June 2024/QP V.6 © QQI

POLICY AND CRITERIA FOR
VALIDATION OF PROGRAMMES

Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and Qualifications Ireland

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION AND LEGAL BASIS

This paper sets out core policy and associated criteria for the validation of education and training programmes by QQI.

Validation is a regulatory process that determines whether or not a new programme proposed by a provider can offer a specified QQI award(s). There are associated processes related to renewal, extension, modification, and withdrawal of validation which are also described here.

This document is focused on the policy and will not detail the associated processes as these are documented elsewhere.

Section 9 of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act (2012) lists the general functions of QQI. Section 9(d) states one of these functions to be:

'to validate programmes of education and training, and review and monitor the validated programmes.'

Sections 44 to 47 of the Act set out the legislative parameters for QQI's validation function and associated processes.

Section 45 (5) stipulates that a provider who falsely claims or represents that QQI has validated a programme of education and training of the provider commits an offence.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this QQI policy is to:

- explain the meaning of *'validation of a programme of education and training'*
- specify the remit within which QQI can validate a programme
- guide providers in the development of programmes
- guide QQI in the validation of programmes
- set out the criteria which underpin validation decisions
- set out the relationship between validation and related QQI functions, particularly those relating to QQI awards
- describe the roles and responsibilities of actors in the validation process
- identify where further information can be found on how to access the validation related processes
- provide a policy reference point for those providers to whom authority to make an award has been delegated.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to programmes of education and training where:

- the programme leads to a QQI award.

- the provider submitting the programme has all relevant quality assurance procedures approved by QQI. (s28 of the 2012 Act).   See QQI Policy on Quality Assurance Approval.

This policy does not apply to those classes of programmes for which a provider has been delegated authority to make awards. As stated above, it can act as a reference point for that provider's own policy development.

4. POLICY

4.1. INTERPRETATIONS

The following are interpretations of terms particularly relevant to the policy statement which follows.

Programme: A programme of education and training is a process by which a learner acquires stated learning outcomes of knowledge, skill and/or competence.

The programme will include *assessment of the learner's* achievement of those learning outcomes, for the purpose of certification by QQI i.e. a programme will offer a QQI award to those learners who successfully complete it by achieving the programme's learning outcomes.

A programme will comprise one or more stages[1], which in turn will be sub-divided into *modules*. Each construct will have its own learning outcomes.

A group of one or more modules within a programme may, if it forms a coherent whole, be proposed for validation as an embedded programme. If validated, this will also lead to a QQI award[2] on the NFQ which may be offered as a standalone offering or as an *exit only award* for learners who don't complete the *principal programme.*

Stream: An embedded programme comprising all the mandatory modules and a selection of electives from the principal programme, the stream will lead to an award of the same level, class and type as that of the principal programme, but with a specialisation reflecting the electives selected.

In order to be considered a separate stream and distinct from the principal programme, the total credit value of the electives chosen needs to be at least 30% of the total credit value of the award.

---

[1]   Fuller explanations of terms shown in italics can be found in the QQI Awards Glossary of Terms
[2]   An embedded award must fit the profile of an award in the NFQ and may be a major, special purpose or minor award. Minor awards must be linked to a major award.

There should be no more than three streams embedded in a principal programme.

Provider: A provider is a legal 'person' who provides, organises, or procures a programme. The 'person' will normally be a public or private organisation established to offer education and training but may have many different forms e.g. large colleges, distributed organisations, multi-party collaborations and small companies / voluntary bodies.

For the purpose of validation, a provider will already have established a relationship through QQI by having had its quality assurance procedures approved with reference to QQI's statutory guidelines. The provider will have responsibility for quality assurance of any validated programme and for organising certification for learners.

Award: An award is made by QQI to learners who have demonstrated through assessment, achievement of the knowledge, skills and/or competence required to complete a validated programme.

4.2. POLICY STATEMENT

Validation is a regulatory process whereby QQI determines whether a programme submitted by a provider is capable of enabling a learner to achieve the knowledge, skills and/or competence required to achieve a named QQI award.

It follows that:

- QQI's determination is based on an independent evaluation of the programme using QQI's validation criteria. The findings of the evaluation will be published following the QQI determination.

- The *de facto* award standard for a particular named award is the statement of minimum intended programme learning outcomes approved at validation of the corresponding programme.

- Validation of a programme is for a defined and limited period i.e. normally five years. Learners can only be enrolled on the programme within the period of validation.

