



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

WHITE PAPER

Core Policy and Criteria for the Validation of Education and Training Programmes by QQI

and specialised policy and criteria for the validation
of programmes leading to Common Awards System (CAS) awards

FOR CONSULTATION

This White Paper contains proposed policy for core policy and criteria for the validation of education and training programmes by QQI and specialised policy and criteria for the validation of programmes leading to Common Awards System (CAS) awards.

Following publication and consideration of the outcomes of consultation, this paper will lead to a draft policy which will be proposed for adoption by the Board of QQI.

QQI is seeking feedback from stakeholders on the proposed policy contained in this White Paper.

Submissions may be emailed to
consultation@QQI.ie

(including 'VALIDATION' in the subject field)

The closing date for submissions
is **Friday 26 February 2016**.

In your submission please clearly indicate:

1. *Your contact details.*
2. *Whether you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.*
3. *If you do not wish your submission to be published.*

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	4
PART 1	6
1 INTRODUCTION TO THE WHITE PAPER	6
2 EXISTING QQI VALIDATION POLICY AND CRITERIA	8
3 HIGHLIGHTING SOME CHANGES IN THE NEW POLICY AND CRITERIA	10
4 THE PLANNED ORGANISATION OF QQI'S NEW VALIDATION POLICY AND CRITERIA	14
PART 2	15
5 THE BASIS AND NATURE OF PROGRAMME VALIDATION	15
6 PREREQUISITES FOR PROGRAMME VALIDATION	21
7 VALIDATION IN THE CONTEXT OF A PARTICULAR PROVIDER	23
8 PREPARING AN APPLICATION FOR VALIDATION	27
9 INDEPENDENT EVALUATION	31
10 DETERMINATION OF AN APPLICATION FOR VALIDATION	35
11 CONDITIONS OF VALIDATION	38
12 MONITORING THE CONDITIONS OF VALIDATION	43
13 REFUSAL OF VALIDATION AND APPEAL	44
14 REVIEW AND WITHDRAWAL OF VALIDATION	45
15 REVALIDATION	47
16 EXTENSION OF VALIDATION	51
17 COMPLAINTS	52
18 TRANSITION	53

PART 3	54
19 THE CORE VALIDATION CRITERIA	54
PART 4	65
1 INTRODUCTION	65
2 THE COMMON AWARDS SYSTEM	67
3 TYPES OF PROGRAMMES	69
4 THE QBS APPLICATION PROCESS FOR PROGRAMMES LEADING TO CAS AWARDS	71
5 ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR PROGRAMMES LEADING TO CAS AWARDS	74
6 PROGRAMME AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION (EARLY DRAFT)	78
7 OTHER CAS CRITERIA	80
8 STREAMLINING VALIDATION FOR CERTAIN PROVIDERS	82

FOREWORD

Validation is a regulatory process that determines whether or not a particular QQI award can be offered in respect of a provider's programme of education and training.

The validation policy and criteria will comprise a core part and specialised parts. The core part entitled "Core Policy and Criteria for the Validation of Education and Training Programmes by QQI" will apply to all programmes. The core part will be augmented by specialised validation policy and criteria (and related) documents. One of these specialised parts is included in this white paper and augments the core part for programmes leading to awards from QQI's Common Awards System.

This white paper propose new validation policy and criteria for programmes of further education and training (FET) and higher education and training (HET) leading to QQI awards. It is divided into four parts.

Part 1 provides an introduction to the white paper and outlines some of the main changes with respect to existing validation policy and criteria.

Part 2 presents the core policy and procedures that will govern validation.

Part 3 sets out the core criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training.

Part 4 augments the core policy and criteria for the validation of programmes leading to FET Common Award System awards.

An implementation plan will be drawn up for the introduction of the new policy and criteria. Particular attention will be given to ensuring a smooth well-coordinated transition for those sectors where the change is greatest.

Stakeholders reading this white paper are invited to consider the implications of the proposed new validation policy and criteria and respond to QQI with comments. QQI will arrange some workshops and briefing sessions to facilitate discussions.

The closing date for responses is 26 February 2016

December 2015

PART 1

1 INTRODUCTION TO THE WHITE PAPER

This paper outlines new policy and criteria for the **validation of programmes of education (validation)** and training by QQI.

Validation is a regulatory process that determines whether or not a particular QQI award can be offered in respect of a **provider's programme of education and training (programme¹)**. Collateral outcomes of the validation process include the identification of good practice and opportunities for improvement. Applications for QQI validation are made after the prospective programme has been fully documented and before it is offered to learners for enrolment.

Currently QQI accepts applications for the validation of programmes of education and training

- » leading to QQI awards at all levels in the National Framework of Qualifications
- » in a range of educational contexts (e.g. further education, higher education, professional education and apprenticeship, English language teaching, and research training)
- » involving diverse modes (including collaborative, transnational and e-learning)

1.1 RATIONALE

QQI's new validation policy and criteria are being introduced for a number of reasons:

- » They implement a consistent approach to QQI validation across all levels in the NFQ. They are organised and presented in a modular format based on core policy and criteria. All validation is governed by the core policy and criteria which are generalised and can be used for many types of programmes without supplementation. For certain kinds of programmes where there is a need for greater consistency or elaboration, the core policy and criteria are augmented with more specific additional policy or criteria.

¹ Certain terms in common usage have different meanings among different groups of providers. The validation policy uses standardised terminology and therefore all readers are urged to be alert to the definitions of terms (even if they seem familiar) because their precise meaning here may be changed.

- » They replace the diverse range of existing validation processes including those derived from QQI's antecedent bodies. This is important because the legacy processes as implemented do not all supply the same level of evidential support for validation nor are they equally transparent.
- » They are developed to work with QQI's new QA guidelines and its recently published awards and standards related policies.
- » They facilitate diverse approaches to validation and aim to ensure that QQI's validation processes efficiently and transparently provide the information required by QQI to satisfy itself reliably that validation is warranted. They should help QQI target its resources to where they are most needed and balance risk.
- » They provide for the validation of FET (further educational and training) programmes that do not depend on the Common Awards System (as well as those that do).

2 EXISTING QQI VALIDATION POLICY AND CRITERIA

The existing legacy higher education and training (HET) and further education and training (FET) programme validation criteria share much in common. However, the validation process differs markedly between FET and HET as does the application of the criteria.

The legacy FET approach assumes that programmes lead to QQI Common Awards System awards. It involves review by anonymous programme evaluators. Normally there are two evaluators and they are not required to be matched to the programme's discipline area. There is rarely a site visit except for authentication visits to check, for example, that the necessary equipment is in place in certain situations. Evaluations and reports focus on compliance checks. There is rarely much commentary in the reports beyond confirmation that certain criteria are met. Reports are not normally published. Heavy reliance is placed on the provider's quality assurance procedures to underwrite the case for validation. Applications are made through an online portal. The approach can handle high volumes of validation applications with current QQI resources. The legacy FET validation process and criteria as implemented are weak in their evaluation of capacity and capability to provide the programme submitted for validation taking existing provision and resources into account (e.g. whether the new programme would overstretch the provider's resources).

The legacy HET approach involves a review of each individual application by an independent group that is matched to the programme concerned. There is normally a site visit by the group. A detailed written report against the validation criteria is produced. The report is published. The approach when managed fully by QQI cannot handle high volumes of validation applications with current QQI resources.

Both the FET and HET policies provide for devolving some responsibility to providers to manage some of the validation sub-processes. Devolution requires greater administrative capacity and validation throughput in the providers concerned and also depends on trust.

In the FET system the devolved responsibility is assigned using a **Programme Approval Agreement**. It almost provides authority to validate but not quite. Large numbers of FET programmes have been validated under the programme approval agreements. QQI is not directly involved in the selection or training of the evaluators involved.

Public FET providers frequently collaborate in the development of '**shared programmes**' see section (5.7). Once a shared programme is validated for one provider it may be validated subsequently for other providers upon application (without any systematic evaluation by QQI of the capacity or capability of those providers to provide the programme).

3 HIGHLIGHTING SOME CHANGES IN THE NEW POLICY AND CRITERIA

This validation policy builds on the ideas of the legacy systems and structures and the experience operating them. The following subsections highlight some of the changes.

3.1 UNIFIED POLICY AND CRITERIA

The core validation policy and criteria (see section 19) will apply to all programmes. Further **specialised validation policy and criteria** will augment the core validation policy and criteria.

For a particular programme the core part may, depending on the nature of the programme, be augmented by one or more of the specialised validation policy and criteria documents.

The planned organisation of validation policy and criteria is discussed in section (4).

For FET programmes, for example, this unified approach will result in greater emphasis on the provider's capacity and capability to provide the specific programme.

3.2 TRANSPARENT AND PROPORTIONAL RIGOUR

Sometimes validation will require verification from first principles. At other times QQI's experience of the applicant may warrant an approach that takes more on trust. What is taken on trust in the validation process will be indicated as having been taken on trust. What has been verified will be reported as having been verified.

3.3 SELF-EVALUATION REQUIRED WITH ALL APPLICATIONS

The process will require each applicant to evaluate their own proposed programme against QQI's validation criteria. This will be new for most FET providers. If the programme to be validated uses a shared curriculum that has been pre-approved by QQI through a prior validation process, the self-evaluation will address the remaining provider-specific aspects, see section (5.7).

3.4 WELL MATCHED INDEPENDENT EVALUATORS

Applications for validation will be evaluated by people who are (i) independent of the provider; (ii) report to QQI and (iii) are well matched to the task considering the specific needs of the validation process for the specific proposed programme.

3.5 THE VALIDATION REPORT WILL ALWAYS BE PUBLISHED BY QQI

QQI will publish all validation reports on its website so there is full transparency. These reports will address the validation criteria and include any conditions of validation (beyond the mandatory conditions) and any recommendations attaching to validation (e.g. for improvement of the programme).

3.6 NEW APPROACHES TO DEVOLVING RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDERS

Providers with the necessary capacity and trust relationship with QQI may be enabled to take on responsibility for organising the independent evaluation of validation applications on QQI's behalf.

3.7 NEW DISCIPLINE-AREA BASED APPROACH TO VALIDATION FOR PROVIDERS OF PROGRAMMES LEADING TO CAS AWARDS

Providers of programmes leading to CAS awards with the necessary capacity, specialised QA procedures, validation throughput, and trust relationship with QQI may have their CAS award programmes in a specified discipline-area validated on the basis of a single discipline-area-level evaluation of the provider and their programmes by QQI. All programmes leading to CAS awards in the discipline-area would be validated by this process for the duration of validation. Moreover the provider may develop new programmes in the discipline-area leading to CAS awards in accordance with approved QA procedures and these will be validated by QQI subject to administrative checks without additional evaluation.

