum is well structured and fit-for-purpose
6. There are sufficient qualified and capable teaching staff available to implement the programme as planned
7. There are sufficient physical resources to implement the programme as planned
8. The learning environment is consistent with the needs of the programme's learners

9. There are sound teaching and learning strategies
10. There are sound assessment strategies
11. Learners are well informed, guided and cared-for
12. The programme is well managed

Development of programme proposals is normally an iterative process with proposals being prepared by the Academic Director/Programme Lead and reviewed by the Programme Development Team with wider consultation internally such as library, careers and industrial liaison and externally as required. The development timescale allows for such consultation and iteration as a productive part of the overall process. In developing the programme, the Programme Development Team draws upon a number of internal and external information sources, including:

- Previous institutional and Programme Reviews undertaken in DBS
- Market research already/previously conducted
- Information on similar programmes offered in other institutions
- Industry/employer requirements and relevant consultation
- Professional body and statutory requirements
- DBS careers office reports
- DBS library
- Annual Reports and Programme Board Reports
- External Examiner reports and consultation
- Professional bodies requirements and correspondence, where relevant
- Government reports
- Feedback from learners and recent graduates from comparable programmes at DBS or from potential candidates on feeder programmes.

Individual programme validations do not happen in isolation within DBS. At any given point in time, DBS is engaged in validation activity, revalidation activity and various other interactions at an institutional level with QQI. Consequently, DBS appreciates the need to plan these separate tasks with sufficient lead times and to make available any human or financial resources required to fulfil our regulatory commitments. However, the complexity of new programme validation and the requirement to have fit-for-purpose programmes that are ready for enrolment, leads to significant and ongoing focus institutionally on these activities. It falls to the DBS Academic Board to ensure that there are sufficient resources in place to manage all programme validation deliverables across all relevant DBS stakeholders.

Phase 3: Internal Review

When the initial stages of programme development are completed by the Programme Development Team in conjunction with the Academic Director and Academic Dean, the programme proposal

document is reviewed and takes account of any feedback received from the wider academic community and/or other stakeholders.

The completed submission including the Programme Document is submitted to the assigned Programme Approval Sub-Committee (PASC) by the Registrar and Director of Campus Operations for formal internal review and for approval to proceed to external evaluation. Feedback is sent to the Programme Development Team. Issues identified in this forum are considered and addressed by the Programme Development Team.

Phase 4: DBS Independent Programme Review (Mock Panel)

External evaluation of the programme proposal is carried out by a review group convened for that purpose by the Registrar and Director of Campus Operations. The group, known as the Independent Programme Review Board (IPRB), should be comprised of members external to the programme under consideration, and as far as possible, to the institution. The recommended composition of the IPRB is as follows:

- External Chair, experienced in the QQI validation process
- At least one experienced external academic in the subject discipline
- Industry representative
- Secretary to the panel (may be internal to DBS)
- Every effort will be made to ensure gender balance on the panel.

For programmes which will require professional body or statutory recognition by a body other than QQI, expertise in this area must be represented on the internal panel.

The IPRB will review the Programme Document(s) and address all key issues in relation to the appropriateness, quality and proposed content of the course. The Board will arrange appropriate presentations and meetings with the Programme Development Team.

In conducting its business, and in particular in its meetings with the proposing group, the IPRB will show objectivity, impartiality and professionalism. The approach shall be courteous and non-adversarial, while carrying out a thorough review of the proposal to identify its inherent strengths and weaknesses. The Chair of the Board will preside at any/all meetings, and will act as a facilitator of the process.

The Board should have the opportunity to meet in private before meeting with the proposing group to agree its methodology and to clarify its approach to the criteria to be used in evaluating the programme.

The IPRB will provide immediate feedback and recommendations to the Academic Dean and the Programme Development Team after the meeting.

In evaluating the submission, the following broad categories will apply:

- **Recommended Approval**: A submission not requiring modification or only minor corrections to be carried out by the Programme Development Team before submission to the Registrar and Director of Campus Operations for progression to the next stage.

- **Recommended Approval with Modifications**: A submission requiring minor modification such as subject re- balancing, some changes in syllabus content and learning outcomes, additional information required, etc.

- **Recommendation Retained**: A programme concept with potential in principle but requiring significant modification and additions, e.g. lack of evidence for support for the programme, absent or insufficient treatment of a required sections of the Programme Document, significant issues with the programme construct.

Where applicable, the updated programme and response will be sent to the Chair of the IPRB. Once the modifications are agreed by the Programme Team, Academic Dean, and if necessary reconvened IPRB, the Programme Document will be forwarded to the Registrar and Director of Campus Operations.

A Programme Approval Sub-Committee meeting will be convened to approve the programme for submission to QQI. Only proposals which receive final approval from the Programme Approval Sub-Committee may proceed to the next stage, i.e. the external evaluation stage by QQI.

Phase 5: Submission and External Review QQI

Once internally identified issues are resolved, the final documentation is submitted for validation by the Registrar and Director of Campus Operations.

