

**Dearbhú Cáilíochta
agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann**
Quality and
Qualifications Ireland

Independent Panel Report on a Provider's Programme Review

Provider	Dublin Business School
Programme(s) Reviewed	Master of Arts in Psychotherapy, NFQ Level 9, 90 ECTS

Independent Panel Members

Name	Role on Panel	Affiliation
Dr. Annie Doona	Chair	Independent Education Consultant
Dr Joseph Fitzgerald	Report Writer	TU Dublin
David O Regan	Subject Matter Expert	IICP
Dr Kathleen Vandenberghe	Subject Matter Expert	Liverpool John Moores University
Lily Walsh	Industry Rep	Nua Healthcare
Dr. Rachel McCauley	Student Rep	DCU

All members of the independent panel declared their independence of DBS and that they have no conflict of interest

Part 1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of an independent panel convened to review the Master of Arts in Psychotherapy at Dublin Business School (DBS). The programme is a part-time NFQ Level 9 award (90 ECTS), and although it is viewed within DBS as constituting the second stage of a four-year professional training in psychotherapy when combined with the Higher Diploma in Arts in Counselling & Psychotherapy, the programme is formally a standalone qualification and has thus been reviewed as such. The programme is recognised by the Irish Association of Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapists (IAHIP) and, as part of the four-year pathway, meets the practitioner criteria for the Irish Council for Psychotherapy (ICP) and the European Certificate in Psychotherapy.

The review was conducted in the context of a strategic decision by DBS to withdraw this programme and to enter a managed teach-out phase, with a final intake in 2027/28 and a final graduation after the 2028/29 academic year. This decision was driven by two principal factors: (i) the announcement of CORU proficiencies for psychotherapy, which would necessitate a significant redesign of the programme to achieve statutory regulation compliance, including substantially revised placement structures that DBS determined it could not sustain at existing enrolment levels; and (ii) DBS's strategic reorientation as an international business school. Notwithstanding this decision, DBS affirmed a clear institutional commitment to maintaining programme quality and supporting all enrolled learners to graduation.

Part 2. Evaluation Process

2.1 Documents Supplied to the Panel

	Document Type	Document Name
1.	Programme Review Report	PRR 2025 MA Psychotherapy
2.	Programme Document	Master of Arts in Psychotherapy Programme Document
3.	Book of Modules	Master of Arts in Psychotherapy Module and assessment
4.	Timetables	Indicative Timetables
5.	Programme Team CVs	Programme Team CVs_MA in Psychotherapy
6.	Programme Handbook	Programme Handbook Master of Arts in Psychotherapy

2.2 Provider's Representatives Met

	Person	Role / Job Title
1.	Darragh Breathnach	Chief Operating Officer & Registrar
2.	Richard Barry	Chief Academic & Innovation Officer
3.	Iseult White	Academic Director
4.	Anita Dwyer	Assistant Registrar

5.	Nicholas Kelly	Head of Faculty Management
6.	Janine Jackson	Faculty Manager
7.	Sean O Leary	Admissions Quality Officer
8.	Francisca Knight	Head of Academic Operations
9.	Sarah Sharkey	Student Engagement Officer
10.	Various Faculty Members	Lecturer
11.	Trevor Haugh	Head of Academic Information and Resource Centre
12.	Amy Hayes	Portfolio Performance Manager

2.3 Description of evaluation process

The independent panel review was conducted across a single virtual site visit day comprising five sessions. Prior to the visit, panel members reviewed all documentation supplied by DBS, including the Programme Review Report (PRR), the updated Programme Document, the DBS Quality Assurance Handbook, External Examiner reports, learner and graduate survey data, and staff evaluation materials. The sessions on the day were structured to meet with: (i) the Programme Management team for an opening session covering the programme rationale, review process and proposed changes; (ii) current learners; (iii) graduates; (iv) the lecturing and academic team; and (v) senior programme leadership for a closing discussion. The panel deliberated following the site visit to agree findings and formulate the conditions and recommendations set out in this report.

Part 3. Panel Findings on Provider Programme Review Report

The following is the panel's commentary and recommendations on the provider's programme review report. It follows the section structure of the report in headings and in sequence.

References to specific parts of the provider report will use the relevant report reference e.g. 2.2.4 Programme Management

Section A. Context and Terms of Reference for the Programme Review

Commentary:

The panel reviewed the context and terms of reference set out in Section 1 of the PRR. The programme review covers the period from 2019/20 through to the current academic year 2025/26, encompassing the full current validation cycle. The review was conducted by the Academic and Clinical Director of Counselling, Psychotherapy and Addiction and the Academic and Training Officer, with input from the wider programme team. The panel noted that the review process was conducted to a good standard, with a comprehensive and evidenced approach to self-evaluation across all required dimensions. The panel commends DBS for the transparency with which the rationale for the programme teach-out has been presented. The decision to run out the programme was explained clearly: the imminent publication of CORU proficiencies for psychotherapy would necessitate a fundamental redesign of the programme, particularly in relation to clinical placement structures and governance, which DBS determined was not viable given its strategic direction as an international business school. The panel accepted this rationale and noted that the decision was reached following careful consideration of the implications for current and future learners. The panel explored the risks associated with the teach-out period, including potential staff attrition, maintenance of access to clinical placements, and continuity of supervision and clinical governance, as it sought to assure itself of the maintainence of the quality of the programme delivery. DBS provided reassurance that significant planning had been undertaken to manage these risks: staff have been engaged in detailed discussions about redundancy arrangements and the options available to them within DBS post-programme; a number of key staff have committed to remaining with the programme until its conclusion; and DBS confirmed that no students left the programme upon announcement of the teach-out decision. The panel was satisfied with DBS's approach to managing these risks, while noting that ongoing vigilance will be required, particularly as the programme approaches its final years.

Recommendations:

None.

Section B. Provider Information and Programme Context

Commentary:

DBS is a well-established private higher education provider located in Dublin city centre, operating from premises on Aungier Street, South Great Georges Street, and Bow Lane. DBS is an approved provider with QQI and has an established Quality Assurance Handbook that governs all aspects of programme management, assessment, learner support and governance. The Master of Arts in Psychotherapy is delivered on a part-time basis over 24 months, with intakes in September, and a maximum enrolment of 60 students per intake. The panel was informed that the vast majority of students on the MA come through the HDip pathway, with only a very small number (single figures) admitted from alternative routes. The panel was satisfied that this structured pathway helps to explain the consistently high progression and completion rates on the MA. DBS confirmed that it does not intend to seek CORU validation for this programme. It is anticipated that graduates who complete the programme on or before 2029 will be well positioned to meet CORU's grandparenting criteria when the Psychotherapists Register opens (estimated circa 2030–2032).

Recommendations:

None.

Section C. Baseline qualitative and quantitative information

Programme Data Overview

This section will include the panel's views on any or all of the following topics covered in the provider's review report: Applications, Enrolment, Attrition Transfer and Progression, Award Classification and Graduate Destinations

Commentary:

The panel reviewed the quantitative data presented in the PRR covering applications, enrolment, progression, completion, award classifications, and graduate destinations. Applications demonstrated consistent growth over the review period, rising from 41 in 2019/20 to a peak of 92 in 2023/24 - a 124% increase over the period. The programme did not experience the sharp COVID-period spike and subsequent decline seen across other programmes; rather, demand remained broadly sustained throughout the pandemic, perhaps reflecting the societal heightening of interest in psychotherapy and mental health services.

The competitive landscape for counselling and psychotherapy programmes in Ireland has grown significantly, with multiple providers now offering programmes across flexible delivery modes. Notwithstanding this, the MA continued to attract healthy application numbers. Enrolment data reflect a predominantly female cohort (consistent with sectoral norms, with female learners typically comprising approximately 65–80% of enrolments) and a predominantly domestic learner profile (approximately 78–90% domestic).

The panel explored the reported 100% progression rate, which was initially noted as a concern due to such a progression rate being viewed as untypical of a programme of this nature. DBS explained that the MA should be understood as a continuation of a four-year training: the HDip effectively functions as the first two years of this pathway, during which the suitability of students is assessed and managed. Only those who are fully prepared — and who have demonstrated professional suitability — progress to the MA. Additionally, very few students who do not come through the HDip apply to the programme, and those who do are considered carefully. The panel was largely satisfied with this explanation, though the panel was also clear in its reiteration that its role only applied to the revalidation of the two year MA.