3.8 NEW VALIDATION PROCESS FOR PROGRAMMES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

The new policy and criteria extend QQI validation to programmes for English language proficiency for the first time.

3.9 CLARITY ABOUT THE SCOPE OF CHANGES THAT MAY BE MADE TO VALIDATED PROGRAMMES BY PROVIDERS

Providers are expected to change their programmes to keep them relevant and up to date. The new policy will make it clearer how much change can be made to a validated programme without having to apply again for validation.

3.10 EVALUATORS WILL BE NAMED IN VALIDATION REPORTS

The practice of using anonymous independent evaluators will be discontinued.

3.11 CLARITY ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF ‘SHARED PROGRAMMES’

See section (5.7).

4 THE PLANNED ORGANISATION OF QQI'S NEW VALIDATION POLICY AND CRITERIA

CORE VALIDATION POLICY AND CRITERIA

- » Core Policy and Criteria for the Validation of Education and Training Programmes by QQI (this is common to all and is sufficient for many FET and HET programmes leading to QQI awards where broad awards standards apply)

SPECIALISED VALIDATION POLICY AND CRITERIA

For a given programme this may be augmented by one or more of the following **specialised validation policy and criteria** (and related) documents:

- » Policy and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards (2013)
- » Policy and criteria for the validation of programme leading to Common Awards System (CAS) awards (a draft is appended to this document)
- » Policy and criteria for the validation of language-proficiency oriented programmes (planned for 2016)
- » Policy and criteria for the validation of collaborative and transnational programmes and for programmes leading to joint awards (planned for 2016)
- » Policy and criteria for the validation of research degree programmes (planned for 2016)

OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

Other anticipated QQI documents that would be closely associated with validation policy and criteria might address:

- » QA guidelines concerning the preparations for revalidation of programmes leading to QQI awards
- » Assessment conventions and protocols for programmes leading to QQI awards
- » Guidelines on the moderation of assessment results and external examining
- » Evaluator conventions and protocols
- » Credit accumulation conventions and protocols

PART 2

5 THE BASIS AND NATURE OF PROGRAMME VALIDATION

The **validation** of a **provider's programme of education and training** is a function defined by statute. It involves a number of concepts that warrant attention as their statutory interpretation may be subtly different from their everyday usages even within FET and HET communities. These are addressed in subsections (5.1)-(5.4) beginning with the most fundamental concept—namely that of a programme of education and training (a programme).

The remainder of this section concerns the implementation of validation by QQI.

5.1 THE CONCEPT OF A PROGRAMME OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

A programme of education and training is a process by which a learner acquires knowledge, skill or competence and includes a course of study, a course of instruction and an apprenticeship.

QQI's validation core policy and criteria have been designed to restrict attention to those elements that are considered intrinsic to all programmes. By focusing on what is considered intrinsic to all programmes the policy and criteria avoid unintended bias in favour of any particular type of programme or approach to teaching and learning. In so doing they facilitate diversity and open the way for enhancing innovations.

5.2 THE CONCEPT OF A PROVIDER

A provider is a person (an entity with legal personality) who provides, organises or procures a programme of education and training.

For example, a provider could be a group or organisations working together under a formal arrangement to provide a validated programme.

5.3 THE CONCEPT OF A VALIDATED PROGRAMME

A programme of education and training is validated where QQI confirms under [section 45 of the 2012 Act](#) (Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012)², that the provider of the programme has satisfied it that an enrolled learner of that provider who completes that programme will acquire, and where appropriate, be able to demonstrate, the necessary knowledge, skill or competence to justify an award (an award is an educational qualification) of QQI being offered in respect of that programme.

Completion of the validated programme means that the learner has been assessed to have achieved the requirements for a QQI award to be made. Therefore a learner who attempts all the learning and assessment tasks and meets all the programme's requirements but fails to achieve the required standard must be regarded as not having completed the programme. If such a learner is excluded from the programme or chooses to leave without re-attempting completion they are included in the programme attrition rate.

Validation applies to a provider's programme rather than to a programme in isolation from a provider. A validated programme is not transferrable from one provider to another see also section (5.7).

² Hyperlinks are provided to sections of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 to assist readers who would like to see the legislative underpinnings of the policy and criteria.

5.4 THE STATUTORY BASIS FOR PROGRAMME VALIDATION

QQI's functions include validating programmes of education and training, and **reviewing** and **monitoring** the validated programmes (section 9(d) of the 2012 Act).

QQI's programme validation function is governed by sections 44-47 of the 2012 Act. The validation policy and criteria are established under section 44 of the 2012 Act.

A provider who falsely claims or represents that the QQI has validated a programme of education and training of the provider commits an offence under the 2012 Act.

5.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF VALIDATING PROGRAMMES

When a programme of education and training is validated by QQI:

- a) the provider of the validated programme is assured that QQI will make an award on learners who successfully complete the programme;
- b) a prospective learner is assured that the programme will help them achieve the standard required for the corresponding QQI award to be conferred on them; and
- c) stakeholders (e.g. funders and employers) investing in the QQI validated programme of education and training are assured that it will adequately prepare learners for the corresponding QQI award.

It must be noted that these assurances are not absolute because (i) validation of new programmes addresses programmes before they are provided and (ii) validation relies on the efficacy of other quality assurance procedures including provider-owned quality assurance procedures.

5.6 DIFFERENTIAL VALIDATION

This involves QQI validation of a programme that is based on, or a modification of, a QQI validated programme. The QQI validation of the original programme can inform the QQI validation of the derived

programme and this can simplify the QQI validation process for the derived programme. QQI validation of a derived programme that relies on the QQI validation of the original programme is referred to as **differential validation**.

For example, differential validation applies when a change in a validated programme that is substantial enough to warrant revalidation would justify the findings of the original validation process being reused. A specific example of this is where a programme designed to be provided at one location is modified to enable it to be provided at another. The modifications might, in this case, be the changed teaching staff; the changed facilities and resources; and perhaps the changed quality assurance environment. If such a programme's curriculum and assessment remain unchanged they need not be re-examined in detail. The validation of the modified programme could focus on what has changed: the difference.

5.7 VALIDATION OF PROGRAMMES THAT USE A SHARED CURRICULUM

A **shared curriculum** is one that is developed for use by two or more providers. It is that part of a provider's programme of education and training that does not depend on the specific characteristics of the provider; for example, the provider's governance, quality assurance arrangements, geographical location, staff, premises, and equipment.

A shared curriculum may be used by a provider (with its owner's permission) when developing a programme of education and training. The resulting programme can be viewed as an *instantiation* of the shared curriculum. When QQI validates one provider's programme using a shared curriculum, any other provider (with permission to use that shared curriculum) need only apply for **differential validation** of its corresponding programme, see section (5.6).

The term '**shared programme**' has been used by providers and QQI in programme approval agreements to describe what is in effect a shared curriculum. The new terminology will allow the collaborative practice to continue in line with appropriate criteria and clarify what precisely is being shared. QQI will continue to support and encourage the practice of sharing curricula.

5.8 COLLABORATIVE PROVISION AND CONSORTIUM PROGRAMMES

A group of providers may form a consortium for the purposes of having a collaborative programme to be provided by members of the consortium validated, see section (4).

The consortium and its members would have to have suitable quality assurance procedures approved by QQI for this kind of collaborative provision before making an application for validation of a consortium programme.

5.9 JOINT AND PARALLEL VALIDATION

QQI will engage in parallel and joint validation where the involvement of other awarding bodies leads to qualifications or quality assurance related benefits to learners.

Joint validation is normally a requirement where a **joint award** is to be made, see section (4). See also QQI's *Policy and Criteria for Making Awards*.

Parallel validation is where two or more awarding bodies independently approve a programme for the purpose of parallel certification that is not subject to a **joint awarding arrangement** under (section 51 of the 2012 Act).

5.10 VALIDATION AND CERTIFICATION

A provider may not request certification in respect of learners who have not completed a validated programme. If validation expires then learners who have not already been enrolled on the programme prior to the expiry of validation may not be presented for certification.

Validation does not oblige a provider to seek QQI certification.

Where the provider has offered the programme to learners as a QQI validated programme, the provider must facilitate access to QQI certification where learners request it.

5.11 PROVIDERS WHO MUST SUBMIT THEIR PROGRAMMES TO QQI FOR VALIDATION

This refers to providers who 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](#).

5.12 VALIDATION FEES

The schedule of fees is published separately. QQI will not accept an application for validation unless the applicable fee has been received.

5.13 RETROSPECTIVE VALIDATION

QQI will not retrospectively validate programmes. Note section (5.4).

6 PREREQUISITES FOR PROGRAMME VALIDATION

A provider must be in good standing with QQI (complying with all applicable requirements) when making an application for validation.

Before a provider of a programme of education and training may apply under [section 44 of the 2012 Act](#) to QQI for validation of a programme it must have:

a) **established procedures for quality assurance under [section 28 of the 2012 Act](#);**

A provider must establish procedures for quality assurance under section 28 of the 2012 Act before making an application for validation. The quality assurance procedures must comprehend the programme submitted for validation and they must be fit-for-purpose in the context of the proposed programme.

b) **established procedures for access, transfer and progression under [section 56](#);**

A provider must establish procedures for access, transfer and progression under [section 56](#) before making an application for validation.

c) **complied with [section 65](#) in respect of arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners; and**

A provider must have complied with [section 65](#) of the 2012 Act in respect of arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners, if applicable, before making an application for validation.

Providers should refer to the QQI document “*Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL): Protocols for the Implementation of Part 6 of the 2012 Act Guidelines for Providers*”.

Essentially, a provider of a programme subject to [section 65\(1\)](#) of the 2012 Act is required to submit details of the arrangements the provider has in place in accordance with [section 65\(4\)](#) of the 2012 Act to QQI in writing when making an application for validation.

The arrangements must be relevant to the programmes for which validation is sought. QQI will require a statutory declaration by the provider that the arrangements (in respect of learners to be enrolled on the programme submitted) comply with [section 65 of the 2012 Act](#). If the programme is validated, the written record of the details of the arrangements will be published along with the declaration.

Notwithstanding any declaration by the provider, QQI will not accept an application for validation if it considers that the arrangements do not comply with **section 65** in respect of arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners. Acceptance of an application may not be interpreted to imply that QQI confirms the efficacy of the arrangements.

- d) **consulted with the person referred to in section 44 subsection (11), if that subsection applies to the provider.**

A provider must consult with any other provider who wholly or partly provides the programme (section 44 subsection (11)).

The involvement of any such second providers must be declared.

QQI's specialised validation policy and criteria for collaborative programmes may apply if two or more providers are involved in the collaborative provision of a programme.

