

**Sector  
Specific**

# **Statutory Guidelines for the Review of Linked Providers by the National University of Ireland (NUI)**



**Dearbhú Cáilíochta  
agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann**  
Quality and  
Qualifications Ireland



QQI, an integrated agency for quality and qualifications in Ireland

March 2019/QG13 © QQI

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# Statutory Guidelines for the Review of Linked Providers by the National University of Ireland (NUI)

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

These are Guidelines for the National University of Ireland (NUI) for the Review of its Linked Providers, under Section 27 (1) (c) of the 2012 Act. The NUI is a university established by law under the Irish Universities Act 1908 and restructured under the 1997 Universities Act. NUI comprises, in law, four autonomous constituent universities. Separately from these, NUI is empowered under its charter and by statute, to recognise other higher education institutions and to award degrees and other qualifications in those institutions. The nomenclature used by NUI is that of “NUI Recognised College”.

The 2012 Act sets out the Designated Awarding Bodies and their responsibilities for the review of Linked Providers. These are the previously established universities, technological universities and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) and the NUI. Designated Awarding Bodies are bodies named in the 2012 Act with the authority in law to make awards. The 2012 Act sets out the responsibilities of NUI, in exercising its awarding powers, for the review of the subset of the higher education institutions that it recognises (“NUI Recognised Colleges”) that meet the definition prescribed in the 2012 Act of a Linked Provider<sup>1</sup>. It is solely these powers and responsibilities that are encompassed by this set of Guidelines.

In keeping with the requirement to establish effectiveness review procedures, QQI has published a Policy and Handbook for Cyclical Review. These guidelines supplement those publications, clarifying the expectations of the responsibilities of NUI as a Designated Awarding Body, under the 2012 Act, as NUI is an awarding body but not a relevant provider.

It is expected that NUI will have regard for these Guidelines in the establishment of their procedures for the review of Linked Providers.

## 2 SCOPE

As already stated, NUI is a designated awarding body under the 2012 Act, however it is not a provider of the education, training and research activities that lead to the degrees and qualifications that it awards. Accordingly, the scope of procedures applicable to NUI as a Designated Awarding Body are more confined, focusing solely on NUI’s responsibilities for the review of its Linked Providers, in which NUI awards degrees and other qualifications. Furthermore, the scope of these guidelines does not extend to engagements between NUI and its Constituent Universities. Any review undertaken by NUI of quality assurance policies and procedures of a Linked Provider must be comprehensive in scope in relation to awards recognised within the NFQ.

<sup>1</sup> Subsections (3) and (4) of Section 2 of the 2012 Act set out the interpretation of a Linked Provider as follows:

(3) Subject to subsection (4), a linked provider is a provider that is not a designated awarding body but enters into an arrangement with a designated awarding body under which arrangement the provider provides a programme of education and training that satisfies all or part of the prerequisites for an award of the designated awarding body.

(4) A provider of a programme referred to in subsection (3) is not a linked provider where the award referred to in that subsection is a joint award of the provider and the designated awarding body.

### **3 EUROPEAN REFERENCES**

Ireland's European commitments are underpinned by our membership of the European Union (EU) and our participation in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and Bologna. These guidelines are underpinned by the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), for which NUI should also have regard.

NUI should also have regard to any European standards, guidelines, directives, policies or political commitments adopted nationally. Examples of such European commitments include but are not limited to, the Lisbon Recognition Convention 1997, the ECTS Handbook 2015 and the Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, October 2014.

### **4 RESEARCH**

NUI is responsible for ensuring that its Linked Providers organise an integrated system of quality assurance in relation to their research activities and that this is comprehended in its review of Linked Providers. These should build upon the peer review mechanisms widely employed in research funding and publication and incorporate relevant metrics. These should complement the specific procedures put in place to quality assure research education and training.

### **5 RESPONSIBILITIES OF NUI FOR THE REVIEW OF LINKED PROVIDERS**

The guidelines are applicable to NUI as an autonomous Designated Awarding Body, with responsibilities for any programmes of education, training and research offered by Linked Providers leading to awards made by NUI. NUI is required to have regard to these Guidelines when establishing its procedures for reviewing the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of its Linked Providers and their implementation.

#### **5.1 General**

NUI must ensure that Linked Providers have regard for QQI quality assurance guidelines when establishing their quality assurance procedures. NUI must also ensure that they establish procedures for access, transfer and progression of learners in accordance with QQI Policy. NUI must ensure that each Linked Provider understands the scope of their engagement with NUI for awarding purposes (is it exclusive or may they enter into arrangements with other awarding bodies also?) and the respective scope of the review (is it all of their provision or NUI-awarded provision only?).