- Validation will expire automatically unless renewed or extended through a QQI process.

- Where a QQI award standard is already specified, a proposed programme should demonstrate how this standard will be achieved.

- Where a QQI award standard is not already specified, a provider can propose the programme learning outcomes to become an award standard. In such a case, the provider should show that the programme learning outcomes align with the proposed NFQ level and award type descriptor.

- Certain providers are obliged under the 2012 Act to submit their programmes to QQI for validation. These are identified in section 44, subsections 9-12 of the 2012 Act.

- Validation applies to a provider's programme rather than to the programme in isolation from the provider i.e. the organisation, its staff, other resources, and quality assurance are intrinsic parts of the programme. Hence, a validated programme is not transferrable from one provider to another.

- QQI will not validate programmes retrospectively.

5.   VALIDATION CRITERIA

Below are listed the core criteria for validating a programme. It is necessary that all applications for validation demonstrate compliance with all twelve criteria.

As well as being the basis for validation decisions, the criteria are also intended to assist providers to develop programmes of good quality, likely to achieve their objectives.

It is expected that a provider will evaluate the programme against the criteria prior to the application being made. Confirmation by the chair of the relevant academic / quality committee of a positive self-evaluation should accompany an application for validation.

QQI's evaluation against the criteria as part of the validation process is intended to improve the programme through the application of independent expertise. When evaluating a programme, an independent panel will rate the programme as either Satisfactory, Partially Satisfactory or Not Satisfactory in respect of each criterion.

The core criteria listed below are expanded using indicators as shown in Appendix 2. These clarify the meaning of each criterion and guide providers as to how it can be met. It is not expected that a programme will address every indicator. The members of the independent evaluation panel will apply their experience and expertise in the use of the indicators in deciding the criticality of each to a particular programme.

		Criterion
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, 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 programme 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 enrolled on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for.
12		The programme is well managed.

6. PRECONDITIONS FOR VALIDATION

In order to make an application to QQI for validation of a programme, a provider must have:

- Quality assurance procedures appropriate to the programme in place, which have been approved by QQI.

- Generic procedures for access, transfer, and progression under section 56 of the 2012 Act, which have been approved by QQI.

- Complied with section 65 of the 2012 Act in respect of arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners (PEL)

- Consulted with any other provider / stakeholder who will be involved in the delivery of all or part of the programme and must have documented the respective responsibilities.

A provider who has had its quality assurance procedures approved by QQI will already have met the first three preconditions.

7. EVALUATION PROCESS

The validation process involves an independent evaluation of the programme by a suitably qualified panel of people using the validation criteria as the basis of their evaluation.

The panel documents its findings against the criteria and its overall recommendation to QQI in an Independent Evaluation Report (IER) for QQI.

The panel can recommend that QQI:

- Validate

- Validate Subject to Special Conditions

- Refuse to Validate

Each recommendation should be based on evidence cited in the report with reference to the criteria.

It is important to emphasise that the process is more than just a tool to deliver a binary decision – validate or refuse validation. It is intended to add value to the programme by bringing peer expertise to evaluate it. Almost all programmes will be given recommendations (voluntary) and / or conditions (mandatory), intended to improve the programme, even where the ultimate QQI decision is to validate.

QQI manages the evaluation process to ensure its integrity and, using the panel's findings and recommendation and the provider's response to same, to determine, i.e. decide on, validation.

8.   VALIDATION DECISIONS

A validation process will result in one of three decisions by QQI, each with its own implications as set out below.

Decision by QQI	Implication
Validate	If validated, each programme, principal or embedded, will have an associated QQI award which is then available to learners who successfully complete the programme. The de facto award standard will be the approved programme learning outcomes. The programme will have an approved enrolment period and limits to enrolment. Details of the programme are published on the Irish Register of Qualifications and via the Certificate of Validation.
Validate subject to Special Conditions	The programme will be validated as above. In addition, however, in order to maintain the validation, the provider must, within a specified time period after approval, address some specific, concrete issues identified by the panel and approved by QQI. Some conditions may need to be met prior to the first intake of learners, while others may be met within a specified time period after the programme commences. The QQI Executive will monitor the fulfilment of these conditions.