Applications will not be accepted from providers who do not meet these 4 conditions.

7 VALIDATION IN THE CONTEXT OF A PARTICULAR PROVIDER

7.1 VALIDATION AND INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

A programme submitted for validation must always interface with the provider's approved quality assurance procedures. This is one of the reasons that validation does not translate from one provider to another, see section (5.7). A programme will include intrinsic governance, quality assurance, learner assessment, and access, transfer and progression procedures that must functionally interface with the provider's general or institutional procedures. If the programme is a collaborative one where the provider is a virtual one (e.g. a consortium of providers) the arrangements are more complex but the principles are similar. Policy and criteria for the validation of collaborative programmes is addressed in section (4).

7.2 FIRST-TIME QQI VALIDATION AND SCOPE OF PROVISION

QQI's *Policy and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards* set out the process, policy and criteria for providers who do not have a current relationship with QQI to get access to the programme validation process for the first time.

Access to validation is limited by the **approved scope of provision**. The approved scope of provision is established for new providers when they apply to access validation.

For other providers the approved scope of provision is taken to be the scope of their currently validated programmes at the time of the commencement of this policy. This may be modified at re-engagement.

The scope of provision is determined by³.

- a) The NFQ levels and award types to which the programme leads
- b) The programme's field of learning and/or professional domain
- c) The maximum and minimum numbers of learners that can be accommodated on the programme each cycle
- d) The target learner groups
- e) The teaching and learning modalities
- f) The location(s) where the programme will be provided to enrolled learners

7.3 EXTENDING THE APPROVED SCOPE OF PROVISION

After a provider has had a programme validated it may extend the **approved scope of provision** by applying for validation of a programme that extends the scope. This may require it to first modify its quality assurance procedures and have these approved by QQI.

Validation may extend the scope to a limited extent (e.g. within the providers existing approved QA procedures).

7.4 VALIDATION AND QA

A standard validation may recommend approval of incremental changes to QA procedures. This does not extend to approval of sector-specific or topic-specific procedures.

³ This definition is from QQI's "Policy and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards". As defined it mixes programme conditions with scope of provision. It may be useful to amend this definition to include the first two and replace the remainder with terms such as the following

- a) Collaborative provision
- b) Transnational provision
- c) Research degree provision
- d) Flexible and distributed learning provision
- e) Further education and training provision
- f) Higher Education and Training provision
- g) English language teaching

Providers should consult the QA guidelines suite concerning the sector-specific and topic-specific guidelines that may apply and note the requirement to have corresponding procedures approved before applying for validation.

In some cases it may be efficient to integrate the approval of QA procedures and validation. The same evaluation process might look at the evidence for both in parallel (i.e. use the same provider self-evaluation report and site visit). The decision making sequence, however, must be sequential and QA must be approved (among other things) before a formal application for validation can be made.

7.5 VALIDATION OF A PROGRAMME PROVIDED AT MULTIPLE CENTRES

Providers that offer programmes at multiple locations (centres) must have QQI approved quality assurance procedures that cover the centres.

When such a provider applies for validation it must specify all the centres at which the programme will be provided and the precise criteria for enabling additional centres to be added to the list.

The programme validation criteria must be satisfied independently for each centre e.g. the availability of competent staff and specialised equipment.

7.6 FLEXIBLE AND DISTRIBUTED LEARNING

QQI may validate a programme that involves arrangements for flexible or distributed learning (FDL). This would, for example, include an online programme or a blend of e-learning and centre-based learning. Unless otherwise indicated **on the certificate of validation**, validation does not allow for the use of flexible or distributed learning arrangements not considered during the validation process.

This restriction does not apply to the use of teaching and learning technology supports in the context of centre-based programmes. If a programme is to introduce such technology the modified programme requires validation. See also QQI's *QA Guidelines for Flexible and Distributed Learning*.

FDL provision will be restricted to learners in the Republic of Ireland unless the scope of provision extends to transnational provision.

7.7 TRANSNATIONAL

A programme is validated for provision in specific countries⁴. Unless otherwise indicated **on the certificate of validation**, validation is restricted to programmes provided from the Republic of Ireland to learners based in the Republic of Ireland. If a new country is to be added to this set the modified programme requires validation.

Specialised validation policy and criteria for transnational programmes will be provided separately, see section (4).

7.8 LANGUAGE

A programme is validated for provision through a particular set of languages e.g. a programme may be validated for provision through Irish exclusively or through Irish, German and English. Unless otherwise indicated **on the certificate of validation**, validation is restricted to provision through the English language. If a new language is to be added to this set the modified programme requires validation.

⁴ Country for the purposes of this document can be construed as territory of a sovereign state or jurisdiction.

8 PREPARING AN APPLICATION FOR VALIDATION

This sections outlines how to make an application for validation. More detailed guidelines may be issued to help providers prepare their applications.

8.1 PREREQUISITES

A provider is responsible for ensuring that the prerequisites are established before making an application for validation.

An application for validation must be consistent with all the requirements of QQI's validation policy and criteria. These include (but are not limited to) the requirements set out in section (6) as well as those in the following paragraphs.

A provider may not apply for validation outside the approved scope of provision, see section (7.2).

An application for validation must be accompanied by a fee.

Acceptance of an application by QQI must not be interpreted as indicating that QQI deems that the policy requirements have been met.

Should QQI, after accepting an application for validation, find that the requirements of its validation policy and criteria have not been met it will refuse validation and the application fee will be not be refunded.

8.2 PROGRAMMES OF FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Providers of FET programmes would be expected to use the CAS unless they have QA procedures that enable them to develop intended programme learning outcomes using broader standards or NQF award-type descriptors.

They would also need to present a compelling rationale for not using CAS.

8.3 PROGRAMME AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

The programme-related documentation must include sufficient information to address the applicable validation criteria for example:

- » An outline of the programme and identification of the QQI awards to which it leads;
- » The documented programme (including for example what is taught, how it is taught, by what means and in which modes it is taught, by whom it is taught, where it is taught, when it is taught, how it is assessed, to whom it is taught in general terms, who owns the programme, and how the programme is managed and quality assured and by whom) this should integrate or be supported by:
 - ~ The programme's assessment strategies and procedures;
 - ~ The programme's teaching and learning strategy (this covers education and training);
 - ~ CVs for the programme's key staff;
 - ~ Comprehensive listing of the physical facilities and learning resources;
 - ~ Documented procedures for the operation and management of the programme;
 - ~ Five-year plan for the programme demonstrating viability
- » Samples of the material to be provided to prospective learners;
- » Samples of the material to be provided to enrolled learners;
- » Samples of assessment tasks, model answers and marking schemes for each award stage.

Additional documentation may be required to address the applicable validation criteria.

Additional or alternative requirements may be set out in the relevant specialised validation policy and criteria documents.

8.4 EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAMME BY THE PROVIDER

Prior to making an application for validation of a programme, a provider will need to conduct, and prepare a report on, an evaluation of the relevant programme against the applicable validation policy and criteria. This process would be expected to be conducted in accordance with the applicant's QQI approved quality assurance procedures. Any external evaluation commissioned by the provider for this purpose is not to be confused with the independent evaluation defined in section (9).

8.5 ASSEMBLING AND MAKING THE APPLICATION

All applications for validation must include

- » Documentation demonstrating that the prerequisites are established (8.1)
- » Any rationale required under section (8.2)
- » The programme and supporting documentation (8.3)
- » The provider's evaluation report (8.4)
- » The applicable fee (the application is incomplete if the fee has not been received by QQI)

The programme documentation and provider's evaluation report must address the applicable validation criteria. QQI may refuse validation on the grounds that the application does not address the applicable validation criteria. **The onus is on the applicant to present a complete case.**

Additional or elaborated requirements may be set out in the **specialised validation policy and criteria** documents and in QQI's operational procedures for validation (including software systems).

In some circumstances QQI may allow the provider to first submit the first three items and request to be invoiced for the applicable fee. QQI will then confirm that the application fee identified by the provider is correct and may screen the documentation. QQI will then invoice the provider if all seems in order. The application is considered made when the application fee is received by QQI. Passing this screening check is no guarantee that the documentation will be found complete when independently evaluated.

8.6 WITHDRAWAL OF AN APPLICATION FOR VALIDATION

Applications for the validation of new programmes may be withdrawn prior to the start of the independent evaluation stage. The fees will be forfeit if the application is withdrawn. After the independent evaluation stage has started, QQI will normally progress to a determination and publish the independent evaluation report.

8.7 CONFIDENTIALITY AND THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

The documentation (including that in section (8.5)) relating to an application for validation will be made available confidentially to QQI staff and persons and organisations involved in their evaluation. Nevertheless, it should be noted that QQI is subject to the Freedom of Information legislation and QQI records are subject to requests under the Freedom of Information Act.

9 INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

All applications for validation will be independently evaluated against the validation criteria. This approach is outlined below. Elaborated requirements may be set out in the specialised validation policy and criteria documents and in QQI's operational procedures for validation (including software systems).

As necessary, by arrangement with QQI, evaluators may undertake site-visits as part of the evaluation. They may interview the provider's leadership, the programme personnel and other relevant stakeholders including any relevant learners. The evaluation group may provide informal feedback to the provider at the conclusion of a site visit. Any such feedback will not be comprehensive and will be given without prejudice to the final **independent evaluation report**.

The independent evaluation report must address whether the programme meets the validation criteria in general and in detail. It must include one of the following overall conclusions in light of the applicable validation policy and criteria:

- » Satisfactory (*meaning that it recommends that QQI can be satisfied in the context of section 5.3*)
- » Satisfactory subject to special⁵ conditions (specified with timescale for compliance for each condition)
- » Not satisfactory

Normally an application that fails to meet the criteria in any of its aspects will be recommended as not satisfactory. However, in exceptional cases the 'special conditions' may be used to identify parts of the application that are considered satisfactory on a stand-alone basis. For example an application might propose a programme to be provided at two locations but the independent evaluation report may find the application satisfactory on condition that it be provided only at one specified location and not at the other. These conditions will not be used to validate a programme conditional on a different QQI award (e.g. at a lower NFQ level or having a different award title) being sought than the one identified in the application.

⁵ Special here means additional to the standard conditions of validation deriving from QQI's validation policy and criteria.

The report may also include recommendations for consideration by the provider.

All independent evaluation reports are required to provide a rationale for any proposed conditions and recommendations as well as the overall conclusion.

The report must outline the evaluation process and identify the evaluators and any interests that they declared (this relates to avoidance of conflicts of interest).

9.1 INDEPENDENT EVALUATORS

Evaluators must be independent of the programme and its providers e.g. free of conflicting interests. Any related interests must be declared in the independent evaluation report and will be published.