However, it was noted by the panel that attendance data in some modules was notably lower than expected, in one case as low as 47% in a particular module, despite an attendance policy that permits only two missed classes. DBS acknowledged this discrepancy and confirmed that make-up classes are arranged, though it was noted that a make-up class is not a replica of the original teaching session. The panel flagged this as an area warranting attention.

At award level, the programme shows a concentration of H2 classifications, with very low rates of Pass awards — a profile sitting at the upper end of sectoral norms for taught Level 9 programmes (QQI-wide: 17% H1, 48% H2, 34% Pass; DBS-wide: 18% H1, 49% H2, 33% Pass). The PRR candidly acknowledges a period of grade inflation between 2020/21 and 2023/24, attributing this to COVID-period emergency practices, growing cohort sizes, and gaps in standardised rubrics and moderation. DBS described the corrective measures implemented — including the introduction of an Academic and Clinical Director role with assessment leadership responsibility, the rollout of standardised rubrics, and enhanced moderation — and the panel noted that these appear to have contributed to a more balanced pattern of outcomes in 2024/25. Graduate destinations data demonstrate strong

employment outcomes, with graduates securing roles across private practice, healthcare, NGOs, and corporate wellbeing sectors. A significant proportion of graduates have established private practices, progressed to supervisor training or teaching roles, or continued professional development, reflecting meaningful engagement with the field post-graduation.

Recommendations:

None.

Programme Delivery and Teaching & Learning Strategies

This section will include the panel's views on any or all of the following topics covered in the provider's review report: Physical Facilities and Resources, Timetabling, Learner Workload, Attendance, Teacher Learner Ratios, Community of Practice Learning, Teaching and Learning Strategies, Learning Outcomes achieved, Assessment Strategies.

Commentary:

The panel reviewed documentation of the physical facilities and resources available to support the programme (in lieu of a site visit given the sessions were held via Zoom). DBS operates from three city-centre buildings; these provide classroom, workshop and group-work spaces for the programme.

The panel queried the suitability of spaces used for process groups, which require a confidential and acoustically appropriate environment. DBS acknowledged that noise has been a concern given the location of the building in a busy city-centre area, and that efforts are made to allocate the quietest rooms for process group work. The panel was also informed about new private group-work rooms and queried whether students were aware of their availability; however it did become apparent during the student session that at least some students were not aware of these new rooms, indicating a gap in communication of facilities improvements.

The teaching and learning strategies used on the programme are varied and appropriately designed for a professional clinical training. They include classroom lectures, case-based learning, practical skills sessions, workshops, tutorials, individual and group work, blended learning, process groups, individual therapy, and supervised clinical practice. The programme's philosophical grounding in experiential and reflective learning, structured through Kolb's experiential learning cycle, provides a coherent pedagogical framework. Learners and graduates consistently valued the experiential elements of the programme, particularly process group, clinical supervision, and skills practice, as central to their development as practitioners.

The panel queried the percentage of clinical placement hours that can be completed online. DBS confirmed that in practice this is very limited or none, as most placement sites cannot provide the infrastructure (security, GDPR compliance) to facilitate online client work. Clinical supervision must be conducted in environments with the requisite supports for student wellbeing. The panel noted that a specific workshop on online therapy has been introduced, and welcomed this development.

On the matter of AI, DBS confirmed that instances of potential AI use in assessments have occurred this year and are being managed through existing Academic Impropriety policies and procedures. The panel noted that four members of staff have availed of AI training through DBS and welcomed the programme's intention to redesign assessments to be more AI-resilient (through increased use of case-based and oral formats).

Recommendations:

None.

Section D. Evaluation of the programme by stakeholders

Evaluation by current learners and graduates of the programme

Commentary:

The PRR presents learner feedback gathered through multiple mechanisms across the 2019/20–2024/25 period: the class representative system (with class representatives meeting twice yearly with the Academic and Training Officer), formal Learning and Teaching surveys administered via Moodle at the end of each module, and a targeted revalidation survey of current MA learners and graduates conducted specifically for this review cycle.

Current learner feedback consistently identifies the programme's experiential components, process group, counselling skills, and clinical group supervision, as central to developing capacity to work with clients, enhancing interpersonal skills, individual growth and reflective capacity. Learners report overall satisfaction with the programme's structure, the balance between academic and experiential learning, and the quality of clinical supervision. The targeted revalidation survey confirms high satisfaction with overall programme quality, the appropriateness of the assessment strategy, class sizes, and staff–learner ratios. Learners identify a consistent set of areas for enhancement across the review period. These include: more interactive delivery methods with less reliance on slide-based teaching; more timely and detailed assessment feedback with better-coordinated deadlines; enhanced communication around progression, accreditation pathways, supervision requirements, client hours, and dissertation processes; and recurrent operational issues relating to noise, classroom suitability and weekend access to facilities.

Learners also identify a desire for earlier and more consistent dissertation support, including earlier allocation of supervisors. Additional content areas requested include trauma, third-wave behavioural and mindfulness-based approaches, creative therapies, and guidance on online therapy practice.

Learners consistently describe the overall workload as demanding, particularly in year 2 of the MA when managing assessment deadlines alongside research requirements, personal therapy, client work, and individual supervision. Graduate feedback, gathered through a targeted revalidation survey of graduates from 2019 to 2025 supplemented by informal communications and focus groups, characterises the programme as a demanding but high-quality professional training that prepares graduates well for clinical practice and accreditation. Graduates report strong personal and professional growth, including deepened self-awareness, emotional development, and a more authentic sense of professional identity. They identify the depth and coherence of theoretical teaching, the high standard and professionalism of lecturers, and the value of experiential learning through process groups, workshops, and group relations weekends as particular strengths.

Personal therapy, clinical supervision, and skills practice are repeatedly cited as central in building confidence, clinical judgement and readiness to practise. Many graduates report having successfully joined professional bodies and established themselves in practice. Graduates also identify areas for further enhancement: the overall workload is described as intense and at times overwhelming, particularly when managing employment, personal therapy, and other commitments alongside programme demands. They express a desire for additional content on the practicalities of setting up

and running a private practice, and more focused input on trauma and specific client groups, including couples, adolescents, and neurodivergent clients.

The PRR's analysis concludes that the programme's strengths lie in its experiential depth, coherence between theory and practice, and its capacity to support significant personal and professional transformation. The developmental implications identified are to preserve and protect the experiential core and high teaching standards; to strengthen communication and administrative reliability; to provide clearer and earlier guidance on accreditation, supervision and dissertation processes; and to extend curriculum content in trauma, specific client groups, contemporary modalities, and the practical dimensions of establishing a practice. These implications are directly reflected in the proposed programme changes described in Section 7 of the PRR.

Recommendations:

None.

Evaluation of the programme by Staff

Commentary:

Staff evaluation of the programme was gathered through a faculty-wide survey, focused meetings with Clinical Group Supervisors (January, May and October 2025), Process Group Conductors (April and October 2025), and Theory and Practice trainers (September and November 2024), as well as two whole-team meetings including faculty, programme leadership and academic operations (February and November 2025), and operational meetings with Timetabling and Academic Operations (October 2024 and August 2025).

Across the survey and meetings, staff identified the following as key strengths: strong integration of personal, theoretical and experiential learning; comprehensive grounding in psychotherapy theory and practice; the centrality of personal development through Theory and Practice, Process Group, Clinical Group Supervision and individual therapy; and the value of both clinical group supervision and external supervision in supporting learning and professional suitability. Areas for development highlighted by staff include the need for more contemporary treatment of some topics, stronger collaboration and communication between lecturers, clearer and simpler assessment frameworks (particularly for supervision and process-based modules), and explicit input on transition to private practice.

The focused group meetings generated specific programme-level implications. Clinical Group Supervisors and Process Group Conductors endorsed the introduction of named module leaders and communities of practice to support consistency, collegial reflection and shared standards, and reviewed learning outcomes for greater developmental clarity and better alignment with the distinctive aims of supervision and process work. Theory and Practice trainers confirmed that the professional suitability process is functioning as intended, while welcoming a revised rubric and

grading scheme for feedback interviews. Staff agreed across meetings that module guides should include clearer, bullet-pointed indicative content, and that aims and learning outcomes should be tightened and explicitly aligned with what is taught, assessed and expected at QQI Level 9.