Refuse Validation	The programme cannot progress any further. The reasons for refusal will be specified in the panel report approved by QQI.
	A decision to refuse validation, given its significance for the provider, is subject to QQI's internal quality assurance before it is confirmed.
	All refusals are referred to the Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC), a part of QQI's governance. The members of this Committee are independent of QQI. Having reviewed a decision to refuse validation, the PAOC may confirm this decision or refer it back for further consideration.
	If the refusal is confirmed by PAOC, the provider may make an appeal to the Appeals Panel which can review the validation process as it has been applied to the provider's programme(s).
	If the provider does not make an appeal or if the appeal is denied, the panel report is then published on IRQ.ie.

9.   VALIDATION PROCESS TYPES

9.1.   PROGRAMME LIFE CYCLE

There are a number of processes included in QQI's overall validation function which reflect the **programme life cycle** i.e. a **new** programme is developed, validated, delivered, certified, reviewed, refreshed, and replaced (**revalidated**), and is eventually **withdrawn** as an offering to learners when no longer useful.

During a period of validation, a programme may require an approved **modification** or, for whatever reason, may require an **extension** to its period of validation.

Each validation process type is briefly described below. The detail of each process and the associated fees are available in separate process guides available on QQI's website.

The importance of the provider's own quality assurance and academic governance for all of these processes must be emphasised i.e. all validation submissions need to be made by or endorsed by the provider's academic council / quality committee. Where there is evidence that pre-submission quality assurance has been thorough and effective, evaluation by QQI will be proportionately easier and faster.

9.2.   PROCESS 1:   NEW VALIDATION

A novel programme originates with a provider that identifies a learning need which can be addressed and accredited by a validated programme. It is crucial that the learning need, the rationale for an award, the target learner profile and the broad programme learner outcomes can be clearly articulated as a proposal for internal consideration by the provider's corporate and academic governance prior to development.

If approved for further consideration, the programme should be developed as per the provider's approved procedures for programme development. This process will include self-evaluation against the core criteria listed above, using the indicators as guidance.

Once assured of the programme's readiness, the proposed programme is submitted to QQI for validation. This will give a programme and each of its embedded programmes, if any, a unique identifier which it will retain in perpetuity.

9.2.1. Differential Validation

Differential validation: this is a variation of the process for new validation, where a programme is subjected to a customised evaluation focusing only on those aspects which differ from an already validated version of the programme. This approach may be used in the following contexts:

Shared programmes: In situations where a group of providers have a very similar mission and profile, e.g. Education and Training Boards, it is possible for them to share among themselves an approved curriculum[3], especially where there has been collaborative development and an agreed structure and content.

Where one provider, the lead, submits the programme to QQI and has it evaluated in the normal way, the final, approved curriculum can be shared with the other, sharing, providers.

In such situations, each of the other providers can submit the same curriculum for validation, customised with their own provider details. In this situation, QQI can take the approach that there is no need to evaluate the curriculum again, but will focus on the differences, in this case, the provider details.

Changed programme: A provider may seek validation of a new programme derived from another, recently validated, programme. If the scope of change is not significant enough to require new validation, this can be a differential validation.
In this scenario also, the evaluation of the newer programme can be confined to the difference(s) from the original.

All such programmes, differentially validated, will have the same period of validation as the original and will be expected to go through review and revalidation as a group.

9.3.   PROCESS 2: REVALIDATION

As validation is timebound, a validated programme will expire unless its validation is renewed. This is termed *revalidation* and comprises four main phases, the first three of which are major parts of the provider's own quality assurance:

1.   Review of the current programme as it has been implemented since validation. This will culminate in a decision whether to apply to revalidate the programme or not.

---

3   those parts of the programme not specific to the provider

2. If the decision is to seek revalidation, then the programme is subject to a **Rewrite**, where the learning from the review phase is used to address any issues identified and to refresh the content.

3. The revised programme is then subject to **independent evaluation against validation criteria** by a panel of experts appointed by the provider under QQI oversight. The panel will also report on the effectiveness of the provider's review.

4. The final phase is the **validation by QQI**. This is based on the recommendation of the independent evaluation process already organised by the provider. Hence, the time between application and validation decision is usually quite short. The potential decisions and governance of same is the same as for new validation.

5. When an 'old' programme is revalidated, it will be replaced by the newer version for any new intakes. Learners already part way through the older version may, depending on the extent of the changes made, move over to the new version or finish out the older version of the programme. When there are no more learners to complete the old version, its validation will be withdrawn (see below) and the associated QQI award will be deactivated[4].