Independent evaluators must be competent to make a recommendation on whether or not the programme should be validated. Competence means the capacity to make judgements against the applicable QQI validation criteria. Specifically, an evaluator or an evaluation group must be selected to have the competence to defend a negative recommendation should they need to make one.

For some programmes leading to CAS awards, one or two evaluators might be sufficient, but often a group of independent evaluators (evaluation group) will be required. The needs of the particular evaluation will determine the number of evaluators and the competences required. A group of three or more evaluators is likely to be required where the applicable QQI awards standards are broadly determined (i.e. the expected learning outcomes are not determined in detail by QQI leaving a lot of room for interpretation as is the case for HET awards standards).

Evaluation groups will have expertise in the programme's discipline-area and in generic areas including pedagogy, assessment, quality assurance and all the other areas indicated by QQI's validation criteria.

9.2 DEVOLVED RESPONSIBILITY FOR ARRANGING AN INDEPENDENT EVALUATION REPORT

QQI may devolve some responsibility to the provider concerned for arranging the independent evaluation report. QQI must be confident that the provider is competent, resourced and sufficiently trustworthy and reliable to manage such a process objectively and that it has the new programme development throughput to justify the establishment of the necessary procedures. Applicants will have no part in making validation *decisions* concerning their own programmes under any circumstances. The arrangements must be established formally through a signed memorandum of agreement between QQI and the provider.

9.3 COMMISSIONING AN INDEPENDENT EVALUATION REPORT

Similarly to section 9.2, QQI may assign responsibility to independent persons or organisations (who are free from conflicting interests) other than provider concerned to arrange the independent evaluation report (IER).

9.4 PROVIDER'S RESPONSE AND IER FINALISATION

After QQI has received the independent evaluation report it will make this available to the provider. The provider will be invited to:

- » Comment on the factual accuracy of the independent evaluation report;
- » Respond briefly to the overall findings (e.g. whether they are accepted by the provider);
- » The provider should submit modified documentation and plans addressing any special pre-validation conditions if the provider accepts the special pre-conditions identified in the independent evaluation report.

Following this, the independent evaluation report will be finalised (where necessary in consultation with the independent evaluator (group) and the provider). The independent evaluator (group) may be invited

by QQI to make a supplementary statement on the provider's response that would be included as an addendum to the report.

Where validation involves special conditions and recommendations providers will generally be expected to provide QQI with plans for addressing these along with modified programme documentation. These do not need to be provided with the brief response mentioned above except where special pre-validation conditions are specified.

9.5 SETTING ASIDE AN INDEPENDENT EVALUATION REPORT

QQI may set an independent evaluation report aside *at any stage* if it is unsatisfied with the report (e.g. if it is inconsistent with QQI's validation policy and criteria) or if it lacks confidence in any aspect of the independent evaluation process.

Generally it will instigate a new independent evaluation process in this situation.

It may require that the applicant instigates a completely new external assessment if the process was managed by the applicant under section (9.2). Alternatively in this situation and in exceptional circumstances it may manage a new process itself (taking due account of the findings of the process that led to the report that was set aside).

10 DETERMINATION OF AN APPLICATION FOR VALIDATION

QQI aims to determine applications for validation within 25 weeks of receiving a complete application (including the correct fee) assuming no supplementary documentary information is required to determine the application.

The principles of natural justice apply to the determination by QQI of an application for validation.

If QQI is satisfied with the independent evaluation report it will approve it. In the unlikely event that it approves the report subject to amendments it will consult with the evaluator group prior to publication.

In making its determination QQI

- » Will consider the findings of the validation process including the **independent evaluation report** along with the applicant's response to this report;
- » May consider any other information received in respect of the process or the standing of the applicant;
- » May consider an account of the conduct of the process and its context noting any concerns or complaints expressed by the provider.

*Validation by QQI is always subject to conditions that may include special conditions as defined in section (9). QQI will validate a programme where a provider has satisfied it (QQI) **that an enrolled learner of that provider who completes that programme will acquire, and where appropriate, be able to demonstrate, the necessary knowledge, skill or competence to justify an award of QQI being offered in respect of that programme.** Similarly, QQI will refuse to validate a programme where a provider has not satisfied it of this. If validation is refused QQI will give reasons for the refusal.*

In respect of a particular application QQI will either

- 1) validate the proposed programme subject to conditions;
- 2) validate the proposed programme or a stand-alone part of it that is a programme, subject to conditions including special conditions;
- 3) refuse to validate the proposed programme.

The provider will be notified in writing as soon as practicable of QQI's determination.

Providers may appeal a refusal of validation 3) or a partial refusal 2); see section (13).

A provider who falsely claims or represents that QQI has validated a programme of education and training of the provider commits an offence ([section 45\(5\) of the 2012 Act](#)).

10.1 CERTIFICATE OF VALIDATION

Validation is communicated to the provider by the issue of a certificate of validation.

The provider must not assume that the programme as described in the application has been validated because QQI may validate subject to special conditions (see section (9.2)). What is not explicitly included in the certificate of validation is not validated (i.e. validation is refused) whether or not it was part of the provider's application.

This may include salient characteristics of the validated programme such as:

- 1) Provider name
- 2) Programme title
- 3) Commencement and expiry of validation
- 4) Programme ID
- 5) Outline of the programme

- 6) Outline of the QQI awards available
- 7) Centres for provision (with maximum and minimum numbers of learners)
- 8) Countries for provision
- 9) The target learner groups
- 10) The teaching and learning modalities
- 11) **Approved programme schedule**
- 12) Conditions of validation

QQI will retain an electronic copy of original the validation submission and any amendments to the programme made prior to validation.

A provider may not commence the programme until in possession of the certificate of validation.

10.2 PUBLICATION OF THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION REPORT

The independent evaluation report is the substantive product of the validation process.

It will be published after the closure of the appeal period unless the validation decision is appealed in which case the report will be published if the appeal is unsuccessful.

In some cases the provider's evaluation report may be published with the provider's permission especially if it demonstrates exemplary practice.

10.3 PUBLICATION OF DESCRIPTIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

Certain administrative information will also be published including information about the validation application determination and the programme.

11 CONDITIONS OF VALIDATION

Validation is always determined conditionally. Validation may be reviewed at any time under [section 46 of the 2012 Act](#) and then may be withdrawn under [section 47 of the 2012 Act](#) if the conditions of validation are not being complied with.

11.1 THE STATUTORY CONDITIONS OF VALIDATION

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

- a) 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,
- b) 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,
- c) continue to comply with [section 65 of the 2012 Act](#) in respect of arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners, if applicable, and
- d) 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.

11.2 CONDITION OF VALIDATION CONCERNING A CHANGE IN THE QQI AWARD OR AWARD STANDARD

- a) Where QQI changes an award or award standard the provider shall not enrol any further learners on the affected programmes unless informed otherwise in writing by QQI. The programme is considered validated for learners already enrolled on the programme.

11.3 THE DURATION OF VALIDATION

The duration of validation is the **interval** during which learners may be enrolled on the validated programme.

Validation is for **five years of enrolment** (i.e. learners may be enrolled within this five year interval) unless another period is explicitly indicated **on the certificate of validation** by QQI **or** the QQI award standard changes (if the standard changes before the end of the validation interval). It is a condition of validation that the programme does not enrol any new learners outside this interval.

If the programme is to continue to enrol learners (who will be candidates for QQI awards) beyond this interval (including where it has evolved) the provider must arrange in good time for it to be validated again by QQI or exceptionally the provider may apply for **extension of the duration of validation** (16). In this context the provider may apply for validation of the programme from first principles or, alternatively, the provider may avail of the process for **revalidation** (15) by QQI.

11.4 GENERAL CONDITIONS

The Provider shall

- 1) Implement its written procedures (as approved by QQI) for quality assurance for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training, research and related services the provider provides.
- 2) Continue to comply with section 56 of the 2012 Act in respect of procedures for access, transfer and progression;
- 3) Implement the programme as validated (this allows changes consistent with section 11.7) and connect it with QQI approved quality assurance procedures.
- 4) Unless otherwise agreed by QQI in writing, start implementing the programme as validated within 12 months of validation.

- 5) Make no significant change to the programme without the prior approval of QQI, save in the case of changes arising from the implementation of findings of the provider's QQI approved quality assurance procedures and provided that any such changes would not result in the programme failing to meet the validation criteria or infringing the conditions of validation. (See 11.7.)
- 6) Notify QQI in writing without delay of anything that:
 - a. impacts on the integrity or reputation of the programme or the corresponding QQI awards;
 - b. infringes the conditions of validation; or
 - c. would be likely to cause QQI to consider reviewing the validation.
- 7) Report to QQI when required or requested on its compliance with the conditions of validation.
- 8) Ensure that appropriate human and physical resources are available for the provision of the programme.
- 9) Implement the programme and assessment in accordance with the **Approved Programme Schedule** and notify QQI in writing of any amendments to this arising from changes to the programme: *see section (11.7) on limitations to changes that may be made.*
- 10) Adhere to QQI regulations and procedures for access to certification.
- 11) 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.
- 12) Validation of a provider's programme is not transferable to a different provider. Where one provider merges or acquires another QQI must be informed in writing to determine the implications for QQI validated programmes.

11.5 CONDITIONS FROM THE SPECIALISED VALIDATION POLICY AND CRITERIA

The specialised validation policy and criteria may specify conditions that augment the conditions set out in this document.

11.6 PROGRAMME-SPECIFIC SPECIAL CONDITIONS

The independent evaluation report may recommend **special conditions** to be attached to validation. QQI will normally attach such conditions to its validation determination.

11.7 CHANGES THAT CAN BE MADE TO A VALIDATED PROGRAMME

A validated programme is not a static entity, frozen in time. It is expected that the provider will make necessary enhancements and adaptations to programmes from year to year (see also section 12).

There are limits to what may be changed before a modified programme must be submitted to QQI for validation as a new programme.

These limits depend on the scope of the provider's quality assurance procedures as approved by QQI. Providers who have sufficiently robust quality assurance procedures for handling the introduction of new centres for provision might not need to reapply to QQI for the revaluation of a programme to enable it to be provided at such a new centre or new arrangements for delivery because such extensions would have been foreseen when the programme was originally validated. See section (19.12).

An extensive (i.e. very substantial) change to a programme is one that effectively results in a new programme that must be validated as such. Any change must be consistent with the applicable award-standard(s) against which the programme was validated. The interpretation of what does or does not constitute an 'extensive change' is a matter for expert judgement. Undermining anything that was essential to support the original validation decision would be judged to be an 'extensive change'. Elimination of any core intended programme learning outcomes would also be judged to be

an 'extensive change'. A change in the pre-requisite learning requirements for a given programme may require an extensive change to the programme.