The research module was viewed as broadly fit for purpose but requiring an updated manual, rubric and more specific indicative content. Staff recommended allowing limited flexibility in delivery mode for academic modules and some rescheduled or summer Clinical Group Supervision, while retaining all Theory and Practice modules and Process Group in person. On staff-learner ratios, staff were broadly satisfied, with the exception of Process Group Conductors, who recommended that the ratio at Level 9 — where MA1 and MA2 students are integrated in process groups — should be reduced to 1:10.

Assessment structures were identified as a priority for review, to reduce written load, respond to generative AI through increased use of interactive orals, and introduce single continuous assessments for 5-credit modules. Timetabling discussions resulted in agreement to revert to an alternating Wednesday pattern for MA1 and MA2 Theory and Practice, to start first-year Clinical Group Supervision and Process Groups slightly later, and to introduce a centralised timetable spreadsheet.

The PRR's analysis of staff feedback concludes that this evidence reflects a strong, coherent programme meeting its core aims but requiring updating and closer alignment with contemporary practice. The pattern of surveys, focused meetings and whole-team discussions is presented as evidence of a culture of collective governance and continuous improvement, with a clear commitment to strengthening communication between academic and administrative functions.

Recommendations:

None.

External Examiner Feedback

Commentary:

External examiner feedback is presented in the PRR covering the period 2019/20 to 2024/25. Feedback is gathered through annual examiner reports, examination paper and script reviews, participation in Examination Boards, and formal written responses prepared by the Academic and Clinical Director and approved by the Chief Academic and Innovation Officer. Recommendations are recorded, assigned to responsible staff, and monitored across subsequent review and revalidation cycles.

Across all years, external examiners confirmed that the standards set for awards are in accordance with QQI expectations, that academic standards and learner achievements are comparable with those of other Irish higher education institutions, and that the assessment process measures learner

achievement rigorously and fairly. Examination Boards were consistently described as fair, thorough and well-conducted, with the programme team and administrative staff commended for being highly supportive and responsive.

Year-specific commendations in the PRR include: the alignment of assessments with professional practice requirements and recommended reading (2019/20); augmentation of written with verbal feedback (2020/21); the variety of well-balanced assessment methods (2021/22); effective integration of didactic teaching, group work and experiential learning across modules (2022/23); and high responsiveness, clear supportive feedback, well-structured programmes and a strong commitment to quality at QQI Level 9 (2023/24 and 2024/25).

Recurring recommendations across the review period focused on: early intervention support for learners with English language challenges; introduction and strengthening of formative assessment; providing more detailed developmental written feedback; updating reading lists with contemporary references; incorporating oral assessments, group presentations and reflective practices to diversify assessment formats and develop communities of practice; and, most recently (2024/25), addressing the impact of generative AI on assessment, including the ethical implications of its unauthorised use for psychotherapy learners.

The PRR documents systematic responses to each of these themes: learners with language challenges were linked with support services; formative assessment was prioritised from 2021/22 onwards; faculty were supported in providing more developmental feedback; reading lists were refreshed; oral and group-based assessments were expanded; and the assessment redesign in this revalidation cycle directly responds to the GenAI recommendations through the introduction of interactive orals, increased case-based written tasks, explicit ethical guidance in induction and handbook materials, and a requirement for learners to declare how GenAI has been used in their work. The PRR presents this as evidence that external examiner feedback is not only affirming standards but is also driving continuous, thematically coherent enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment on the programme.

Recommendations:

None.

Section E. Programme Quality Assurance

Complaints, appeals and commendations

Commentary:

The panel noted that there have been no formal complaints or formal appeals logged on the MA in Psychotherapy since 2019. The PRR provides a clear account of the complaints and appeals processes

in place, which are institutional in scope and are managed through the Academic and Training Officer, the School Administrative Officer, and the Quality Assurance Officer as appropriate. The panel noted the DBS Learner Charter, which sets out learners' entitlements in relation to a supportive and professional learning environment, timely feedback, and access to information.

The panel commends DBS for the absence of formal complaints, noting that this reflects a programme culture in which issues are addressed effectively at a local level. However, the panel notes feedback from the learner session indicating instances where feedback loops were not fully closed, and recommends that DBS ensure a more consistent and documented approach to closing the loop on learner concerns raised through informal or class representative mechanisms.

Recommendations:

None.

Quality Assurance Systems and Processes

Commentary:

The panel reviewed the quality assurance systems and processes described in the PRR and the DBS Quality Assurance Handbook. DBS operates a comprehensive QA framework covering governance, programme development, monitoring, assessment, learner support, and staff development. The programme-specific QA structures include monthly programme team meetings, semesterised programme boards, class representative meetings, and the involvement of external examiners.

The panel noted that the transition from the Agresso student management system to TSM has presented some data capture challenges; DBS confirmed that corrective measures are in progress. The panel also noted the PRR's acknowledgement that the learner complaints system had not always clearly distinguished between formal and informal processes, and that mentoring of new staff, while specified in the QAH, had been inconsistently applied. DBS described steps taken to address both issues, including the production of a teacher's manual and the introduction of peer observation. The panel was satisfied that DBS is aware of and actively addressing these gaps.

In the context of the teach-out, the panel considered whether the existing QA structures are adequate to maintain quality through to the final graduation. DBS confirmed that all key roles — including Academic and Clinical Director, Practicum Coordinator, Academic and Training Officer, and Clinical Placement Officer — will be retained for the duration of the teach-out, and that external examiners, programme review processes, and moderation of assessment will continue to operate normally. The panel was satisfied with these arrangements while noting the importance of DBS maintaining close oversight of staffing continuity throughout the teach-out period.

Recommendations:

None.

Additional Quality Assurance Systems and Processes required (e.g. online delivery / assessment)

Commentary:

Nothing addition to the section above.

Recommendations:

None.

Section F. Summary Analysis of the programme

Commentary:

The panel's overall assessment is that the Master of Arts in Psychotherapy is a strong, coherent, and professionally credible programme that has been performing well across the review period. The programme's principal strengths include: its clear humanistic-integrative-psychodynamic identity, which is well embedded throughout the curriculum and assessment strategy; its effective integration of personal, theoretical and experiential learning; the quality of its clinical placement network and supervision structures; and its strong professional credibility as a programme recognised by IAHIP and meeting the practitioner criteria of ICP and the ECP.

Application and enrolment data show consistent demand, healthy progression and completion rates, and graduate destinations that reflect the dual vocational and professional nature of the training. External examiner and professional body feedback affirm that standards are appropriate to QQI Level 9 and are being achieved.

The areas identified for enhancement - streamlining assessment, improving consistency through rubrics and module guides, strengthening fitness-to-practise documentation, addressing the practicalities of post-graduation practice, and managing the information provision to students about additional programme costs - are developmental in character rather than fundamental.

The panel was satisfied that the PRR presents an honest and thorough self-evaluation and that the proposed programme changes are appropriate, proportionate and well-reasoned. The panel considered the teach-out arrangements carefully and was satisfied that DBS has made credible commitments to maintaining quality, supporting learner progression and protecting professional accreditation routes through to final graduation.

Recommendations:

None.

Section G. Revision of the programme

In this section the panel will respond to any proposals made by the provider in respect of changes to the programme arising from the review. The revised programme's readiness for validation will be reported on in more detail in the Independent Evaluation Report for Validation.

