Document Name and Version	9.3 IICP College New Programmes Policy 9.3 (ii) Development of New Programmes where the College has devolved responsibility for arranging programme validation related Independent Evaluation Reports
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Policies that Interact with Policy 9.3 (ii)	Policy 2.2 IICP College's Quality and Governance Framework; (ii) Governance Policy 2.7 Terms of Reference of Academic Council Policy 2.8 Terms of Reference of Senior Management Team Policy 9.3 IICP College New Programmes Policy (i) Development of New Programmes outside the scope of devolved responsibility for arranging programme validation related Independent Evaluation Reports
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Revisions	

1. Preamble

1.1. All programmes leading to an award from IICP College are subject to a rigorous design and approval process against established criteria. They are delivered in line with the requirements of Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI) and are aligned with an appropriate level on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

1.2. Core Policies and Criteria for the Validation by QQI of Programmes of Education and Training prescribes the process and criteria to be used for validation as well as the documentation required when submitting an application for the validation of a new programme. The steps below are based on this policy.

1.3. Devolved Responsibility applies to the process for arrangement of the independent evaluation report for new programme applications by IICP College as approved by QQI. Where programmes come within the scope of provision for devolution of responsibility, then policy 9.3(ii) should be used. Where programmes come outside the scope of provision for devolution of responsibility, then policy 9.3(i) should be used. It should be noted that while the development processes are comparable in both policies, the validation processes and timelines differ.

2. Purpose

2.1. This policy sets out the process by which new programmes, and substantial modifications to existing programmes, are developed, described, considered by the IICP College community and submitted to QQI for validation. It is intended to support the development and implementation of programme change and new programmes in the IICP College community. It establishes a robust development process based on a design that requires proposals (i) to demonstrate compliance with QQI validation criteria and (ii) to go through several iterative stages, incorporating feedback (both internal and external) at each stage. Once the final programme is approved, it can be submitted to QQI for validation.

3. Scope

3.1. The scope of Devolved Responsibility is limited to taught programmes up to NFQ Level 9 in Counselling and Psychotherapy excluding:

   3.1.1. Programmes organised in collaboration with other providers (Collaborative programmes);

   3.1.2. Apprenticeship programmes;

   3.1.3. Transnational programmes;

   3.1.4. Programmes leading to joint awards;

   3.1.5. Research Masters programmes;

   3.1.6. Programmes otherwise outside IICP College's current scope of provision.

3.2. The scope includes full and part-time programmes, delivered in Face to Face or blended modes.

3.3. The scope includes major, minor, special purpose and supplemental awards, and micro-credentials.

3.4. Programmes leading to major awards may be delivered at the IICP College campus only. Those leading to other awards may be delivered at the approved locations selected using agreed quality assurance procedures.

3.5. Programmes outside of the scope of this policy should be developed in accordance with IICP College QA manual, Policy 9.3(i) IICP College New Programmes Policy. While the development processes are comparable in both policies, the validation processes and timelines differ.

4. Policy.

4.1. IICP College's approach to the design and approval of new programmes and modules, as well as the substantial revision of existing programmes, draws on regulation and guidance from QQI and ESG. It provides for:

   - Systematic and thorough internal and external consultations with stakeholders, including evaluation of new programmes by appropriate internal decision-making

structures, as well as external consultation and input. This is intended to facilitate and enhance the development of new programmes and major change in existing programmes.

- Collaborative engagement in programme development across faculty and the College.
- Fair assessment of proposals on the basis of rationale, academic merits and financial implications.
- Consideration of QQI and professional body regulatory requirements.
- Effective use of resources in the programme design process, in particular in relation to documentation.

5. Procedures for Design and Internal Approval of New Programmes and Modules.

5.1. There are six stages to internal programme approval:

(i)   Outline approval,

(ii)   Programme Development;

(iii)   Document Development.

(iv)   Internal Review;

(v)   External Expert Review;

(vi)   Academic Council approval.

5.1.1. Each stage must be navigated successfully in order to produce an approved programme document that can be considered for validation or re-validation.

5.1.2. The stages in detail are as follows.

5.1.2.1.   *Outline Approval*:

5.1.2.1.1. A new programme may be proposed by any staff member(s). The proposer must present an outline for a new academic programme to the Academic Council. The outline must consist of

a) Rationale for the programme;

b) Outline of the programme;

c) Programme aims and objectives.

d) Fit with IICP mission, ethos and strategic planning;

e) Proposed design process This should outline how the design process will engage with internal and external stakeholders;

f) Business plan;

g) Financial implications for the College.

5.1.2.1.2. On the basis of this information the Academic Council decide whether to provide outline approval. Where approval is granted then the Registrar will appoint a Programme team to prepare a Programme submission.