The validation of the modified programme could focus on what has changed with respect to the validated programme from which it is derived. This type of validation is called **differential validation** see section (5.6).

More detailed regulation concerning changes that may be made to validated programmes may be provided in applicable specialised validation policy and criteria documents.

QQI should be consulted in case of any doubt about whether or not validation extends to a modified programme.

12 MONITORING THE CONDITIONS OF VALIDATION

QQI monitors validated programmes (section 9(d) of the 2012 Act). Monitoring focuses on the satisfaction of the conditions of validation section (11). This includes special conditions imposed by QQI on foot of the independent evaluation report.

There are far too many programmes for QQI to be able to determine with certainty that all the conditions are being complied with by all providers all of the time.

The approach to monitoring will be based on

- » The level of uncertainty involved;
- » Risk equalisation across programmes validated by QQI; and
- » QQI's *Policy on Monitoring*.

Reviews of validation under (section 46 of the 2012 Act) may be triggered by monitoring.

13 REFUSAL OF VALIDATION AND APPEAL

Where QQI refuses to validate a programme of education and training it will give reasons for the refusal and the provider of the programme may appeal against the refusal to the **Appeals Panel** (section 45(4) of the 2012 Act).

Detailed information on the process is available on the QQI website.

14 REVIEW AND WITHDRAWAL OF VALIDATION

14.1 WITHDRAWAL OF VALIDATION FOLLOWING A REVIEW OF A PROGRAMME OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

QQI may, at any time, review a programme of education and training which it has validated ([section 46 of the 2012 Act](#)).

Withdrawal of validation following a review under [section 46 of the 2012 Act](#) will be conducted in accordance with the process and criteria outlined in [section 47 of the 2012 Act](#).

Where QQI withdraws validation of a provider's programme of education and training subsection (3) of section 47 of the 2012 Act, the provider of the programme may appeal against the refusal to the **Appeals Panel** ([section 45\(4\) of the 2012 Act](#)).

QQI's website explains how to appeal withdrawal of validation under section 47 of the 2012 Act.

14.2 WITHDRAWAL OF VALIDATION ON ACCOUNT OF WITHDRAWAL OF APPROVAL OF A PROVIDER'S QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

Where QQI withdraws approval of a relevant provider's quality assurance procedures under subsection (4) of section 36 of the 2012 Act, QQI will also by notice in writing addressed to that relevant provider, from such date (not earlier than the date of service on the relevant provider of the notice of withdrawal) as it considers appropriate and as is specified in the notice having regard to the interests of enrolled learners concerned, withdraw validation of any programmes of education and training of the relevant provider concerned which the QQI has validated under section 45 of the 2012 Act.

14.3 WITHDRAWAL OF VALIDATION ON ACCOUNT OF WITHDRAWAL OF APPROVAL OF A PROVIDER'S ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION PROCEDURES

Where QQI withdraws approval a provider's access, transfer and progression procedures under subsection (4) of section 59 of the 2012 Act, QQI will also by notice in writing addressed to that provider, from such date (not earlier than the date of service on the provider of the notice of withdrawal) as it considers appropriate and as is specified in the notice having regard to the interests of enrolled learners concerned, where applicable to that provider, withdraw validation of any programmes of education and training of that provider which the Authority has validated under section 45 of the 2012 Act.

15 REVALIDATION

Programmes are always validated conditionally. All validation determinations are subject to a duration condition. The duration of validation is the interval during which learners may be enrolled on the validated programme, see section (11.3).

Validation may be reviewed at any time under [section 46 of the 2012 Act](#) and then may be withdrawn under [section 47 of the 2012 Act](#) if the conditions of validation are not being complied with.

Revalidation is validation by QQI of a programme that has been validated before by QQI but may have evolved. Preparations for revalidation should be planned by the provider well before the end of the interval during which learners may be enrolled (duration of validation condition) to ensure continuity.

Revalidation is validation in every sense: the process for the independent evaluation may differ from that normally used for the validation of new programmes (but unless otherwise arranged it is the same) and the nature of the evidence that is likely to be available may differ on account of the fact that the proposed programme is always based on one the provider has been providing. The main steps are:

- A. Self-evaluation by the provider of their programme
- B. Application to QQI
- C. Independent evaluation of the programme
- D. Determination of the application by QQI

Similar programmes may be evaluated together for the purpose of re-validation provided this does not compromise the quality of the self-evaluation or independent evaluation processes.

Revalidation provides an opportunity to substantially update and modify the programme. Revalidation benefits from the availability of evidence from providing the programme (on which the proposed programme is based). For example there will be quantitative and qualitative information concerning the effectiveness of the programme. This might include learner enrolment data; attrition and completion

data; graduate progression into employment or other educational programmes; evaluations of the programme by learners, teachers, trainers and employers. This additional evidence must be fully and effectively used in the evaluation of the proposed (revised) programme against the QQI validation criteria.

QQI may refuse revalidation on the grounds that the application does not address the applicable validation criteria. The onus is on the applicant to present a complete case.

A coordinated approach is recommended for programmes using shared curricula as in the case where such programmes are presented for first-time validation e.g. one provider may submit an application for revalidation and following successful completion of the process, other providers who share the updated programme may focus their revalidation applications on the provider-specific factors.

15.1 MAKING THE APPLICATION FOR REVALIDATION

All applications for re-validation must provide the information required for new programme validation (section 8.5) and more besides:

- » Documentation demonstrating that the prerequisites are established (section(8.1))
- » The updated programme and supporting documentation (section (8.3))
- » The provider's evaluation report (using the evidence gleaned from providing the programme) (section (8.4) and (15)).
- » The applicable revalidation fees
- » Where applicable the proposed terms of reference for the independent evaluation report, see section (15.2).

The programme documentation and provider's evaluation report and, where applicable, the independent evaluation report must address the applicable validation criteria and use the evidence gleaned from providing the programme.

Additional or elaborated requirements may be set out in the **specialised validation policy and criteria** documents and in operational procedures (including software systems).

15.2 REVALIDATION PROVISIONS IN APPROVED QA PROCEDURES

QQI may issue quality assurance guidelines concerning the revalidation of programmes leading to QQI awards.

Unless the specialised validation policy and criteria documents stipulate otherwise, the revalidation of a programme that has been validated before may, subject to advance written agreement between QQI and the provider concerned, be determined by QQI on the basis of an **independent evaluation report** prepared in accordance with section (9) and the provider's QQI approved quality assurance procedures. This is a variant form of devolved responsibility for undertaking certain validation sub-processes. This process is not for the validation of new programmes. Where a provider wishes to embed programmes (leading to any class of QQI award) within an existing programme the new programme validation process should be used.

This **written agreement** will set out the **terms of reference for the independent evaluation report** and how this interfaces with QQI's validation process.

15.3 INDEPENDENT EVALUATION MANAGED BY QQI

If the independent evaluation report is not managed by the provider it will be managed by QQI.

15.4 OTHER ASPECTS OF THE REVALIDATION PROCESS

All the other steps in the process are those for validation because revalidation is validation. This includes (*inter alia*) the arrangements for determination of the application for revalidation and for review, withdrawal, and appeal.

The independent evaluation report will be published by QQI.

16 EXTENSION OF THE DURATION OF A VALIDATION DETERMINATION

The duration of validation is the interval during which learners may be enrolled on the validated programme, see section (11.3).

Exceptionally where there is a compelling case, a provider may request an extension of the duration of validation in respect of one of its validated programmes. This is a request for the variation of one of the conditions of validation.

Extensions would be granted by QQI on the basis of the original validation determination and would not require an independent evaluation. The provider and the programme for which an extension is sought are subject to all the conditions other than duration continuing to be satisfied.

An extension might be granted, for example, when the applicable QQI award standard is about to change significantly.

17 COMPLAINTS

Complaints may be made in accordance with the procedures set out in the QQI Customer Charter and Complaints of Service documents.

18 TRANSITION

Sufficient time will be allowed for providers to transition. Full implementation no sooner than September 2016.

PART 3

19 THE CORE VALIDATION CRITERIA⁶

Using the criteria

The criteria are written as statements that are expected to be true if the *provider's programme of education and training* (programme) is to be validated and implemented. The term programme here applies to the entire programme submitted for validation.

Programmes may be divided into partial programmes with a lesser award available to those who only complete part of the programme.

A **partial programme** leading to a major (or any non-minor) award may be embedded in a programme. Such a programme is called an **embedded programme**. Such an award is called an **embedded award**.

Embedding major award programmes is complicated if the full programme is targeted at widely mixed ability cohorts. This is because the average learning rates of the groups aiming for different embedded awards may be significantly different. If all the groups are required to progress at the same rate then either (i) attrition rates will increase, or (ii) the more able students will be able to progress with significantly less effort than the weaker students (and may become bored or distracted), or (iii) standards will fall. Therefore programmes with embedded awards may need to be longer than those without them.

Programmes and embedded programmes may be subdivided into small partial programmes called **modules**. Completion of a module may warrant a QQI **minor award** but it should be noted that the volume of learning required for a minor award increases significantly with NFQ level and minor awards are not available at all at doctoral level. Minor awards are widely used in further education and training.

6 The criteria are not original and have been informed by multiple sources, including the “Handbook for VET providers: Supporting internal quality management and quality culture” and the “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)”

The criteria referring to programmes apply also to embedded programmes. This will not be made explicit everywhere because it would overcomplicate the presentation of the criteria. A few of the earlier criteria do spell out the approach for illustrative purposes.

The criteria footnotes provide further explanatory support for specific criteria.

The validation criteria here along with augmented criteria from applicable specialised validation policy and criteria documents must always be addressed by:

- » provider's evaluation report and the
- » independent evaluation report.

Generalised, non-programme-specific, vague, ambiguous, contradictory or evasive responses to the criteria by the provider or evaluators are unacceptable and may result in

- » the refusal of validation if they appear in the *provider's evaluation report* and
- » the setting aside of an *independent evaluation report*.

These reports should take each of the 12 criterion statements in turn and explain how the programme meets that criterion. They should also address the sub-criterion statements where applicable.

Applicants should note that validation may be refused if any one of the applicable criteria are not demonstrated to be satisfied.

Some larger providers may offer a programme in multiple centres. Such providers will be expected to have QA procedures for determining which centres have the capacity and capability to provide the programme. The application for validation need not address the criteria for each and every centre independently but should select some representative centres to make the case for validation against the full set of criteria.