Depending on the nature of the programme there are two options for how new programme applications can be processed:

> **Phase 5A** *Devolution of Responsibility for arranging (Programme Validation Related) Independent Evaluation Reports at QQI's request.*

> **Phase 5B** *Process for QQ-led validation.*

Note: The College can withdraw a programme from the validation process prior to the independent evaluation stage. No report will be published in this case. A programme application cannot be withdrawn after the independent evaluation stage and the report will be published.

Phase 5A: Devolution of Responsibility for arranging Programme Validation Related Independent Evaluation Reports at QQI's request

Devolved Responsibility applies to the process for arrangement of the independent evaluation report for new programme applications by DBS as approved by QQI.

The scope of Devolved Responsibility is limited to taught programmes up to Level 9 **excluding**:

- Programmes organised in collaboration with other providers (Collaborative programmes);
- Apprenticeship programmes;
- Transnational programmes;
- Programmes leading to joint awards;
- Research Masters programmes;
- Programmes otherwise outside DBS's current scope of provision

Submission

QQI should be notified that the application is expected at least one month before submission.

Applications should be submitted at least 6 weeks prior to the proposed validation meeting date.

The following comprises the submission sent to QQI via QHub:

1. A cover letter stating the College's eligibility to apply as per Criteria 3 of the *Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training* (QQI, 2017).
2. A statement of PEL Refund Arrangements and a copy of the Deed of Guarantee.
3. Fee Cover Note.
4. Terms of Reference detailing proposed panel members.
5. Panel members' completed documentation (Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Form and Expert Details Form).
6. All Programme Documentation.
7. Additional Quality Assurance arrangements, if relevant.

On receipt of the proposal, QQI will acknowledge the application and undertake a desk review to ensure that the submission includes all the required elements. If the submission is inadequate, then a revised submission will be requested by QQI.

Note: The independent evaluation cannot take place until QQI advises in writing that the application has been screened by QQI, and that the independent evaluation may proceed. The proposed panel membership should be submitted to QQI at the time of submission (as outlined above), or a minimum of 6 weeks prior to the planned validation meeting. QQI must formally agree the panel in writing ahead of the validation meeting (or desk review; see below).

Once QQI formally agrees, DBS can proceed with initiating the validation process. DBS organises the validation site visit, or independent desk review in the case of microcredential programmes. The site visit may be conducted on-site as a visit to the DBS premises, or online. In the case of independent desk review, a meeting is not necessary unless requested by the Chair of the panel.

The expert panel will be selected on the basis of their subject expertise, particular expertise in pedagogy, assessment or quality assurance and prior experience of QQI or other validation/review panels. They will be independent of the College. Before the panel is agreed any potential conflict of interest must be declared by the panel member or the College.

The panel will generally comprise:
- A Chair (who must have completed QQI Chair's training)
- A Secretary/Report Writer
- A current learner on a similar programme (level and discipline area) from another Higher Education Institution
- Two experienced academics in the discipline from Higher Education
- A professional/industry expert in the discipline or employer in the sector
- An observer from QQI may also attend.
- Academic and industry experts should be competent to appraise the content of the programme and to make national and international comparisons. In the case of Level 9 programmes, one of the academics should be international, i.e. from an HE provider in another jurisdiction. In all cases, there must also be current representation from an Irish HE institution.

For programmes which will require professional body or statutory recognition by a body other than QQI, expertise in this area must be represented on the internal panel.

In the case of independent desk review of a microcredential programme, the panel will comprise of:

- A Chair, who will also have responsibility for writing the report.
- Two subject matter experts.

The validation process for Major, Minor and Special Purpose Awards will usually involve a meeting where the panel reviews the submission, meets with senior management, the Programme Development Team and in some cases learners, and conducts a review of the resources available to support the operation of the programme. The meeting is conducted in accordance with the validating body's procedures for programme validation. Professional body representatives may be part of the panel or may observe the process.

The purpose of the meeting is to:

- Establish if the programme meets the criteria and should be validated.
- Give the expert panel an opportunity to interview the provider's leadership and programme personnel about the programme and their self-assessment.
- Allow the panel to experience the learning environment.
- Allow the panel explore the quality assurance procedures.
- Assess the appropriateness of relevant facilities and resources to support provision of the programme.
- Provide an opportunity for the expert panel to discuss the proposed programme in situ with other relevant stakeholders, learners, industry representatives, professional bodies, etc.

On conclusion of the meeting the expert panel will normally provide initial feedback to the team regarding their intent to recommend the programme for validation, or not. And indication of conditions and/or recommendations for validation may also be given.

Within two weeks of the meeting the expert panel agrees a draft report of its findings, conclusions whether or not the programme as described should be validated, prerequisites for validation, conditions and recommendations.

The draft report will be provided to the College by the Chair (or Secretary on behalf of the Chair), and the College is invited to confirm factual accuracy. Once DBS has confirmed agreement with the report, the draft report is sent by DBS to QQI for review and screening.

