Policy And Criteria For The Validation of Further Education And Training Programmes Leading To QQI CAS Awards

Revised October 2013

QQI has adopted policies, criteria and guidelines established by its predecessor bodies and saved under section 84 of the 2012 Act. These are adopted and adapted as necessary, to support new policies issued by QQI and the establishment of QQI services in accordance with the 2012 Act. Over time these policies will be replaced with new QQI policies under the QQI Comprehensive Policy development Programme. All references in this policy document to the predecessor bodies and the associated structures should be read as referring to QQI and its structures.

In the event that there is any conflict between the adopted and adapted legacy policy, criteria and guidelines and QQI policy, the QQI policy will prevail.
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1 Policy

1.1 The Meaning of Programme Validation
A programme of education and training is validated where QQI confirms under section 45 of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (the 2012 Act) that the provider of the programme has satisfied the Authority 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 in the Common Award System (CAS) being offered in respect of that programme.

The validation of a programme by the QQI is always conditional as provided for by Section 45(2) and 45(3) of the 2012 Act. These include, for example, that the provider shall

- establish procedures which are fair and consistent for the assessment of enrolled learners to ensure the standards of knowledge, skill or competence determined by the QQI under section 49(1) of the Act of 2012 are acquired, and where appropriate, demonstrated, by enrolled learners,
- continue to comply with Section 65 in respect of arrangements for the Protection of Enrolled Learners, if applicable, and
- comply with the full list of conditions as set out in Appendix 1.

1.2 Requirement for Programme Validation
Organisations wishing to provide programmes of education and training leading to QQI awards shall secure QQI validation before enrolment of learners on the programme and before commencement of the programme.

Validation will be for a maximum of five years and will then automatically lapse unless renewed through re-validation.

Validation will automatically lapse when the award standard for the award to which the programme leads is changed significantly or when the programme (or its provider) is found, through QQI monitoring, to no longer meet the validation criteria or comply with the conditions of validation.

A validated programme may be reviewed by QQI at any time. Following review, validation of a programme may be withdrawn. The decision to withdraw validation of a programme will be made by the QQI board.

Validation decisions may be appealed. Information on the appeal process is available separately.

The stages of the validation process are outlined in Appendix 3.

1.3 Principles of programme validation
The following principles underpin the validation of FET programmes:

Quality: This is a key principle which underpins the validation policy, processes, and procedures. Quality will be assured through robust and rigorous criteria underpinned by best practice and through
systematic monitoring and evaluation of the policy’s effectiveness.

**Transparency:** Transparency will underpin both the development and implementation of the policy and procedures.

**Consistency:** The validation process will contribute to ensuring and maintaining consistency of national standards across providers and programmes. The policy and associated processes must support and enhance the credibility of programmes and FET awards made by QQI.

**Responsiveness:** Validation processes will be responsive to the needs of providers and will operate efficiently in an agreed timescale from submission to approval.

**Subsidiarity:** Validation processes will be carried out by organisations who have appropriate quality assured policies and processes for the approval of programmes, in place.

1.4 Devolution of Responsibility for Programme Validation Sub-processes through Programme Approval Agreements

While QQI must validate programmes leading to its awards it wishes to do this where feasible in collaboration with quality assured organisations which have the necessary capacity to take responsibility for validation sub-processes.

Through Programme Approval Agreements (PAAs) QQI will ensure that organisations have appropriate structures, processes and procedures in place for the evaluation of programmes against QQI’s validation criteria. Programmes will be evaluated, by these organisations, in accordance with QQI’s validation policy and criteria. These evaluations if accepted by QQI will inform its validation decision.

1.5 Development of Programmes for Sharing

There may be instances in which programmes can be developed by consortia for use (sharing) by other providers. The consortium develops the programme and extracts relevant programme information in accordance with the *FET Programme Information Requirements for Shared Programmes, Revised 2013*. Consortia can also develop other programme related resources and materials and may act as a support mechanism to the providers who subsequently run the programme.

2 Programme Evaluation Criteria

Programmes will be submitted in a format determined by QQI (see Appendix 2). The quantitative aspects of the programme will be verified and the qualitative aspects will be evaluated on the basis of:

- **consistency** with the award being sought i.e. the structure of the proposed programme should meet the award requirements at the relevant level within the framework of qualifications. There should also be consistency between the programme and the provider’s quality assurance policies and procedures

- **coherence** in respect of its stated objectives, content, learner profile and assessment activities
- **capacity** of the provider to deliver the programme to the proposed level

- **compliance** with the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 in relation to access, transfer and progression and protection for learners as appropriate and compliance with any special conditions attached to the award specification e.g. legislation, specialist resources etc.

- The programme’s potential to enable the learner to meet the standards of knowledge, skill and competence for the awards based on the specified learner profile and the standards for the award

Detailed evaluation criteria are included in the *Guidelines for Preparing Programme Descriptors for Further Education and Training Programmes leading to QQI Awards, Revised October 2013.*
3. Appendices

3.1 Appendix 1: Terms and Conditions of Programme Validation

(Level 1 - 6)

The following represents the Terms and Conditions attaching to the validation of programmes leading to awards made by QQI at levels 1 - 6 of the National Framework of Qualifications. The terms outline the provider’s entitlements and the conditions outline the provider’s obligations. Providers shall abide by all the conditions attaching to validation. Any provider who breaches the conditions may have the validation of their programme withdrawn by QQI.