19.1 THE PROVIDER IS ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR VALIDATION OF THE PROGRAMME

- a) The provider is in good standing with QQI to apply for validation of this programme.
- b) The application for validation is signed by the provider's chief executive who confirms that the information provided is truthful and that all the applicable criteria have been addressed.
- c) The provider has declared that their programme complies with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.⁷
- d) The provider owns or is otherwise entitled to use the property (including intellectual property, premises, materials and equipment) required to provide the programme.

19.2 THE PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES ARE CLEAR AND CONSISTENT WITH THE QQI AWARDS SOUGHT

- a) The programme aims and objectives are expressed plainly.
- b) A QQI award is specified for those who complete the programme.
 - a. Where applicable, for each embedded programme a QQI award is specified for those who complete it.
- c) There is a satisfactory rationale for the choice of QQI award(s).
- d) The award title(s) is consistent with section 3.1 of QQI's *Policy and Criteria for Making Awards*.
- e) The award title(s) is otherwise legitimate for example it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.
- f) The programme title and any embedded programme titles are
 - a. Consistent with the title of the QQI award sought.
 - b. Clear, accurate, succinct and fit for the purpose of informing prospective learners and other stakeholders.

⁷ This criterion is to ensure the programme can actually be provided and will not be halted on account of breach of the law. The declaration is sought to ensure this is not overlooked but QQI is not responsible for verifying this declaration of enforcing such requirements.

- g) For each programme and embedded programme
 - a. The **minimum intended programme learning outcomes** and any other educational or training objectives of the programme are explicitly specified.⁸
 - b. The minimum intended programme learning outcomes to qualify for the QQI award sought are aligned with the relevant QQI awards standards.
- h) Where applicable the **minimum intended module learning outcomes** are explicitly specified for each of the programme's modules.
- i) Any QQI minor awards sought for those who complete the modules are specified, where applicable.
 - a. For each minor award specified the minimum intended module learning outcomes to qualify for the award is aligned with relevant QQI minor awards standards.⁹

19.3 THE PROGRAMME CONCEPT, IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY, AND ITS INTERPRETATION OF QQI AWARDS STANDARDS ARE WELL INFORMED AND SOUNDLY BASED (CONSIDERING SOCIAL, CULTURAL, EDUCATIONAL, PROFESSIONAL AND EMPLOYMENT OBJECTIVES)

- a) The development of the programme and the intended programme learning outcomes has sought out and taken into account the views of stakeholders such as learners, graduates, teachers, lecturers, education and training institutions, employers, statutory bodies, regulatory bodies, the international scientific and academic communities, professional bodies and equivalent associations, trades unions, and social and community representatives.¹⁰
- b) The interpretation of awards standards has been adequately informed and researched; considering the programme aims and objectives and minimum intended programme (and modules where applicable) learning outcomes¹¹:
 - a. There is a satisfactory rationale for providing the programme.

⁸ Other programme other objectives, for example, may be to meet the educational or training requirements of a statutory, regulatory or professional body.

⁹ Not all modules will warrant minor awards. Minor awards feature strongly in the QQI common awards system however further education and training awards may be made outside this system.

¹⁰ Awards standards however detailed rely on various communities for their interpretation. This consultation is necessary if the programme is to enable learners to achieve the standard in its fullest sense.

¹¹ The criteria here apply only where QQI has not determined a specific (as distinct from broad) standard.

- b. The proposed programme compares favourably with existing related (comparable) programmes in Ireland and beyond.
 - c. There is support for the introduction of the programme (such as from employers, or professional, regulatory or statutory bodies).
 - d. There is evidence of learner demand for the programme.
 - e. There is evidence of employment opportunities for graduates where relevant.¹²
 - f. The programme meets genuine education and training needs.¹³
- c) There are mechanisms to keep the programme updated in consultation with internal and external stakeholders.
- d) Employers and practitioners have been systematically involved in the programme design where the programme is vocationally or professionally oriented.
- e) The programme satisfies any validation-related criteria attaching to the applicable awards standards and QQI awards specifications.

19.4 THE PROGRAMME'S ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION ARRANGEMENTS ARE SATISFACTORY

- a) The information about the programme as well as its procedures for access, transfer and progression are consistent with the procedures described in QQI's policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training (QQI, restated 2015). Each of its programme-specific criteria is individually and explicitly satisfied.¹⁴
- b) If the programme leads to a higher education and training award and its duration is designed for native English speakers, then the level of proficiency in English language must be greater or equal

¹² It is essential to involve employers in the programme development and review process when the programme is vocationally or professionally oriented.

¹³ There is clear evidence that the programme meets the target learners' education and training needs and that there is a clear demand for the programme.

¹⁴ Each of the detailed criteria set out in the Policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training (QQI, restated 2015) must be addressed in the provider's evaluation report. The detailed criteria are arranged under the headings

- Progression and transfer routes
- Entry arrangements
- Information provision

to B2+ in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR¹⁵) in order to enable learners to reach the required standard for the QQI award.

- c) The programme specifies the learning (knowledge, skill and competence) that target learners are expected to have achieved before they participate in a programme and any other assumptions about programme participants.
- d) The provider has suitable procedures and criteria for the **recognition of prior learning** for the purposes of access and advanced entry to the programme and for exemptions.
- e) The programme title (the title used to refer to the programme):-
 - a. reflects the core *intended programme learning outcomes*, and is consistent with the standards and purpose of the QQI awards to which it leads, the award title(s) and their class(es).
 - b. is learner focused and meaningful to the learners;
 - c. has long-lasting significance.
- f) The programme title is otherwise legitimate; for example it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.

19.5 THE PROGRAMME'S WRITTEN CURRICULUM IS WELL STRUCTURED AND FIT-FOR-PURPOSE

- a) The programme is suitably structured and coherently oriented towards the achievement by learners of its intended programme learning outcomes. The programme (including any stages and modules) is integrated in all its dimensions.
- b) In so far as it is feasible the programme provides choice to enrolled learners so that they may align their learning opportunities towards their individual educational and training needs.
- c) Each module and stage is suitably structured and coherently oriented towards the achievement by learners of the intended *programme* learning outcomes.
- d) The objectives and purposes of each of the programme's elements are clear to learners and to the provider's staff.

¹⁵ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf (accessed 26/09/2015)

- e) The programme is structured and scheduled realistically based on sound educational and training principles¹⁶.
- f) The curriculum is comprehensively and systematically documented.
- g) The credit allocated to the programme is consistent with the difference between the entry standard and minimum intended programme learning outcomes.
- h) The credit allocated to each module is consistent with the difference between the module entry standard and minimum intended module learning outcomes.
- i) Elements such as practice placement and work based phases are provided with the same rigour and attentiveness as other elements.
- j) The programme **duration** (expressed in terms of time from initial enrolment to completion) and its **fulltime equivalent contact time** (expressed in hours) are consistent with the difference between the minimum entry standard and award standard and with the credit allocation.¹⁷

19.6 THERE ARE SUFFICIENT QUALIFIED AND CAPABLE PROGRAMME STAFF AVAILABLE TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAMME AS PLANNED

- a) The provider has staff who are available, qualified and capable to provide the specified programme in the context of its existing provision.
- b) The programme's staff (those who support learning including any employer-based personnel) demonstrated to be competent to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes and to assess learners' achievements as required.
- c) The performance of the programme's staff is managed to ensure continuing capability to fulfil their roles and there are staff development opportunities¹⁸.
- d) Staff performance is reviewed and there are mechanisms for encouraging development and for addressing underperformance.

¹⁶ This applies recursively to each and every element of the programme from enrolment through to completion. In the case of a modular programme, the pool of modules and learning pathway constraints (such as any prerequisite and co-requisite modules) is explicit and appropriate to the intended programme learning outcomes.

¹⁷ If the duration is variable, for example, when advanced entry is available, this should be explained and justified.

¹⁸ Professional or vocational education and training requires that teaching staff's professional/vocation knowledge is up to date. Being qualified in a discipline does not necessarily mean that a person is currently competent in that discipline. Therefore performance management and development of professional and vocational staff needs to focus on professional/vocational competence as well as pedagogical competence. Professional development may include placement in industry, for example.

19.7 THERE ARE SUFFICIENT PHYSICAL RESOURCES TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAMME AS PLANNED

- a) The provider has the capacity to provide the specified programme in the context of its existing provision; e.g. availability of:
- suitable accommodation for the learning and human needs (comfort, safety, health, wellbeing) of learners
 - suitable information technology and resources
 - suitable of specialist equipment (e.g. kitchen, laboratory, workshop, studio) – if applicable
 - technical support
 - administrative support
 - company placements/internships – if applicable
- b) If versions of the programme are provided in parallel at more than one location each independently meets the location-sensitive validation criteria for each location (for example staffing, resources and the learning environment).
- c) There is a viable five year plan to ensure that the programme can be provided as proposed. It should address
- Planned intake (first five years) and
 - The total costs and income over the five years based on the planned intake.

19.8 THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IS CONSISTENT THE NEEDS OF THE PROGRAMME'S LEARNERS

- a) The physical, social, cultural and intellectual environment (recognising that the environment may be virtual or in the workplace or otherwise removed from the provider's premises) 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 learning environments including peer learners, teachers, and where applicable supervisors, practitioners and mentors.

- c) The provider has arrangements in place 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.

19.9 THERE ARE SOUND TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

- a) The teaching strategies support achievement of the intended programme/module learning outcomes.
- b) The programme provides authentic learning opportunities to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes.
- c) The programme enables enrolled learners to attain (if reasonably diligent) the minimum intended programme learning outcomes reliably and efficiently (in terms of overall learner effort and a reasonably balanced workload).
- 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.

19.10 THERE ARE SOUND ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

- a) All assessment is undertaken consistently with *Assessment Conventions and Protocols for Programmes Leading to QQI Awards (planned 2016)*.
- b) The programme's assessment procedures interface effectively with the provider's QQI approved quality assurance procedures.
- c) The programme includes specific procedures that are fair and consistent for the assessment of enrolled learners to ensure the minimum intended programme/module learning outcomes are acquired by all who successfully complete the programme.¹⁹
- d) The programme includes formative assessment to support learning.

¹⁹ This assumes the minimum intended programme/module learning outcomes are consistent with the applicable awards standards.

- e) There is a satisfactory written programme assessment strategy for the programme as a whole and there are satisfactory module assessment strategies for any of its constituent modules.²⁰
- f) Sample assessment instruments, tasks, marking schemes and related evidence have been provided for each award-stage assessment and indicate that the assessment is likely to be valid and reliable.
- g) There are sound procedures for the moderation of summative assessment results.
- h) The programme only puts forward an enrolled learner for certification for a particular award if they have been specifically assessed against the standard for that award.²¹

19.11 LEARNERS ARE WELL INFORMED, GUIDED AND CARED FOR

- a) The learner is fully informed in a timely manner about the programme including the schedule of activities and assessments.
- b) Information is provided about learner supports that are available.
- c) Information is provided about appeals and complaints procedures.
- d) Providers of modular programmes have effective guidance services for learners on the selection of appropriate learning pathways.
- e) The programme takes into account and accommodates to the differences between enrolled learners, for example, in terms of their prior learning, maturity, and capabilities.
- f) Learners are supervised and individualised support and due care is targeted at those who need it.