Once QQI has screened and agreed the report, QQI will ask the College to arrange for the panel to finalise the report, and will request DBS respond in writing (within a specified time) on the expert panel report's findings, conclusions, prerequisites for validation, conditions and recommendations. A

written response will be compiled, and where applicable programme documentation will be updated to address any conditions or recommendations for validation. DBS will circulate the written response to the panel for review, and if appropriate sign off.

The College's response will:

- Detail how the proposed programme has been modified to meet any conditions of validation.
- Detail where recommendations have been addressed.
- Explain how any special conditions have been met or will be met by referring to the implementation plan.
- Provide an implementation plan to address the expert panel report's recommendations and conditions with specific objectives, actions, times, targets/success-metrics.

Once documentation is finalised and agreed by QQI and the expert panel, the new programme will be presented at the next QQI Programme and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) meeting for decision.

Desk Review of Microcredential Programmes

In the case of independent desk review of a microcredential programme, the panel will provide DBS with a Request for Further Information form if necessary to (i) reach an agreed recommendation on validation and/or (ii) where an obvious issue/omission can be clarified which would otherwise require a condition of validation to be specified in the panel report. Once DBS has provided the response to the further information request, the panel will proceed to draft the report.

The draft report will be issued to the College to identify any factual inaccuracies. Where accepted, the panel Secretary will amend the draft report as appropriate.

The draft report will be submitted to QQI for review and screening. Once QQI has screened and agreed the report, QQI will ask the College to arrange for the panel to finalise the report, and will request that the College formally respond in writing (within a specified time) on the expert panel report's findings, conclusions, prerequisites for validation, conditions and recommendations. A written response will be compiled, and where applicable programme documentation will be updated to address any conditions or recommendations for validation.
The College's response will:

- Detail how the proposed programme has been modified to meet any conditions of validation.

- Detail where recommendations have been addressed.

- Explain how any special conditions have been met or will be met by referring to the implementation plan.

- Provide an implementation plan to address the expert panel report's recommendations and conditions with specific objectives, actions, times, targets/success-metrics.

Once documentation is finalised and agreed by QQI and the expert panel, the new programme will be presented at the next QQI Programme and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) meeting for decision.

Phase 5B: QQI-led evaluation of programme application.

QQI-led evaluation of a programme application applies to the process whereby QQI retains responsibility for arrangement of the independent evaluation report for a new programme application.

Submission

QQI should be notified that the application is expected at least one month before submission.

The following comprises the submission sent to QQI via QHub:

1. A cover letter stating the College's eligibility to apply as per Criteria 3 of the *Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training* (QQI, 2017).
2. A statement of PEL Refund Arrangements and a copy of the Deed of Guarantee.
3. Fee Cover Note.
4. Programme Documentation.
5. Additional Quality Assurance arrangements, if relevant.
6. Consortium agreements if applicable; refer to the QAH Part C Section 3 for collaborative, transnational or joint awards.

On receipt of the proposal, QQI will acknowledge the application and undertake a desk review to ensure that the submission includes all the required elements. If the submission is inadequate then a revised submission will be requested by QQI.

Where the programme proceeds to validation, the validation meeting event is organised. This may be conducted on-site as a visit to the DBS premises, or online.

The expert panel will be selected on the basis of their subject expertise, particular expertise in pedagogy, assessment or quality assurance and prior experience of QQI or other panels. They will be independent of the College. Before the panel is agreed the College is consulted and any potential conflict of interest must be declared by the panel member or the College. The construct of the panel will be the same as detailed in Phase 5A above but will be identified and assembled by QQI. Generally, the panel will comprise:

- A Chair
- A Secretary
- A learner
- At least three members from academia and industry who are competent appraise the content of the programme and to make national and international comparisons.
- An observer from QQI may also attend.

The validation process will usually involve a meeting where the panel reviews the submission, meets with senior management, the Programme Development Team and in some cases learners, and conducts a review of the resources available to support the operation of the programme. The meeting is conducted in accordance with the validating body's procedures for programme validation. Professional body representatives may be part of the panel or may observe the process.

The purpose of the meeting is to:

- Establish if the programme meets the criteria and should be validated.

- Give the expert panel an opportunity to interview the provider's leadership and programme personnel about the programme and their self-assessment.

- Allow the panel to experience the learning environment.

- Allow the panel explore the quality assurance procedures.

- Assess the appropriateness of relevant facilities and resources to support provision of the programme.

- Provide an opportunity for the expert panel to discuss the proposed programme in situ with other relevant stakeholders, learners, industry representatives, professional bodies, etc.

On conclusion of the meeting the expert panel will normally provide initial feedback to the team regarding their intent to recommend the programme for validation, or not. And indication of conditions and/or recommendations for validation may also be given.

Within two weeks of the meeting the expert panel agrees a draft report of its findings, conclusions whether or not the programme as described should be validated, prerequisites for validation, conditions and recommendations.

The report will be provided to the College via QQI, and the College is invited to (a) confirm factual accuracy and (b) respond in writing (within a specified time) on the expert panel report's findings, conclusions, prerequisites for validation, conditions and recommendations. A written response will be compiled, and where applicable programme documentation will be updated to address any conditions or recommendations for validation.

