National College of Ireland

Quality Assurance Handbook

Chapter 3: Programme Development, Validation and Evaluation

Appendix: Procedures for Devolution of Responsibility for Arrangement of Independent Evaluation Report

June 2018

(Updated August 2021; approved October 2021)

Version History

Version	Author	Date	Note	Modifications Made
0.1	Sinéad O'Sullivan	Jun 2018	For initial QQI comment	
0.2	Sinéad O'Sullivan	9/7/2018	On feedback from QQI	
1.0	Sinéad O'Sullivan	10/10/2018		
2.0	Karen Jones	10/02/2021	For QQI consideration	
2.1	David Mc Carthy	25/05/2021	For QQI consideration	
2.2	David Mc Carthy	18/10/2021	Approved	

Contents

1. Context

QQI's *Core Policies and Criteria for the Validation by QQI of Programmes of Education and Training* (CPCV) prescribes the process and criteria to be used for validation as well as the documentation required when submitting an application for the validation of a new programme. The steps below are based on this policy.

Interpretation Principle*:* If any part of this procedure is found or interpreted to be inconsistent with the CPCV then QQI policy should be followed instead.

1.1 Scope

1.1.1   Level on the National Framework of Qualifications

This procedure applies to taught programmes at Level 6-9 on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) for submission to QQI for validation.

1.1.2. Subject Area

The scope of devolved responsibility is limited to taught programmes at Level 6-9 on the NFQ in Business, Computing, Psychology (excluding clinical psychology) and Education excluding:

1. First time collaborative provision of programmes where there is no collaborative agreement or relationship already in place
2. Transnational programmes delivered in new transnational destinations
3. Programmes leading to joint awards
4. Statutory Apprenticeship programmes

1.1.3. Target Learner Group

Programmes may be offered on a full or part-time basis.

1.1.4. Teaching & Learning Modalities

Programmes may be offered in traditional (face-to-face) or blended learning modes. Programmes developed for blended learning are developed according to NCI's quality assurance policies and procedures relating to programmes using technology mediated learning, which are aligned with QQI's *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes*. Modules that are first validated as part of a principal programme and are subsequently developed as Special Purpose Awards (Micro-Credentials) can be validated for fully online delivery.

1.1.5. Location

Programmes leading to major awards may be delivered at the IFSC campus only. Those leading to minor or special purpose awards may be delivered at an off-campus location. These locations must be approved by QQI as part of the validation of the programme and are only proposed by NCI once they have been reviewed according to the Off-Campus Provision Policy (QAM Section 3.11).

1.2. Responsibilities within NCI

The Director of Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (DQIE) is responsible for ensuring the procedures agreed in this document are implemented consistently and adhered to by all individuals involved in the development and validation of programmes at NCI. The below individuals are responsible for implementing the procedures regarding the arrangement of the Independent Evaluation Report (IER) during the programme validation process.

1.2.1. *Director of Quality and Institutional Effectiveness*

The Director of Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (DQIE), or nominee within the QIE Office is responsible for:

- Managing the development of the programme(s) alongside the relevant Dean of School
- Coordinating the internal validation process as outlined in QAH Section 3.2.3
- Completing Step 0, Step 1 and Steps 5-8 in the Validation Process as outlined below
- Coordinating the components of Step 3 as outlined below
- Communicating with the QQI and the members of the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) as required
- Maintaining accurate regards of the Validation Process and managing the version control mechanisms for the related documentation
- Participating in the review of the Validation Process as outlined in Section 2 below as requested by QQI

1.2.2. *Dean of School*

The relevant Dean of School is responsible for working with the DQIE to manage the development of programme(s), in particular:

- Approving the Validation Descriptor(s) prior to submission to QIE Office
- Ensuring that all special conditions of validation and recommendations to the provider included in the Independent Evaluation Report (IER) are satisfied by the Programme Team

1.2.3. *Programme Director (provisional)*

The Programme Director is responsible for developing a programme of education and training as per the policies and procedures outlined in QAH Section 3.2, in addition to:

- Submitting all documentation to DQIE as detailed in Section 2 below
- Liaising with the Programme Team and compiling the Programme Team's response to the IER as per Step 7 in the Validation Process

1.2.4. *Programme Team (provisional)*

The Programme Team is involved in the different stages of the development of a programme of education and training as per the policies and procedures outlined in QAH Section 3.2, in addition to:

- contributing and preparing all documentation required by DQIE under the guidance of the Programme Director
- considering the special conditions of validation and recommendations to the provider included in the IER and contributing to the Programme Team's response to the IER under the guidance of the Programme Director

1.3. Role of the Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (QIE) Office

The Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (QIE) Office will provide administrative support to the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) throughout the validation process. When the IEP is participating in the review and revalidation of an existing programme, the QIE Office will review the Terms of Reference in consultation with the Panel Chairperson. The policies and procedures relating to programme review and revalidation are outlined in QAH Section 3.8.

1.3.1. *Communication between NCI and QQI*

All communication relating to the validation process between NCI and QQI, including the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP), will be made by the Director QIE or nominee in the QIE Office. No member of the Programme Team, or any other member of NCI staff associated with the programme(s) being evaluated, is to contact QQI or the IEP directly.