6. If, following a programme review, a provider decides not to seek revalidation of a programme, the provider can inform QQI of its intention to close the programme. This will end with withdrawal of validation on an agreed date.

9.4.   PROCESS 3: MODIFICATION OF VALIDATION

If a significant issue arises for a validated programme during its period of validation, the provider may request that QQI allow a modification to the programme to address the issue.

Recognising that tweaks and changes are normal parts of programme delivery, deciding on what is a 'significant' modification and needing QQI approval can be difficult.   A general rule of thumb is that if the modification would impact on the Certificate of Validation and / or the Programme Schedule, then QQI needs to be alerted and approval for the modification requested.

Any proposed modification requests should include evidence that the request has the approval of the provider's own academic governance.

9.5.   PROCESS 4: EXTENSION OF VALIDATION

Where there are unusual and compelling grounds, a provider may request an extension of the period of validation i.e. the period within which new intakes of learners can be enrolled.

In making any request for an extension, the provider must set out the reasons for the request and ensure that the implications of any extension are also addressed e.g. arrangements for Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL) would need to be extended too.

QQI may or may not agree to an extension.

---

4   CAS awards are not linked to individual programmes and so are not deactivated when a programme's validation is withdrawn.

9.6. PROCESS 5: WITHDRAWAL OF VALIDATION

Withdrawal by QQI of a programme's validation means the programme is no longer valid and that no new learners can be enrolled.   Following withdrawal, the programme will no longer appear on the Irish Register of Qualifications and the associated QQI award will be deactivated[5].

Validation can be withdrawn for a number of reasons.

1. Replacement of the programme by a newer version following **revalidation**. The revalidation process should set out if and how learners on the 'old' version migrate to a newer version.

2. **Following Programme Review by Provider**: Following review, the provider has decided that there is no longer a sound basis for continuing to offer the programme. Validation will be withdrawn following programme teach out of any learners remaining on the programme.

3. **Following Programme Review by QQI**: QQI may, at any time, review a programme of education and training which it has validated (section 46 of the 2012 Act). This is termed a focused review, procedures for which are published on the QQI website.   A focused review will generally follow from an issue raised about the continuing validity of all or part of the programme or the provider's quality assurance procedures. The outcome from such a review may be a recommendation that validation of the programme be withdrawn by QQI. Where this happens, the provider may appeal against the withdrawal to the Appeals Panel.

4. **Following QA Review by QQI:** Under section 36 (4) of the 2012 Act, QQI may review and withdraw approval for a provider's quality assurance procedures. In such a case, validation of all of that provider's programmes would also be withdrawn.

9.7. FEES

The fees for all Provider Approval processes are included in the Schedule of Fees published by QQI.

10. DEVOLUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY (DR)

Wherever possible, QQI will recognise provider capacity for self-governance.

Where a provider has demonstrated that it has both the necessary resources and procedures, QQI may devolve responsibility for parts of a validation process to that provider in respect of some or all of its own programmes. The scope of a provider's DR is specified in a formal memorandum of agreement (MoA) with QQI.

Where a provider has DR, responsibility for all validation decisions is retained by QQI and those responsibilities which are devolved are conducted under QQI oversight.

The remit of DR in respect of the various validation processes is set out below.

---

5   CAS awards are not linked to individual programmes and so are not deactivated when a programme's validation is withdrawn.

10.1.   DR IN NEW VALIDATION

A provider with DR will have responsibility for managing the independent evaluation process i.e. appointing and supporting an independent panel and arranging for the panel report and recommendation.

10.2.   DR IN REVALIDATION

There is an element of DR in all revalidation processes, as it is expected that the provider will propose and appoint the independent panel and arrange for the production of the independent panel's report, in much the same manner as set out above for New Validations.

As it is already part of a provider's responsibility to quality assure its programmes, providers do not need to be approved for DR in order to manage the evaluation part of the revalidation process.

10.3.   DR IN MODIFICATION OF VALIDATION

For large, distributed providers with many centres geographically or otherwise separated e.g. ETBs and Teagasc, it is often necessary to make minor adjustments to a validated programme to take account of locally specific circumstances.

These adjustments (localisations) can be numerous over the course of a programme's life cycle. Rather than formally seek QQI approval for such minor changes, in the spirit of subsidiarity, responsibility for approval can be devolved to the provider's own academic governance structures. As with all DR, this would be subject to the provider showing that such governance structures with appropriate resources and procedures are in place.