The College's response will:
- Detail how the proposed programme has been modified to meet any conditions of validation.
- Detail where recommendations have been addressed.
- Explain how any special conditions have been met or will be met by referring to the implementation plan.
- Provide an implementation plan to address the expert panel report's recommendations and conditions with specific objectives, actions, times, targets/success-metrics.

Once documentation is finalised and agreed by QQI and the expert panel, the new programme will be presented at the next QQI Programme and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) meeting for approval.

Summary of Validation under Devolved Responsibility (DR) versus QQI-led evaluation

The same principles and high-level processes apply whether new programmes are evaluated under DR or through the QQI-led process, and the same criteria and standards must be met.

The key difference is that under DR the panel is identified and assembled by DBS subject to QQI pre-approval.

In both cases all Programme Documentation and the full application is first submitted to QQI, and once approved to proceed a panel meeting/site visit is held. Following this;

> In the case of QQI-Led evaluation the panel report is sent directly to QQI and sent on to DBS, and DBS responds via QQI;

In the case of DR the panel report is sent directly to DBS for factual accuracy check, and then sent by DBS to QQI for review. QQI reviews the panel report and if accepted will request in writing that DBS arranges for the provider response to be sent to the panel in order to conclude the process

Phase 6: Post-External Review and Approval of Programme

The focus of this phase is the close-out of the process and the communication of all relevant information to both internal functional areas and external agencies, including the validating body, key stakeholders and relevant professional bodies.

If approved by the QQI PAEC, QQI will send a Certificate of Validation and an Approved Programme Schedule. These documents are checked by the Assistant Registrar and Registrar and Director of Campus Operations, and the accuracy confirmed with QQI. The programme may now be advertised as leading to a QQI award. The expert panel report and the Certificate of Validation is published on the QQI website.

The following activities are carried out to facilitate effective implementation of the programme:

- The Directory of Programme Validation is updated by the Assistant Registrar.
- A complete set of definitive documentation is made available internally.
- The Certificate of Programme Validation is held by the Assistant Registrar and an electronic version is made available on the shared drive.
- A Programme Administrator is appointed to liaise with the School and maintain all programme records.
- All relevant committees and internal stakeholders are informed of the validation status:
  - Academic School
  - Academic Operations
  - Marketing and Admissions
  - Registration
  - Library, Careers and Student Services
  - Finance and Facilities
- The School Leadership Team overseen by the DBS President ensures that:
  - The programme is included within an Academic Director remit.
  - All conditions of validation have been met and any implementation plan is executed.
  - Resources are in place for delivery of the programme prior to its commencement.

A review of the validation event and outcomes is carried out by the Academic Dean to inform future reviews and action plans.

Phase 7 Implementation

Once approved for validation through QQI the Registrar and Director of Campus Operations writes formally to notify all relevant parties within the College, including:

- Chief Commercial Officer
- Admissions Manager
- Faculty Manager
- Head of Academic Operations
- Curriculum Systems Manager

The following information is provided:

- Programme title and award
- Level
- ECTS
- Duration full-time/part-time as applicable
- PAEC date at which programme was approved
- Commencement date for first intake of learners
- Minimum and maximum number of learners
- Module titles and ECTS
- Entry requirements
- Exit awards (if applicable)
- Copy of Approved Programme Schedule

This information is used by Marketing and Admissions Department to update the DBS website and any other marketing materials. It is used by the Faculty Manager and Head of Academic Operations for staffing and timetabling purposes.

The duration of validation for a QQI programme is normally five years. Throughout the lifetime of the programme the Programme Board will review the programme annually and make necessary enhancements or adaptations to the programme. All such changes are proposed by the Programme Board will be subject to the approval by the Board of Studies. Any proposed changes to learning outcomes, entry requirements or to the Approved Programme Schedule is subject to approval by QQI and may require a peer review process/new validation process. The programme is subject to DBS and QQI monitoring and review processes on an on-going basis.

The Marketing and Admissions Department will ensure that the relevant programme information is included in the Central Applications Office (CAO) Handbook for the following academic year. In order to include the programme in the DBS Prospectus, information must be forwarded to the Chief Commercial Officer or nominee.

The process of implementing new courses is delegated by the DBS President to the Head of Teaching Delivery and Content Production and Faculty Management.

The Programme Development Team will be dissolved and a Programme Board will oversee the implementation of the course.

The Head of Teaching Delivery and Content Production will ensure that the programme is included in the Annual Operational Programmes and Budgets of the College and will provide programme information to staff involved in promotional activities with secondary schools.

2.1.7   Requesting an Extension to a Period of Validation

In exceptional circumstances, DBS may apply to QQI for an extension of the duration of enrolment for a programme. The request must be made in good time ahead of commencement of the revalidation process, and a clear rationale must be provided, including evidence of the programme's continued currency and the reasons why an extension is sought.

