



QQI Awards

Guide to completing QQI Programme¹ Validation Descriptor – Further Education and Training (non-CAS)

¹ Where programme is 30 credits of volume or less. An alternative template is available for programmes above 30 credits

Purpose of the document: This document is designed to guide providers who intend to submit their application for a new programme so that it can be evaluated for the purpose of validation by QQI.

This document sets out

- Important things to consider during programme design and development.
- The validation criteria against which the programme will be evaluated.
- The submission process via QHub.
- The evaluation process carried out by the panel.
- Validation Decisions.
- Certification of learners – differences from CAS awards.
- Relevant templates.

Programme Design

When preparing a new programme for validation by QQI, the following points should be borne in mind:

- a) A special purpose award should have a coherence and identity of its own and be clearly for a *special purpose* i.e. focused and identifiable.
- b) It is essential that the document show meaningful consultation with relevant stakeholders and that these stakeholders support the learning outcomes as submitted.
- c) A programme should only have embedded minors where there is a clear justification / rationale for them and where each has clear learning outcomes of its own.
- d) If there are embedded minor awards in a special purpose award, they should collectively form a coherent package represented by the special purpose award.
- e) No new SPA or minor should be any less than 5 FET credits i.e. the award should be based on a notional 50 hours of learner effort – directed and self-directed. This can include time on the job but in a learning capacity.
- f) The wording of the principal programme's MIPOs and their mapping to the NFQ should make a convincing case that:
 - a. The MIPOs, as indicated by the verbs, are appropriate to the NFQ level.
 - b. The MIPOs are appropriate as award standards.
 - c. The programme provides opportunities to (i) deliver the learning required for the MIPOs and (ii) assess learners' achievement of those MIPOs.
- g) Having completed the mapping of the principal programme outcomes to the NFQ level, there is no need to repeat the mapping process for each embedded programme if the minors fit well with the principal programme and are genuinely embedded within it.
- h) Keep in mind the future award holder when proposing new programme title(s) to ensure the associated award title is relevant, useful and reflective of the subject area.
- i) The specialisation part of the programme title should be no more than 43 characters long.
- j) It's important that data entered on QHub is taken from and consistent with what has been documented and approved.
- k) The QQI Validation criteria (paraphrased below) will form the basis of the evaluation. They should be kept in mind when designing and documenting the programme and should be applied as part of a preparatory self-evaluation.
- l) When designing the assessment strategy, ensure that it will delivery an overall grade for the award. Note that, unlike CAS awards, the QBS system does not either determine the outcome for each learner or the grade for those who achieve the award.

Validation Criteria

1. *Is the Provider eligible to apply for validation of programme?* Note that this is a given for all approved providers.
 2. *Are the programme's objectives and learning outcomes clear and consistent with the QQI awards sought?* The programme objectives should be about why the programme is being offered. The learning outcomes are about what the learner will be able to do, know etc at the end of a module, programme etc. They are not the same.
 3. *Are the programme's concept, implementation strategy, its interpretation of QQI awards standards well informed and soundly based?* Is the rationale for the programme clear and evidenced. Is a national award appropriate?
 4. *Are the programme's access, transfer and progression arrangements satisfactory?* Focus on learner information, entry criteria and verification, RPL, connections to other programmes where possible.
 5. *Is the programme's written curriculum well-structured and fit-for-purpose?* Is it clear how the MIPLOs are going to be achieved by the target learner profile
 6. *Is the programme staff qualified and capable and sufficient to implement programme as planned?* Self-explanatory but obviously critical to reinforce the quality of the proposed programme.
 7. *Are the physical resources sufficient to implement programme as planned?* Will vary according to the programme. Where appropriate include photographic or video evidence to show available and / or technological resources.
 8. *Is the learning environment consistent with the needs of the programme's learners?* Critical for blended / online programmes. Show that the environment within which learning happens is conducive / supportive to learning.
 9. *Are the Teaching and Learning strategies sound?* Should be clearly stated and supported by consultation with experienced staff.
 10. *Are the Assessment strategies sound?* Show how the MIMLOs/ MIPLOs are to be assessed and how grades will be calculated. Include sample assessment briefs and, ideally, marking schemes.
 11. *Are the learners well informed, guided and cared for?* Is there a learner handbook showing programme information and how learners can access further information about services, supports and / or appeals / complaints mechanisms.
 12. *Is the programme well-managed?* Explain how the programme is quality assured when in progress i.e. what monitoring will take place, by whom and in consultation with who.
- a) The development process should include a self-evaluation report to evidence that the programme has been checked against the validation criteria. This should demonstrate a chronology of quality assurance checks within the provider and culminating with a signoff from the provider's academic council or equivalent governance group responsible for endorsing an application as having been approved as ready to submit for validation.
- b) Evidence of any other pre-submission checks or endorsements should also be submitted in support of the programme. This could be from industry groups, mock panels, experienced assessors etc. All such evidence will make evaluation by QQI more straightforward.