²⁰ A programme assessment strategy is a document aimed at those teachers, learners and assessors who are involved with the programme. It should be prepared for every programme during the programme's development and maintained thereafter. The programme assessment strategy should have a number of features. It should:

- Link a programme's assessment instruments (summative and formative, including continuous assessment and repeat assessment) to the minimum (and any other) intended programme learning outcomes as well as intended module and stage learning outcomes.
- Describe and provide a rationale for the choice of assessment tasks, criteria and procedures. It should also address their fairness and consistency, specifically their validity, reliability and authenticity.
- Describe any special regulations (e.g. learners may be required to pass some key modules outright and not rely on pass by compensation).
- Regulate, build upon and integrate the module assessment strategies and (where used) stage assessment strategies.
- Provide contingent strategy for cases where learners claim exemption from modules, including for recognition of prior learning.
- Match the programme's assessment instruments to the requirements of the institutional grading system, particularly concerning the recording and combination of module grades/marks (i.e. provide clear criteria for grading/markings).
- Ensure that the programme's continuous assessment workload is appropriately balanced.
- Relate to the programme's teaching and learning strategy.

²¹ If the award is a QQI CAS compound award it is not necessarily sufficient that the learner has achieved all the components specified in the certification requirements unless at least one of those components is a capstone component (i.e. designed to test the compound learning outcomes).

- g) The programme provides supports for enrolled learners who have special education and training needs.
- h) The programme makes reasonable accommodations for learners with disabilities²².
- i) If the programme aims to enrol international students it complies with the *Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Students*²³.
- j) The programme's learners will be well cared for and safe while participating in the programme, 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.

19.12 THE PROGRAMME WELL MANAGED

- a) The programme interfaces effectively with the provider's QQI approved quality assurance procedures. 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.
- b) Quality assurance²⁴ is intrinsic to the programme's maintenance and addresses all aspects highlighted by the validation criteria.
- c) The programme-specific quality assurance arrangements use continually monitored completion rates and other sources of information that may provide insight into the quality and standards achieved.
- d) The programme operation and management arrangements are coherently documented and suitable.
- e) There are sound procedures for interface with QQI certification.

²² For more information on making reasonable accommodations see www.AHEAD.ie and QQI's Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners (QQI, restated 2015).

²³ See Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Students (QQI, 2015)

²⁴ See also QQI's Policy on Monitoring (QQI, 2014)

PART 4

POLICY AND CRITERIA FOR THE VALIDATION OF PROGRAMMES LEADING TO COMMON AWARDS SYSTEM (CAS) AWARDS

1 INTRODUCTION

This document elaborates the *Core policy and criteria for the validation of education and training programmes by QQI* for providers submitting applications for programmes leading to CAS (Common Awards System) awards. It must be read in conjunction with the ‘core’. It does not repeat material from the core except for elaborative purposes.

It (and its supporting documentation) replaces

- » “*Guidelines for Preparing Programme Descriptors for Further Education and Training Programmes*”
- » “*FET Programme Validation Shared Programme Guidelines*”
- » *Preparing Descriptors for FET Programmes – Guidelines 2013*
- » *Validation of FET Programmes – Policy 2014*

which are rescinded. They may no longer be used when preparing applications for validation. They will be replaced suitable materials to help explain and implement the new policy.

This document applies to programmes that lead to CAS awards. Providers wishing to apply for validation of programmes leading to other kinds of FET awards should use the *Core policy and criteria for the validation of education and training programmes by QQI*.

The *Core policy and criteria for the validation of education and training programmes by QQI* indicates what is required when applying for QQI validation of a programme of education and training. The

requirement to include the provider's evaluation report is new to the validation of further education and training programmes leading to CAS awards. The requirement to include programme and supporting documentation is not new but the scope and presentation of this documentation is new.

2 THE COMMON AWARDS SYSTEM

The CAS's **Certificate/Component Specification Syntax** is set out in detail in *QQI's Policy for Determining Awards Standards*. The following headings are involved

- i. Award Title
- ii. Framework Level
- iii. Purpose Statement
- iv. Credit Value
- v. Field of learning
- vi. Expected Learning Outcomes
- vii. Certificate requirements
- viii. Assessment requirements
- ix. Grading
- x. Special Validation Requirements
- xi. Supporting Documentation
- xii. Access Statement

The expected learning outcomes (vi) is the statutory award standard. The other parts are other QQI determinations (including subsidiary awards standards under the heading Certificate Requirements) that are conveniently linked with the award standard. Each impacts upon the design of programmes leading to CAS awards.

Note that a CAS certificate specification (major, special purpose or supplemental) may be determined without prescribing any component awards.

Programmes designed to lead to CAS awards are special because CAS specifies more than the expected learning outcome for the award to which the programme ultimately leads (normally a compound award). Some of these additional constraints warrant additional (elaborating) validation policy and criteria.

The common awards system is supported by a software systems maintained by QQI. These systems make the awards specifications available online and allow providers to submit and track their validation applications online.

3 TYPES OF PROGRAMMES

3.1 PROGRAMMES

Programmes in the context of the Common Awards System typically lead to multiple awards minor awards and possibly compound awards. A single programme could for example be designed to lead to several minor awards.

Typically programmes are modularised and the modules are aligned with minor awards to which the programme leads—however this approach to modularisation is not mandatory and the provider is free to configure the programme in other ways as long as the programme meets the validation criteria.

3.2 COMPOUND PROGRAMMES AND MODULES

Compound programmes, for the purposes of this document, are **modularised** integrated programmes leading to major, special purpose, supplemental, or professional awards.

Compound programmes normally contain **modules** (small programmes within programmes) that frequently (but not always) lead to minor awards—this is influenced by the QQI certificate specification.

Compound programmes are to be distinguished from mixture programmes defined merely by a mixture of discrete subjects or isolated minor programmes (see below).

3.3 MINOR PROGRAMMES

Minor programmes, for the purposes of this document, are programmes leading to one or more minor awards where the provider **does not provide** a corresponding **compound programme** that leads to a CAS

award. As noted in section (3.2), the term module is used for sub-programmes leading to minor awards in the case where the provider provides the compound programme.

QQI will accept applications for the validation of **minor programmes**. However, there is some doubt about whether **minor programmes** should continue to be validated at all in the longer term because it is difficult to validate such programmes meaningfully in isolation from a **compound programme**. Validation is simplified when a provider of **minor programmes** collaborates with other providers who can collaboratively provide a relevant **compound programme**. However this is not mandatory.

The CAS as originally conceived and implemented made no FET credit allowance for the work required to integrate learning achieved through discrete modules and certified using minor awards towards the achievement of the requirements for a non-minor award. This validation policy includes a number of measures that attempt to work around this limitation.

3.4 PROGRAMMES USING A SHARED CURRICULUM

This is addressed in Core policy and criteria for the validation of education and training programmes by QQI.

3.5 PROGRAMMES USING A MANDATORY CURRICULUM

QQI does not *a priori* mandate curricula. However, certain regulators have been involved in approving 'mandatory' curricula as part of the procedures for recognising certain CAS awards. Generally providers must obtain the permission of the relevant regulator before providing such a programme. The applicable constraints are generally addressed in the relevant awards specifications. QQI does not validate mandatory curricula but the efficiencies applying to the validation of programmes using shared curricula apply to mandatory curricula.

4 THE QBS APPLICATION PROCESS FOR PROGRAMMES LEADING TO CAS AWARDS

Applications for validation are governed by requirements specified by the *Core policy and criteria for the validation of education and training programmes by QQI*.

QQI provides an online interface for the upload of the information required for validation of a programme leading to a QQI CAS award. The online interface enables the

- I. Completion of an online application form that provides summary information relating to the **compound programme** with its **modules** and the CAS awards to which it leads; **OR**
- II. Completion of an online application form that provides summary information relating to a **minor programme** and the CAS minor award(s) to which it leads and the **linked certificate award**.
- III. Uploading the documentation supporting the application (as specified by the *Core policy and criteria for the validation of education and training programmes by QQI*).

Providers are responsible for tracking their applications and ensuring that the necessary information is provided within the allowed timescales. Failure to perform these tasks might result in automatic refusal of validation if the required information is not uploaded in time. Tracking is important because QQI cannot guarantee that providers will receive notifications or reminders (outside the QQI Business System [**QBS**]) about these matters.

4.1 SCREENING

See *Core policy and criteria for the validation of education and training programmes by QQI*.

4.2 INDEPENDENT EVALUATION REPORT

The independent evaluation report will be prepared and ultimately published in accordance with the *Core policy and criteria for the validation of education and training programmes by QQI*.

QQI provides (separately) a model for the independent evaluation report. This is aligned with the validation criteria.

There are two alternatives for evaluation:

- » evaluation focusing on the documentation submitted
- » evaluation focusing on the documentation submitted and site visits

Within these alternatives different levels of scrutiny will apply depending on the complexity of the proposal and the level of uncertainty involved from QQI's perspective.

Complicated or highly important programmes are likely to be validated by a group of evaluators (rather than just one or two evaluators). The evaluator group will probably visit the provider.

Otherwise, providers will not know in advance which of these alternatives will be selected for their application.

4.3 INDEPENDENT EVALUATION BY ONE OR MORE PERSONS

This process is facilitated by the **QBS**.

The application is evaluated by at least two people who will reach consensus on an **independent evaluation report**. In the unlikely event that consensus cannot be achieved a third evaluator will resolve the matter one way or the other. Alternatively, at QQI's discretion, the application may be referred to a group of evaluators selected by QQI to resolve the uncertainty.

Evaluators must have:

- » educational and training expertise;
- » expertise in the programme's field of education and training;

- » an understanding of the labour market in the relevant field; and
- » a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of QQI's validation policy and criteria.

Training will be provided by QQI for evaluators where necessary.

An evaluator who feels that they do not have the competence to evaluate an application should not accept an invitation to act or if this realisation occurs following acceptance should resile from acting and inform QQI without delay.

Where there is no site visit, evaluators may make one **request for additional information (RFI)**—this is done through QBS—this will be visible to the provider within QBS who is expected to upload a response within a specified time. **RFIs** are for the purpose of informing the evaluators and not for the purpose of modifying the application.