2.1.8   Modifications to Validated Programmes of Education and Training

As per Section 8 of *Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training* (QQI, 2017, p.20) it is anticipated that minor modifications of validated programmes will occur throughout the active enrolment of a given programme. This is a normal part of the academic process and is consistent with the vibrant activities of an academic faculty. However, any amendment which leads to a change in a programme learning outcome(s), Approved Programme Schedule, pre-requisite learning requirements, or the fundamental construct of the programme is not permitted without submission to QQI for approval either as a differential validation or new validation (depending on the nature of the changes).

It should be noted that 'QQI should be consulted in case of any doubt about whether or not validation would extend to a modified programme' (*Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training,* QQI, 2017, p.20).

Procedure for Securing Changes to a Validated Module through Programme Board and Board of Studies

(See also QAH Part A Section 2.3.6, Permitted Changes and Updates to QQI Accredited Programmes.)

Following the validation of a programme it is reasonably expected that on-going review activity, such as described above, will identify the requirement for modifications to programme and module content, delivery and assessment methodology. Changes which do not impact the programme learning outcomes, the Approved Programme Schedule, prerequisite learning or other fundamental constructs of the programme may be proposed by the Programme Board and approved by the Board of Studies. Proposed modifications should be presented initially at Programme Board and must include evidence-based rationale for change and any expected impact or enhancements. A copy of the current module descriptor and the proposed module descriptor must also be provided. If the Programme Board supports the proposal for change, it will be submitted to the Board of Studies via the Academic Dean, for consideration at the next meeting.

For QQI accredited programmes on the NFQ:

- The Board of Studies **may** approve changes to programme content to reflect developments in the subject area and the outside environment to ensure that programmes remain current, relevant and up-to-date through the course of the validation period.
- The Board of Studies may **not** approve changes which affect materially affect the nature of modules or the programme.

Changes which cannot be made to QQI validated programmes within validation include, but are not limited, to:

- Entry requirements
- Programme learning outcomes
- Programme title
- NFQ level
- Award stem
- ECTS
- Assessment weightings

Regardless of the nature of changes, any change exceeding approximately 15–20% of a module's content must be referred from Boards of Studies to the Registrar's Office to assess whether the

change is acceptable under the terms of the validated programme. Percentage change in can obviously be difficult to accurately determine. If in doubt, the Board of Studies should refer changes to the Registrar's Office.

Where a change is approved through Board of Studies, the Secretary of the Board of Studies will notify the Curriculum Systems Manager, the Exams Manager and the Head of Academic Operations of all approved changes and will provide copies of the revised module descriptors. The Assistant Registrar will update the programme documentation record to reflect the revised module descriptor.

Where changes are approved, it is expected that the lecturer and programme team will undertake appropriate monitoring and review activities to evaluate the effectiveness of the change implementation.

Programme Boards must annually review changes since the programme validation or revalidation to ensure that the sum of changes within the validation period does not exceed acceptable norms such that the programme evolves beyond the scope of the programme validation.

For programmes which are innovative or relate to a rapidly developing field or industry, DBS is cognisant that Programme Review may need to be initiated earlier than the standard 5-year window to ensure continued currency and relevance of the programme.

2.1.9   Programme Development of Non-Framework Programmes and Professional Programmes

DBS provides a significant number of professional and non-framework programmes, i.e. programmes that are not recognised on the NFQ. These programmes have aided participant labour market activation and have been a key aspect of DBS education and training provision.

Professional Accountancy Programmes

DBS has been offering professional accountancy programmes for over 30 years within an established market, to meet the needs of the changing economy, in line with national and international requirements. Content, format and examination periods for these programmes are prescribed by the relevant professional bodies. Operational and quality review systems, processes and procedures (e.g. learner feedback) for these programmes are implemented by the DBS in accordance with standard DBS practices.

Kaplan Professional Awards (KPA)

In 2020 DBS successfully validated diploma programmes as Kaplan Professional Awards accredited on the Ofqual framework for England and Wales. The process for this involves in-house programme and module development in alignment with the required KPA templates and subsequent desk review and approval. In order for DBS to set and host exams for these diplomas, a further QA exercise is carried out for centre approval by Kaplan Professional, and all associated policies and procedures presented as part of this process. Delivery of the programmes is closely monitored by Kaplan Professional through attendance at exam boards and annual programme review meetings.

Dublin Business School (DBS) Professional Diploma Programmes

DBS offers a suite of short professional diploma programmes (ranging in duration from 8 weeks to 1 year) which are administered by the Academic Directors of the relevant subject area. The range of programmes has developed over the years to reflect the changing needs of the economy in line with national and international requirements, and to support lifelong learning.

DBS designs and develop these programmes and devise, set and moderate assessments/examinations. All documentation is prepared within the prescribed DBS format. Learners are registered on the Student Information System for the purpose of capturing their assessment/examination results and generation of transcripts and parchments. Examination meetings are held by the Programme Team to consider and review results. The conferring of awards ceremony is organised by DBS.

DBS Professional Diploma Programmes procured by third-party organisations, e.g. the project management diploma, are also governed by these processes.

Changes to programmes or development of new programmes are approved through the DBS Board of Studies and the Programme Approval Sub-Committee.