Submission of the programme via QHub

- a) Read the QHub manual.
- b) The new programme should be submitted via QHub as a *FET non-CAS* programme.
- c) If there are no embedded programmes leading to minor awards, then it should be identified as a *Single* application. If there are to be embedded programmes, then it should be identified as a *Multiple* application.
- d) If it is a Multiple application, then add the principal programme first, including all modules. When complete the principal programme should show as being at Pre-Submission status. This means it's fully entered but awaiting the embedded programmes before it can be submitted.
 - I. Create each of the embedded programmes taking its module(s) from among those already entered for the principal programme.
 - II. When all the programmes are entered, **submit the principal programme. This will submit** the group of programmes will be given over to QQI for screening and evaluation.
- e) Ensure that there is consistency between the programme descriptor and what is entered into QHub. The QHub data is what will be used to populate the Certificate of Validation and so it is essential it is accurate.
- f) Note that there may be need to edit the programme document and QHub based on feedback from the panel.

Evaluation of the Programme(s)

- a) **Screening:** a programme entered on QHub will have to meet mandatory data fields and document requirements before it can be submitted. This is to ensure that (i) the data required to create a new award is entered and (ii) the documents required to evaluate the programme (descriptor and self-evaluation report) have been uploaded. This is part of the screening. Further screening will check that the programme is ready to be sent to a panel. If not, it will be reverted for further editing.
- b) **Panel Evaluation:** QQI will appoint at least two evaluators to evaluate the documentation. Where the documentation / data entry is of good quality and there is good evidence of pre-approval and endorsement, a desk audit will be used. If the programme is larger and / or there is a lack of clarity in the application, a site visit / online visit will be arranged.
- c) The evaluators will represent a QA perspective and a subject matter expertise (SME) perspective. Ideally at least one evaluator would have both. Where necessary two SMEs will be appointed.
- d) Evaluators will review the documentation independently and then attempt to come to a consensus. They may:
 - a. Request further information.
 - b. Recommend validation with or without conditions.
 - c. Recommend refusal of validation of one or all programmes in a suite.
- e) A condition proposed by a panel can be addressed before a validation decision or may be addressed within a specified timescale afterwards.

Validation of the Programme

- a) The evaluators' independent evaluation report (IER) is presented together with supporting information, to a meeting of QQI's Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) for decision. Unless there is a particular reason not to, the PAEC will accept the panel's recommendation.
- b) If validated, the panel report and certificate of validation (CoV) for the programme will be published on the Irish Register of Qualifications www.irq.ie
- c) Irrespective of outcome, the validation report is published on the QQI website.
- d) A programme is validated for a maximum of five years. The Last Intake Date on the CoV is the last date by which a new intake of learners can start the programme. For any further intakes, the programme needs to be replaced by a new version through revalidation.

Certification

- a) Learners who are likely to complete a special purpose award which has embedded minor awards should, where possible, only be certified with the special purpose certificate i.e. on completion of the whole programme.
- b) Learners who are interested only in a part of the programme can be certified with a minor award(s) which has been included and validated as embedded programme.
- c) A learner can be entered for one certificate only per centre per certification period.

Post Validation

- a) If a programme is validated, the associated curriculum can be shared with other providers on condition that:
 1. The provider whose programme it is (lead provider) has given its permission in writing.
 2. The governance of the other (sharing) provider gives it written confirmation that it has the wherewithal to deliver and quality assure the programme as validated.
 3. The last intake date for the original programme is the same for all the shared programmes.
 4. The lead provider will consult with the sharing provider(s) when reviewing the programme prior to revalidation.

QQI Documentation relevant to the process:

Programme Descriptor template
Self-Evaluation Report Template
User Manual for QHub
Request for Further Information (RFI) Template
Response to RFI Template
Independent Evaluation Report template