Commentary:

The proposed changes to the programme are focused on enhancement of clarity, coherence and assessment while preserving the core philosophy and structure of the MA in Psychotherapy. The principal changes include: (i) Revision of all MIPLOs to strengthen alignment with QQI Level 9 standards, CORU proficiencies, and IAHIP requirements, using Level 9-appropriate language and explicitly linking outcomes to theoretical, clinical and reflective dimensions of practice; (ii) Redesign of assessment to reduce written load, introduce interactive oral formats, and create GenAI-resilient tasks, including a move to single continuous assessments for certain 5-credit modules (Body in Psychotherapy, Psychotherapy and the Public Sphere, Self, Subject and Person, and Contemporary and Ethical Issues); (iii) Minor module title changes (Theory and Practice 2 and 4; Supervised Practice renamed Supervised Clinical Practice) to better reflect content and professional identity; (iv) Refinement of indicative course content across modules to reduce unnecessary overlap and ensure that revisited concepts deepen rather than duplicate learning; (v) Introduction of a Career Day to provide practical guidance on working as a therapist in Ireland, covering business skills, private practice, career pathways, and accreditation routes; (vi) Introduction of a specialist workshop on online psychotherapy for all second-year clinical trainees; (vii) A structured online delivery element for certain academic modules where this does not compromise quality and supports learners in managing workload.

The panel reviewed these changes and is satisfied that they are appropriate, well-evidenced by the review findings, and consistent with the stated objective of maintaining and enhancing quality through the teach-out period. The panel particularly welcomes the introduction of the Career Day and the online therapy workshop, both of which directly address concerns raised by learners, graduates and placement providers. The assessment redesign is also welcomed as a response to both external examiner feedback and the emerging challenge of generative AI in assessment. The panel is satisfied that the core structure, philosophy and professional recognition of the programme are preserved in the revised version.

Recommendations:

None.

Part 4. Overall Findings

In this section the panel will give its overall feedback on the conduct of the review and the findings therein. This feedback will inform future provider review processes and will also contribute to the refinement of any programmes being proposed for revalidation following this review process.

Section A. Commentary on review process:

The panel is satisfied that the programme review was conducted to a high standard. The PRR provides a comprehensive, evidence-based, and candid self-evaluation across all required dimensions. The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data is thorough, and the programme team demonstrates a genuine culture of reflection and continuous improvement. The review process engaged appropriately with all key stakeholder groups — learners, graduates, staff, external examiners, professional bodies, and clinical placement providers — and the findings are clearly grounded in this multi-perspectival evidence base. The panel commends the openness with which DBS presented the rationale and management of the teach-out decision.

Section B. Recommendations on review process:

None arising. The panel recommends no changes to the review process itself.

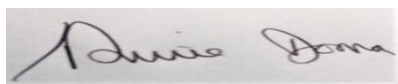
Section C. Commentary on programme revisions:

The proposed programme revisions are well-considered and directly responsive to the review findings. They preserve the core philosophy and professional credentials of the programme while strengthening clarity, assessment integrity and practice-readiness. The panel is satisfied that the revised programme is ready for revalidation for the duration of the teach-out period.

Section D. Recommendations on programme revisions:

The panel is satisfied that the proposed programme revisions are appropriate, well-informed, and will lead to the enhancement of the programme going forward

Signed: _____



Panel Chairperson:

Date: 2nd March 2026



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Independent Evaluation Report on an Application for Validation of a Programme of Education and Training

Part 1. Provider details

Provider name	Dublin Business School (DBS)
Date of site visit	12 th February, 2026
Date of report	2 nd March, 2026

Section E. Overall recommendations

Principal programme¹	Title	Master of Arts in Psychotherapy
	Award	Master of Arts
	Credit	90 ECTS
	Recommendation <i>Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions OR Not Satisfactory</i>	Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions

¹ Replace throughout with actual programme title.

Section F. Expert Panel

Name	Role	Affiliation
Dr. Annie Doona	Chair	Independent Education Consultant
Dr Joseph Fitzgerald	Report Writer	TU Dublin
David O Regan	Subject Matter Expert	IICP
Dr Kathleen Vandenberghe	Subject Matter Expert	Liverpool John Moores University
Lily Walsh	Industry Rep	Nua Healthcare
Dr. Rachel McCauley	Student Rep	DCU

Section G. Principal Programme

Names of centre(s) where the programme(s) is to be provided	Maximum number of learners (FT)	Maximum number of learners (PT)
Dublin Business School, Dublin 2 (Aungier Street, Castle House, Bow Lane)	n/a	60

Proposed Duration and Enrolment					
	First Intake Date	Duration	Intakes per Annum	Enrolment i.e. learners per Intake	
			Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
Full-Time	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Part-Time	September 2026	24 months	2	7	60
Intake Schedule e.g. January September		September X 2 intakes			

Panel Commentary on proposed enrolment:

The panel accepts the proposed enrolment figures. The programme is operating in a teach-out context with a final intake in September 2027. The enrolment of up to 60 learners per intake is consistent with the programme's existing capacity and resources. The panel notes that the enrolment projection is realistic given that approximately 60–70% of HDip graduates.

Brief synopsis of the programme (e.g. who it is for, what is it for, what is involved for learners, what it leads to.)

Across the two years of study, learners engage in supervised clinical practice, experiential training skills training, and both individual and process group. The curriculum introduces a range of theoretical orientations including existential, Gestalt, and body-oriented psychotherapies, supporting learners in the development of a humanistic and integrative practice within a psychodynamic frame.

The programme builds on prior learning achieved through the Higher Diploma in Counselling and

Psychotherapy, comprising the final two years of a four-year professional training pathway. It includes a substantial research component enabling learners to engage in practice-based inquiry and to contribute to the advancement of knowledge within the discipline.

The Masters of Arts in Psychotherapy meets the professional training standards required for recognition by the Irish Association for Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy (IAHIP). Graduates are equipped to practise as psychotherapists in diverse health, educational, and community settings and to establish and manage a professional private practice in accordance with recognised ethical and professional standards, with the combined four-year HDip and MA pathway maintaining recognition by IAHIP and supporting eligibility for grandparenting to the future CORU register.

Following a strategic review of its academic portfolio, DBS has decided to undertake a phased withdrawal from its Counselling and Psychotherapy programmes, including the MA in Psychotherapy, in order to align with its long-term ambition to focus on programmes that address the evolving skills needs of an international business school context. The final year for admitting new learners onto the MA in Psychotherapy will be 2027-2028, and DBS will continue to offer the programme through to final graduation in 2028-2029 so that all current and incoming cohorts on the established HDip/MA pathway can complete within the CORU grandparenting window, with explicit commitments to maintain academic and clinical leadership roles, maintain IAHIP recognition, and clinical placements and supervision, and provide full teach-out support to all affected learners.

Target learner groups

The Master of Arts in Psychotherapy programme is aimed at graduates of a Level 8 NFQ accredited programme (such as the Higher Diploma in Arts in Counselling and Psychotherapy or equivalent). Successful applicants will be required to have academic components, skills components which have been delivered in an experiential mode and personal development components (personal psychotherapy and process group work over a minimum of a two-year period). An applicant for the Masters must also have a recommendation from a practitioner closely familiar with the applicant's study and experience recommending that the applicant is suitable for the Master of Arts in Psychotherapy programme and for supervised client work in particular. Consideration is given to clinicians from other traditions of psychotherapeutic and psychological work as long as they also have the required minimum experience of personal psychotherapy, process group work and skills training as well as formally recognised academic study in the field of psychotherapy.

Due to the significant responsibility inherent in the practice of psychotherapy, it is imperative that only learners deemed suitable for clinical practice at the completion of the Higher Diploma in Counselling and Psychotherapy (or equivalent) are eligible to apply and interview for the Master of Arts in Psychotherapy, where they will commence client work. Therefore, the Higher Diploma in Arts in Counselling and Psychotherapy is designated as a distinct Level 8 award. The mandatory interview for all applicants seeking entry to the Master of Arts in Psychotherapy is vital for upholding training quality and standards, thereby safeguarding both learners and the public.

Approved countries for provision	Ireland
Delivery mode: Full-time/Part-time	Part-time

The teaching and learning modalities
The programme employs a wide range of teaching and learning modalities appropriate to a professional clinical training: classroom lectures and tutorials; case-based learning; practical skills sessions; workshops; individual and group work; process groups; individual personal therapy (external to programme); supervised clinical practice; and clinical group supervision.