2.1.10 Recognition or accreditation by Professional or Statutory Bodies

Where a programme relies on recognition by a professional or statutory body other than QQI, the validation process must include expertise and representation of that body to ensure full compliance and alignment with all requirements.

Where a separate application to the professional or statutory body is required, full external review must take place as part of this process, as below.
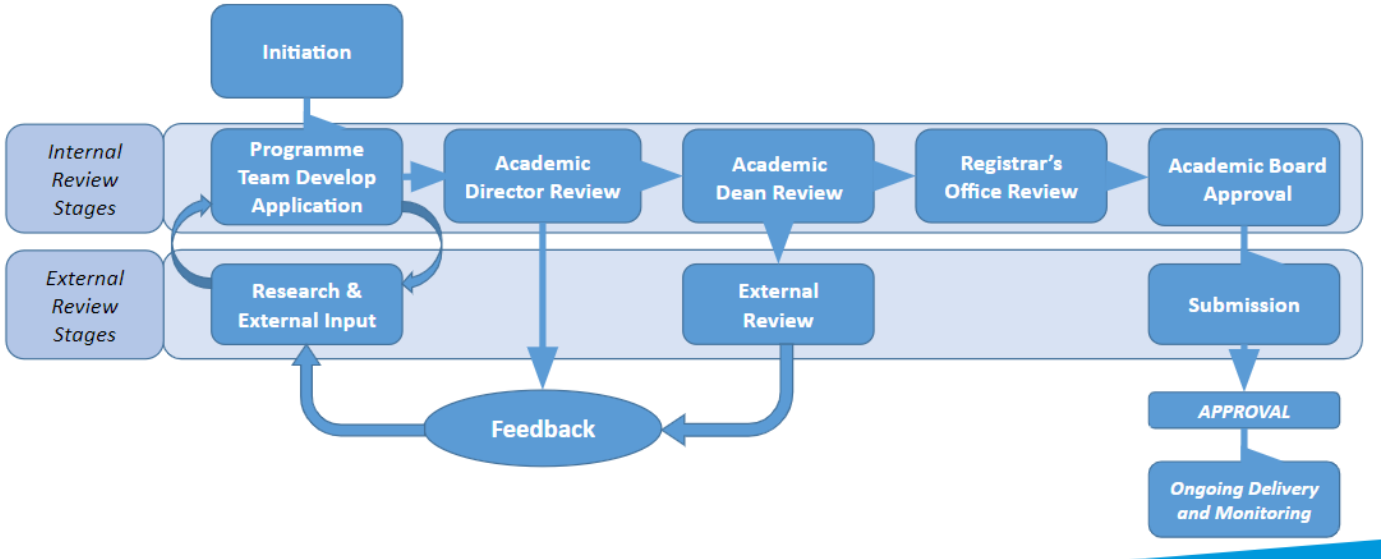

Figure 3 Review process of Professional Body validation application

2.2 Programme Review and Revalidation Policy

Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) Part C	
Document Name	**Programme Review and Revalidation Policy**
Policy Document Number	**033**
Version Reference	**v2.0**
Document Owner	**Registrar and Director of Campus Operations**
Roles with Aligned Responsibility	**Assistant Registrar, QA Officer, Academic Dean**
Applicability	**All NFQ/QQI programmes**
Approved By	**Academic Board &QQI**
Approval Date	**23/07/19**
Date Policy Becomes Active	**18/09/19**
Revision Cycle	**A minimum of every five years**
Revision History/Amalgamation History	**N/A**
Additional Information	**Active date will be following approval by QQI**
References/ Supporting Documentation	**QQI (2016) *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines*, Section 2.3, 'Programmes of Education and Training'.**[5] **QQI (2017) *Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training*.** [6] **QQI (2018) *Programme Validation Manual for Programmes of HET and Apprenticeships* (Edition 3).** **QQI *Programme Review Manual 2018*.**

2.2.1 Policy Overview

This policy and stated procedures detail the process steps and responsibilities required of DBS when undertaking Programme Review activities and application for Revalidation of said programmes. In common with the process for new programmes, the process aims to ensure that programme are and continue to be complaint, relevant and appropriately constructed.

This policy applies to the review of all Minor, Special Purpose (SPAs) and all Major Awards. These procedures apply to all programmes of study irrespective of delivery mode. The procedures also

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[5] https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Core%20Statutory%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines.pdf

[6] https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Initial_Validation_policy_7_10_13.pdf

apply to collaborative programmes where DBS is the main or lead partner in the collaboration. In addition, the QAH Part C Section 3 deals with transnational programmes and joint awards

The process of Programme Review and Revalidation is managed in accordance with guidelines set out in the QQI *Policies and Procedures for Validation of Programmes of Education and Training* Section 13 and *QQI Programme Review Manual 2016/2017* (Pilot Implementation Draft). DBS manages the phases of the process relating to Programme Review, Self-Evaluation and Independent Evaluation under agreed Terms of Reference with QQI.