5.1.2.2. *Programme Development:*

5.1.2.2.1. All new programmes should be designed with reference to internal QA process and procedures as well as external reference points including QQI policy, QQI Awards Standards, and professional body requirements.

5.1.2.2.2. It is expected that all new programmes are designed in consultation with relevant faculty members, and that learners are consulted.

5.1.2.2.3. It is required that the design is internally coherent, can demonstrate alignment to the intended NFQ level and QQI Award standards, and complies with national and international professional standards.

5.1.2.3. *Document Development:*

5.1.2.3.1. Programme documentation must address the Core Validation Criteria. QQI Programme Validation Manual and (if relevant) Programme Review Manual should be utilised to describe the programme and to demonstrating compliance with QQI Core Validation Criteria.

5.1.2.3.2. Assessment of the Proposed Programme against Core Validation Criteria: Programme development must include self-evaluation against the Core Validation Criteria. This should be carried out on the QQI template.

5.1.2.4. *Internal Review: Executive Management Team:*

5.1.2.4.1. When the programme development team finalises the submission, it sends the Programme submission to the Senior Management Team. The Senior Management Team will check that it is consistent with QQI

and Professional Body regulations, appears financially viable, conforms to QQI format and is complete, clear and comprehensible.

5.1.2.5. *External Expert Review:*

5.1.2.5.1. The Registrar engages with an external academic expert in order to provide an external review of programme and documentation. External experts are nominated by the Academic Council, senior management and/or faculty. In general, it is expected that the external expert will be both a disciplinary expert and familiar with QQI and Professional body requirements. The Programme development team will review the programme documentation in the light of the report of the External expert.

5.1.2.6. *Academic Council:*

5.1.2.6.1. Following review of programme documentation, the Registrar will send the revised programme, together with the External Expert report and commentary from the Programme Development Team to the Academic Council. The programme documentation will be reviewed and must be approved by the Academic Council before the External Validation Process can commence. The Programme Development Team will be notified of the outcome at the end of the Academic Council evaluation.

5.2. External Validation Processes cannot commence until the programme to be validated has completed the internal validation process as defined in Section 5.1

6. **The External Validation Process**

6.1. On completion of the internal validation process the external validation process can commence. Throughout the validation process liaison with QQI is through the Registrar or his/her nominee.

6.2. Stage 1: Pre-submission to QQI.

6.2.1. Prior to submission to QQI the following steps must be taken:

- Final check of programme documentation

- Preparing nominations for the independent evaluation panel

- Notification of the application to QQI

These steps are set out in detail below

6.2.2. Step 1. Final check of programme documentation

6.2.2.1.   The Registrar will arrange for a Pre-Validation check of the documentation to ensure that the submission includes all the required elements.

6.2.2.2.   In particular the Pre-Validation check shall determine whether:

i.   The application addresses the validation criteria, and programme description accords with QQI's current Programme Descriptor and Guidelines for Completing Descriptor[1].

ii.   The proposed programme has appropriate measures for the Protection for Enrolled Learners in accordance with QQI Protocols for Implementation.

iii.   The self-assessment document is completed and demonstrates a critical evaluation of the programme based on the validation criteria.

iv.   The invoice relating to the validation has been paid.

6.2.2.3.   Submission to QQI can only occur where the Pre-Validation check establishes that all of the validation documentation required is fully complete and finalised, including a Self-Assessment Report against the QQI validation criteria.

6.2.3. Step 2. Preparing nominations for the independent evaluation panel

6.2.3.1.   An external evaluation of the programme(s) submitted for evaluation is carried out by a panel of independent evaluators (the Panel) agreed with QQI. A proposed panel will normally be notified to QQI by the Registrar for approval between 6 and 8 weeks in advance of the proposed panel visit. This may occur at the time of submission to QQI (see section 6.3). Any

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[1] The most recent version is available through the QQI website, https://www.qqi.ie/

subsequent changes to the proposed or agreed panel must also be subject to agreement with QQI.

6.2.3.2.   External evaluators are expected to conduct their responsibilities in a professional, thorough and objective fashion and may only be proposed where it is clear that no conflict of interest exists in relation to their appointment.

6.2.3.3.   The roles and responsibilities of each evaluator should be stated clearly and communicated to prospective evaluators who must confirm that they are happy to act subject to QQI's approval. Prospective evaluators must undertake to read QQI's "Roles, Responsibilities and Code of Conduct for Reviewers and Evaluators", and to complete QQI's "Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality" form. Evaluators should also agree to complete QQI's "Expert Details" Form for inclusion in its database, where requested by QQI. Prospective evaluators must be required to declare any relevant interests and be advised that these declarations will be published in the panel report.