1.4 Pre-Requisites

The procedure for arranging the IER cannot commence until the internal validation process for new programmes as outlined in QAH Section 3.2.3 has been completed. This process includes the initial programme proposal and feasibility study and concludes with the Internal Review Panel, which considers the programme's compliance with QQI's validation criteria. Once the Programme Team have satisfied any conditions or recommendations made by the panel, the programme can be submitted to the Academic Operations Committee for approval to proceed with the validation.

1.5 Related NCI Policies and Procedures

- *Policy & Procedures for the Development & Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Higher Education Awards* (QAH Section 3.2)
- *Policy and Procedures for Programme Review and Revalidation* (QAH Section 3.8)
- *Policy and Procedures for the Design, Approval and Quality Management of Collaborative Provision & Transnational Education Programmes* (QAH Section 3.6)

Validation Process

Devolved responsibility for arrangement of the IER commences at Step 3 and ends at Step 7 of the validation process. These steps apply to all programmes that are submitted to QQI for validation, excluding those identified in Section 1.1.2 above. Please refer to Appendix 1 for an indicative timeline of the Validation Process. An diagrammatic overview of the validation process is provided below.

Step 0: Pre-Application Processes

To facilitate an efficient validation process, the following 3 activities take place shortly before the programme is due to be submitted to QQI for validation:

1. Notification of the application to QQI
2. Review of validation documentation
3. Preparing nominations for the Independent Evaluation Panel

Overview of Validation Process where preparation of the IER is devolved

	PreApplication/Application	Event	Post Event

Programme Director
- Provides document set to QASS
- Rework & respond
- Programme starts

QASS
- Advise QQI of intent to apply with PO
- Arranges payment
- Review Documents & Prepare Panel Nominations
- GO/No Go — N / Y
- Submit/Resubmit to QQI
- Confirm Panel Dates, Location etc.
- Send document to panel mbrss
- Factual accuracy check
- Send report to QQI
- QASS forwards request
- DQASS sends reponse to Chair/Panel
- Final document pack prepared for QQI

QQI
- QQI raises invoice
- QQI Screens & reviews nominations
- Accepts Nominations — N / Y
- NCI requested to initiate IER process
- Documents accepted — Y / N
- Review and request NCI to respond
- PAEC decides — Y / N
- End

Panel Chair
- Requests Initial Observations from panel members
- Panel Takes place
- Chair arranges for response to be agreed to/ not agreed to
- Completes addendum to the IER

Panel Secretary
- Draft IER issued
- Agreed IER

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Step 0 (Part 1) Notification of Application to QQI

The Director of Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (DQIE), or nominee, will formally advise QQI that an application is expected to be made one month before the application is scheduled to be completed. This process triggers the issue of an invoice from QQI and a purchase order will then be generated by the DQIE or nominee.

Step 0 (Part 2) Review of Validation Documentation

The DQIE, or other person appointed by Academic Council, shall review the validation documentation to determine whether the programme:

- complies with QQI's *Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training* and the guidelines in *Programme Validation Manual for Programmes of HET and Apprenticeships (FET and HET).*
- has been developed and internally validated according to NCI's *Policy & Procedures for the Development & Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Higher Education Awards* (QAH Section 3.2).
- has appropriate measures for the Protection for Enrolled Learners in accordance with QQI Protocols for Implementation.
- has been critically evaluated against QQI's validation criteria by the Programme Team using the "Self-Evaluation Against QQI Validation Criteria" template.

The outcomes of the review of the validation documentation are:

a. Recommendation that the programme is submitted to QQI for validation. Such a recommendation will only be made where all the validation documentation required by the CPCV is fully complete and finalised including a Self-Assessment Report against the QQI validation criteria

b. Recommendation that the documentation is returned to the Programme Development Team for revision based on specific conditions and/or recommendations.

c. Recommendation that the programme validation process is paused and the programme is not submitted to QQI for validation at this time. The documentation is returned to the Programme Development Team for redevelopment so it can address issues of non-compliance with QQI's validation criteria.

Step 0 (Part 3) Nominations for the Independent Evaluation Panel

The external validation of programmes involves the evaluation of the programmes against QQI's validation criteria by the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP). The IEP is required to make an impartial judgement on the rationale for the programme and its objectives, the learning outcomes and curriculum structure, and the teaching, learning and assessment strategy of the programme and its constituent modules. The IEP consists of quality assurance and subject matter experts who have the capacity to review the programme against the applicable QQI validation criteria and to make a formal recommendation to QQI that the programme should be validated. Panel members will:

- be external to and independent of NCI
- have expertise in relevant quality assurance policies and procedures, pedagogy, and assessment, and/or the programme's discipline
- be capable of reviewing the programme against comparable programmes both nationally and internationally national and international
- have the expertise to substantiate their recommendation to QQI to approve or refuse a programme for validation

The IEP is constituted on a case-by-case basis depending on the programme(s) being considered for validation and in accordance with QQI's CPCV. In all instances, the IEP must have a 3:2 gender balance.