Summary of specifications for teaching staff		
Role	Profile	WTE
Academic and Clinical Director	The ACD is responsible for the overall management and development of the programme, the coordination of the organisation and delivery of the programme, and the management and support of learners on the programme, and for ensuring clinical standards are maintained at a high level of quality. The role is focussed on 4 key areas: • Governance of discipline area programmes • Programme development, review, and retention for discipline area • Programme innovation, employer engagement and foster growth opportunity in discipline area • Clinical governance and clinical excellence The ACD has an important role in mentoring learners and providing them with guidance and support on both academic and non-academic matters related to learner life. Learner attendance is taken at every lecture and an 'early warning' system ensures that where a learner's attendance falls short, counselling is available from the ACD. Along with the Student Engagement Officer, the ACD determines any issue that warrants intervention and if required a range of measures can be adopted. Such measures include following up directly with the learner by telephone and email. If direct contact is not made with the learner, an official letter will also be sent by the ACD and if necessary, followed up by a meeting with the ACD. The ACD highlights any 'at risk' learners and works with the Programme Team and Student Retention Officer to put supports in place. The ACDr also advises learners should they require an extension to an assessment deadline when personal mitigating circumstances apply. The ACD also manages the communication between the Registrar's office and the learner to ensure that the learner is aware of their obligations and responsibilities. In addition, administrative and pastoral support is received from the DBS Academic Operations and Student Services teams.	1.0
Academic and Training Officer	The Academic and Training Officer (ATO) plays a key role in upholding the quality and successful delivery of academic programmes by keeping learners well-informed and supported, while collaborating with academic, trainer and supervisor teams to ensure adherence to professional standards and regulatory requirements. The ATO is responsible for quality control and programme compliance, liaising with bodies such as QQI, CORU and IAHIP, and ensuring documentation and teaching materials are up to date and aligned with best practices. On the learner support side,	1.0

	the ATO mentors learners, monitors attendance and academic progress, and implements early interventions for at-risk learners in collaboration with other support teams. The ATO also manages administrative processes such as exam submissions, accommodations, and communications with the Registrar's Office, while providing both academic and pastoral support to ensure learners receive comprehensive guidance throughout their studies.	
Practicum Coordinator	The Practicum Coordinator has responsibility for the coordination of the organisation and delivery of the supervision modules, as well as for the monitoring and recording of arrangements for personal psychotherapy and for individual supervision. The Practicum Coordinator collates all documentation to provide evidence that learners have completed the requisite number of hours of personal psychotherapy and of clinical supervision	1
Clinical Placement Officer	The Clinical Placement Officer role is central in supporting learners with a high-quality experience of clinical practice, ensuring that all placements meet QQI and IAHIP standards. Key responsibilities include supporting learners, collaborating with programme staff to maintain compliance and effective communication, and proactively developing and maintaining a diverse range of placement opportunities. The role also involves vetting and monitoring clinical placement centres, and ensuring that all placements adhere to IAHIP and programme requirements. Working closely with the Academic and Clinical Director, trainers, and supervisors, the Clinical Placement Officer ensures that every learner has equitable access to suitable placements. This comprehensive oversight ensures quality of placement experience.	1
Lecturers and Practice Trainer	Academic staff to be qualified to at least Masters Level 9 in psychotherapy or related area, with some teaching, training, supervising or research experience within the counselling and psychotherapy field. Staff should have considerable practical/clinical experience and experience in mutually supporting theory and practice learning opportunities for learners	8
Clinical Group Supervisors	Clinical Group Supervisors are required to hold an IAHIP supervision qualification or an equivalent recognised supervision credential, together with a Masters Level 9 qualification in psychotherapy or a closely related discipline, or significant clinical practice in the field. They must have a minimum of 3-5 years' post-accreditation supervision experience, including demonstrable experience of supervising groups in psychotherapy training contexts. In addition to substantial practical/clinical experience, supervisors are expected to evidence expertise in facilitating the integration of theory and practice, supporting reflective learning, and maintaining high standards of ethical, safe and developmentally appropriate supervision for trainee psychotherapists.	6
Process Group Conductors	Staff must have considerable practical/clinical experience significant experience in facilitating process groups and/or participating in group relations.	6

Learning Activity	Ratio of learners to teaching staff
Classroom Lectures	1:30
Practical Skills Sessions	1:15
Clinical Group Supervision	1:4
Lecturer/Supervisor	1:60

Panel Commentary on programme outline and staffing:

The panel is satisfied that the programme has an appropriately qualified and experienced complement of staff to deliver the programme as specified. All lecturing staff are practising clinicians, which is essential for a professional clinical training of this nature. The panel notes DBS's commitment to retaining all key academic and clinical leadership roles for the duration of the teach-out, including replacement of departing faculty with staff of equivalent standing. The panel commends the introduction of named module leaders and communities of practice for Clinical Group Supervisors and Process Group Conductors as enhancements to consistency and collegial governance.

Programmes being replaced (applicable to applications for revalidation)		
Code	Title	Last enrolment date
PG24189	Master of Arts in Psychotherapy	August 2026

Section H. Other noteworthy features of the application

n/a

Part 1A Evaluation of the Case for an Extension of the Approved Scope of Provision (where applicable).

Having examined appropriate QA / Governance procedures, comment on the case for extending the applicant's Approved Scope of Provision to enable provision of this programme. (Especially relevant for move to online delivery / assessment)

n/a

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Part 2. Evaluation against the validation criteria

This includes QQI's 12 validation core criteria. When making a judgement on achievement of a core criterion, the panel should use the sub-criteria as guidance. Non-achievement of relevant and significant sub-criteria will mean non-achievement of the core criterion. The panel will apply its expertise and experience in determining 'relevance' and 'significance' of sub-criteria to a particular programme.

The panel should complete this section with commentary against each criterion to support the recommendation given in the 'Satisfactory?' column i.e. Yes, No, or Partially.

If 'Yes', there should be a comment citing the evidence for this finding. Likewise, there should be an explanation as to why the panel have concluded that the criterion has either not been met or only partially so.

Criterion 1. The provider is eligible to apply for validation of the programme

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The provider meets the prerequisites (section 44(7) of the 2012 Act) to apply for validation of the programme. b) The application for validation is signed by the provider's chief executive (or equivalent) who confirms that the information provided is truthful and that all the applicable criteria have been addressed. c) The provider has declared that their programme complies with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements. 		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MA in Psychotherapy	Yes	DBS is an approved provider with QQI with an established QA framework. It has previously had this programme validated (2019).

Criterion 2. The programme objectives and outcomes are clear and consistent with the QQI awards sought

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The programme aims and objectives are expressed plainly. b) A QQI award is specified for those who complete the programme. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Where applicable, a QQI award is specified for each embedded programme. c) There is a satisfactory rationale for the choice of QQI award(s). d) The award title(s) is consistent with unit 3.1 of QQI's Policy and Criteria for Making Awards. e) The award title(s) is otherwise legitimate for example it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements. f) The programme title and any embedded programme titles are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Consistent with the title of the QQI award sought. (ii) Clear, accurate, succinct and fit for the purpose of informing prospective learners and other stakeholders. g) For each programme and embedded programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) The minimum intended programme learning outcomes and any other educational or training objectives of the programme are explicitly specified. (ii) The minimum intended programme learning outcomes to qualify for the QQI award sought are consistent with the relevant QQI awards standards. h) Where applicable, the minimum intended module learning outcomes are explicitly specified for each of the programme's modules. i) Any QQI minor awards sought for those who complete the modules are specified, where applicable. j) For each minor award specified, the minimum intended module learning outcomes to qualify for the award are consistent with relevant QQI minor awards standards. 		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MA in Psychotherapy	Yes	<p>Master of Arts is an appropriate and accurate title for the award.</p> <p>The revised MIPLOs have been refined using Level 9-appropriate language and are mapped clearly to QQI standards, CORU proficiencies and IAHIP requirements. The panel is satisfied with the quality and clarity of the revised MIPLOs.</p>

Criterion 3. The programme concept, implementation strategy, and its interpretation of QQI awards standards are well informed and soundly based (considering social, cultural, educational, professional and employment objectives)

- a) The development of the programme and the intended programme learning outcomes has sought out and taken into account the views of stakeholders such as learners, graduates, teachers, lecturers, education and training institutions, employers, statutory bodies, regulatory bodies, the international scientific and academic communities, professional bodies and equivalent associations, trades unions, and social and community representatives.
- b) The interpretation of awards standards has been adequately informed and researched; considering the programme aims and objectives and minimum intended programme (and, where applicable, modular) learning outcomes.
 - (i) There is a satisfactory rationale for providing the programme.
 - (ii) The proposed programme compares favourably with existing related (comparable) programmes in Ireland and beyond. Comparators should be as close as it is possible to find.
 - (iii) There is support for the introduction of the programme (such as from employers, or professional, regulatory or statutory bodies).
 - (iv) There is evidence of learner demand for the programme.
 - (v) There is evidence of employment opportunities for graduates where relevant.
 - (vi) The programme meets genuine education and training needs.
- c) There are mechanisms to keep the programme updated in consultation with internal and external stakeholders.
- d) Employers and practitioners in the cases of vocational and professional awards have been systematically involved in the programme design where the programme is vocationally or professionally oriented.
- e) The programme satisfies any validation-related criteria attaching to the applicable awards standards and QQI awards specifications.

Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MA in Psychotherapy	Yes	<p>The programme addresses a genuine training need in professional psychotherapy education in Ireland. The teach-out rationale is clearly explained and well-justified in the context of CORU regulation and DBS's strategic direction.</p> <p>Comparator analysis against DCU MSc in Psychotherapy and CIT MSc in Integrative Psychotherapy was presented. The DBS programme's unique four-year integrated pathway with IAHIP recognition distinguishes it in the market.</p> <p>Application data show sustained and growing demand over the review period, peaking at 92 applications in 2023/24.</p> <p>Graduate destination data confirm strong employment outcomes across private practice, healthcare, NGO and corporate sectors.</p> <p>Regular team meetings, external examiner engagement, class representative meetings, and</p>

		professional body liaison provide multiple channels for updating the programme.
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Criterion 4. The programme's access, transfer and progression arrangements are satisfactory

<p>a) The information about the programme as well as its procedures for access, transfer and progression are consistent with the procedures described in QQI's policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training. Each of its programme-specific criteria is individually and explicitly satisfied.</p> <p>b) Programme information for learners is provided in plain language. This details what the programme expects of learners and what learners can expect of the programme and that there are procedures to ensure its availability in a range of accessible formats.</p> <p>c) If the programme leads to a higher education and training award and its duration is designed for native English speakers, then the level of proficiency in English language must be greater or equal to B2+ in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR²) in order to enable learners to reach the required standard for the QQI award.</p> <p>d) The programme specifies the learning (knowledge, skill and competence) that target learners are expected to have achieved before they are enrolled in the programme and any other assumptions about enrolled learners (programme participants).</p> <p>e) The programme includes suitable procedures and criteria for the recognition of prior learning for the purposes of access and, where appropriate, for advanced entry to the programme and for exemptions.</p> <p>f) The programme title (the title used to refer to the programme):-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Reflects the core <i>intended programme learning outcomes</i>, and is consistent with the standards and purposes of the QQI awards to which it leads, the award title(s) and their class(es). (ii) Is learner focused and meaningful to the learners; (iii) Has long-lasting significance. <p>g) The programme title is otherwise legitimate; for example, it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.</p>		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MA in Psychotherapy	partially	<p>Access pathways, including the primary route through the HDip and RPL provisions, are documented in the programme document.</p> <p>The panel notes that although information on additional programme costs (personal therapy, supervision) is provided, it must be more prominently communicated. Learner feedback indicates that information about mandatory additional costs and deferral arrangements during the teach-out requires clearer and more prominent communication.</p> <p>Condition 1: It is a condition of validation that programme information on the provider's website, prospectuses and any other public information outlets need to specify that there will be additional costs associated with the programme – for example, personal</p>

² http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf (accessed 26/09/2015)

	<p>therapy and clinical supervision, as well as the time requirements associated with these.</p> <p>Furthermore, it is the view of the panel that information about deferrals in the runout period needs to be consistently communicated to both existing and potential students.</p> <p>Recommendation 1: The panel recommends that the programme’s deferral policy be formalised and published to clearly outline the maximum period of time for deferral, bearing in mind the individual needs of the student.</p> <p>The panel notes the intention to teach out this programme, and applauds the transparency and openness of DBS in communicating this with stakeholders. Although the panel also accepts that there is currently no CORU approved provider in this discipline area that DBS could liaise with for potential future transfer students (e.g. for possible future deferral students), it is the view of the panel that DBS should commit to do so when CORU approved providers come on stream.</p> <p>Recommendation 2: The panel recommends that the programme management engage with other providers to establish transfer pathways when CORU approved programmes become available.</p>
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Criterion 5. The programme's written curriculum is well structured and fit-for-purpose

- a) The programme is suitably structured and coherently oriented towards the achievement by learners of its intended programme learning outcomes. The programme (including any stages and modules) is integrated in all its dimensions.
- b) In so far as it is feasible the programme provides choice to enrolled learners so that they may align their learning opportunities towards their individual educational and training needs.
- c) Each module and stage is suitably structured and coherently oriented towards the achievement by learners of the intended *programme* learning outcomes.
- d) The objectives and purposes of each of the programme's elements are clear to learners and to the provider's staff.
- e) The programme is structured and scheduled realistically based on sound educational and training principles.
- f) The curriculum is comprehensively and systematically documented.
- g) The credit allocated to the programme is consistent with the difference between the entry standard and minimum intended programme learning outcomes.
- h) The credit allocated to each module is consistent with the difference between the module entry standard and minimum intended module learning outcomes.
- i) Elements such as practice placement and work-based phases are provided with the same rigour and attentiveness as other elements.
- j) The programme **duration** (expressed in terms of time from initial enrolment to completion) and its **fulltime equivalent contact time** (expressed in hours) are consistent with the difference between the minimum entry standard and award standard and with the credit allocation.

Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MA in Psychotherapy	Yes	<p>The revised curriculum maintains a coherent humanistic-integrative-psychodynamic structure with clear developmental progression across both years. The reduction of unnecessary content overlap and the tightening of module learning outcomes enhance the curriculum's coherence. Although the panel acknowledges this theoretical foundation as appropriate for a programme such as this, it does suggest that the programme may benefit from an openness to alternative theoretical perspectives.</p> <p>Recommendation 3: The panel recommends that a more explicit reference to person centred theory in the theoretical component of the programme, and to consider alternative theoretical perspectives.</p> <p>Supervised clinical practice is a central component of the programme, governed by clear policies, clinical placement agreements, and a structured supervision framework.</p> <p>The panel agreed that the placement provision has a critical learning role within this programme. It also views the management and supervision of placements as being critically important and key to guiding the students learning. However, the panel</p>

		<p>also notes that the sector is moving towards a greater prevalence of online and telephone therapy, and that students need to be equipped for this reality post-graduation.</p> <p>Recommendation 4: The panel recommends that the programme team explores the possibility of including online and telephone therapy within the placement provider options.</p>
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Criterion 6. There are sufficient qualified and capable programme staff available to implement the programme as planned

<p>a) The specification of the programme’s staffing requirements (staff required as part of the programme and intrinsic to it) is precise, and rigorous and consistent with the programme and its defined purpose. The specifications include professional and educational qualifications, licences-to practise where applicable, experience and the staff/learner ratio requirements. See also criterion 12 c).</p> <p>b) The programme has an identified complement of staff (or potential staff) who are available, qualified and capable to provide the specified programme in the context of their existing commitments.</p> <p>c) The programme's complement of staff (or potential staff) (those who support learning including any employer-based personnel) are demonstrated to be competent to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes and to assess learners’ achievements as required.</p> <p>d) There are arrangements for the performance of the programme’s staff to be managed to ensure continuing capability to fulfil their roles and there are staff development opportunities.</p> <p>e) There are arrangements for programme staff performance to be reviewed and there are mechanisms for encouraging development and for addressing underperformance.</p> <p>f) Where the programme is to be provided by staff not already in post there are arrangements to ensure that the programme will not enrol learners unless a complement of staff meeting the specifications is in post.</p>		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MA in Psychotherapy	Yes	<p>Staffing specifications are clear and appropriate. All lecturing staff are practising clinicians. The panel notes the importance of the commitment to retaining and replacing key staff through the teach-out.</p> <p>Research grants, CPD support, pre-semester TLA days, communities of practice for Clinical Group Supervisors and Process Group Conductors, and peer observation are all in place or being introduced.</p> <p>Four staff members have completed AI training to date. Although the panel acknowledges this, it is of the view that this may be useful training for all faculty members.</p> <p>Recommendation 5: The panel recommends that the programme management consider the introduction of compulsory training in AI for all programme staff.</p>

