



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland  
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

# WHITE PAPER

## Modification to Sectoral Convention 3 on Repeating for Honours in QQI's 'Assessment and Standards'

FOR CONSULTATION

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Submissions may be emailed to

**consultation@QQI.ie**

Please include  
**'Modification to Sectoral Convention 3'**  
in the subject line.

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.*

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The closing date for submissions is **Friday 3 December 2021**

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This White Paper proposes a modification to Sectoral Convention 3 on Repeating for Honours in QQI's [Assessment and Standards Revised 2013](#) which sets out QQI's expectations concerning the assessment of learners by providers of programmes leading to QQI higher education awards or those made under delegated authority from QQI.

QQI is seeking feedback from stakeholders on the proposal outlined in this White Paper.

## Introduction

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Assessment and Standards 2013 was originally developed in 2009 by HETAC, one of QQI's antecedents:

*The Sectoral Conventions for Assessment comprise a set of regulations and benchmarks which, in the interest of fairness and consistency, are agreed at the sectoral level by QQI and all associated providers.*

The 'associated providers' referenced are providers of higher education programmes that QQI had validated and providers to whom QQI had delegated award-making authority.

The classifications available for QQI awards are set down in Sectoral Convention 1 of [Assessment and Standards Revised 2013](#)). Sectoral Convention 3 sets down some constraints on how those classifications may be determined.

It is modifications to the final two paragraphs of Sectoral Convention 3 which QQI is consulting on.

QQI is planning to revise and update Assessment and Standards in the near future but not in time for this academic year. The embargo on repeat for honours has always been controversial and is well overdue for formal review.

Looking at the practices across the public HEIs, there seems to be a compelling case to change Sectoral Convention 3, which now only applies to independent/private HEIs, to make it clear that an honours classification may be offered to students who have repeated one or more relevant modules, i.e. ones whose results are used in the determination of the classification, but the grades available for the repeated modules would be capped at pass for the purpose of determining the overall classification.

We understand from the research that Irish HE awarding bodies impose a credit limit on the elements that may be repeated so we do not see a strong case for QQI to impose such a limit or forbid the imposition of a limit by an individual provider.

## Sectoral Convention 3

The current version of Sectoral Convention 3 in its entirety reads:

### **Sectoral Convention 3 on Determination of Award Classification**

*Calculation of the award classification shall be based on the credit-weighted mean value of the allowable grades (i.e. those that contribute to the classification) for modules of a specific programme which has been validated by QQI or by a recognised institution for the purpose of making the award.*

*A learner may claim exemption from a module whose grade would otherwise contribute to the award classification, provided that he or she can demonstrate the attainment of the relevant knowledge, skill and competence. In cases where the attainment cannot be graded fairly and consistently, only an unclassified award shall be available.*

*Procedures for exemption and/or pass by compensation shall not compromise national standards for awards.*

*Honours classification, or any classification higher than 'Pass', shall be made based on first attempt grades. Necessary procedures to allow consistent treatment of a repeat grade as a first attempt grade, where exceptional mitigating circumstances exist, shall not compromise this principle.*

*Accordingly, the existing approach to repeat for honours (it is not to be offered) shall be maintained, pending discussions between other awarding bodies (including universities and Dublin Institute of Technology), with a view to finding an agreed national approach. This position shall be reviewed within 12 months of the commencement of the Conventions.*

This convention was to be reviewed within 12 months of its commencement. However, no formal review was conducted by HETAC or QQI until relatively recently. The review was prompted by requests from some HEIs that provide QQI validated programmes.

Since this Sectoral Convention 3 was published, all of the public-sector HEIs who had relied on QQI for their awarding powers have become awarding bodies in their own right for programmes up to NFQ level 9, namely 'designated awarding bodies'. This changes their relationship with QQI regarding standards and assessment. How QQI and the designated awarding bodies work together on assessment and classification issues is something that will need to be explored separately, that relationship is outside the scope of the current Assessment and Standards document and its Sectoral Conventions.

## Current Practices

QQI has conducted some research into designated awarding bodies' practices in respect of award classification where a module has had to be repeated.

Practices are varied and some still operate in accordance with Sectoral Convention 3. However, many have some provision for an honours classification to be available with penalties if a module is failed on first attempt but subsequently passed. Some limit the maximum number of credits that can be repeated for honours classification e.g. to 10 ECTS.

Among the private HEIs who offer QQI awards there is support for a relaxation of, and/or more consistent application of, the convention.

## Proposal

At the meeting of 20 September 2021 of the QQI Policies and Standards Committee (PSC) the following proposed modification to Sectoral Convention 3 was approved for public consultation..

QQI proposes to replace Sectoral Convention 3 with the following.

### ***Revised Sectoral Convention 3 on Determination of Award Classification***

*Calculation of the award classification shall be based on the credit-weighted mean value of the allowable grades (i.e. those that contribute to the classification) for modules of a specific programme*

*which has been validated by QQI or by a recognised institution for the purpose of making the award.*

*A learner may claim exemption from a module whose grade would otherwise contribute to the award classification, provided that he or she can demonstrate the attainment of the relevant knowledge, skill and competence. In cases where the attainment cannot be graded fairly and consistently, only an unclassified award shall be available.*

*Procedures for exemption and/or pass by compensation shall not compromise national standards for awards.*

*When a module whose grade is designed to contribute to the determination of an award classification is failed on the first attempt, the maximum achievable grade shall be capped at Pass for any and all subsequent attempts and the capped grade shall be used in the determination of the award classification which is not capped at Pass.*

The change to Sectoral Convention 3 will only apply to awards made after its adoption by QQI i.e., there will be no retrospective change to the classification of awards already made.

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