Step 0 (Part 3a) Sourcing Panel Members

The Director of Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (DQIE) is responsible for constituting the nominated panel and approving nominations made to QQI. The Programme Director will make several nominations to the DQIE who will determine their eligibility based on experience and expertise. Nominations will also be sourced through NCI's staff and faculty networks and the QIE Office's CRM system.

When contacted, nominees will be provided with sufficient information to allow them to decide whether their workload permits them to fully participate in the external programme validation process. This information includes:

- The number of programmes due to be evaluated by the panel, the structure of the programmes and their level on the NFQ
- The expected commitment in terms of:
    - the time required to review the documentation in advance of the panel meeting
    - the expected duration of the panel meeting, including any preparatory meetings
    - correspondence between the Panel Chairperson and the Report Writer and the schedule to completion for the Independent Evaluation Report

While the DQIE will approve nominations for the IEP, the panel must be formally approved by QQI before progressing any further in the external validation process.

Step 0 (Part 3b) Panel Composition

The Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) for Major, Minor and Special Purpose Awards is comprised of the following members:

- Panel Chairperson – Registrar, senior academic or quality assurance expert
- Report Writer – education consultant or quality assurance expert
- Subject Matter Experts – at least two senior academics in the discipline area from the university sector and/or coordinator of a comparable programme (in the case of Master programmes, one of the Subject Matter Experts should be an academic from an international Higher Education Institution)
- Industry Representative – manager/employer/practitioner from the sector that graduates are expected to be employed in
- Learner Representative – a current learner on or recent graduate from a comparable programme

In addition to the above, the Panel Chairperson is expected to have completed the relevant QQI training, the Report Writer will have expertise regarding NFQ Award Standards and QQI's CPCV, and the Learner Representative will have completed training delivered by the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP). Additional panel members may be required to address specific quality assurance procedures relating to work-based learning, blended and online delivery, and supervision of research projects.

In the case of modules that are first validated as part of a principal programme and are subsequently developed as Special Purpose Awards (Micro-Credentials), the IEP will consist of

a Panel Chairperson (who also fulfils the duties of the Report Writer) and two Subject Matter Experts.

Step 0 (Part 3c) Criteria for the Nomination of Expert Panel Members

As explained in Section 6.1 of QQI's *Core Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training*, QQI is ultimately responsible for appointing the panel and "will exercise its judgment as to the number of evaluators that may be required in respect of the programme in question and the competences required having regard to the particular programme and the relevant QQI awards standards." However, the devolved responsibility for arranging the Independent Evaluation Report (IER) allows NCI to arrange nominations for the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP). To ensure the IEP can fulfil its responsibilities in the external validation process, the following criteria for nominations must be satisfied:

- nominees must be sufficiently and demonstrably external to and independent of NCI. To this end:
  - A period of five years should have elapsed before former staff members of NCI can be nominated to a panel
  - A period of five years should have elapsed before former external examiners can be nominated to a panel
  - A period of five years should have elapsed before graduates of NCI can be nominated to the panel
- nominees must declare any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest regarding their responsibilities as a member of the IEP*
- nominees must be included in QQI's Register of Experts**

* While the DQIE will consider any conflicts of interest before approaching a potential nominee, the nominee must declare any conflicts of interest that the DQIE may not be aware of as per Section 2.1.3.4 below.
** If a nominee is not already included in QQI's Register of Experts, s/he must complete an Expert's Details Form, which will be submitted to QQI on their behalf by DQIE.

When contacting prospective nominees to ascertain availability and willingness to participate, the QIE Office will make it clear to nominees that their participation on the panel is subject to agreement of QQI and that non-selection in the final agreed panel is subject to ensuring balance and is not a reflection on their suitability.

Expenses incurred by panel members during activities relating to the IEP are covered by NCI. Standard public sector norms apply to those who are employed in an Irish university, whereas panel members who are not employed by an Irish university will be reimbursed according to QQI's current guidelines regarding panel expenses

The DQIE will liaise with nominees to ensure that they formally accept nomination and the terms of participation on the panel in accordance with QQI policy on participation on panels. The DQIE is responsible for ensuring a 3:2 gender balance on the panel, that there is sufficient variety of HEIs represented on the panel and that the Panel Chairperson and Report Writer are rotated sufficiently between different IEPs.

Step 0 (Part 3d) Conflict of Interest

Panel nominees will be required to read QQI's *Considerations for Independent Evaluators in QQI Validation / QA Approval Processes (including conflicts of interest matters)* and make all relevant declarations (see Appendix 3).

Step 0 (Part 3e) Communication with Panel Members

Communication with Panel members in relation to the validation process is made exclusively by the QIE Office. No other member of NCI staff may communicate with a panel member on matters relating to the validation/revalidation event.