Programme Review normally takes place every five years, but may be undertaken more frequently if circumstances require.

2.2.2   Policy Statement

As laid out in the *QQI Programme Review Manual 2016/2017* (pp.3–4), the objectives of Programme Review are to evaluate the programme as implemented in light of the provider's experience of providing the programme over the previous five years with a view to determining:

(1)   What has been learned about the programme, as an evolving process (by which learners acquire knowledge, skill and competence), from the experience of providing it for the past five or so years?

(2)   What can be concluded from a quantitative analysis of admission data, attrition rates by stage, completion rates and grades achieved by module, stage and overall?

(3)   What reputation do the programme and provider have with stakeholders (learners, staff, funding agencies, regulatory bodies, professional bodies, communities of practice, employers, other education and training providers) and in particular what views do the stakeholders have about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats concerning the programme's history and its future?

(4)   What challenges and opportunities are likely to arise in the next five years and what modifications to the programme are required in light of these?

(5)   Whether the programme in light of its stated objectives and intended learning outcomes demonstrably addresses explicit learning needs of target learners and society?

(6)   What other modifications need to be made to the programme and its awards to improve or reorient it?

(7)   Whether the programme (modified or unmodified) meets the current QQI validation criteria (and sub-criteria) or, if not, what modifications need to be made to the programme to meet the current criteria?

(8) Whether the provider continues to have the capacity and capability to provide the programme as planned (considering, for example, historical and projected enrolment numbers and profile and availability and adequacy of physical, financial and human resources) without risk of compromising educational standards or quality of provision in light of its other commitments (i.e. competing demands) and strategy?

(9) What is the justification (or otherwise) for the provider continuing to offer the programme (modified or unmodified)?

(10) What changes need to be made to related policies, criteria and procedures (including QA procedures)?

Through the Programme Review process, DBS will:

- Analyse the effectiveness and efficiency of each validated programme, including detail of learner numbers, retention rates and success rates.
- Review the development of the programmes in the context of the requirements of employers, industry, professional bodies, the Irish economy and international developments.
- Evaluate the response of the provider/school/department to market requirements and educational developments.
- Evaluate the feedback mechanisms for learners and the processes for acting on this feedback.
- Evaluate the physical facilities and resources provided for the provision of the programme(s).
- Evaluate the formal links which have been established with industry, business and the wider community in order to maintain the relevance of its programmes.
- Evaluate feedback from employers of the programmes' graduates and from those graduates.
- Review any research activities in the field of learning under review and their impact on teaching and learning.
- Evaluate projections for the following five years in the programme(s)/field of learning under review.
- Make proposals in relation to updating programmes and modules; proposals in relation to the discontinuation of programmes and the development of new programmes.

DBS has the opportunity to have other initiatives taken into consideration at review:

- The introduction of a new programme structure.
- The revision of credit weightings.
- Approval for a new minor award.
- Approval of new centres for delivery (locations, resources, proposed intakes, etc.).
- The addition of new delivery modes.

In its initial phase Programme Review is a structured self-evaluation undertaken by the School and Programme Board Team, whereby a critical evaluation of activities at programme level is carried out and an updated Programme Document and Self-Evaluation Report are produced.

2.2.3   Phases of Programme Review and Revalidation

The following process applies to programmes under review which the College intends to continue to run and therefore put forward for Revalidation. For programmes which are to be discontinued, an internal review process will take place to document the reasons for discontinuing the programme, and this will be reported to the Academic Board.

Phase 1: Self-Evaluation Process

The process of Programme Review starts with the agreement of Terms of Reference with QQI. This includes agreement of the membership of the Independent Review Panel, and a timeline for the review process and the date of the panel visit.

The DBS approach to Programme Review includes a wide-ranging consultative process, reflection and a series of approval procedures involving all stakeholders in a programme. The self-evaluation process is designed to:

- Provide opportunities for reflection on the operation of programme boards and meetings.
- Provide opportunities for consultation with learners, employers, staff and external stakeholders.
- Contribute to the strategic plan of the provider and strategic management.
- Provide information on strengths and weaknesses, in respect of all aspects of programme provision.
- Identify the future direction for the programmes/fields of learning and/or the profession under review.
- Identify future challenges.
- Identify and eliminate inefficiencies and overlaps between programmes.
- Include a review of external examiner reports and actions taken on same.
- Provide for an analysis of recruitment statistics, attrition rates, pass rates, and learner completion rates.
- Include the review of all programmes and benchmarking these against best practice.
- Identify and address resource issues, both physical and human.
- Incorporate a review of the operation and effectiveness of current quality assurance procedures.
- Ensure that programmes remain relevant to learner needs, including academic and labour market needs.
- Assure that quality improvements are made to programmes in a timely and effective manner.

The self-evaluation process is the responsibility of the Academic Dean and Academic Director. The Academic Director is responsible for progression of the review process and for bringing detailed review proposals forward for approval by the relevant school. The Academic Director chairs meetings of the Programme Board Team, i.e. all the lecturers and examiners involved in delivery and

assessment of modules under the currently approved structure, to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the programme in detail and develop proposals for suitable modifications.