6.2.3.4.   The proposed panel is constituted on a case-by-case basis in accordance with QQI's Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training 2017. The panel must be agreed with QQI prior to appointment.

6.2.3.5.   Proposed evaluators will be selected to ensure that in addition to discipline specific expertise, the panel encompasses expertise in areas such as: quality assurance, programme validation/review and issues relating to teaching methodologies, assessment and learner support mechanisms and to include persons who are able to make national and, where appropriate international comparisons. Panels may also include members who represent industry or the professions and /or broader stakeholders nationally or from within the Institute's region.

6.2.3.6.   The composition of the panel will be as follows:
   i.   A Chairperson, who has completed the relevant QQI training.
   ii.   A Secretary to the panel who shall be appointed to attend the panel and shall be a member of the panel. The secretary should have the capacity and capability of writing reports that meet QQI's

requirements, and shall be independent of the College. The secretary is responsible for assisting the panel to prepare and agree the expert panel report. The expert panel is the author of the report.

  iii. At least two academics in the proposed programme discipline, normally including at least one from the university sector for programmes leading to awards at Level 7 or above.

  iv. An Industry/sectoral representative in the area of the proposed programme.

  v. At least one person who is familiar with QQI and NFQ standards, policy and criteria.

  vi. A learner on a programme similar to the programme being evaluated.

6.2.3.6.1. Additional members may be added to the Panel where this is deemed necessary to address the specific aspects of the Programme Submission Document.

6.2.4. The proposed panel should be gender balanced (where possible 40% of each)

6.2.5. Participation in an expert panel is normally on a *pro bono* basis, and expenses are covered for all relevant activities. Standard public sector norms apply and a suitable expenses guideline is issued to all prospective evaluators prior to appointment to a specific panel. Where participation is not on a pro bono basis and a fee applies for participation in an independent evaluation panel, the College will make clear to prospective evaluators what fee applies. Any fees paid should be comparable to those that would be paid by QQI. Fees for participation in a review/evaluation are never payable to employees of the Irish public service

6.2.6. Step 3. Notification of the application to QQI

6.2.6.1. Devolved responsibility only applies to procedures that occur after a complete application for validation of a programme of education and training has been received by QQI.

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

6.3. Stage 2: Submission to QQI.

6.3.1. Submission to QQI can occur when Stage 1 is complete; i.e., when:

- A final check had demonstrated that the programme documentation is in order;
- Nominations for the independent evaluation panel have been finalised;
- QQI has been notified of the application within the required time frame.

6.3.2. The documents set out in section 6.3.2 must be submitted to QQI through Qhub at least 6 weeks in advance of any planned panel date.

6.3.3. The following comprises the submission sent to QQI via QHub:

    i.   A cover letter stating the College's eligibility to apply as per Criteria 3 of the Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training (QQI, 2017).

    ii.   A statement of PEL Arrangements.

    iii.   Fee Cover Note.

    iv.   Terms of Reference detailing proposed prospective evaluators and a proposed timeline for the validation.

    v.   Names and occupations of each of the proposed evaluators (but not CVs and such like), along with a rationale for the composition of the proposed panel. Prospective evaluator's completed documentation (Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Form) should also be included.

    vi.   All Programme Documentation.

    vii.   Additional Quality Assurance arrangements, if relevant.

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

6.3.5. Progression to Stage 3 can only occur following receipt of QQI advice in writing that the application is eligible to be processed under DR and the proposed panel is agreed.

6.3.6. Prior to constituting the panel, IICP College must have received QQI's formal agreement to panel membership in writing.

6.3.7. QQI's written agreements should be secured at least two weeks in advance of the deliberative meeting of the panel and site visit. Any change to the panel

invalidates the agreement and a new agreement should be sought. This may require a change to the validation timeline, in particular the site visit.

6.4. Stage 3: The external validation process.

6.4.1. The independent evaluation cannot take place until QQI advises in writing that the application has been screened by QQI, and that the independent evaluation may proceed.

6.4.2. Following receipt of QQI's formal agreement to panel membership, the Registrar will inform the Evaluators of their appointment in writing. This communication should make clear that they are serving as evaluators in an independent evaluation process forming part of a QQI validation process and must be independent of the provider. The terms and conditions of their appointment must also be communicated in writing, including entitlements to expenses and any other payments. Payment of unnecessary expenses and expenses other than travel and subsistence expenses should be expressly prohibited unless a fee is warranted. They should be informed about the expected timelines. It should be made clear that QQI has no liability towards the evaluators.

6.4.3. Following their appointment, communication with Evaluators in relation to the validation process is made exclusively through the Registrar or his/her nominee. No other member of staff may communicate with any panel member.