Step 1: Application to QQI

The following documents will be submitted as part of the application to QQI for validation of Major, Minor and Special Purpose Awards:

    a. Programme Validation Descriptor
    b. Self-Evaluation Against Validation Criteria
    c. Fee Cover Note
    d. Confirmation of Protection for Enrolled Learner arrangement where appropriate
    e. Panel Nominations pack which includes for each nominee:
        a. Signed QQI Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Declaration
        b. Signed Expert Details Form (if required)
        c. Signed Data Protection Form (see Appendix 2)
    f. Confirmation that the invoice for validation has been paid

In the case of modules that are first validated as part of a principal programme and are subsequently developed as Special Purpose Awards (Micro-Credentials), the Programme Validation Descriptor is significantly different to that submitted for Major, Minor and Special Purpose Awards. For that reason, a Self-Evaluation Report will be submitted, which outlines the rationale for delivering the module(s) as a stand-alone programme in terms of learner demand, satisfying a genuine educational and/or training need, and the currency of curriculum content and learning outcomes.

Step 1 must be completed by the DQIE or nominee at least 6 weeks prior to any planned Panel Meeting date (see Section 2.4.3 below).

Step 2: Application Screening by QQI

Upon receipt of the application, QQI will screen the documentation as outlined in Section 5.5 of the CPCV. It is at this point that QQI will formally advise NCI if the Validation Panel Meeting and arrangement of the Independent Evaluation Report are to be managed under devolved responsibility. The subsequent stages in this process cannot commence until NCI receives confirmation *in writing* that application screening has taken place and that devolved responsibility has been approved.

Step 3: Independent Evaluation

When arranging the Validation Panel Meeting, the DQIE will give due regard to the workload associated with reviewing all relevant documentation and corresponding during the preparation and approval of the Independent Evaluation Report (IER). Sufficient time will be made available to the panel to review the documentation prior to the Validation Panel Meeting, to evaluate the programme(s) during the meeting itself, and to prepare and approve the IER.

Step 3 (Part 1) Provision of Documentation to the Independent Evaluation Panel

The documentation required by the panel to fulfil their duties must be provided at least 2 weeks prior to the Validation Panel Meeting. In the case of programme validations of Major, Minor and Special Purpose Awards, this documentation will include:

- Programme Validation Descriptor
- Self-Evaluation Against the QQI Validation Criteria
- Appendices
- Agenda for the Validation Panel Meeting

In the case of modules that are first validated as part of a principal programme and are subsequently developed as Special Purpose Awards (Micro-Credentials), this documentation will also include a Self-Evaluation Report for each distinct programme and a panel briefing pack outlining the desk-review process.

When the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) is participating in the review and revalidation of an existing programme, the documentation will include the Terms of Reference for Programme Review and the Provider's Programme Review Report. The policies and procedures relating to programme review and revalidation are outlined in QAH Section 3.8.

In addition to the above documentation, the IEP will be provided with links to:

- NCI's Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH)
- QQI's *Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training*
- Award Standards for Higher Education (relevant to programme(s) being considered for re/validation
- QQI's *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes* (If applicable)

Step 3 (Part 2) Preparatory Panel Meeting

Panel members are invited to complete an 'Initial Comments' form in advance of the meeting and forward this directly to the Panel Chairperson. In the case of major award programmes, the expert panel will normally meet the evening before the validation panel meeting to discuss the application, allocate areas of expertise between the panel members and identify areas for discussion with the Programme Team. In all cases, the agenda will allow sufficient time for the panel to deliberate before, during and after the meeting with programme staff.

The Panel Chairperson may request additional information and/or supplementary documentation to elaborate the context of the programme development process or to further explain the rational for providing the programme as proposed. This can include quality assurance policies and procedures, evidence of stakeholder engagement from the programme development process or documents relating to institutional strategies. The Director of Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (DQIE) will provide such additional information requested by the Panel Chairperson.

Step 3 (Part 3) Validation Panel Meeting

The Validation Panel Meeting includes a site visit by the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP), which is organised by the Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (QIE) Office. The IEP will meet with the Programme Team to discuss any issues that arose from their review of the programme(s) under consideration. QQI will be invited to observe the validation panel meeting as appropriate.

Should a conflict of interest arise during the site visit, the relevant procedures outlined in

current QQI guidelines should be used and QQI should be notified immediately.

The IEP will evaluate the programme(s) against QQI's *Core Policies and Criteria for the Validation by QQI of Programmes of Education and Training* and will provide the Programme Team with provisional feedback outlining the panel's intention to make one of the one of the following recommendations:

Recommendation	Reason
Validate	Satisfactory of Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training.
Validate subject to special conditions	Satisfactory subject to proposed special conditions, which may include proposed pre-validation conditions, i.e. proposed (minor) things to be done to a programme that almost fully meets the validation criteria before QQI makes a determination.
Refuse to validate	Not satisfactory of Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training.

In the case of modules that are first validated as part of a principal programme and are subsequently developed as Special Purpose Awards (Micro-Credentials), the Validation Panel Meeting is replaced by a desk review of the documentation specified in Section 2.4.1 above. The Panel Chairperson can request additional information regarding the programme to support the panel in arriving at one of the above recommendations. In such instances, the Panel Chairperson will submit the "Request for Further Information" form (see Appendix 4) to the Director of Quality and Institutional Effectiveness, who will liaise with the programme Team to ensure all requests are accommodated.