Terms

Providers may:

▪ Offer the programme as leading to the named CAS award(s).
▪ Publicise, subject to the conditions below, the fact that this programme has been validated by QQI.
▪ For Programmes leading to Major Awards, amend the validated programme to include other minor awards as long as these amendments do not affect in excess of 20% of the programme (see conditions for further details).

Conditions

Providers shall:

▪ Inform QQI immediately of any issue which impacts on the validity or integrity of this programme.
▪ Apply consistently its internal quality assurance procedures.
▪ Inform QQI of any significant changes to the programme. Significant change is defined as change that affects more than 20% of the programme objectives, indicative content or assessment.
▪ Inform QQI of any additional minor awards which have been added to the validated programme (see Terms above).
▪ Inform QQI if the programme is to be offered in any of the Provider’s registered centres other than those listed in the initial programme validation application.
▪ Include this programme in the self-evaluation process under agreed quality assurance processes.
▪ Deliver and review the programme in accordance with the provider’s policy and procedures relating to programme development, delivery and review as outlined in the provider’s quality assurance agreement.
▪ Ensure that learners on this programme have the opportunity to be assessed for the purpose of achieving the named CAS awards. Assessment must be carried out in accordance with the Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Providers, Revised 2013.
▪ Adhere to such regulations and procedures as are required by QQI for candidate assessment and certification.
▪ Designate a staff member to act as programme co-ordinator.
▪ Use only the programme title as validated, and the associated FETAC award title(s), including level on the National Framework of Qualifications in advertising and promoting the programme (or related courses).
Consider the feedback from the QQI evaluation and monitoring processes and implement plans for the continuous improvement of the programme.

**General Provisions**

- Approval of quality assurance procedures is a pre-requisite of programme validation. Should the status of the provider change adversely, this will affect the validation of the programmes being offered by that provider.
- This programme will be considered valid for a period of up to five years unless
  a) Provider access to validation is withdrawn and/or
  b) the requirements of the award(s) to which the programme is designed to lead change and/or
  c) the objectives, indicative content and assessment of the programme are changed significantly by the provider and/or
  d) QQI withdraws programme validation.
- QQI will protect the integrity of its awards at all times. Where evidence of fraud is discovered procedures to withdraw programme validation will be initiated.
- Providers who do not comply with the regulations for Protection of Enrolled Learners, in relation to this programme, as set out in Part 6 of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, will be subject to penalties set out in section 67 of that Act and programme validation will be withdrawn.
- Validation of a programme is non-transferable. This programme is validated to be offered by the named provider in the named centres.
- These Terms and Conditions of validation are effective from 09 October 2013.
- QQI reserves the right to amend these Terms and Conditions as it sees fit and will give prior notice to all registered providers where this applies.
### Programme Validation Submission

#### Provider Information
- **Provider Name**
- **Provider Type**
- **Registration Reference**
- If fee is charged to learner
- Outreach centres/contracted deliverer

#### Award Information
- List of award types, titles, levels relating to programme(s) being validated
- Special conditions attached to the award (including specific legislative compliance if any)

#### General Programme Information
- **Duration/Delivery Cycle**
- **Delivery Mode(s)**
- **Learner Numbers (approx)**
- **Sites of Delivery (if known or criteria for selection of sites)**

#### Access, Transfer and Progression
- **Learner Profile**
- **Entry Criteria**
- **Selection Processes**
- **RPL (arrangements for access)**
- **Learner Supports**
- **Information for Learners**
- **Transfer and Progression opportunities**

#### Specific Programme Information
- **Title**
- **Aims/objectives/rationale**
- **Programme learning outcomes**
- **Programme content and activities**
- **Learning strategies/methodologies**
- **Assessment Requirements** (techniques, weightings, criteria, RPL procedures, schedule)
- **Staff resources (full time and part time)**
- **Arrangements for monitoring and evaluation of the programme**

#### Accommodation & Resources
- **Accommodation**
- **Specialist resources**

#### Protection of Enrolled Learners*
- **Transfer and/or Refund Arrangements (Part 6, 2012 Act)**
- **Information to Learners**

#### Second Provider Information*
- **Second Provider Details**
- **Evidence of QA agreement between first and second provider**
- **Evidence of consultation about the programme between first and second provider**
**Provider Declaration**

- Verifying accuracy of submission content
- Assurance that resources are in place
- Compliance with QQI requirements in relation to monitoring and evaluation.
- Terms and Conditions of Validation
### 1. SUBMISSION

Providers will submit a programme in a standard format and consistent with QQI requirements as outlined in the published Award Specification, Guidelines for Assessment and Guidelines for Preparing Programme Descriptors for FET Programmes leading to QQI awards.

### 2. EVALUATION

The programme will be evaluated against current validation criteria.

When programmes are submitted by organisations that have quality assured Programme Approval Agreements, it will have already been evaluated against the current validation criteria.

### 3. DECISION

Programmes and Awards Executive Committee validate or refuse to validate the programme.

### 4. APPEAL

Providers may appeal the decision to refuse validation.

### 5. REVIEW

QQI may at any time review the programme. The decision may be to withdraw validation. The provider may appeal this decision.