6.4.4. The validation process for Major, Minor and Special Purpose Awards will require a deliberative meeting of the panel unless agreed otherwise by QQI. At this deliberative meeting the panel reviews the submission; meets with senior management, the Programme Development Team and in some cases faculty, learners and/or external stakeholders; and conducts a review of the resources available to support the operation of the programme. The meeting may be conducted on-site as a visit to the IICP College campus, or online. The meeting is conducted in accordance with QQI's procedures for programme validation. An observer from QQI may also attend.

6.4.5. Microcredentials

6.4.5.1.   In the case of microcredentials an independent desk review will be arranged. A meeting is not necessary unless requested by the Chair of the panel.

6.4.6. Documentation should be provided to members of the panel at least 2 weeks prior to the site visit. The documents provided must include:

  i.   Programme documentation

 ii.   Agenda for the day

iii.   Membership of the panel

iv.   Terms of reference where required

 v.   They should also be provided with links to:

  o   Relevant awards standards

  o   Core Policies and Criteria for the Validation by QQI of Programmes of Education and Training (QQI)

  o   Assessment & Standards (QQI).

  o   IICP College QAM

6.4.6.1.   Programme-specific documents, such as handbooks and assessment material, may also be provided.

6.4.7. Supplementary material concerning the proposed programme may be sent to the panel by the provider **only if** requested by the panel. Any requests for further information should be set out by the Panel on a *Request for Further Information* form, available from the College.

6.4.7.1.   Requests for supplementary material may occur where this is necessary (i) to reach an agreed recommendation on validation and/or (ii) where an obvious issue/omission can be clarified which would otherwise require a condition of validation to be specified in the panel report. The production of such material should not be for the purpose of the further development of the programme after the application for validation has been made.

6.4.7.2.   Any such requests must be recorded in the panel report along with the supplementary documentation which must be submitted to QQI with the panel report.

6.4.8. A Panel Meeting will occur in any application for validation of a Major, Minor and/or Special Purpose Awards unless agreed otherwise by QQI. A Panel meeting will not occur in an application for validation of microcredentials, unless requested by the Chair of the panel. The purpose of a Panel Meeting is to:

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

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

iii. Provide opportunities for the panel to experience the learning environment.

iv. Provide opportunities for the panel to explore the quality assurance procedures.

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

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

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

6.4.10. Independent Evaluation Report [IER]

6.4.10.1. Within two weeks of the meeting, or the desk review in cases of microcredentials, the expert panel agrees:

i. A draft report [IER] of its findings,

ii. Conclusions whether or not the programme as described should be validated, and

iii. Prerequisites for validation, conditions and recommendations.

6.4.10.2. The IER shall be produced by the panel in accordance with QQI's current validation policies and criteria. The panel is the author of the IER.

6.4.10.3. The panel report must be approved in writing by the panel chairperson having been agreed by the whole panel.

6.4.10.4. The panel report must address the applicable QQI validation criteria. It should be drafted in QQI's format and style. The conclusions, conditions and

recommendations must be based on judgements made against the validation criteria in accordance with QQI validation policy and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. It must be produced in accordance with QQI policy.

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

6.4.10.6. The draft report will be submitted to QQI for review and screening. Once QQI has screened and agreed the report, QQI will ask the College to arrange for the panel to finalise the report, and will request that the College formally respond in writing (within a specified time) on the expert panel report's findings, conclusions, prerequisites for validation, conditions and recommendations.

6.4.10.7. A written response will be compiled by the Registrar, and where applicable programme documentation will be updated to address any conditions or recommendations for validation.

6.4.10.8. The College's response will:

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

ii. Detail where recommendations have been addressed.

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

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

6.4.10.9. IICP College will issue its response to the final report to the panel for consideration.

6.4.10.10. The panel will be given at least a week to review the response, and if the panel are satisfied IICP have addressed the conditions of validation (if any), the Chair will sign their confirmation of acceptance.

6.4.10.11. Once the documentation is finalised and agreed with the expert panel, IICP College will update the programme details on Qhub to reflect the final documentation, and upload all relevant documents to Qhub.

6.4.10.12. The new programme will be presented at the QQI Programme and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) meeting for decision.

6.4.11. Conflict of Interest

6.4.11.1. If at any stage a conflict of interest or a potential conflict of interest is discovered or arises after the engagement of a reviewer or evaluator, they should disclose this in writing, in consultation with the panel chairperson, to QQI.

6.4.11.2. If the discovery is by somebody other than the reviewer or evaluator they will be expected to disclose it, in consultation with the panel chairperson if applicable, to QQI.

6.4.11.3. Normally, a reviewer or evaluator should take no further part in the review or evaluation once a conflict of interest has been discovered. The QQI executive will rule on the continuing eligibility of the reviewer or evaluator following discovery of an apparent conflict of interest.