When the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) is participating in the review and revalidation of an existing programme, panel members are expected to consider the Provider's Programme Review Report and to evaluate the programme in terms of the proposed modifications to the existing iteration of the programme. documentation will include the Terms of Reference for Programme Review and the Provider's Programme Review Report. The policies and procedures relating to programme review and revalidation are outlined in QAH Section 3.8.

Step 4: Preparation of the Independent Evaluation Report

The Report Writer will prepare the draft Independent Evaluation Report (IER) within an agreed timeframe, normally two weeks after the Validation Panel Meeting. The IER is composed according to QQI's approved template and Report Writing Guidelines and is submitted directly to the Director of Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (DQIE) by the Panel Chairperson.

When the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) is participating in the review and revalidation of an existing programme, the Report Writer will also complete the relevant sections of the Provider's Programme Review Report, indicating the panel's evaluation of the analyses conducted by the Programme Team during the review process and the proposed modifications to the programme(s) informed by this process. The policies and procedures relating to programme review and revalidation are outlined in QAH Section 3.8.

Step 5: Factual Accuracy Check

The Director of Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (DQIE) or nominee will review the draft Independent Evaluation Report (IER) to determine its factual accuracy. If any factual errors are identified, these will be communicated to the Panel Chairperson and a revised version will be prepared. Once DQIE is satisfied with the factual accuracy of the IER, the Panel Chairperson will sign-off on this final draft version.

Step 6: Submission of the Independent Evaluation Report to QQI

The Director of Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (DQIE), or nominee, will submit the final draft Independent Evaluation Report (IER) to QQI. QQI will review the final draft IER, within two weeks of receipt, and if accepted QQI will formally request *in writing* that NCI responds to all special conditions of validation and recommendations to the provider as outlined in the report. The QIE Office will liaise with the Programme Team to ensure that each special condition of validation and recommendation to the provider is responded to appropriately and the necessary changes made to the Validation Descriptor(s). The DQIE or nominee will correspond with the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) on behalf of the Programme Team and provide the Programme Team's response to the IER and the final version of the Validation Descriptor(s).

Step 7: Independent Evaluation Panel Sign-Off

The Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) will consider the Programme Team's response to the Independent Evaluation Report (IER) and decide if each special condition of validation has been satisfied and each recommendation to the provider has been considered. Once the IEP is satisfied with the Programme Team's response, the Panel Chairperson will provide formal acceptance of the response to the Director of Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (DQIE).

Step 8: Submission to QQI for Validation

The Director of Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (DQIE) will submit the programme(s) to QQI for consideration by the Programme & Awards Executive Committee (PAEC). The submission will be made at least 3 weeks prior to the next scheduled PAEC meeting via Qhub and will consist of the following documentation:

- Independent Evaluation Report (IER) initially reviewed by QQI
- Programme Team's Response to the IER
- Confirmation of the Panel Chairperson's acceptance of the above
- Validation Descriptor modified as required by the above

The IER may be adopted without amendment or additional conditions may be imposed by the PAEC. QQI will issue the Certificate of Validation and the Programme Schedule to the Director of Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (DQIE). Any inconsistencies between these documents and the programme as proposed in Validation Descriptor will be communicated to QQI by the DQIE for immediate correction.

2. Disputes and Failure of the Validation Process

3.1. Dispute Regarding the Validity of the Independent Evaluation Report

If the Director of Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (DQIE) is concerned about the validity of the Independent Evaluation Report (IER) in terms of its factual accuracy or the special conditions of validation imposed by the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP), QQI will be informed immediately and will assume responsibility for managing the validation process from Step 5 onwards.

3. Fees & Expenses

Where NCI undertakes devolved responsibility for the organisation of the Independent Evaluation Report (IER), a 50% deduction will be applied by QQI to the standard validation fee. QQI may charge an additional fee if, for any reason, it becomes necessary to assume responsibility for the management of the validation process. The validation fee will be paid to QQI during Step 1 of the validation process as outlined above. All reasonable expenses incurred by the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) will be reimbursed by NCI, while payment to the panel members for services provided will be made in accordance with QQI's current policies.

4. Freedom of Information & Data Protection

Both QQI and NCI are subject to Freedom of Information legislation and must comply with GDPR requirements. The final report is the record of this process and the final programme submission document is the record of the approved programme. These records are subject to the document retention and disposal policies of NCI.

Personal data relating to nominated and actual panel members will be retained by the Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (QIE) Office in accordance with current data protection legislation and the document retention and disposal policies of NCI (QAH Section 9.5). Personal data relating to nominated and actual panel members will only be transferred to QQI with the consent of the data subject for the purpose specified in "NCI Data Protection Form" (Appendix 2).

5. Evaluation of the Process

At the close of each event, a questionnaire is sent to each panel member by QQI. QQI will share the overall outcomes of surveys relating to NCI as part of this process.