4.4 INDEPENDENT EVALUATION BY A PANEL WITH SITE VISIT

From time to time some programmes will be selected for more detailed evaluation by an independent evaluator group. Such a panel will likely visit the provider to meet with the provider's staff and other stakeholders and view the facilities related to the programme.

4.5 VALIDATION AND REVIEW OF AWARDS STANDARDS

FET programmes leading to CAS awards may be validated while the relevant awards standards are indicated as being **under review** provided learners can complete the validated programme and their awards made before the scheduled **deactivation date** for the affected award(s).

A provider applying for the validation of a programme leading to an award that is under review must accept the risk that the programme validation will expire sooner than the normal five years for enrolment.

5 ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR PROGRAMMES LEADING TO CAS AWARDS

The *Core policy and criteria for the validation of education and training programmes by QQI* applies to programmes leading to CAS awards. **All of its criteria must be addressed when applying for validation of a programme of education and training leading to a CAS award.**

This section provides some augmenting criteria that **must also** be addressed when applying for the validation of programmes leading to CAS awards.

Here, the criteria are organised under the headings used in the CAS's awards specifications (see QQI's *Policy for Determining Awards Standards*).

A programme leading to a CAS award will be subject to a **compound award specification** as well as the applicable **component award specifications**. This applies even to the case where a provider is submitting a **minor programme** leading to a single minor award because even in that case the programme must be designed in the context of a particular compound. This does not necessarily mean the minor award can only be used to meet the certification of the specified compound award but in some cases it does mean this, for example, where the minor programme and its associated minor award are strongly differentiated by the compound.

5.1 LINKED CERTIFICATE SPECIFICATION

- a) A **minor programme** that leads to a **minor award** (issued as a **component certificate**) is developed for the purpose of preparing a learner to meet part of the requirements for a specified non-minor award (**a certificate**) (e.g. a major, special purpose, professional or supplemental class award) that includes the minor award in its certificate specification. This is called the **linked certificate specification**. A minor programme might be designed to lead, upon completion, to more than one minor awards and the same principle applies.

5.2 PURPOSE STATEMENT

- a) The compound programme is consistent with the relevant award specification's purpose statement.
- b) The minor programme is consistent with the relevant minor award(s) specification's purpose statement and that of the **linked certificate specification**.

5.3 FIELD OF LEARNING

- a) The provider's approved scope of provision must encompass the programme's field of learning and that of linked certificate specification.

5.4 EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES

- a) The minimum intended **compound programme** learning outcomes are consistent with the applicable award standard (non-minor award) and the minimum intended module learning outcomes are consistent with the applicable minor awards standards.
- b) The minimum intended **minor programme** learning outcomes are consistent with the applicable award standard.
- c) A **minor programme**'s minimum intended programme learning outcomes must also be consistent with the **linked certificate specification** and the provider must be capable of providing a programme leading to the linked certificate.
- d) The programme leading to a compound award cannot be completed unless the learner has demonstrated all of its expected learning outcomes (those of the compound award itself *in addition to* those of the required minor awards).

5.5 CERTIFICATE REQUIREMENTS²⁵

- a) The **compound programme** ensures the certificate requirements are satisfied for each learner before the (non-minor) certificate is requested.
- b) The satisfaction of the certificate requirements is a **necessary but insufficient** condition for the (non-minor) certificate to be requested.²⁶

5.6 ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS

- a) The programme only puts forward an enrolled learner for certification for a particular award if they have been specifically assessed against the standard determined by QQI for that award—this applies separately to each award including minor, major and special purpose awards.²⁷

5.7 GRADING

- a) The **minor programme** or **compound programme module** apportions the determination of the overall grade for the corresponding minor award to the combination of assessment techniques prescribed by the applicable minor award specification.
- b) Certificates (non-minor awards) are classified in accordance with QQI's requirements (Assessment Conventions and Protocols, planned 2016).

²⁵ Certificate requirements are a necessary but insufficient requirement for the recommendation to QQI that a compound award be made.

A particular component award may appear in the certificate requirements of more than one compound. For example the Level 5 minor award 'work experience' appears in the certificate requirements of dozens of major awards. Achievement of this such a minor award in the context of one programme does not automatically imply that it can be used to meet the certificate requirements of a different programme. For example work experience in 'Engineering Technology' will not be useful for 'Early Childhood Care and Education'.

It is the responsibility of the provider of a programme leading to a compound award to determine whether or not an enrolled learner's prior CAS awards can be used to meet the compound award's certificate requirements. CAS minor awards cannot be taken at face value in this regard especially general ones that can be achieved in significantly different ways.

²⁶ A learner who meets the certificate requirements may not be entitled to the certificate if they have not demonstrated achievement consistent with the certificate's expected learning outcomes.

²⁷ It is not necessarily sufficient that the learner has achieved all the components specified in the certification requirements unless at least one of those components is a capstone component (i.e. designed to test the compound learning outcomes).

5.8 SPECIAL VALIDATION REQUIREMENTS

- a) The programme complies with the **special validation requirements** and where special validation requirements specify physical facilities (e.g. professional kitchen), there is convincing evidence that these requirements are established including for example digital photographic (or video) evidence that enables the suitability of the facilities to be evaluated.
- b) Where special validation requirements relate to facilities or staff or other factors that vary with centre, they are met at each centre where the programme is to be provided.

5.9 SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

- a) Where the expected learning outcomes require compliance with supporting standards (e.g. occupational standards or competence standards) this compliance is systematically demonstrated in the application for validation.

5.10 ACCESS STATEMENT²⁸

- a) Where the award specification specifies access requirements these are enforced by the programme.

²⁸ CAS awards are designed to enable people to qualify in stages. The credit allocation for an NFQ level N award assume that a person has qualified with a major award at NFQ level N-1 in the field.

6 PROGRAMME AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

The documentation must include sufficient information to address the criteria for example:

- » An outline of the programme and its QQI awards (using the template made available by QQI for this purpose).
- » the written curriculum
- » the material provided to prospective learners
- » the material provided to enrolled learners
- » a set of sample assessment tasks, model answers and marking schemes for each award stage
- » the assessment strategies
- » the educational and training strategy
- » CVs for the programme's key staff
- » Comprehensive listing of the physical facilities and learning resources
- » Documented procedures for the operation and management of the programme

Additional or alternative requirements may be set out in the relevant specialised validation policy and criteria documents.

6.1 AN OUTLINE OF THE PROGRAMME AND ITS QQI AWARDS

6.1.1 *Compound programme outline template*

- » Programme title
- » Programme purpose
 - ~ What is it for
 - ~ Who is it for

- » QQI CAS award offered
- » List of the QQI CAS minor awards offered (if any)
- » Programme duration in days (from enrolment to final assessment)
- » Number of fulltime equivalent days of contact (instruction or supervised activities)
- » List of centres at which the programme is to be provided
- » Specific entry requirements
- » Indication whether the programme is mainly for initial or mainly for continual education and training
- » Specific progression opportunities
- » Note any statutory, regulatory or professional body linkages.

6.1.2 Minor programme outline template

- » Programme title
- » Programme purpose
 - ~ What is it for
 - ~ Who is it for
- » Linked certificate specification
- » QQI CAS minor award
- » Programme duration in days (from enrolment to final assessment)
- » Number of fulltime equivalent days of contact (instruction or supervised activities)
- » List of centres at which the programme is to be provided
- » Specific entry requirements
- » Indication whether the programme is mainly for initial or mainly for continual education and training
- » Note any statutory, regulatory or professional body linkages.

7 OTHER CAS CRITERIA

7.1 85% RULE

There is a lower limit to the volume of learning at the award's NFQ level involved in a programme leading to a CAS compound award. The lower limit is 85% of the minimum credit requirements for the compound award. For example if the minimum credit requirement is 120 FET credits then at least 102 credits must be at the award's NFQ level.

7.2 20% RULE

A validated programme leading to a CAS compound award may be changed by the addition of electives leading to minor awards specified in the compound award's certificate requirements and involving up to 20% of the compounds credit value, provided these electives are part of the provider's other validated programmes. Otherwise the provider must apply for the validation of the electives. The 20% calculation must be made with respect to the programme as originally validated by QQI. The rule may not be invoked successively to exceed the 20% change with respect to the original programme.

Changes that would involve in excess of 20% would require that the modified compound award programme be submitted for validation (differential validation may be appropriate).

7.3 COMPOUND AWARD RULE: THRESHOLD BEFORE AN APPLICATION FOR THE VALIDATION OF A MAJOR AWARD MUST BE MADE

Providers are encouraged to design programmes in the context of compound awards rather than isolated components.

A provider applying for validation of one or more **minor programmes** must ensure that the set of minor awards accessible through the proposed **minor programmes** and its currently validated **minor programmes** does not overlap with the certification requirements of any non-minor QQI award by more than the FET credit limits below.

Programmes can be validated to lead to component awards without having to apply for the validation for the corresponding compound award subject to the following limits. The limits apply to the FET credit associated with the compound award's components that the provider wishes to access before they must seek validation of a programme leading to the compound award.

In determining whether the limits are exceeded all of the provider's validated programmes are taken into account along with the proposed new programmes.

The limits for major awards are:

- » NFQ level 3: 45 FET credits
- » NFQ level 4: 70 FET credits
- » NFQ level 5: 90 FET credits
- » NFQ level 6: 90 FET credits

Limits for other compound awards are not automatic but QQI may require a provider to apply for the validation of a programme leading to a particular compound award where the provider wishes to access compound award components that amount to more than 75% of the compound award's credit allocation.

8 DISCIPLINE-AREA BASED APPROACH TO VALIDATION FOR PROVIDERS OF PROGRAMMES LEADING TO CAS AWARDS

Providers of programmes leading to CAS awards with the necessary capacity, specialised QA procedures, validation throughput, and trust relationship with QQI may have their CAS award programmes in a specified discipline-area validated on the basis of a single discipline-area-level evaluation (of the provider and their programmes by QQI).

All programmes leading to CAS awards in the discipline-area would be validated by this process for the duration of validation. Moreover the provider may develop new programmes in the discipline-area leading to CAS awards in accordance with approved QA procedures and these will be validated by QQI subject to administrative checks without additional evaluation.

The QQI evaluation process would focus on the provider's capacity to approve and provide programmes leading to CAS awards within a defined scope. This generalised validation process would involve a peer review process including a site visit. After this validation process a provider would have to upload the same material to QBS as it would have had to had it applied for validation using the standard approach (this would provide the data QQI would need for certification and would provide programme documentation that QQI would need were it to select the programme for review); they would also have to arrange an independent evaluation report and send this to QQI for publication.

QQI may review validated programmes from time to time to check compliance with its validation policy and criteria. This applies to this arrangement too.

Providers availing of this procedure would require sophisticated QA and governance arrangements.