The Self-Evaluation Report should include the following sections as per the QQI Self-Evaluation Report template:

- Section 1: Introduction and terms of reference for the review
- Section 2: Objectives and strategy
- Section 3: Baseline qualitative and quantitative information on the previously validated programme
- Section 4: Programme management and evolution over the past five years
- Section 5: Contemporary evaluation of the programme by stakeholders
- Section 6: Analysis of the programme in light of the findings
- Section 7: Revision of the programme and action plan
- Section 8: The modified programme document and self-evaluation against the QQI validation criteria.

Following completion of the internal review and approval process, the responsibility for the coordination of the Independent Review Panel is the responsibility of the Registrar and Director of Campus Operations supported by the Assistant Registrar and QA Officer. The activities include:

- Ensuring appropriate programme review documentation has been prepared and has gone through the appropriate approval mechanisms
- Organising an external evaluation by a panel of assessors (the Independent Review Panel)
- Liaising with the panel members to arrange the Panel visit
- Liaising with validating body.

Phase 2: External Evaluation and Reporting

Membership of the panel should comprise experts from relevant fields of learning and industry who are capable of making national and international comparisons with regard to the specific suite of programmes.

At a minimum the panel should comprise the following:

- Chair with experience in higher education and training; preferably with knowledge of Programme Review and who has undertaken QQI Chair's training
- Secretary
- Academics (minimum 2), experts in relevant field of learning
- Representatives from industry/relevant profession
- Learner representative
- QQI representative if appropriate
- A member of a relevant professional body if appropriate and by agreement with QQI

Other factors to be considered include, gender balance and international input, in particular the possibility of an academic from another jurisdiction.

Academic Directors provide nominees for the peer review panel to the Registrar and Director of Campus Operations / Assistant Registrar. These are reviewed and endorsed internally by the Academic Dean and Registrar and Director of Campus Operations and subsequently agreed with QQI in the Terms of Reference. Each panel member returns a conflict of interest form to the Assistant Registrar to ensure their independence of the evaluation.

The panel are provided with the following documentation prior to the visit:
- Covering letter, including local arrangements such as meeting location, local hotels, maps, contact details, etc.
- Agreed Terms of Reference
- Programme Self-Evaluation Report
- Modified Programme Documentation
- Provider QAH

The role of the panel is to evaluate the extent to which the programme review objectives have been fulfilled in the internal process. The specific responsibilities of the independent panel laid out in the *QQI Programme Review Manual 2018* are to:

(1) Evaluate the effectiveness of the Provider's Programme Review considering the Provider's Programme Review Report and the programme documentation and evaluate the programme and any proposed modifications against QQI's validation criteria.

(2) Prepare initial impressions on the basis of a systematic evaluation of the written documentation.

(3) Meet (virtually or otherwise) in advance of the site visit to review findings and plan the site visit.

(4) Agree an agenda for the site visit identifying a list of topics that would benefit from discussion with stakeholders, e.g. the provider's chief executive (or equivalent) and other of its leaders, its teaching staff, learners (current and, if possible, former learners), administrative staff, employers and any other category of internal and external stakeholders.

(5) Conduct the site visit.

(6) Prepare an Independent Programme Review Report (checking its factual accuracy with the provider before finalisation).

Once the Independent Programme Review Report is finalised, DBS prepares the Provider's Evaluation Report comprised of:

- The Provider's Programme Review Report.
- The finalised Independent Programme Review Report.
- The provider's formal response and implementation plan.
- The independent panel's response.

Phase 3: Applying for Revalidation

An application for Revalidation is submitted to QQI, comprised of the above documents. Arrangements are made with QQI for an Independent Evaluation Report to be produced. In principle the same independent panel may be used for the second review and report, subject to agreement with QQI.

2.2.4 Programme Review of Non-Framework Courses

The approach to Programme Review within the Professional School (non-framework courses) is governed by the same overarching principles as those applied for the programmes offered within the academic schools. The periodic review of programmes is undertaken to ensure that

- Programmes remain relevant to learner needs, including academic and labour market needs
- and
- Quality improvements are made to programmes in a timely and effective manner.

Formal Programme Reviews usually take place not less than five years after the commencement of the programme, and are the responsibility of the Academic Dean and Academic Director. The approval mechanism for documentation is Programme Approval Sub-Committee and the Academic Board. The process undertaken is specific to the individual programme type as follows.

Professional Accountancy Programmes

The Professional Accountancy programmes are delivered to the relevant professional body guidelines, using the prescribed academic material. Routine audits are conducted within the Professional School/DBS by the relevant professional accountancy bodies to ensure on-going compliance with their requirements.

DBS Diplomas

DBS Diplomas are developed and maintained in response to specific market demands. The content of the programmes is reviewed on an annual basis by the relevant lecturers. Where a DBS Diploma contains content from a QQI validated module or modules offered within an academic school, the material is reviewed as part of the linked major award by the appropriate Academic Director.

[END OF PART C SECTION 2]