At the discretion of the Director of Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (DQIE), a periodic evaluation of the process and outcomes of both internal and external validation events will be undertaken to review themes such as:

- Patterns in conditions & recommendations
- Sourcing of panel members
- Faculty and other relevant staff members perceptions of the validation process
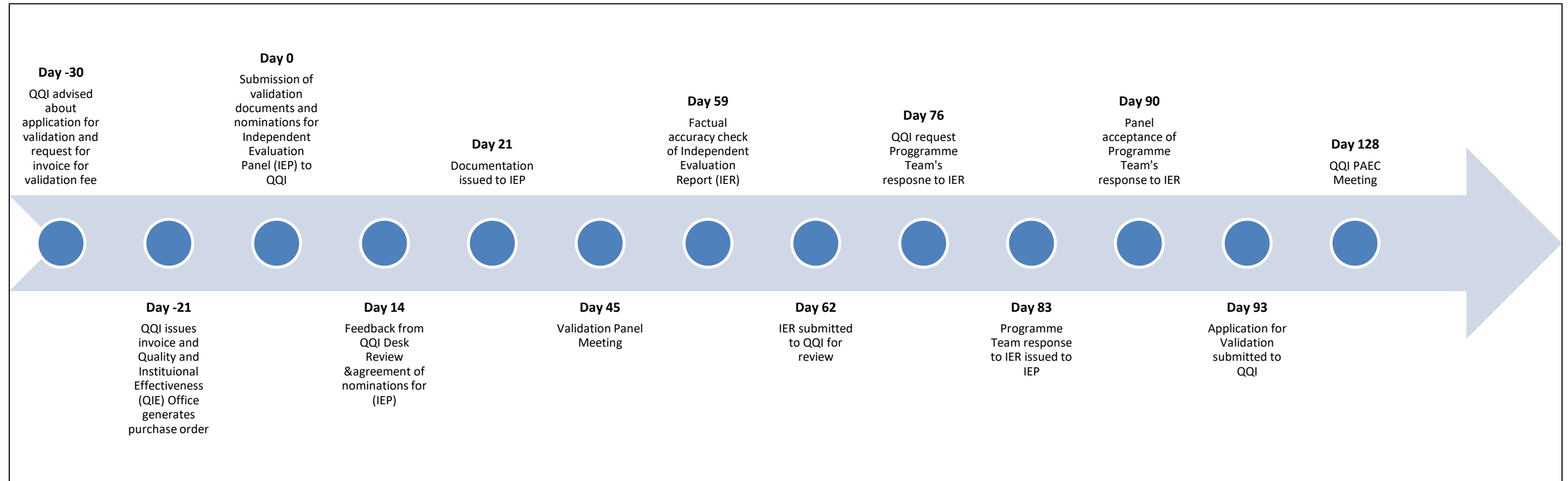
The timing of this review will be determined by the level and volume of validation activity. The outcomes will inform review of policy and procedure with respect to programme development and validation, professional development events and/or sectoral consultations.

Both NCI and QQI will monitor the implementation of the process and provide feedback on its operation.

6. Appendices

Appendix 1: Indicative Timeline of Validation Process

This timeline represents the 'best case scenario' assuming all stages in the validation process are completed properly and both NCI and QQI meet the agreed levels of service outlined in this memorandum of agreement.

Day -30
QQI advised about application for validation and request for invoice for validation fee

Day 0
Submission of validation documents and nominations for Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) to QQI

Day 21
Documentation issued to IEP

Day 59
Factual accuracy check of Independent Evaluation Report (IER)

Day 76
QQI request Proggrame Team's resposne to IER

Day 90
Panel acceptance of Programme Team's response to IER

Day 128
QQI PAEC Meeting

Day -21
QQI issues invoice and Quality and Instituional Effectiveness (QIE) Office generates purchase order

Day 14
Feedback from QQI Desk Review &agreement of nominations for (IEP)

Day 45
Validation Panel Meeting

Day 62
IER submitted to QQI for review

Day 83
Programme Team response to IER issued to IEP

Day 93
Application for Validation submitted to QQI

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Appendix 2: NCI Data Protection Form

I agree to my personal and contact details provided during the course of this event being held electronically by NCI for the purpose of future contact in relation to participation in programme validation panels, external examinership, or similar academic activities.

Yes/No

I agree to share my personal contact details provided during the course of this event with Qualifications and Quality Assurance Ireland (QQI) for the purpose of evaluating this programme for validation and for evaluating the process of validation.

Yes/No

Signed _____   **Date:**_____

Data Protection Notice

Any personal data provided to the National College of Ireland ("**NCI**"), through or in connection this form will be processed by NCI as data controller for the purposes of nominating evaluators for programme evaluation panels, external examiners or related academic activities. For further information on how the NCI uses your personal data and in relation your data protection rights and how to contact the NCI data protection officer, please refer to the **NCI Data Privacy Statement**, which is available at www.ncirl.ie

Considerations for independent evaluators in QQI Validation / QA Approval Processes (including conflicts of interest matters)

Version May 2020

Independent evaluators

All applications for validation / QA Approval will be independently evaluated against QQI's guidelines and / or validation criteria. The following extract from QQI's "Policies and Criteria for The Validation of Programmes of Education and Training" addresses independent evaluators (see section 6 of the core validation policy document for more detailed information). *Note that references to the validation process should be read to include QA approval processes also*.