#### **5.2 Preparation for Review**

Whilst the scope of these Guidelines concerns the review of Linked Providers, it is advisable that NUI's procedures also encompass the stages leading up to a review, such as the approval of quality assurance policies and procedures with linked providers and the ongoing monitoring of those procedures. NUI should seek to ensure that Linked Providers have full understanding of quality assurance requirements and the range of quality

mechanisms which they must apply and support if they are to be fully effective. Linked Providers are required to have regard for the QQI Core Quality Assurance Guidelines and other relevant topic-specific Guidelines.

NUI should ensure that its linked providers are in a position to adopt an integrated approach to quality assurance and improvement. Integrated institutional approaches should be geared to eliminate unnecessary duplication, reduce burden and, most importantly, promote synergies. Such approaches should yield benefits and opportunities for the Linked Providers to test the effectiveness of their systems and procedures with a view to ongoing enhancement; identify and disseminate good practice; identify challenges and areas for improvement and how to address them; enhance the student experience; enhance strategic and other planning as appropriate.

### 5.3 Review

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NUI must include in its own procedures, procedures to review the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of each of its Linked Providers.

These procedures must include procedures for:

- Review by NUI of the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures established and implemented by the Linked Provider under Section 37 of the 2012 Act. The review of a Linked Provider shall be carried out by NUI in accordance with the procedures for cyclical review established by QQI and set out in the QQI Cyclical Reviews Policy and Handbook.
- A provision to send QQI a copy of the report of the review, when completed.
- The issuing of Directions, following review, regarding the effectiveness of a Linked Provider's quality assurance procedures.
- The appointment of an independent appeals person for the purposes of hearing an appeal under Section 39 of the 2012 Act.
- The hearing of an appeal under Section 39 of the 2012 Act.
- The withdrawal by the NUI of the approval of a linked provider's quality assurance procedures under Section 39 of the 2012 Act. This will include procedures to forward notice of any such withdrawal.

Additional procedures for consideration are procedures for:

- The recruitment and engagement of external, independent, national and international experts (where appropriate), including the selection and recruitment of expert panel members. Ethical guidelines relating to the selection and participation of such external experts are provided to the experts. These require a declaration by the external expert of any interests that could conflict, or might appear to conflict, with the role or responsibilities proposed by the provider. Independence and expertise are reviewed each time a person is engaged because both are subject to change. The names and affiliations of expert panellists, examiners and authenticators and other external experts are collated and monitored.
- The consideration of outcomes of reviews and follow-up actions taken when preparing for upcoming external reviews. The findings of self-evaluations are

analysed and are available for, and connect to and support, the external review cycle. The distinction between ongoing, internal self-monitoring and formal self-evaluation is typically in frequency and scale. Self-evaluation has a broad, systemic focus and is carried out at specified intervals. Internal self-monitoring is ongoing and typically focuses on specific indicators.

- Ensuring that self-evaluation focuses particularly on the quality of, or impact on, the learner's experience, achievements, contributions and on findings from the many stakeholders engaging in the quality system. The emphasis is on the impact on learners and other stakeholders, rather than on policies and procedures. Self-evaluation is taken as an opportunity to engage in a crucial dialogue with stakeholders, including learners, employers, collaborative partners, and external experts engaged in quality assurance procedures. Basic self-evaluation has two primary outputs: a self-evaluation report, including findings and recommendations for improvement, and an improvement or action plan detailing how and when the Linked Provider will address the recommendations made in the self-evaluation report, and who will have responsibility for doing so. The self-evaluation report consolidates areas of effective practice and addresses areas requiring improvement. Actions agreed following self-evaluation are implemented and have their intended effect.
- Ensuring that the quality assurance system is connected with the Linked Provider's external QA obligations, including statutory external review of QA under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012, and any national and international accreditation systems held, both statutory and voluntary.

## **6. STANDARDS AND AWARDS**

NUI should ensure that linked providers establish procedures to ensure that:

- Each award made, in so far as is reasonably practicable, is recognised within the NFQ. QQI is responsible for the policies and criteria on which the NFQ is based.
- Learners enrolled on programmes leading to awards recognised within the NFQ acquire the standard of knowledge, skill or competence associated with the level of that award.
- Professional regulatory bodies and QQI are consulted with on the standards and quality assurance of programmes leading to qualifications in regulated occupations.

### **6.1 Procedures for Certification**

NUI has established procedures for the certification of awards and maintenance of learner and award records. These procedures apply to all awards made by NUI in its linked providers. These procedures have regard to:

- Award level, award class and type in the NFQ, including references to the total credit value of the award.
- Other such references that facilitate the implementation of the NFQ, such as the European Diploma Supplement.

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