



Policy for the Development and Approval of Programmes for a Blended or Online Environment

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This policy sets out the principles and criteria by which the College will approve a programme. This policy dovetails with the *Policy on the Design of Programme and Curricula for a Blended or Online Learning Environment*.

1.2 Scope

a. *To whom does the policy apply?*

- i. This policy applies to Hibernia College staff and faculty who are designing new programmes, these individuals are referred to as programme developers in this policy.
- ii. It also applies to the Academic Board and Executive Management Team (EMT) when approving a programme or a proposal to develop a programmes.

b. *In what situations does the policy apply?*

- i. The policy applies in the design and development of programmes being prepared for provision by Hibernia College.
- ii. The policy applies where the programme is intended to lead to:
 - An award by QQI
 - An award of a professional, regulatory, or other statutory body (PRSB)
 - An award of a body recognised as providing state qualifications leading to awards of in another jurisdiction
 - Any non-formal award made by Hibernia College.
- iii. This policy applies to all programmes regardless of location of provision, mode of provision, or disciplinary area.

c. *Who is responsible for implementing the policy?*

- i. The Academic Board is ultimately responsible for the implementation of this policy.

1.3 Definitions

See the *Policy for the Design of Programmes and Curricula for a Blended or Online Environment*.

2 Context

2.1 Legal or Regulatory Context

a. 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act

This policy is cognisant of the 2012 Act and its definitions and provisions around the principles underpinning the validation of programmes of education leading to awards on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications.

b. Quality Assurance Guidelines

This policy has been designed with regard to the European Standards and Guidelines¹ and QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines,² Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Independent/Private Providers,³ all of which specify and guide on the need for Hibernia College to implement policy and procedure to support the design and approval of programmes.

Guidelines for programme development and approval (3.1), as well as programme monitoring and review (3.3), are clearly laid out in the Core QA Guidelines, and should be considered when developing and providing programmes of education and training regardless of the mode of delivery. The Core QA Guidelines also include guidelines on staff recruitment (4.1) and staff development (4.3).

c. Validation Policies and Criteria

Where a programme is being developed for submission to QQI for accreditation as a programme leading to an award on the NFQ, it is developed in line with QQI's validation policies and criteria.⁴

d. Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning Programmes

The Topic-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning are a supplement to the QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines and Sector-Specific QA Guidelines. As a provider delivering blended learning programmes, Hibernia College shall 'have regard to' the Core QA Guidelines, the Sector-Specific guidelines, and the Topic-Specific Guidelines for Blended Learning.

e. Transnational and Collaborative Provision

Where the programme being developed is intended to be delivered as a collaborative or transnational provision, the development and approval takes place in line with:

- i. QQI policies for transnational and collaborative provision⁵ in addition to the usual regulatory requirements for new programmes.

¹ European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, 2nd edn, 2015, sec. 1.2.

² Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 'Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines', 2016, sec. 3.1.

³ <https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Sector%20Specific%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines%20V2.pdf>

⁴ Quality and Qualifications Ireland, '[QQI Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training](#)', 2016.

⁵ Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 'Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes and Joint Awards', 2012.

- ii. IHEQN document Guidelines for the Approval, Monitoring and Review of Collaborative and Transnational Provision.⁶

2.2 International Good Practice and Standards

The College shall have due regard to the following policy instruments as relevant to a particular programme.

f. *Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area (ESG) (2014)*⁷

g. *ACODE - Benchmarks for Technology Enhanced Learning*

The Australasian Council on Open, Distance and e-learning, referred to as ACODE, developed benchmarks in 2014 for technology enhanced learning and teaching. This policy, and associated procedures, have been designed to at a minimum meet these benchmarks.

h. *EADTU - Quality Assessment for E-learning: a Benchmarking Approach*

The European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), a leading European institutional association in online, open and flexible higher education has also established benchmarks for good practice. This policy, and associated procedures, has also been designed to at a minimum meet these benchmarks.

i. *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher education in the European region, Lisbon (1997)*⁸

j. *Committee of the Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, Recommendation the Recognition of Joint Degrees, Strasbourg (2004)*⁹

k. *OECD/UNESCO Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education (2005)*¹⁰

l. *UNESCO/COUNCIL OF EUROPE Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education (2007)*¹¹

m. *BFUG, European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, 2014*¹²

n. *UNESCO-Asia Pacific Quality Network Toolkit: Regulating the quality of cross-border education (2006)*

o. *Ministers of Education, European Higher Education Area - European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes 2015*

A policy around the European accreditation approach for Joint programmes, which should be applied to all those Joint programmes that are subject to compulsory programme accreditation at national level.