Criterion 7. There are sufficient physical resources to implement the programme as planned

<p>a) The specification of the programme’s physical resource requirements (physical resources required as part of the programme and intrinsic to it) is precise, and rigorous and consistent with the programme, its defined purpose and its resource/learner-ratio requirements. See also criterion 12 d).</p> <p>b) The programme has an identified complement of supported physical resources (or potential supported physical resources) that are available in the context of existing commitments on these e.g. availability of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) suitable premises and accommodation for the learning and human needs (comfort, safety, health, wellbeing) of learners (this applies to all of the programme’s learning environments including the workplace learning environment) (ii) suitable information technology and resources (including educational technology and any virtual learning environments provided) (iii) printed and electronic material (including software) for teaching, learning and assessment (iv) suitable specialist equipment (e.g. kitchen, laboratory, workshop, studio) – if applicable (v) technical support (vi) administrative support (vii) company placements/internships – if applicable <p>c) If versions of the programme are provided in parallel at more than one location each independently meets the location-sensitive validation criteria for each location (for example staffing, resources and the learning environment).</p> <p>d) There is a five-year plan for the programme. It should address</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Planned intake (first five years) and (ii) The total costs and income over the five years based on the planned intake. <p>e) The programme includes controls to ensure entitlement to use the property (including intellectual property, premises, materials and equipment) required.</p>		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MA in Psychotherapy	Yes	<p>DBS's city-centre campus provides adequate classroom, workshop and group-work facilities for the programme's current enrolment. Library and IT resources are available to learners.</p> <p>The panel notes ongoing concerns about noise in process group spaces. DBS has taken steps to allocate quieter rooms, and new group-work rooms have been created. However, awareness of new facilities among current students requires improvement.</p>

Criterion 8. The learning environment is consistent with the needs of the programme’s learners

<p>a) The programme’s physical, social, cultural and intellectual environment (recognising that the environment may, for example, be partly virtual or involve the workplace) including resources and support systems are consistent with the intended programme learning outcomes.</p> <p>b) Learners can interact with, and are supported by, others in the programme’s learning environments including peer learners, teachers, and where applicable supervisors, practitioners and mentors.</p> <p>c) The programme includes arrangements to ensure that the parts of the programme that occur in the workplace are subject to the same rigours as any other part of the programme while having regard to the different nature of the workplace.</p>		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MA in Psychotherapy	Yes	<p>The programme's environment — combining academic modules, experiential learning, process groups, supervision and clinical placement — is well suited to a professional clinical training.</p> <p>Small class sizes, close supervisory relationships, and a strong team culture support rich learner-teacher and peer interaction.</p> <p>Clinical placement governance is documented and monitored through the Clinical Placement Officer and Practicum Coordinator.</p>

Criterion 9. There are sound teaching and learning strategies

<p>a) The teaching strategies support achievement of the intended programme/module learning outcomes.</p> <p>b) The programme provides authentic learning opportunities to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes.</p> <p>c) The programme enables enrolled learners to attain (if reasonably diligent) the minimum intended programme learning outcomes reliably and efficiently (in terms of overall learner effort and a reasonably balanced workload).</p> <p>d) Learning is monitored/supervised.</p> <p>e) Individualised guidance, support and timely formative feedback is regularly provided to enrolled learners as they progress within the programme.</p>		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MA in Psychotherapy	Yes	<p>The programme employs a range of pedagogically appropriate strategies grounded in Kolb's experiential learning model, with strong integration of academic and clinical learning.</p> <p>Supervision, skills feedback, process group facilitation, and programme board structures all support ongoing monitoring of learner progress.</p> <p>The panel was content that the teaching and learning strategies of the core programme were sound. However, the panel felt that there was scope for additional teaching and learning opportunities outside of the core programme that would enhance the learning experience for the student, and help them in the post-graduation transition to general employment.</p> <p>Recommendation 6: The panel recommends the programme team introduce a series of workshops covering topics such as note-taking appropriate for court subpoena, report writing, practice of online therapy, and running an independent private practice.</p>

Criterion 10. There are sound assessment strategies

<p>a) All assessment is undertaken consistently</p> <p>b) The programme’s assessment procedures interface effectively with the provider’s QQI approved quality assurance procedures.</p> <p>c) The programme includes specific procedures that are fair and consistent for the assessment of enrolled learners to ensure the minimum intended programme/module learning outcomes are acquired by all who successfully complete the programme.</p> <p>d) The programme includes formative assessment to support learning.</p> <p>e) There is a satisfactory written programme assessment strategy for the programme as a whole and there are satisfactory module assessment strategies for any of its constituent modules.</p> <p>f) Sample assessment instruments, tasks, marking schemes and related evidence have been provided for each award-stage assessment and indicate that the assessment is likely to be valid and reliable.</p> <p>g) There are sound procedures for the moderation of summative assessment results.</p> <p>h) The provider only puts forward an enrolled learner for certification for a particular award for which a programme has been validated if they have been specifically assessed against the standard for that award.</p>		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MA in Psychotherapy	Yes	<p>The revised assessment strategy represents a significant improvement, with standardised rubrics, more consistent moderation, and a more explicit mapping to outcomes. Some further work on rubric consistency across all modules is ongoing.</p> <p>The assessment redesign explicitly addresses GenAI through increased use of interactive orals and case-based tasks. The panel welcomes this.</p> <p>Assessment materials were reviewed and found to be generally satisfactory.</p>

Criterion 11. Learners enrolled on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for

<p>a) There are arrangements to ensure that each enrolled learner is fully informed in a timely manner about the programme including the schedule of activities and assessments.</p> <p>b) Information is provided about learner supports that are available to learners enrolled on the programme.</p> <p>c) Specific information is provided to learners enrolled on the programme about any programme-specific appeals and complaints procedures.</p> <p>d) If the programme is modular, it includes arrangements for the provision of effective guidance services for learners on the selection of appropriate learning pathways.</p> <p>e) The programme takes into account and accommodates to the differences between enrolled learners, for example, in terms of their prior learning, maturity, and capabilities.</p> <p>f) There are arrangements to ensure that learners enrolled on the programme are supervised and individualised support and due care is targeted at those who need it.</p> <p>g) The programme provides supports for enrolled learners who have special education and training needs.</p> <p>h) The programme makes reasonable accommodations for learners with disabilities.</p> <p>i) If the programme aims to enrol international students it complies with the <i>Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Students</i> and there are appropriate in-service supports in areas such as English language, learning skills, information technology skills and such like, to address the particular needs of international learners and enable such learners to successfully participate in the programme.</p> <p>j) The programme's learners will be well cared for and safe while participating in the programme, (e.g. while at the provider's premises or those of any collaborators involved in provision, the programme's locations of provision including any workplace locations or practice-placement locations).</p>		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MA in Psychotherapy	Yes	<p>Learner feedback identified gaps in communication about additional mandatory costs (personal therapy, supervision) and the practicalities of the teach-out and deferral arrangements. This shows that the mechanisms that are in place are effective and fit for purpose.</p> <p>Learner support services, including disability support, academic writing support, and counselling, are available and referenced in programme materials.</p> <p>Professional suitability processes, clinical supervision, and programme board structures provide strong oversight of individual learner progress.</p>