10.4.   DR IN EXTENSION OF VALIDATION

Responsibility for extension of validation is not devolved.

11.   'EUROPEAN APPROACH'

In accordance with the European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, QQI will apply a modified approach to validation which accepts the outcome of an external evaluation of the programme, based on the European Approach. This approach will apply to joint programmes which involve a relevant provider already approved to offer QQI awards and where a QQI award is to be made to learners enrolled with that provider.

QQI accepts that, according to the European Approach, where the external evaluation of the joint programme is carried out by an EQAR (European Register for Quality Assurance in Higher Education)-registered external quality assurance agency using the European Approach, the outcome and report of that process is accepted as the basis on which the programme is validated without additional evaluation or validation procedures. Therefore, if a relevant provider which is a member of a consortium for which a programme evaluation has been completed using the

13

European Approach, applies to QQI for validation, QQI will not conduct its own evaluation, but will determine validation on the basis of the evaluation already carried out.

There are conditions which must be met in validating a programme using the European Approach:

- The standard pre-conditions to validation will apply.
- The award resulting from the programme must be capable of inclusion in the NFQ i.e. the application to QQI must identify the NFQ Level, Class, Award Type and credit value expressed in ECTS6[1].
- QQI will only make awards to learners enrolled with the relevant provider.

QQI has also, as an external quality assurance agency, published procedures for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes based on the European Approach.

---

6   [1] ECTS   European Credit Transfer System

12. CONDITIONS OF VALIDATION

Validation is always subject to conditions. Providers must ensure these conditions are met and continue to be met. Failure to comply with a condition can result in refusal or withdrawal of validation.

There are different types of conditions, described as follows:

Statutory Conditions

These are derived from section 45(3) of the 2012 Act and apply to all programmes. They are listed in Appendix 1.

General Conditions

These are set by QQI in this policy and also apply to all programmes. They are listed in Appendix 1.

Special Conditions

These are proposed by the independent evaluation panel and are programme specific.

Most special conditions must be addressed by the provider *before* the panel will make its final recommendation to QQI. These often but not always, relate to the programme documentation.

Other special conditions are to be met *after* validation. These must be quite specific and include a timeline. If the PAEC accepts the panel's recommendation, the programme will be validated *subject to the special conditions.*

13. CERTIFICATE OF VALIDATION

If the Programme Awards and Executive Committee (PAEC) decides to validate a programme, details of that programme and its validation will be published in a Certificate of Validation. The certificate will include details including:

- provider
- award
- programme code, title, and synopsis
- target learner profile
- programme learning outcomes
- approved validation period
- statutory and general conditions of validation
- special conditions of validation, if any, and current implementation status.

The information on the certificate derives from what is entered into QHub about the programme. Hence, it is critical that information in QHub be accurate and reflect any details of the programme

updated following the independent evaluation.

The certificate of validation is published together with other programme-specific information on the Irish Register of Qualifications.

14. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN VALIDATION PROCESSES

The primary actors in a validation process are:

- Provider
- QQI Executive
- Independent panel
- QQI Governance Committees
    - Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC)
    - Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC)
- Appeals Panel

The roles and responsibilities of each are summarised below:

Provider:

The provider will

1. Develop and document a programme ensuring that pre-conditions, including PEL, have been addressed.
2. Self-evaluate the programme, using internal and / or independent expertise, with reference to this and related QQI policy, criteria and QA guidelines.
3. Submit the programme to QQI via its intranet (QHub)
4. Pay the validation fee.
5. Respond to any requests for clarification or amendment from QQI Executive during screening of the programme.
6. Participate in the independent evaluation process.
7. Respond to findings of the independent evaluation process.
8. Quality assure and monitor the programme as delivered.
9. Review the programme for effectiveness and achievement of objectives.
10. Revise the programme and submit for revalidation.

QQI Executive:

The QQI Executive will:

1. Explain the processes whereby a provider can apply for validation of a programme(s).

2. Screen applications for validation made by providers.

3. Ensure that the programme is independently evaluated against validation criteria.

4. Present the findings of the independent panel to the PAEC for decision.

5. Implement the decisions of PAEC and publish independent evaluation reports (IERs).

6. Provide all information required by PAOC and / or Appeals panel to facilitate their operations.

Independent Panel:

The independent panel will:

1. Comprise expertise in quality assurance, subject matter area and stakeholder (industry, professional body, higher education) concerns.