⁶ IHEQN, 'Guidelines for the Approval, Monitoring and Review of Collaborative and Transnational Provision', 2013.

⁷ http://issuu.com/revisionesg/docs/esg_-_draft_endoresed_by_bfug

⁸ <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/165.htm>

⁹ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/lrc_EN.asp

¹⁰ http://www.unesco.org/education/guidelines_E.indd.pdf

¹¹ http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/lrc/code_tne_rev2007.pdf

¹² <http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/european-approach-for-quality-assurance-of-joint-programmes/>

3 Policy Statements

3.1 Principles and Criteria

The design and development of all programmes within Hibernia College must be conducted in line with the following principles which are to be used as programme approval criteria. These are equivalent to validation criteria, and these are based on, and include extracts from, the QFI *Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training*.

a. The programme aligns to the strategy of the College

- i. New programmes must conform to the College's mission, vision, values and strategic objectives as determined by the Board of Directors and managed by the Chief Executive.

b. The programme objectives and outcomes are clear and consistent with the awards sought

- i. The programme aims and objectives are expressed plainly and an award is specified for those who complete the programme
- ii. The award title(s) is consistent with unit 3.1 of QFI's Policy and Criteria for Making Awards and complies with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.
- iii. The programme title and any embedded programme titles are
 - Consistent with the title of the QFI award sought.
 - Clear, accurate, succinct and fit for the purpose of informing prospective learners and other stakeholders.
- iv. For each programme and embedded programme the minimum intended programme learning outcomes and any other educational or training objectives of the programme are explicitly specified and they are consistent with the relevant QFI awards standards.

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

Hibernia College programmes are developed on the basis of rigorous investigation into:

- i. Market demand and societal need.
- ii. Educational need and impact.
- iii. Disciplinary research.
- iv. The business case for the programme.
- v. Stakeholder perspectives – both internal within Hibernia College and externally (e.g. potential employers).
- vi. Similar programmes delivered elsewhere.

d. The programme's access, transfer and progression arrangements are satisfactory

- i. The information about the programme as well as its procedures for access, transfer and progression are consistent with the procedures described in QFI's policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training.

- ii. Programme information for learners is provided in plain language providing detail on 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
 - iii. 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
- e. *The programme's written curriculum is well structured and fit-for-purpose and has been devised in accordance with the HCQF Policy for the Design of Programmes and Curricula for a Blended or Online Environment.*

The College's policy on programme design is of critical importance and must guide programme designers and developers in the process of creating a new programme.

- f. *There are sufficient qualified and capable programme staff available to implement the programme as planned*

- i. The specification of the programme's staffing requirements, to include professional and educational qualifications, licences-to practise where applicable, experience and the staff/learner ratio requirements is precise, and rigorous and consistent with the programme and its defined purpose.
- ii. There are arrangements for the performance of the programme's staff to be managed ensuring continuing capability to fulfil their roles
- iii. There are staff development opportunities and 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 require

- g. *There are sufficient physical resources to implement the programme as planned*

- i. Programme developers must consider the resource implications for the programme including:
 - Developing the programme
 - Providing and maintaining the programme from both an academic and administrative perspective
 - Supporting the learners on the programme.
- ii. New programmes must have a clear business justification that demonstrates viability and sustainability.

- h. *The blended or online learning environment is consistent with the needs of the programme's prospective learners*

- i. The proposed programme will be supportive and foster the development of a learning community through social, teaching and cognitive presence.
- ii. The programme will be accessible and will incorporate principles of universal design.

- i. *Strategies for Teaching, Learning and Assessment Excellence*

The proposed programme will:

- i. Incorporate a range of inclusive teaching and assessment methods.
- ii. Provide opportunities for discussion and interaction.
- iii. Promote and supports reflective practice.
- iv. Promote and supports a research culture.
- v. Support the integration of theory and practice through simulation and profession practice placement where relevant.