> Evaluators will be objective and 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 (see the introduction for unit (6)). Competence means the capacity to make judgements against the applicable QQI validation criteria. Specifically, an evaluator or an evaluation group will be selected to have the competence to justify their recommendation whatever it may be (see the introduction for unit (6)).
>
> Typically, evaluation groups (panels) 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. QQI will exercise its judgment as to the number of evaluators that may be required in respect of the programme in question and the competences required having regard to the particular programme and the relevant QQI awards standards. For certain programmes one or two evaluators may be sufficient, however 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 normally the case for HET awards

standards). For the independent evaluation of applications for the validation of programmes leading to higher education and training awards, the groups of evaluators will include (a) student member(s) and will be composed in compliance with ESG standard 2.4.

Training will be provided to independent evaluators where QQI considers this 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, or a conflict of interest, occurs following acceptance should inform QQI without delay.

Members of the QQI Board and its Committees

Members of the QQI Board or any committee of the Board should not be appointed on the basis that they have a role in the determination of the application.

Conflicts of interest

Generally, QQI has a firm policy of not appointing persons as evaluators or reviewers in any case where there is any foreseen possibility of conflict of interest. Even the appearance of conflict of interest, where none exists, can damage the credibility of the person selected and the evaluation/review process.

The instances listed below are given as examples. They are not intended to comprise an exhaustive list of situations where a conflict of interest might arise.

Independence could be compromised, or perceived to be compromised, for the following groups.

- Current or previous appointment holders in the provider making the application for validation (e.g. employees, consultants, guest lecturers/trainers, external examiners/authenticators, research supervisors and such like).
- Former employees, governors, directors, consultants and graduates (except for learner representatives) of the provider making the application for validation. These individuals are not normally eligible to serve as members of a validation panel (independent evaluation group) for a programme of the provider.
- Persons who have had long-standing service, or who are retired from their employment with the provider making the application for validation. Normally these

individuals should not participate in any validation panel for a programme of that provider.

- Collaborators in joint projects (including research initiatives) involving the provider making the application for validation. Where an assessor is concerned regarding existing minor collaborations in a particular field of study or at any institutional level, he/she should consult the QQI executive for an adjudication on suitability.
- Persons who have a potential future conflict of interest.
- Persons with family or other relationship with any members employed by or attending the provider making the application for validation might have a conflict of interest. They should inform the provider and QQI prior to involvement in the validation process, so that an appropriate judgement can be made as to the advisability of the individual's involvement.
- Persons with direct financial interest of any sort, including the holding of shares in a company associated with that provider making the application for validation. In the case of a private, for-profit provider, no panel member, appointed to evaluate or review an application, may have a direct financial interest of any sort, including the holding of shares in a company associated with that provider.
- Direct competitors in a particular industry or professional environment or in a specific geographical location may have a conflict of interest, but will not automatically be deemed to be conflicted.

Since cases can arise where the possible appearance of a conflict of interest is not generally known, the primary responsibility for disclosing such a possibility rests on the prospective independent evaluator.

Prospective QQI independent evaluators (panel members) are required to declare any relevant interests and potential conflicts of interest prior to appointment. If there are no relevant interests or conflicts this should be declared. The declarations will be published with the panel report (e.g. the independent evaluation report of the validation / QA approval process).

In addition, the provider involved (making the application for validation / QA Approval) will be informed of the intended panel by QQI and asked to declare any potential conflicts of interest prior to appointment of the panel.

Where an independent evaluator's potential conflict of interest emerges after appointment, they should inform QQI without delay and inform the panel chairperson.

Should the provider making the application for validation / QA Approval become aware of a conflict of interest after the panel has been appointed it should inform QQI without delay and inform the panel chairperson.

In such cases, the QQI executive will rule on the continuing eligibility of the panel member.

Confidentiality

> - The documentation (including that covered by unit (5.5) of *Core Policies And Criteria For The Validation By QQI Of Programmes Of Education And Training*) 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.

GDPR Agreement

This agreement ("Agreement") is made between Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and XXXX (name of reviewer) (the Reviewer/Evaluator). QQI and the Reviewer/Evaluator have agreed to enter into this agreement for the purposes of ensuring compliance with Data Protection Legislation, inter alia, Regulation 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council (General Data Protection Regulation) (hereinafter "the GDPR"). Terms used herein are as defined in the GDPR unless otherwise defined.

The Reviewer/Evaluator processes data on behalf of QQI for the purpose of reviewing and evaluating quality assurance processes, to inform, for example, the determination by QQI of applications for the validation / QA Approval of programmes of education and training and the review by QQI of the effectiveness of providers' quality assurance procedures. For the purposes of the Agreement, this shall be referred to as the Review.

QQI and the Reviewer/Evaluator have agreed that the Reviewer/Evaluator is a processor as defined in Article 28 of the GDPR as he/she carries out processing of data on behalf of QQI. QQI is a controller of the data for the purposes of the GDPR.

This Agreement is limited to personal data provided by QQI to the Reviewer/Evaluator and to personal data provided by the relevant provider to the Reviewer/Evaluator, and to personal data duly shared between reviewers/evaluators, for the purposes of a Review, (hereinafter "the data").