2. Include perspective of a peer of the provider whose programme is being evaluated.

3. Include learner perspective where appropriate.

4. Be transparent in its composition and motivation. Potential panel members will sign declarations on confidentiality and conflict of interest. Before a panel is confirmed and given access to programme documentation, a provider may raise concerns about its composition.

Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC):
The PAEC will:

1. Review an application made under this policy together with the IER and the provider's response to same.

2. Make a determination on validation.

Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC):
The PAOC will:

1. Review any validation process resulting in a decision by PAEC to refuse validation.

2. In each case, decide to confirm the PAEC decision or to refer it back for further consideration.

Appeals Panel:

The Appeals Panel will:

1. Review any request by a provider who wishes to appeal an approval decision made by ARC or PAEC.

2. In each case, the Panel may confirm the original decision or quash the decision and direct the PAEC to reconsider.

15. REVIEW OF POLICY

This policy and embedded criteria are to be reviewed no later than five years after approval by the QQI Board.

16. APPENDIX 1 – CONDITIONS OF VALIDATION

16.1. STATUTORY CONDITIONS OF VALIDATION

The statutory (section 45(3) of the 2012 Act) conditions of validation are that the provider of the programme shall:

1. Co-operate with and assist QQI in the performance of QQI's functions in so far as those functions relate to the functions of the provider,

2. Establish procedures which are fair and consistent for the assessment of enrolled learners to ensure the standards of knowledge, skill or competence determined by QQI under section 49 (1) are acquired, and where appropriate, demonstrated, by enrolled learners,

3. Continue to comply with section 65 of the 2012 Act in respect of arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners, if applicable, and

4. Provide to QQI such information as QQI may from time to time require for the purposes of the performance of its functions, including information in respect of completion rates.

16.2. GENERAL CONDITIONS OF VALIDATION

The provider of the programme shall

1. Ensure that the programme as implemented does not differ in a material way from the programme as validated; differing in a material way is defined as differing in any aspect of the programme or its implementation that was material to QQI's validation criteria.

2. Ensure that the programme is provided with the appropriate staff and physical resources as validated.

3. Implement in respect of the programme its written quality assurance procedures (as approved by QQI).

4. Make no significant change to the programme without the prior approval of QQI.

5. Unless otherwise agreed by QQI in writing, start implementing the programme as validated and enrol learners within 18 months of validation.

6. Continue in respect of the validated programme to comply with section 56 of the 2012 Act in respect of procedures for access, transfer and progression.

7. Implement the programme and procedures for assessment of learners in accordance with the Approved Programme Schedule and notify QQI in writing of any amendments to this arising from changes to the programme;

8. When advertising and promoting the programme and awards, use the programme title as validated, and the correct QQI award title(s), award type(s) and award class(es) indicating the level of the award(s) on the National Framework of Qualifications.

9. Adhere to QQI regulations and procedures for certification.

10. Notify QQI in writing without delay of:

    A. any material changes to the programme;

    B. anything that impacts on the integrity or reputation of the programme or the corresponding QQI awards;

    C. anything that infringes the conditions of validation; or

    D. anything that would be likely to cause QQI to consider reviewing the validation.

11. Notify QQI in writing to determine the implications for the provider's validated programmes, where the provider is likely to, or planning to, merge (amalgamate) with another entity or to acquire, or be acquired by, another entity.

12. Report to QQI, when required or requested, on its implementation of the programme and compliance with the conditions of validation.

17. APPENDIX 2: VALIDATION CRITERIA AND INDICATORS

Criterion 1: THE PROVIDER IS ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR VALIDATION OF THE PROGRAMME

Indicators

A. The provider meets the prerequisites (section 44(7) of the 2012 Act) to apply for validation of the programme i.e. (having approval for QA procedures, AT&P procedures and, if relevant, PEL procedures)

B. The application for validation is signed by the provider's chief executive (or equivalent) who confirms that the information provided is truthful, the applicable criteria have been addressed and the application has the approval of the provider's academic governance.

C. The provider has declared that their programme complies with any applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.

Criterion 2: THE PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES ARE CLEAR AND CONSISTENT WITH THE QQI AWARDS SOUGHT

Indicators

A. The programme aims and objectives are expressed plainly.

B. A QQI award is specified for those who complete the principal programme and any embedded programme.

C. There is a satisfactory rationale for the choice of QQI award(s).

D. The programme's minimum intended programme learning outcomes (MIPLOs) and credit value are appropriate to the specified NFQ level and award type.