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

- i. Programme Handbooks will detail relevant curriculum and assessment detail.
- ii. In the case of collaborative and/or transnational programmes, learners must:
 - Have an equivalent learning experience to that of learners attending elements of their programme in Ireland
 - Receive information on the recognition of their qualification in the country in which they are based.

k. The programme is well managed

- i. Programmes approved are governed within the College's existing governance structures as set out in the Policy for Governance and Management.
- ii. There is a designated programme leader with clearly defined responsibilities.
- iii. A programme board is established in keeping the Terms of Reference for a Programme Board.
- iv. Any supplementary governance considerations (for example joint programme boards) must be specified in the programme proposal and ultimately in the programme document.
- v. Collaborations must be formalised in a memorandum of agreement between Hibernia College and any collaborating partners.

l. All potential risks are assessed, and appropriate due diligence undertaken

The College monitors risk to ensure continued success and prevent any potential harm to itself and its students. The College monitors risk in the following ways:

- i. New programmes inevitably present new risks to the College. Programme developers must (at a minimum) identify these during development of the programme.
- ii. Due diligence checks and a risk assessment are undertaken in respect of all collaborative and/or transnational programmes. In particular transnational and collaborative programmes must be legal and comply with all regulatory requirements in jurisdictions where they operate, as well as in Ireland.

m. In respect of Management and Governance in respect of Collaborations

- i. Governance
 - Programmes approved are governed within the College's existing governance structures as set out in the Policy for Governance and Management
 - Any supplementary governance considerations (for example joint programme boards) must be specified in the programme proposal and ultimately in the programme document and in any associated memorandum of agreement.
- ii. Regulatory landscape
 - Programme developers consider and seek advice on how to address the accreditation context for the programme as well as the accreditation for any potential graduates.

iii. Quality Assurance

- Policies and procedures for the quality assurance of the programme are set out in the Hibernia College Quality Framework
- Any supplementary quality assurance policy and procedure (specific progression rules for example) are specified in the programme proposal and ultimately in the relevant programme document
- For collaborative and transnational programmes, all policies and procedures governing the programme will be agreed in advance between Hibernia College and all collaborating partners and documented in a formal legal agreement.

n. *Where relevant, the relationships and programme's governance and quality assurance arrangements are clearly documented in an appropriate formal agreement. On this point:*

- i. Collaborations must be formalised in a memorandum of agreement between Hibernia College and any collaborating partners.
- ii. Hibernia College does not participate in:
 - Serial collaborations or serial franchising arrangements
 - Any collaboration or provision that is in opposition to the mission and vision of the College, is outside its validated authority or where it is unlikely that College standards or quality assurance policies and procedures will be satisfied.

o. *Where relevant, have due regard to the requirements of the Lisbon Recognition Convention 1997 and relevant national and international legislation by doing the following:*

- i. Ensure appropriate credit and qualification recognition in all relevant jurisdictions.
- ii. Ensure the provision of full and clear information on the nature of the proposed programme, and all local regulation on the recognition of online or blended learning.

3.2 Principles and Criteria for the Approval Process

a. *A formal approval process*

- i. There shall be a comprehensive approval process in which:
 - Corporate decisions and academic decisions are made distinctly
 - Decisions are made with the appropriate level of authority
 - Decisions incorporate both independence and externality.

b. *Stages in the approval process*

There shall be four key stages in approval process:

- i. The first stage, the approval to develop a detailed programme proposal by the EMT is based on the following criteria:
 - 1) The proposal aligns to the strategic goals of the College and presents a genuine opportunity
 - 2) There is a solid rationale for the development of the programme
 - 3) There is a clearly identified target market and there is evidence of demand
 - 4) Where the target market and or country of provision is other than Ireland, there is legal entitlement of the College to offer a programme there and it will be recognised within that country

- 5) The programme development costs are reasonable
 - 6) There is an indicative programme fee and the target market has ability to pay
 - 7) Preliminary due diligence has been conducted in respect of any potential partnerships/collaborations. Any potential collaborator is in good standing with all professional, regulatory and statutory bodies in their country
 - 8) There is clarity on any professional and statutory body validation/recognition/accreditation required
 - 9) There is clarity on facilities and support services required to support students
 - 10) The lecturing and authoring expertise required has been indicatively identified.
- ii. The second stage, the approval to develop a detailed programme proposal by the Academic Board, is based on the following criteria:
- 1) The proposal reflects a genuine education opportunity for potential learners and social need
 - 2) The proposed programme has been described by providing a broad structure with the identification of a framework level and award type and flexible entry and exit routes as appropriate
 - 3) The proposed programme is innovative and reflects good educational practice in online or blended learning
 - 4) The proposal aligns to the strategic goals of the College and presents a genuine opportunity
 - 5) Where the proposed programme is being developed for submission to QQI for accreditation as a programme leading to an award on the NFQ, it is developed in line with QQI's validation policies and procedures.
- iii. The third stage is the approval by the Academic Board of a developed programme.
- iv. The fourth and final stage is the approval by the EMT to proceed with the provision of an academically validated programme.

4 Document Control

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