This data may include:
(a) Personal data of providers;
(b) Personal data of members of staff of providers;
(c) Personal data of enrolled learners or prospective learners of providers;
(d) Personal data of reviewers/evaluators.

This data should not be used by the Reviewer/Evaluator for any other purpose other than the carrying out of the Review. The Reviewer/Evaluator shall not transfer personal data to a third country or an international organisation (as defined in the GDPR), unless required to do so by Union or Member State law, in such a case the Reviewer/Evaluator shall inform QQI of that legal requirement before processing.

The Reviewer/Evaluator understands that he/she is bound by the terms of the Confidentiality Clause which he/she has separately entered into.

The Reviewer/Evaluator shall not engage another processor for the processing of the data without prior specific written authorisation of QQI as per Article 28.2 of the GDPR. For the avoidance of doubt, QQI hereby gives prior specific written authorisation to the Reviewer/Evaluator to share the data with the other reviewers/evaluators engaged in the specific Review, and this Agreement applies equally to all data received by the Reviewer/Evaluator from fellow reviewers/evaluators in relation to the Review.

The data held by the Reviewer/Evaluator for each Review should be deleted at the end of each Review, unless otherwise instructed in writing by QQI. Any hard copy data shall be shredded; if shredding facilities are not available to the Reviewer/Evaluator then they shall be returned to QQI.

The Reviewer/Evaluator will implement appropriate technical and organisational security measures to protect the personal data in his/her possession. The Reviewer/Evaluator will ensure that these measures comply with the requirements of the GDPR.

As required by Article 33(2) of the GDPR, the Reviewer/Evaluator will inform QQI of any personal data breach without undue delay. The Reviewer/Evaluator will cooperate with any enquiries or investigations by the Data Protection Commissioner. The Reviewer/Evaluator will assist QQI in ensuring compliance with QQI's obligation to respond to requests for exercising the data subject's rights laid down in chapter III of the GDPR. The Reviewer/Evaluator will cooperate fully with QQI to ensure compliance with the obligations of QQI pursuant to articles 32 to 36 of the GDPR.

The Reviewer/Evaluator will make available to QQI all information necessary to demonstrate compliance with the obligations laid down in this Article and allow for and contribute to audits, including inspections, conducted by QQI or another auditor mandated by QQI.

This Agreement terminates at the same time as the agreement between QQI and the Reviewer/Evaluator in relation to the Review. Notwithstanding the expiry or termination of this Agreement for any reason, the provisions of this Agreement shall continue to apply to any personal data in the possession of either party which was covered by the agreement.

This agreement shall be governed by Irish law and subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of the Irish courts.

Declarations:

1) I wish to declare the following interests and understand that this declaration will be included in the validation / QA Approval report:

2) I have read the above and confirm that I do not have any conflicts of interest in participating in the evaluation of application for QA Approval by [provider]:

3) I understand that the application documentation and materials are confidential and must (along with any copies made) be returned to QQI or destroyed once the Independent Evaluation Report has been finalised. I understand that application materials are provided for evaluation purposes only and must not be distributed or used for other purposes. This applies equally to any copies made for evaluation or back-up purposes. I further understand that all communications concerning the process are confidential and that the publishable outcome of the process is the Independent Evaluation Report. I understand that QQI is subject to the Freedom of Information legislation and QQI records are subject to requests under the Freedom of Information Act.

4) I acknowledge that I have read and understood the GDPR Agreement included above and as a condition of my engagement as a reviewer/evaluator by signing here I agree to be bound by its terms.

5) For the purposes of this evaluation only, I agree that my contact details may be shared with the other reviewers/evaluators who have agreed to participate in the evaluation of the application for validation / QA Approval by [provider].

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Micro-Credential Validation

Request for Further Information

This form is to be used by a panel conducting a desk audit of a microcredential programme, where the normal opportunity for clarifications provided by a face-to-face meeting with a provider is not available. The purpose of this form is to allow the panel to pose agreed questions / requests to the provider in respect of those parts of the application documentation which the panel deem need further clarification.

It should only be used where the panel feel the information is necessary to (i) reach an agreed recommendation on validation and /or (ii) where an obvious issue / omission can be clarified which would otherwise require a condition of validation to be specified in the panel report. The format of the document mimics the template for the panel report so that questions / requests can be posed under the most relevant heading. Other sections can be left blank.

Programme details

Provider name		National College of Ireland		
Programme	**Code**		**Title**	
Date of request		TBC		

Clarifications / Further Information Sought

Enter specific question(s) into the box under the most relevant heading.

Programme Profile Information

Brief synopsis of the programme
Target learner groups
Rationale for Programme

Evidence of learner demand
Duration and Enrolment

Programme Resourcing, Content, Delivery and Assessment

Human and ICT Resources available to the programme

Mode(s) of Delivery (incl. forms of online delivery)

Assessment Strategy (incl. forms of online assessment)

Indicative Content (Currency, comprehensiveness etc)

Learner Information and Supports

Other (where the information / clarification sought does not fit under any of the headings above)