E. The award title(s) is consistent with QQI's Policy and Criteria for Making Awards and comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.

F. The programme title and any embedded programme titles are

   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

   i. The MIPLOs and any other educational or training objectives of the programme are explicitly specified.

   ii. The MIPLOs are consistent with or exceed the relevant QQI awards standards.

H. Where applicable, the minimum intended module learning outcomes (MIMLOs) are explicitly specified for each of the programme's modules.

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).

Indicators

A.   The development of the programme and the intended programme learning outcomes has considered 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.   There is a satisfactory rationale for providing the programme. This is demonstrated by evidence of:

- support from relevant stakeholders (such as employers, or professional, regulatory, or statutory bodies)

- learner demand

- employment opportunities for graduates where relevant

- the programme potentially meeting genuine education and training needs.

C.   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.

D.   There are responsibilities, mechanisms and resources within the provider to keep the programme updated in consultation with internal and external stakeholders.

E.   Employers and practitioners in the case of vocational and professional awards have been systematically involved in the programme design where the programme is vocationally or professionally oriented.

Criterion 4: THE PROGRAMME'S ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION ARRANGEMENTS ARE SATISFACTORY

Indicators

A. All information about the programme is accurate and available to stakeholders in plain language.

B. A learner handbook is available, setting out in plain language what the programme expects of learners and what learners can expect of the programme.

C. General learner supports and appeals / complaints processes are published.

D. Entry requirements are clearly specified. These include, as appropriate, the expected minimum level of:

    i.   general learning

    ii.   programme discipline specific learning.

    iii.   maths

    iv.   English language

    v.   IT resources and competency

E. If available, opportunities for recognition of prior learning (RPL) for access and advanced entry to the programme are clearly specified, including procedures and criteria.

F. The curriculum reflects the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

G. The programme title (the title used to refer to the programme):-

    viii.   reflects the core intended programme learning outcomes and is consistent with the standards and purposes of the QQI awards to which it leads, the award title(s) and their class(es).

    ix.   is learner focused and meaningful to the learners.

    x.   has long-lasting significance.

    xi.   the programme title is otherwise legitimate; for example, it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory, and professional body requirements.

Criterion 5: THE PROGRAMME'S WRITTEN CURRICULUM IS WELL STRUCTURED AND FIT FOR PURPOSE

Indicators

A.   The programme structure is clear. Stages and modules are clearly identified.

B.   The objectives and purposes of each module and each stage are clear to learners and to staff.

C.   The programme is structured and scheduled realistically based on sound educational and training principles.

D.   The curriculum is comprehensively and systematically documented.

E.   Wherever feasible, opportunities for integration of learning and assessment have been taken.

F.   There is clarity as to how module assessments will ultimately address assessment of programme learning outcomes.

G.   Where feasible and consistent with the overall programme learning outcomes, learners are given choice of elective modules.

H.   The credit allocated to each module is consistent with the credit system being used i.e. ECTS or FET

I.   Practice placements and work-based phases are provided with the same rigour and attentiveness as other parts of the programme.

J.   Curriculum written for asynchronous online delivery is appropriately designed and quality assured.

K.   Curriculum designed for work integrated learning has appropriate teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

Criterion 6: THERE ARE SUFFICIENT QUALIFIED AND CAPABLE PROGRAMME STAFF AVAILABLE TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAMME AS PLANNED

Indicators

A.   The specification of the programme's staffing requirements is 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.

B.   The programme has an identified complement of staff (or potential staff) who are available, qualified, and competent to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes and to assess learners' achievements as required.

C.   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.

D.   Curriculum intended for work integrated learning or asynchronous learning is designed and supported by suitably trained staff.

E.   Staff have access to continuous professional development to ensure continuing capability to

fulfil their roles.

F.   There are explicit and suitable programme-specific criteria for selecting persons who meet the programme's staffing requirements and who can be added to the programme's complement of staff.

G.   There are arrangements for programme staff performance to be reviewed and there are mechanisms for encouraging development and for addressing underperformance.

Criterion 7:   THERE ARE SUFFICIENT PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL RESOURCES TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAMME AS PLANNED

Indicators

A.   The specification of the programme's physical and digital resource requirements is precise, and consistent with the programme, its defined purpose, and its resource / learner-ratio requirements.