Criterion 12. The programme is well managed

<p>a) The programme includes intrinsic governance, quality assurance, learner assessment, and access, transfer and progression procedures that functionally interface with the provider’s general or institutional procedures.</p> <p>b) The programme interfaces effectively with the provider’s QQI approved quality assurance procedures. Any proposed incremental changes to the provider’s QA procedures required by the programme or programme-specific QA procedures have been developed having regard to QQI’s statutory QA guidelines. If the QA procedures allow the provider to approve the centres within the provider that may provide the programme, the procedures and criteria for this should be fit-for-the-purpose of identifying which centres are suited to provide the programme and which are not.</p> <p>c) There are explicit and suitable programme-specific criteria for selecting persons who meet the programme’s staffing requirements and can be added to the programme’s complement of staff.</p> <p>d) There are explicit and suitable programme-specific criteria for selecting physical resources that meet the programmes physical resource requirements, and can be added to the programme’s complement of supported physical resources.</p> <p>e) Quality assurance is intrinsic to the programme’s maintenance arrangements and addresses all aspects highlighted by the validation criteria.</p> <p>f) The programme-specific quality assurance arrangements are consistent with QQI’s statutory QA guidelines and use continually monitored completion rates and other sources of information that may provide insight into the quality and standards achieved.</p> <p>g) The programme operation and management arrangements are coherently documented and suitable.</p> <p>h) There are sound procedures for interface with QQI certification.</p>		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MA in Psychotherapy	Yes	<p>Programme governance structures are clearly documented in the QAH and programme-specific documentation. Monthly team meetings, semesterised programme boards, and class representative meetings provide regular monitoring.</p> <p>The DBS QAH is aligned with QQI's Core Statutory QA Guidelines. The programme demonstrates ongoing engagement with the QA cycle.</p> <p>DBS has documented a comprehensive plan for managing the teach-out, including retention of key staff, maintenance of IAHIP recognition, continuation of clinical placement governance, and regular learner communication.</p>

Part 3. Overall recommendation to QQI

3.1 Principal programme:

Select one	
	Satisfactory (meaning that it recommends that QQI can be satisfied in the context of unit 2.3) of Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training;
✓	Satisfactory subject to proposed special conditions (specified with timescale for compliance for each condition; these may include proposed pre-validation conditions i.e. proposed (minor) things to be done to a programme that almost fully meets the validation criteria before QQI makes a determination);
	Not satisfactory.

Reasons for the overall recommendation

The panel is satisfied that the revised Master of Arts in Psychotherapy meets the QQI validation criteria to the required standard, subject to the condition below. The programme is a well-established, professionally credible Level 9 training with a clear humanistic-integrative-psychodynamic identity, strong external recognition from IAHIP and ICP, good learner outcomes and a committed and experienced staff team. The proposed programme enhancements — including assessment redesign, MIPLO revision, career day introduction, and strengthened clinical placement documentation — are appropriate and evidence-based. DBS has demonstrated a credible and transparent plan for maintaining quality through the teach-out period.

Special Conditions of Validation (directive and with timescale for compliance)

1. It is a condition of validation that course information on the provider's website, prospectuses and any other public information outlets need to specify that there will be additional costs associated with the programme – for example, personal therapy and clinical supervision, as well as the time requirements associated with these.

Post PAEC Meeting 09 April 2026 – Additional Special Condition of Validation

2. Following the PAEC meeting on 09 April, the PAEC requested that the Executive seek regulatory and progression confirmation for learners on this programme. Once confirmed, a special condition of validation to be included in the IER Report. CORU provided confirmation, and as a special condition of validation for this programme, QQI has added this at Section 2.5 of the Certificate of Validation and requires that the following information be made available to (proposed) learners on this programme:

Learners should note that, at this time, the CORU register for counsellors and psychotherapists is not yet open, and that this programme is not approved by CORU for the purposes of registration.

CORU has indicated that, when the register opens, a grandparenting process is envisaged for applicants who are already practicing in the profession. Eligibility for grandparenting will be determined by the Registration Board at that time and will be subject to defined threshold criteria, which may include the nature and scope of practice, number of hours of professional

practice completed, supervised practice, and other regulatory requirements.

Completion of this programme does not of itself confer eligibility for statutory registration, nor can eligibility for registration through grandparenting be guaranteed. Any future application for registration will be assessed by the Registration Board on an individual basis, in accordance with the legislation, standards of proficiency, and grandparenting criteria in force at the time of application.

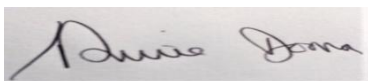
Prospective and enrolled learners are therefore advised to consider this programme as an academic qualification, and not as a programme that confers, or guarantees, professional registration. They should seek up to date information directly from CORU when making decisions about professional registration.

Recommendations

1. The panel recommends that the programme's deferral policy be formalised and published to clearly outline the maximum period of time for deferral, bearing in mind the individual needs of the student.
2. The panel recommends that the programme management engage with other providers to establish transfer pathways when CORU approved programmes become available.
3. The panel recommends that a more explicit reference to person centred theory in the theoretical component of the programme, and to consider alternative theoretical perspectives.
4. The panel recommends that the programme team explores the possibility of including online and telephone therapy within the placement provider options.
5. The panel recommends that the programme management consider the introduction of compulsory training in AI for all programme staff.
6. The panel recommends the programme team introduce a series of workshops covering topics such as note-taking appropriate for court subpoena, report writing, practice of online therapy, and running an independent private practice.

Declarations of Evaluators' Interests

This report has been agreed by the evaluation panel and is signed on their behalf by the chairperson.



Panel chairperson: Dr Annie Doona

Date: 2nd March 2026

Signed:

3.2 Disclaimer

The Report of the External Review Panel contains no assurances, warranties or representations express or implied, regarding the aforesaid issues, or any other issues outside the Terms of Reference.

While QQI has endeavoured to ensure that the information contained in the Report is correct, complete and up-to-date, any reliance placed on such information is strictly at the reader's own risk, and in no event will QQI be liable for any loss or damage (including without limitation, indirect or consequential loss or damage) arising from, or in connection with, the use of the information contained in the Report of the External Evaluation Panel.

Part 4. Proposed programme schedules *(post panel feedback and consequent amendments, if any)*

1B.3 Proposed Programme Schedule(s)															
Name of Provider:		Dublin Business School													
Programme Title <i>(Principal)</i>		Master of Arts in Psychotherapy			QQI Award Title		Master of Arts in Psychotherapy			ECTS		90			
Stage (1,2,3, Award etc)		Award	Exit Award Title <i>(if relevant)</i>			NA					Stage ECTS		90		
Programme Delivery Mode - <i>✓ one as appropriate.</i>		On-site Face-to-Face			Blended			Online			Workplace Learning				
		✓													
Teaching and Learning Modalities - <i>✓ one or more as appropriate.</i>		On-site Face-to-Face		Synchronous Hybrid		Synchronous Online		Asynchronous			Work Based				
		✓									✓				
Assessment Techniques Utilised in Stage - <i>✓ one or more as appropriate.</i>		Continuous Assessment		Invigilated Exam – in person		Proctored Exam – online		Project			Practical Skills Demonstration		Work Based		
		✓									✓		✓		
Modules in this stage (add rows as required)															
Total Student Effort Module (hours)										Assessment – Allocation of Marks <i>(from the module assessment strategy)</i>					
Module Title	Semester	Mandatory (M) or Elective (E)	Credits (ECTS)	Total Hours	In person	Synchronous	Independent learning & Assignment	Work Based	Continuous Assessment %	Proctored Exam – in person %	Proctored Exam – online %	Project %	Practical Skills Demonstration %	Work Based %	

Theory and Practice 1: Psychodynamic Psychotherapy	1	M	5	125	18		107		100%						
Theory and Practice 2: Integrative Psychotherapy Introduction	2	M	5	125	18		107		100%						
Research Project	2 + 3 + 4	M	15	375	50		325		100%						
The Body in Psychotherapy	1	M	5	125	18		107		100%						
Gestalt Therapy	1 + 2	M	5	125	22.5		102.5		100%						
Existential Psychotherapy	1 + 2	M	5	125	22.5		102.5		100%						
Theory and Practice 3: Object Relations	3	M	5	125	18		107		100%						
Theory and Practice 4: Integrative Psychotherapy Advanced Practice	4	M	5	125	18		107		100%						
Workshops	3 + 4	M	5	125	24		101		100%						
Self Subject Person	3	M	5	125	18		107		100%						
Psychotherapy and the Public Sphere	2	M	5	125	18		107		100%						
Ethics and Contemporary Issues	4	M	5	125	18		107		100%						
Clinical Group Supervision	1 - 4	M	5	100	60		40		60%				40%		
Process Groups	1 - 4	M	5	60	60								100%		
Supervised Clinical Practice	1 - 4	M	10	250	40		10	200							100%