B.   The programme has an identified complement of supported resources that are available, or committed to be available; e.g.:

   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, especially where blended and online modes are used

   vi.   administrative support

   vii.   company placements/internships – if applicable

C.   There are explicit and suitable programme-specific criteria for selecting physical /digital resources that meet the programmes requirements and can be added to the programme's complement of supported resources.

Criterion 8:   THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IS CONSISTENT WITH THE NEEDS OF THE PROGRAMME'S LEARNERS

Indicators

A.   The programme's physical, social, cultural, and intellectual environment (recognising that the environment may be wholly or partially virtual and / or involve the workplace) including resources and support systems are consistent with the intended programme learning outcomes.

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. This is of particular importance where learners are remote from others for significant parts of or all of the programme.

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.

Criterion 9:   THERE ARE SOUND TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

Indicators

A. The programme document provides guidance for staff on teaching strategies likely to enable learners achieve the intended programme / module learning outcomes.

B. It is clear that the programme provides real opportunities to achieve and demonstrate the module and programme learning outcomes.

C. The learner workload is reasonable and proportionate to module, stage and programme duration.

D. Learning is monitored / supervised.

E. Individualised guidance, support and timely formative feedback is regularly provided to enrolled learners as they progress within the programme.

F. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) methodologies are indicated to allow flexible methods of teaching, assessment and service provision to cater for diverse of learners and learning styles.

Criterion 10: THERE ARE SOUND ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

Indicators

A. All assessment is undertaken consistently.

B. The programme includes clear guidance for teachers / assessors as to how and when assessment is to be carried out.

C. 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.

D. The provider's QQI-approved quality assurance procedures for assessment are referenced. How and where they support the programme's assessment process is clear.

E. The provider has quality assurance processes to guard against breaches of academic integrity.

F. These processes include awareness building of the potential uses and abuses of artificial intelligence.

G. 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. These strategies include documented grading rubrics / guides.

H. The programme's assessment strategy clarifies how the assessment process ensures the programme's minimum intended programme learning outcomes will be assessed.

I. The programme includes formative assessment to support learning.

J.   There are sound procedures for the moderation of summative assessment results.

K.   There is clarity on how the provider has assured itself that a learner to be submitted for certification with a QQI award has demonstrated the necessary standard.

Criterion 11: LEARNERS ENROLLED ON THE PROGRAMME ARE WELL INFORMED, GUIDED AND CARED FOR

Indicators

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.

B.   A learner handbook is available including information on:

    i.   supports available to learners

    ii.   appeals and complaints procedures

    iii.   supports for learners who have special education and training needs

    iv.   where further information / supports can be found.

C.   If the programme is modular, there are effective guidance services for learners on the selection of appropriate learning pathways.

D.   The programme accommodates differences between enrolled learners, for example, in terms of their prior learning, maturity, and capabilities.

E.   There are arrangements to ensure that learners enrolled on the programme are supervised and that individualised support and due care are targeted at those who need it.

F.   The programme makes reasonable accommodations for learners with disabilities.

G.   If the programme aims to enrol international students, it complies with the Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Students and there are appropriate in-service supports in areas such as English language, learning skills, information technology skills etc. to address the particular needs of international learners and enable such learners to successfully participate in the programme.

H.   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).

Criterion 12: THE PROGRAMME IS WELL MANAGED

Indicators

A.   There is evidence that the process of programme development has been quality assured and subject to academic governance.

B.   The structures and procedures supporting quality assurance of learner experience, assessment, access transfer and progression are referenced.

C.   Unless otherwise specified, the programme is within the limits of the provider's approved scope of provision.

D. Where there is a pre-approved request to extend the scope of provision through validation of this programme, the implications of such an extension are clearly identified by the provider. How those implications are to be addressed by the provider is clearly set out in terms of additional resources, governance, QA etc.

E. 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.

F. Responsibility for the following quality assurance activities is clearly allocated and adequately resourced:

   i.   admission and enrolment procedures

   ii. ongoing monitoring of the programme and reporting to academic council / quality committee or equivalent

   iii. monitoring and reporting completion and non-completion rates

   iv. data management

   v.   quality assurance of assessment.

G. There are sound procedures and resources for data management and for interface with QQI certification.

18. APPENDIX 3 – PROCESS OUTLINE FOR VALIDATION OF A NEW PROGRAMME

Validation of New Programme